



The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited

“Our Commitment to Excellence in Action”

NAAA 2018 Awards

Saturday 5th January 2019

Feature Address

Professor Gerry C. Brooks

SALUTATIONS

THE HONOURABLE SHAMFA CUDJOE ; MINISTER OF SPORT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

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ATHLETES, PARENTS, CLUB OFFICIALS, TECHNICAL OFFICIALS, MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA AND SPECIALLY INVITED GUESTS.

It's not where you start; it's where you are going! Good is the enemy of great! Some key words which resonated in your theme – our route is excellence; destination is success!

2018 is now behind us! It was a building block year with the Commonwealth Games, the Youth Olympic Games and the Central American Games. Michelle Lee Ahye distinguished herself and was our 2018 Sportswoman of the Year. Jereem Richards, with courage and flair, captured the Sportsman of the Year award. Other athletes distinguished themselves this evening. Let's recognise their achievements in 2018.

But colleagues 2018 is over! This is 2019 – the beginning of a new year. We are 360 days away from a new decade - the 2020s. This must be our decade!

It is time to reset! Reset dreams! Reset strategy! Recalibrate approaches for athletes for whom 2018 was unsatisfactory or merely average. Reset for coaches whose charges did not achieve their aspirations! Merely repeating the same training, nutritional habits and strategy will not yield improvement. Let 2019 be a time for vision and action! Vision without action is day dreaming. Action without vision is passing time. As Nelson Mandela said: *“Vision with action is the foundation for greatness.”*

This evening, NGC stands here as a socially responsible corporate sponsor, partner and champion of Trinidad and Tobago's quest for track and field excellence. Allow me to thank the NAAA, and your President Mr. Ephraim Serrette, for the privilege and honour of addressing you this evening. President Serette, Dr. Iva Gloudon, Ganness Persad, Hasely Crawford TC, George Commissiong, Dr. Ian Hypolite, Kelvin Roberts, Winston Roberts, Edwin Skinner are volunteers who have carried the NAAA banner for many of its 76 years without any salary. T&T owes you and all our volunteers a debt of gratitude for your selfless contribution, which often involved giving of your own resources to support our athletes.

Let's pause for a moment to convey our gratitude to them and our many volunteers at club and country level.

Tonight, I propose to address three themes: -

1. The 2017-2020 NAAA strategic plan – “sharpening the plan for greater success!”
2. Optimising the NGC / NAAA partnership for our athletes and our country!
1. Two keys for excellence and success during and after athlete life!

At that stage, you will have grown tired of me, and I will retire to my seat.

Firstly, I will address - sharpening the NAAA 2017 - 2020 plan for greater success.

Athletes are in the business of converting raw energy, talent, determination and skill through disciplined training, into excellence and success. Consistent success requires a focused athlete,

mental toughness, courage and discipline. But it also requires an enabling umbrella administration and sporting architecture.

Every business or organisation must strategically ask the question - how can we be truly transformative? Is there a radically new approach to accelerate growth? What additional paths can we take to create “*a self-sustaining organisation producing a pathway to track and field excellence?*”

Lest there be any doubt, I want to emphasise that the NAAA’s 41-page, 2017-2020 strategic plan, is a well-thought out plan. It is clear and cogent, with quantifiable deliverables! It is researched and is predicated on “whole system thinking” - engaging athletes, clubs and volunteers, it draws on other national models and provides clear pathways to operationalise strategy. It has also been supported by constitutional reform.

I commend the executives on a deliberate and well-crafted plan. Completed in 2017, we are now at least 18 months into the plan. We are at the first or second leg. May I respectfully suggest that a retreat involving clubs and key stakeholders be convened to revalidate the plan.

To retest assumptions! Recalibrate direction! Reassess deliverables – budgeted against actual! Let the data speak to us and let’s have the courage to listen and share and realign where appropriate. If we are to lead hemispherically and internationally, we must accelerate the pace of achievement. If we have slipped, we must recalibrate. Only bold moves, and extraordinary people and actions change the world. Ask Bill Gates! Ask Sir Richard Branson!

As a future focused organisation, the 2017-2020 strategic plan is based on the following pillars: -

- a. Strengthening national support for track and field for our athletes particularly in financial support and marketing of the athletes.
- b. Increasing and strengthening public participation in track and field. More kids and juniors must be attracted to athletics.
- c. Having more persons involved in the sport of athletics and recreational running with increased adult participation by 15% and increased volunteerism by 10%

The strategic plan also speaks to more T & T winners on the world stage as measured by medalling at junior and senior levels:

Among senior elites:

88 medals over the next 18 months culminating in two gold medals in Tokyo 2020.

6+ silver medals/bronze medals in Tokyo 2020!

