

A Propos des Jeux Olympiques

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Haitian Athletes at the Olympic Games

From Paris to Beijing

and

From Sylvio Cator to Nadine Faustin-Parker

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These days, all the Jamaicans that I meet either on the streets or in the Hospital, be they housekeepers, nurse's aids or physicians, seem to have a bit more spring in their steps. They walk their head high, their chest inflated and a flame of pride in their eyes. And, if you mention the Beijing Olympic Games, a broad smile blossoms on their faces. This small nation of the Caribbean is home to Usain Bolt, the fastest man on earth, as well as some of the fastest women. The performance of athletes at the Olympics is always a source of pride for all nations. Capturing the most medals always confers enormous bragging rights and is a coveted privilege, fought for acrimoniously particularly by the super giants like the United States, China and previously the Soviet Union. Most of the other nations find solace in the motto rightly or wrongly attributed to Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the creator of the Modern Olympic Games. "The important thing is to participate." In fact, most of the other athletes are only seen during the opening day ceremony. Of course, as a proud Haitian, I always look to see our delegation. This year, it counted seven members and since the NBC announcers had a short comment for every country, I was all ears, curious to hear what would be said about Haiti. To my dismay, nothing! Nothing, I thought!

Why did he not talk about the long presence of Haiti at the Olympic Games? Indeed, Haiti first participated in the second Modern Olympiads in 1900 in Paris. This was the first time that countries other than those of Europe and the United States took part in this international event. For the record, our lone representative Leon Thiercelin participated in the fencing competition. He competed valiantly but failed to come out of his pool.

Why didn't he talk about the medals, or more exactly the two medals that we have won in the past? He most likely did not know and I felt even sadder that probably many young Haitians do not even know that a Haitian won a silver medal at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, Netherlands. It was exactly 80 years ago. And the star athlete was none other than Sylvio Cator... I am sure that his name will sound familiar to most Haitians as it designates the largest soccer stadium in Haiti, but do they know why or who he was.

Sylvio Cator was born in Cavaillon, on October 9, 1900, son of General Joseph Milien Cator. Later on, General Milien was elected to the National Assembly and moved his family to Port-au-Prince. Young Sylvio attended elementary school at the St Louis of Gonzagua Institute. However, in 1911, then President Antoine Simon resigned from office and the Cator family went into exile on the Island of Jamaica. It is there that Sylvio discovered his athletic talents. Back in Haiti, during the First American Occupation, he joined the soccer team of the Tennis Club, earning the admiration of all of Port-au-Prince. In 1921, he became the star of the newly created Tivoli Athletic Club, along with Philippe Cham, Rene Etheart, Justin Sam, Leon Chips, Lucien Regnier and Alberic Cassagnol.

In 1924, Sylvio Cator, Andre Theard and Emmanuel Armand were bound to Paris to further their college education. They were given the task to represent Haiti at the VIIIth Olympic Games. However, when the Olympic Committee of Haiti requested funds for the Haitian team, the American agent who then oversaw the Haitian Finances refused to give a dime, unless he could verify the ability of the athletes. Hurriedly, the committee set up a field on the Champ-de-Mars. The same afternoon, Cator did a long jump that landed him beyond the sand box, on the hard surface. In doing so, he sprained his ankle, but he had jumped 7.35 m., farther than the French record holder. The funds were allocated. However in Paris, despite intense physical therapy, his ankle still swollen, he finished 15th in the high jump and 12th in the long jump. Instead the Haitian heroes of these games were our free rifle team, who included Ludovic Augustin, Destin Destine, Saint-Eloi Metellus, Astrel Rolland and Ludovic Valborge, all members of the military corps. They earned a bronze medal, the first ever Olympic medal for Haiti.

Cator did not give up. He continued to play soccer and tennis in Port-au-Prince, but he had his eyes on the next Olympics Games of 1928, in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Sylvio Cator jump 7.58 m. enough to win the Silver medal, behind the American Edward Hamm who had established a new Olympic record of 7.73 m. One month later, not only Cator beat Hamm in Paris, but he established a new world record for the long jump at 7.937 m. Back in Haiti, Sylvio Cator and the entire Olympic team received a heroes' welcome. His supporters gave him a brand new Chrysler convertible. His leap into sports history was commemorated by a series of postal stamps that were released by the Haitian government in 1958, 30 years after this extraordinary accomplishment. This world record lasted eight years and was only beaten by the hero of the Berlin Olympics, Jesse Owens who in the presence of the Fuhrer himself established a new Olympic and world record of 8.06 m. However, the Haitian record in long jump after 80 years still belongs to Sylvio Cator, making it the longest standing national record in track and field.

