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**I**N 1993, Jamaica's bobsleigh team was at the final qualifying event in La Plagne, France, seeking points to gain a place in the 1994 Winter Olympic Games in Norway.

Without a sled to compete with, the Jamaicans were left to use an aging one that was on display inside the lobby of the hotel in which they were staying.

They were laughed at and mocked, but gained the points needed to qualify for the 1994 Games, where they were one of the standout teams.

It is one of the incredible stories — similar to their sensational debut at the 1988 Games in Canada — linked to Jamaica's bobsleigh programme.

Shoot forward over two decades and Jamaica is primed for medal-winning success at 2018 Games in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea.

On Tuesday, a contract was signed between Japan manufacturers Shitamachi Bobsleigh and the Jamaica Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation to provide the latter with state-of-the-art sleds at no financial cost, up to the 2022 Winter Games in China.

The scope of the present project — which is said to involve over 200 companies in Japan — is to manufacture two-member sleds. The Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project base is in Ota City in

Tokyo, Japan.

"As well as we've done in bobsleigh throughout the years, we have never really competed with the best sleds in the world. We've always been able to beat teams with much better equipment just based on our athletic ability or driving ability and competitive spirit.

"For the first, we are in a position to enter a major Games with what we expect to be the fastest sleds in the world. And that makes a big difference where, over four miles of racing, you may be separated by a hundredth of a second. This is a big part of the puzzle in putting together a medal-winning team," said an elated Nelson 'Chris' Stokes, the acting president of Jamaica Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation, during an interview at the **Jamaica Observer** on Monday.

Stokes said the financially strapped federation has usually only been able to rent and lease sleds or, on occasion, has bought old sleds for competition since it cannot afford to dish out 80,000 euros for a two-member sled or 120,000 euros for the four-member option.

Stokes said those options would have been "off-the-shelf sleds that are not race ready".

The partnership with the Japanese manufacturers will mean customised sleds for the Jamaican team.

"That sled from the hotel lobby has been our story, but now we don't have to do that

# Cool Runnings

## Jamaica bobsleigh's partnership with Japan manufacturers boosts medal-winning thrust



Minister of Sport Olivia Grange (left), looks on as acting president of Jamaica Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation Nelson 'Chris' Stokes (second left) signs a formal agreement on Tuesday which will see Shitamachi Bobsleigh providing sleds for Jamaica's bobsleigh teams. Also signing is team leader of the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project Junichi Hosogai (at second right). Other participants are Japanese Ambassador to Jamaica Masanori Nakano (right) and counsellor at embassy of Japan, Hiromoto Oyama. (Photo: Mark Bell)

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ACTING president of the Jamaica Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation Nelson ‘Chris’ Stokes is encouraging athletes who are not in contention of making the national track and field team to the Summer Olympic Games to attend today’s selection exercise at GC Foster College in St Catherine.

The move is part of the federation’s recruitment thrust for brakemen ahead of the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games in the Republic of Korea.

The selection event is set to start 9:00 am.

“We are very happy now with the drivers that we have. But we feel we can do better on the pusher side, the brakeman side, so we are continuing to look at that,” said Stokes.

“We are encouraging many athletes who would have participated at the National Track and Field Championships and other athletes like rugby players or people who are just into fitness to come out and participate and have a chance.

“We hope from the group we’ll be able to come out with a final set of pushers to compete in the Olympic Games.

“We will have 30-metre sprints, 60-metre sprints and standing long jump, just to demonstrate some speed/

# Jamaica on the hunt for bobsleigh



Members of Jamaica’s bobsleigh team go for a test run in one of the sleds built by the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project team.

Minister of Sport Olivia Orange (left), looks on as acting president of Jamaica Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation Nelson ‘Chris’ Stokes (second left) signs a formal agreement on Tuesday which will see Shitamachi Bobsleigh providing sleds for Jamaica’s bobsleigh teams. Also signing is team leader of the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project Junichi Hosogai (at second right). Other participants are Japanese Ambassador to Jamaica Masanori Nakano (right) and counsellor at embassy of Japan, Hiromoto Oyama. (Photo: Mark Bell)

# upgrade?



Hiromoto Oyama (left), counsellor at the Japan Embassy in Jamaica, makes a point during an interview on Monday. Looking on is head of Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project Junichi Hosogai. (Photo: Naphtali Junior)

anymore. These we are getting from the Japanese are built from drawings, from scratch. We will get the sleds to test and then send back if additional modifications are needed. This would be the best we have ever been equipped."

Junichi Hosogai, the leader of the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project team, spoke to the *Observer* on Monday through

an interpreter.

He said the partnership is a mutual one since the Japanese are glad for the exposure as they seek a place in the global bobsleigh manufacturing marketplace.

"Japan has developed by manufacturing things, having factories, and providing work to appeal to a global market. And to get on that global stage, we wanted to get exposure.

"The Olympics is a world-famous event so that is the best way to get the exposure we want. That's why we started this project," he said.

Hosogai said the marketability of Jamaica and the popularity of the Jamaica bobsleigh in



Members of Jamaica's bobsleigh team and the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project members pose behind one of the sleds being fine-tuned for the Jamaicans.

2015, and again in Japan in January 2016, said the aim is to continue testing the sleds over dozens of runs throughout the season, to fine-tune the driving experience.

