

“ABOVE AND BEYOND”
NGC’S National Heroes Project
Hasely Crawford’s Achievement

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Good Evening – Let me acknowledge all Government Ministers and other esteemed guests but especially let me acknowledge the young people who are here. My remarks are particularly addressed to them.

I was very pleased when Mark Loquan, President of NGC, invited me to speak at this inaugural launch of “Above and Beyond”, a project to celebrate national achievers.

I was even more delighted that sport was selected as the first arena to highlight national achievement. And, I can think of no finer example of the contribution that sporting achievement makes to our nation, than my friend Hasely Crawford – our first Olympic gold medalist.

Let me take you back 40 years, to the Montreal stadium, when Hasely was preparing for, and running in the 1976 Olympics.

It was July 24th. Hasely, number 846, in his red white and black was in lane one. He’d had the best time in the semi-finals so Harvey Glance, the American and Don Quarry, the Jamaican were giving our man the cut eye, proof of their nervousness.

Valery Borzov, the Russian who won gold at the previous Olympics and the great white hope kept to himself.

Monsieur Drapeau, the Mayor of Montreal, looked up at the beautiful flying cantilever covering the stadium - an engineering marvel and a source of deep pride for French-speaking Canada.

He flinched slightly, taking note of the extra-ordinarily heavy security presence. Remember, this was the first Games after the hooded horror of Munich, when terrorists killed 11 Israeli athletes. As you can see, terrorism is an older scourge than we sometimes credit.

Mr. Drapeau wanted to make sure that these 1976 Olympics would not be marred by the political agendas of others. After all, the Olympics has always been a big stage – the biggest - whose lofty goal is to champion the triumph of the human spirit.

It showcases physical beauty and prowess but it also tells the stories of struggle, talent and discipline. From the agony of defeat to the joy of victory, the world's collective consciousness is held in thrall.

Given that incredible power, there is a temptation to use the Olympic games for political and social gain.

1976 is an example - thirty-three African nations boycotted the Montreal games in protest against New Zealand. The Kiwi nation had flouted the international sanctions against apartheid South Africa and played rugby against the pariah state.

In the first two days, a million Canadian dollars were lost in event cancellations and seat refunds. Obviously, the Africans looked to the Caribbean and other progressive nations for support in their boycott.

Hasely must have been wondering whether the political conscience in our country would thwart his aspirations for Olympic fame after all the effort he had put in.

Politics always bubbles beneath the surface of sports but the individual conscience of sports men and women will also emerge to reflect the social and economic context of the times. Heroism comes in different forms and the nobility of those singular, but powerful, actions is often overlooked.

I say once more, the Olympics - and sport in general – has always been about the triumph of the human spirit, about its dignity, its courage, its optimism, its overcoming.

The great American swimmer, Michael Phelps was diagnosed at age 9 with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). He struggled at school. His mother put him in a swimming pool to cool him down. Assisted by community coaches, he learned the discipline of focused practice. Twenty-eight Olympic gold medals later and the rest is history. For all you parents struggling with ADHD children, google Phelps's mother's inspirational advice.

1968 is another example of the irrepressible spirit. Again, I ask the young people – how many of you know the names John Carlos (not to be confused with Carlos John), Tommie Smith or Peter Norman? If you saw the photo of them after the men's 200 meters - two black Americans with their fists raised and an unassuming white Australian in the bottom left corner, wearing an Olympic Project for Human Rights button, would you grasp the magnitude of the moment?

1968 was the height of a turbulent era – the war in Vietnam raged, there was civil unrest from Prague to Paris and in America, following the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King; the struggle for Civil Rights was fiercer than ever.

In was in this context that those three men – John, Tommie and Peter – chose to take a personal stand, in front of the whole world, for what they believed to be right. It was a choice that cost them dearly – they were banned from representing their countries, rejected by their governments and many of their fellow citizens for years and years.

Yet their actions still resonate today, nearly 50 years later, reminding us that fighting injustice and inequality matters, that fighting to make our countries and our world a better place, matters.

John F. Kennedy said, “We choose [to do these things] not because they are easy, but because they are hard. Because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.”

Doing the right thing, especially when it’s hard, is the ultimate measure of the human spirit.

Back on that July day in 1976, every TV set, handheld radio and rum shop audience across Trinidad and Tobago was tuned to the Olympics and cheering on their countryman - hoping and praying for Hasely’s victory.

There were 66,308 spectators packed in the stadium. There was hush as the athletes came under starter’s orders. BAM, shot call, race GONE and in a 10.02 second flash, Hasely Crawford races into His-Story and becomes an enduring hero of Trinidad and Tobago.

I went to visit Hasely in preparation for these remarks. I wanted a special face to face with this man, who I have met many times and known over these four decades. I wanted to probe the elements that separated his gold from my silver. We are both Olympians. I won

silver twelve years before in Tokyo in the 400 metres. He reminded me that he was born in San Fernando, one of eleven children, in very humble circumstances.