Both Cator and Andre Theard represented Haiti as captain and co-captain at the tenth Olympic Games of Los Angeles in 1932. Cator's performance was dismal. He made a jump of only 5.93 m. and placed ninth behind the American Champion Ed Gordon, whose jump was taped at 7.64 m. However, at a subsequent invitational competition at Soldier's Field in Chicago, Cator won the long jump event with a jump of 7.387 m, proving that he still could do it. However, that was Cator's last appearance at the Olympic Games.

Sylvio Cator had accumulated a total of 37 victories in international competition, in France, England, Holland, Belgium, USA, Poland, Hungary, and Switzerland. He had competed with success not only in long jump, but also in high jump, 100 m dash, tennis, soccer and even boating.

A fervent of all sports, he created the Club "Les Sports Generaux" in Port-au-Prince and was named president of the Haitian Federation of Soccer. He also opened a restaurant, called le "Savoy" at the corner of Rue Capois and Avenue Magny, which was the favorite gathering venue for the intellectuals of his time. Despite all the fame and glory, Sylvio Cator had remained a humble and kind man who always faced with a smile all the adversities that later came his way.

From 1946 to 1950, during the presidency of Dumarsais Estime, he served as mayor of Port-au-Prince. He then was elected to the Legislative Assembly to represent the Town of Aquin. On July

21, 1952, the year of the completion of the stadium, a fabulous life dedicated to sports and country came unexpectedly to an untimely end. The circumstances of his death are unknown to me, but as a child, I remember after Paul Magloire left office in 1956, that the popular minstrels, with their missing front teeth and their breath reeking alcohol would go from door to door during the presidential campaign, singing in quest of a few cents:

“Yo tiye silvio kato

Detri fanmiy desino

“Fol jije (ter)

Me sa se trop a to »

seeming to implicate Magloire in Cator’s death, but we know what « Yo di » and “hear say” mean in Haiti and I am still looking for the truth about the end of the life of this national hero. Nevertheless, he was given a national funeral, celebrated at the Cathedral of Port-au-Prince. At his burial, he was eulogized by members of the government, the Senate, the National Assembly and the Sports Federation. In 1959, the Haitian Senate voted to create a Medal entitled: Ordre du Merite Sportif Sylvio Cator, to be granted to individuals who performed exceptionally well in sports. The government also renamed Stade Magloire, the largest stadium in Haiti, Stade Sylvio Cator.

This is Sylvio Cator. All these thoughts came to my mind as I saw the Haitian delegation walked proudly in Beijing in the Bird’s nest, without the least commentary by the NBC announcer.

Haiti has continued to participate in the Olympics since 1932. Perhaps, their greatest achievements since Sylvio Cator, were in Athens, Greece at the Games of 2004, when Dudley Dorival reached the semi-final in the 110 m. hurdle, with a time of 13.39 sec. and Nadine Faustin also reached the semi-final in the 100 m. hurdle with a time of 12.74 sec. The other Haitian Olympians were in Tae Kwon Do, Tudor Sanon who reached the round of 16, Joel Brutus who in Judo-Heavy weight reached the round of 32, Ernst Laraque in Judo-Light weight, who reached also the round of 32 and finally Dadi Desir and Moise Joseph who respectively in the 400 and the 800 m. races lost in the first round.

One may asked how our athletes fared in Beijing in 2008, since they were not exactly in the spotlight of the media. Azea Augustama, boxing in the 81-kg category lost to Brazil in his first match. Joel Brutus in Judo (100 kg category) lost to Korea in the round of 64. Ange Mercie Jean-Baptiste in Judo (57 kg category) won her first match, but lost to Cuba in the round of 32. Dudley Dorival competing in the 110 m. hurdle with a time of 13.71 sec. moved to the second round and finished seventh in his heat but 25th overall. Barbara Pierre in the 100 m. dash, also advanced to the second round but with a time of 11.56 sec. finished fifth in her heat, but 31st overall and was eliminated. Nadine Faustin in the 100 m. hurdle (13.25 sec.) and Ginou Etienne in the 400 m. race (53.94 sec.) were all eliminated in the first round.