"Two things struck me... the quality of the workmanship — I've never seen in any German, Swiss, Austrian sled before, or American. And the quality of the material used is high, because not all carbon fibre material is the same.

The second thing is the willingness to make the changes that we knew needed to be made. There was an issue with the steering during training. And in any other country that could have taken two weeks, but the changes were made by the next morning, so these are serious people," explained the Jamaica bobsleigh boss, who



Members of Jamaica's bobsleigh team inspect one of the sleds built by the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project team.

## athletes

strength type of capabilities," he added.

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of the Shitamachi Bobsleigh Project team, spoke to the **Observer** on Monday through

# athletes

strength type of capabilities," he added.

Stokes, who represented Jamaica at a number of Winter Games, said bobsleighbg provides the opportunity for many Jamaican athletes to represent the country at the Olympic Games.

"We have a tradition of having among the best starters, and it's important for us to maintain that. Bobsleigh is one of those outlets for our outstanding athletes to become Olympians.

"When you have a situation with somebody running 10.20 seconds [in the men's 100-metre event] and has no chance of making the Jamaican team, this is one of the sports where speed/strength is required over short distances and an opportunity to become Olympians and Olympic medallists," he told the **Jamaica Observer**.

The Jamaican bobsleigh team made its Winter Olympic Games debut in 1988 in Calgary, Canada, which inspired the 1993 film *Cool Runnings*.

— Sanjay Myers

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"The Olympics is a world-famous event so that is the best way to get the exposure we want. That's why we started this project," he said.

Hosogai said the marketability of Jamaica and the popularity of the Jamaica bobsleigh-inspired movie *Cool Runnings* were huge pluses.

He said he and his colleagues wanted to explore technology that is not developed by major manufacturers, and they found great potential in the use of high quality carbon fibre for the sleds.

Hosogai told the **Observer** that under the partnership, durable, Japan-made lightweight helmets and apparel are also on the cards.

"We take opinion from Jamaica federation and to put into the design and manufacture of the bobsleighs. The manufacturing of bobsleighs is under tight regulations. There are some good bobsleighs with good craftsmanship, however, our emphasis is to have bobsleds which can satisfy each individual requirement by Jamaican athletes. We are custom-making our sleds for the Jamaica athletes and that is our best feature."

He conceded that his team takes its cue from German experts, but said the manufacturing process is "all about Japanese technology".

Stokes, who first met with the Japanese team in December

The second thing is the willingness to make the changes that we knew needed to be made. There was an issue with the steering during training. And in any other country that could have taken two weeks, but the changes were made by the next morning, so these are serious people," explained the Jamaica bobsleigh boss, who said he has the full backing of the Jamaica Government.

Japan has a history of partnering with Jamaica in sports and other areas.

Tottori Prefecture in Japan hosted the Jamaica team before World Championships in Beijing, China, last year.

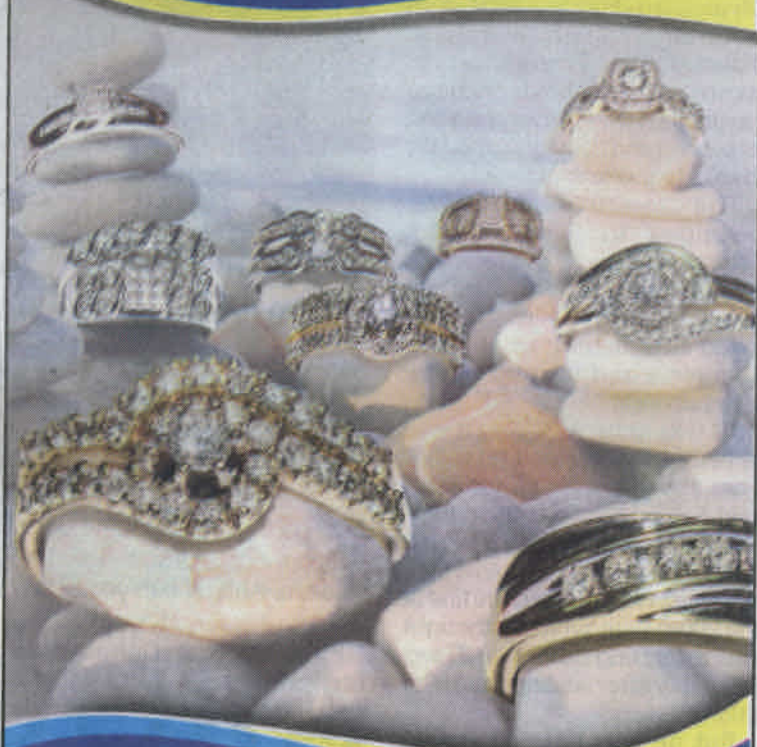
"Tokyo [Japan's capital] will host the Olympics in 2020, and under a partnership between Jamaica and Japan, we are promoting co-operation... and through the embassy here in Jamaica, the Japanese Government is in full support of this project," said Hiromoto Oyama, the counsellor and chief of mission in charge of communications at the Japan Embassy in Jamaica.

He said Japan has benefitted from the union between the countries.

"When Tottori Prefecture hosted the Jamaican team before World Championships in Beijing last year, the [Jamaican] coaches took time to go to Japanese schools to share expertise on how to teach athletics, etc. So we are benefitting from these types of exchanges. We also have our own strength in certain areas of sport, so we have sent experts to Jamaica to engage in exchanges," explained Oyama.

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