Interviews with all achievers, especially sports personalities reveal that they are all **driven**. Here in Trini, we would say “Dey mad, yes”. What would cause Hasely in the months before the Games, to work 12-hour shifts for Nash Engineering in Detroit and then put in four hours grueling physical training? The intensity of his focus.

Chariots of Fires, the 1981 British historical docudrama about two driven British athletes had a profound effect on me the first time I saw it. The two athletes both compete in the 1924 Paris Olympics. Harold Abraham is motivated to go for gold to overcome anti-Semitism. He won gold in the 100 metres.

Eric Liddell, was a Scottish missionary, who refused to run in his 100 metre heat because it was on the Sabbath. Liddell quoted Isaiah from Scripture to explain why he couldn't run on a Sunday. “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary.” Liddell indeed had wings of eagles as he won gold in the 400 metres, which was not his event. He was fired up by the glory of his God.

I too ran for glory but of a more earthly kind. I visualized myself wrapped in the national flag—the red, white and black especially because I ran in the first Olympic Games after T&T's Independence. I also ran for QRC, Yale and for Cambridge, all institutions, which taught me the importance of discipline, practice and patience.

The common thread here is that athletes are usually driven by something bigger than themselves. That is not to say that personal glory has nothing to do with it – athletes are a

proud and competitive sort. But it's precisely because of that that they understand that winning for the sake of winning doesn't cut it.

It's when it means more to you than the roar of the crowd or the time that flashes on the clock when you cross the finish line that you'll be able to dig really *really* deep enough to find the determination to keep going, to overcome obstacles and resist the temptation to quit.

To give it ALL– sometimes more than you think you can – in pursuit of your dream.

So I asked Hasely what so deeply motivated him; “Wendell” he said “I will be very frank with you. My supreme motivation was to distance myself from the poverty in which I grew up and the shame I'd experienced as a result of it”

“I was always observant,” he told me. “I watched my mother re-stitch elastic in to the single pair of underpants I possessed. I didn't start school until age 10. My way up and out was very narrow so I learned to be very disciplined. You could beat me once but I studied the reason for my defeat and guaranteed that you couldn't beat me again. Borzov beat me in Munich but I was ready for him in Montreal.”

Hasely's attitude speaks to another of the many ways that sport brings out the best of human nature. Sport teaches you that success can be built on failure – and that actually, if you have never failed, you'll never have what it takes to succeed beyond measure.

The greatest basketball player of all time, Michael Jordan, explained it like this. “I missed more than 9000 shots in my NBA career,” he said. “I have lost almost 300 games. Twenty

six times, I have been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I have failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Yes, we are all born with some talent. If we are lucky, someone will recognize it and encourage us. Then the really hard work of disciplined preparation begins. Talent by itself is just potential – something that *could be*.

Achieving takes work and the ability to pick yourself up from failure and keep going. Achieving is the process of turning talent into triumph. Hence, the importance of motivation that never wavers.

Horace Williams noticed Hasely's disciplined drive and was responsible for introducing this skinny boy to the Brooklyn Sports Club. His bronze medal in the Commonwealth Games in 1970 brought him to the notice of Eastern Michigan University and he was awarded an athletic scholarship.

The institutional support and coaching at Eastern Michigan was the decisive factor in his preparation for Olympic fame. Sports put Hasely on a ride up life's escalator and onto a bigger stage. His story proves, more than my own, how sports training and discipline can contribute to the improvement and overcoming of life's initial circumstances.

Hasely earned his sporting triumph but has continued to offer young people opportunities for self-development through his work at NGC. Both the man and the corporate citizen should be applauded.

Before I conclude, I feel compelled to remind not only those in this audience but the entire Trinidad and Tobago that there are many young people facing some of the difficult and

shaming circumstances that characterized Hasely's early years. And many of them do not even have a mother to stitch elastic into their only pair of pants.

Too often, their narrow path is not up. As a society, we must ensure that sport, wonderful as it is, is not the only avenue out of poverty. We must create more escalators for the differing talents of our youth, especially those that are most disadvantaged economically and socially.

Whether in pan, other musical and performing arts, or business and science, we have to create new arenas for the unique human spirit of Trinidad and Tobago to thrive.

Recently, I had reason to marvel at just how varied T&T talent can be. At the last Capildeo lecture, The Central Bank celebrated our own Anil Kokoram parlaying a gift for mathematics into an Academy Award for video film processing.

Yes! People like Hasley have helped to blaze the trail. It's up to us now to pave and expand the pathways toward a better future for all of our young people. We'll have to do the work together, which means special sacrifices of time and resources by parents, relatives, mentors, and coaches but also from institutions like sports clubs and schools. Hasley admits and credits all those who helped him attain his dreams. In that way, he incarnates our national motto, "*Together we aspire, Together we achieve.*"