4+ gold medals at Commonwealth and 6 gold medals at each regional games (CARIFTA, NACAC, PanAm)

6+ medals at the World Championships

Among junior elites:

30 medals at CARIFTA games

10 medals at PanAm juniors

2 medals at World Juniors

These are truly impressive targets. It means that the organisers of the CAC, Worlds, CARIFTA and Olympic Games are holding medals that belong to athletes in this audience – medals which you are due to collect in 2019 and next year. Jada Williams, Veyon Joseph, Aquilla Lewis, Shaniqua Bascome and Avindale Smith - see yourself on the Tokyo podium; envision yourselves there, as we see you there.

This success can be truly life changing. So, what must you and your organisation do differently?

We must drive organisational efficiency. Attract and deepen professional expertise. Ensure strategic clarity and deepen the trust and commitment of all stakeholders. But we must all unite. One plus one must equal three... not two. We must be greater than the sum of our parts. It cannot be one leader or the other! One superstar or the other!

It must be one and one using our combined intellect, shared experience, knowledge and access to resources that are leveraged for the benefit of our athletes.

Tonight, I commend the NAAA on its ability to grow club membership – 20% over the 2013-15 period. General membership has increased by a mean of 15% according to your latest data (I have not seen 2018 figures). Reports must be updated annually and within 30 days of year end as a start! The number of coaches has also increased over the 2012-16 period with 106 and 116 being registered in 2015 and 2016 respectively. However, truth be told, leadership development within the executive ranks of all clubs must be strengthened.

This is the skeleton of the club and the NAAA framework. It must be supported by continuous professional development of coaches and administrators. Many successful organisations use a “train the trainer” approach. How can the NAAATT club management leadership programme be enhanced to immerse athletes in the latest coaching techniques? Continuous training must be embraced at all levels. That’s the difference between standing on a platform and attending the games.

Let me also implore coaches to pass on athletes who have maxed out under them; particularly if they have employed various approaches without significant improvement for athletes. This is a

contentious point. But there are cases in which the coach has done an excellent job in transforming the athlete from 'kid' to 'junior'; 'junior' to 'junior elite'. But the athlete sometimes needs a different intervention - a new environment and new inputs. The coach is still an excellent coach, but the welfare of the athlete must come first!

I ask coaches and the NAAA, to address these issues if we are to realise our aspirations in Tokyo and other championships. I implore the NAAA to formalise and deepen the continuous development programme – 17 or so days of training cannot constitute a permanent basis for coaching and training. This is a profession like medicine, engineering and accounting, where continuous professional development is required.

Ladies and gentlemen, on another note, track and field, like many other professional sports, can only succeed when government provides promised funding early. This evening I implore the Government - notwithstanding the difficult financial circumstances, and their good work – to make money available to athletes early.

There is nothing more disturbing psychologically than to be unsure of whether you will receive funding to participate at planned athletic events. It compromises training and weakens confidence. It distracts athletes and causes underperformance. Corporate T&T, let's step up and support our athletes with tangible sponsorship. The athlete arrives to the games village late and tired. They see the facilities late, they get the worst hotel rooms. Diet changes occur later affecting metabolism and their psyche. We at NGC commit to doing our part to avoid such circumstances, by continuing to provide our grants on time.

On the matter of sponsorship: Athletes! Hear me well – celebrate and honour your sponsor. This is not about personal preferences. Once your sponsor is the team sponsor – you must honour them by wearing the brand proudly and always!

If exceptions have to be made negotiate these explicitly, in writing and beforehand. As former Group COO for ANSA McAL, our brands were the best. Love your brand! Fulfill contractual engagements willingly and with a smile. This ensures that you and future junior and senior athletes have access to funding. Sponsors have many options. Give them no other option but to choose you again and again.

At this point, allow me to broach a second theme: optimisation of the NGC / NAAA partnership.

The NGC/NAAA partnership commenced in 2014. It is a partnership to which we are committed and financially invested. To date, we have given approximately TT 14 million dollars. This evening, we pledge to continue this partnership – on the basis that NAAA continues to demonstrate good governance, accountability, timely reporting and produces results. It is a partnership that is good for athletics and team Trinidad and Tobago. It defines our country, lifts our spirit and is a beacon of hope for people and communities.

Our relationship and your careers are set against the back drop of 517 murders in 2018, with most occurring in the 14-30 age bracket - talented young people who lost hope and lost their way. Potentially bright futures, snuffed out because of poor life choices. Parents and/or communities have failed our young people. Sometimes young people are too headstrong or arrogant to listen!

The NGC/NAAA partnership creates an athlete value chain that provides “a pathway” to realising talents, aspirations and education. So, when at 13/16/19 you are approached to be involved in nefarious activities, “say no!” ... Turn to your club and coach and let’s move forward together! – “This is your alternative one shot.” The NGC/NAAA athlete value chain starts with the kids’ athletic programme, followed by NGC’s ‘Right On Track’ programme which supports athlete development all the way to the ‘Youth Elite Programme’.