Not the brightest results. Nevertheless, we are proud of our Olympians, who have courageously carried out national colors almost every four years for the past 108 years, despite political unrest, despite natural disasters, despite a lack of year-round financial support, despite the lack of adequate training facilities, often despite the lack of proper coaching. If throughout mankind’s history, sports have played such a dominant role, there must be solid reasons for it. Success in sports is tantamount to psychotherapy for not only the individual performers, but also for entire

nations. Ask the Americans, the Chinese and the Jamaicans. Success in sports provides a mental boost, a lift to the country's spirit.

In Haiti, sports can play a major role in bringing our youth back to an apparent normal life. After being lured to a path of hatred, crime and destruction, sports can strengthen their character, give them a purpose in life and teach them perseverance. Thanks to sports, we all can learn that success does not come easily overnight. It requires sacrifices. It requires to practice, practice and practice, even when you are tired, even when you are not in the mood, even when you are in pain. The Latin philosopher expressed it best "Mens sana in Corpore sano." A healthy body is a sine qua non for a health mind and vice versa. Our youth needs to be challenged to reach for the stars, to dream of impossible things. Stressing the achievements of Sylvio Cator can be a great motivation, but our youth needs all our support, that of all of us private citizens and of the government as well. Governing is not just managing one crisis after another, one conflict after another. It is looking forward and building the future. It is motivating all our fellow countrymen to always do their best and providing them with the venues to develop their skills. It is widening the talent pool, from which our future champions will come. Citius, Altius, Fortius is the motto of the Olympic Games. I am certain that Sylvio Cator would love to see one of our young athletes finally break his long jump record.

As a conclusion, no one says is better than Nadine Faustin-Parker herself: Although she was born in Brussels and lived all her life in New York, when the time came to choose which country to represent, she never had much doubt. "My parents have always kept me close to my Haitian roots, so I never felt because I was outside the country that I was not a part of it. Competing for Haiti gave me a purpose. I enjoy the challenge of trying to put a country on the map. Some Haitian youths are ashamed of their roots, and that 's something I never was so I try to make them understand they have a lot to be happy about." Looking forward to the day when she will no longer be competing herself, she states: "I really want to build a track in Haiti. I see what track and field has done all over the world for the youth. It can really help somebody move forward in life."