We at NGC are committed to these programmes. Encourage talented friends to see a future in athletics and help us save families and communities! Young people! Understand me tonight! There is nothing called “fast money”. There is passion, discipline, hard work and consistent effort with a focus on excellence. Our message is simple: listen to your coaches; feed your body properly! Use NGC funding for development and training, not for other things. Parents, if the athlete is to succeed, diet, muscle recovery and nutrition are critical building blocks.

Through this partnership, we will continue to mobilise every square mile of our republic - from Laventille to La Brea; from Carenage to Carapichaima; from Toco to Tobago to support our athletes. Our support does not occur when you medal, but from the moment potential is spotted, and carries you through the tough and exhilarating climb to Olympic achievement and personal excellence.

Athletes, in all of this, there will be some disappointment; we always want more funding, more support. This is where personal courage, conviction, the will to win, family and community support become critical. “*That medal is mine!*” and let us turn adversity into opportunity.

Recall when Wendell Mottley, Kent Bernard, Edwin Skinner and Edwin Roberts, won silver in the 400 meters in 1964 - there was no stadium and very little support. They are icons today. Wendell Mottley received the The Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Hasely Crawford, Trinity Cross holder, before his Olympic gold in 1976, trained in the cane; our entourage did not even have uniforms – adversity and difficult circumstances must not define us but become the platform for future success and excellence. There is no easy way!

Allow me to share briefly two keys for personal excellence and success: complacency is the enemy of success! Success is where preparation meets opportunity.

You, who are being honoured tonight, have earned the admiration and respect of a grateful nation - you are an inspiration to all of us. We applaud your dedication to excellence and hope that this ceremony will motivate you to achieve greater success.

This is your time to make your mark and shape your legacy. When your moment comes, and the starter's pistol goes off, it must find you prepared and at your best. NGC reaffirms its confidence in you and is investing in your development and your dreams. you are greatness in the process of becoming.

Draw inspiration from legends before you. Take for example, Michael Johnson. You know him as the Youth Elite programme is modelled on the tenets of the MJP or Michael Johnson Programme.

Johnson's stiff upright running position and very short steps defied the conventional wisdom that a high knee lift was essential for maximum speed. a theory he destroyed. he is the only male athlete in history to win both the 200 metres and 400 metres events at the same Olympics, accomplished at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Johnson is also the only man to successfully defend his Olympic title in the 400 metres, at the 2000 Sumer Olympics in Sydney. He accumulated eight gold medals at World Championships and is tied with Carl Lewis for the second most gold medals won by a runner (second only to Usain Bolt).

As Michael Johnson did, tap into that which makes you unique. Use your raw talent. Use every avenue to hone this talent. Continue to believe in yourself and listen and accept the advice of those who can transform you from good to great.

Ladies and gentlemen, as my time runs short, I wish to leave you with some final words on becoming a great athlete.

To navigate today's world successfully, athletes must go beyond athletics. How do I negotiate a contract presented to me? How do I develop and market my brand during and after my athletic career? how do I invest to maximise my earnings and have sufficient for later years? Professional athletes must have a grasp of financial planning, contract law, marketing, branding and communications. You must be aware of cultural nuances as you move from country to country and seek to develop personal and business relationships.

Move out of the comfort zone of 'trini' relationships.

Akanni Hislop ; Tyriq Horsford ; Kashief Ling ; Ianna Roach ; Tyrell Edwards ; Adell Colthrust.... and others, grasp the opportunities like Jehue Gordon ; Jereem Richards; Richard Thompson; Ato Boldon and Candice Scott and pursue tertiary education. Start with a diploma, a certificate programme – the same qualities that made you a champion athlete can be leveraged to transform you into a great icon. Athlete to icon – that is the path followed by Shaquille O'neal. He received a doctorate in education in 2012, well after his playing days.

To our athletes gathered here tonight, I leave you with this quote by American track and field athlete and four-time gold medalist, Olympian Jesse Owens. He had fewer opportunities than all of us here tonight, and as a black man in a segregated America in the 30s and 40s, said:

“We all have dreams. but to make dreams become reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.”

I congratulate and thank each of you, your coaches, your families and friends and all who have helped you and will continue to do so. And I congratulate the NAAA for discharging its responsibilities to our athletes and the sport with purpose and vigour. With a year and half to Tokyo 2020, we don't have the luxury of relaxing, if we are to achieve the goals set out in your plan. even as we celebrate today, let's also get back down to business. Let's reset and ensure our best days are ahead of us. May God bless you all and your families in 2019.

I thank you and wish you every success.

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