Haitian Olympians

1900 – 2008

Date and location Name of the athlete Event Best result Outcome

1900 – Paris, France

Leon Thiercelin

Fencing/master's foil Round 1 Did not advance

Master's epee 3rd & 6th in Pool C Did not advance

1924 – Paris, France V. A. Theard Men's 100 m Round 1 Did not advance

V.A. Theard Men's 200 m Quarter finals Did not advance

E. B. Armand Men's 400 m Round 1 Did not advance

Sylvio Cator High jump (Rnd 1) 1.75 m Did not advance

Sylvio cator Long jump (Rnd 1) 6.81 m Did not advance

E, B. Armand Men's decathlon 5207.895 pts 23rd place

Ludovic Augustin 600 m free rifle 91 pts 5 th place

Ludovic Valborge 600 m free rifle 90 pts Tied for 6th place

Destin Destine 600 m free rifle 86 pts Tied for 10th place

Astrel Rolland 600 m free rifle 85 pts 13th place

Ludovic Augustin Men's team rifle 135 pts 4th place
Astrel Rolland Men's team rifle 129 pts 15th place
Ludovic Valborge Men's team rifle 128 pts Tied for 16th
Destin Destine Men's team rifle 128 pts Tied for 16th
St-Eloi Metellus Men's team rifle 126 Tied for 23rd
Team 646 pts 3rd place
1928 – Amsterdam
Netherlands V. A. Theard Men's 100 m (Rnd 2) 10.6 Did not advance
V.A. Theard Men's 200 m (Rnd 1) 22.4 Did not advance
Sylvio Cator Long jump 7.58 m 2nd place
1932 – Los Angeles, USA Andre Theard Men's 100 m (Rnd 1) 10.9 Did not advance
Sylvio Cator Long jump 5.93 m 9th place
1960 – Rome, Italy Philome Laguerre Weight lifting
Clean and press 137.5 kg 5th place
snatch Did not finish
Clean and jerk Did not finish
1972 – Munich, West Germany Mireille Joseph Women's 100 m (Rnd 1) 13.84 Did not advance
Elsie Baptiste Did not compete
Pierre-Richard Gaetjens Men's 100 m ((Rnd 1) 11.50 Did not advance
Gary Georges Men's 200 m (Rnd 1) 22.97 Did not advance
Jean-Alix Faustin Men's 400 m (Rnd 1) 52.33 Did not advance
Fritz Pierre Men's 800 m (Rnd 1) 2:01.05 Did not advance
Anilus Joseph Men's 10,000 m Round 1 Did not finish
Maurice Charlotin Men's Marathon 3:29:21.0 Last finisher
1976 – Montreal, Canada Antoinette Gauthier Women's 100 m (Rnd 1) 13.11 Did not advance
Louise Pierre Women's 200 m (Rnd 1) 28.19 Did not advance
Rose Gauthier Women's 400 m (Rnd 1) 1:13. 27 Did not advance
Philippe Etienne Men's 100 m (Rnd 1) 11.05 Did not advance
Philippe Etienne Men's 200 m (Rnd 1) 22.57 Did not advance
Wilfrid Cyriaque Men;s 400 m (Rnd 1) 51.49 Did not advance
Wilner Joseph Men's 800 m (Rnd 1) 2:15.26 Did not advance
Emmanuel St-Hilaire Men's 1500 m (Rnd 1) 4:23.41 Did not advance
Dieudonne Lamothe Men's 5000 m (Q. R.) 18:50.07 Did not advance
Olmeus Charles Men's 10,000 m (Q.R) 42:00.11 Did not advance
Thanoule Dezart Men's Marathon Did not finish Did not advance
Olmeus Charles Men's Marathon Did not start
Yves Jeudy Boxing (Lt weight) (quarter finals) Did not advance
Siergot Sully Boxing (Ltwt) (Rnd 1) Did not advance
Wesly Felix Boxing (Wltr wt) (Round 3) K-O Did not advance
1984 – Los Angeles, USA Dieudonne Lamothe Men's Marathon 2:52. 18 78th
Gina Faustin Fencing – Individual foil (Rnd 1) won 2/6 matches Did not advance
Sheila Viard Individual foil (Rnd 1) won 0/6 matches Did not advance
Ronald Agenor Tennis Round 1 Did not advance
1988 – Seoul, South Korea Claude Roumain Men's 100 m (Rnd 1) 11.22 Did not advance
Claude Roumain Men's 200 m (Rnd 1) 12.60 Did not advance
Dieudonne Lamothe Marathon 2:16:15 20th Place

Deborah St-Phard Women's Shot Put (Q. R.) 16.02 m. Did not qualify
Ronald Agenor Tennis Round 1 Did not advance
1992 – Barcelona, Spain Claude Roumain Men's 100 m (Rnd 1) 21.62 Did not advance
Claude Roumain Men's 800 m (Rnd 1) 1:48.82 Did not advance
Dieudonne Lamothe Men's Marathon 2. 36:11 76th
Caleb Jean Judo – ½ light wt Round 2 Did not advance
Rubens Joseph Judo – light wt Round 2 Did not advance
Jean-Alix Holmand Judo – ½ mid wt Round 2 Did not advance
Hermate Souffrant Judo – middle wt Round 2 Did not advance
Parnel Legros Judo – ½ heavy wt Round 2 Did not advance
1996 – Atlanta, USA Anderson Vilien Men's 200 m (Rnd 1) 21.62 Did not advance
Jean Destine Men's 800 m. (Rnd 1) 1:48.82 Did not advance
Wagner Marseille Men's 110m h (Rnd 1) 13.95 Did not advance
Adler Volmar Judo - 1/2mdwt Round 2 Did not advance
Somoza Celestin Judo – middle wt Round 2 Did not advance
Alain Sergile Swimming
100 m. butterfly (Rnd 1) 58.23 Did not advance
Ronald Agenor Men's Tennis Round 1 Did not advance
2000 – Sydney, Australia Gerard Clercil Men's 400 m (Rnd 1) 46.69 Did not advance
Dudley Dorival Men's 110 m. h (final) 13.49 7th place
Nadine Faustin Women's 100 m. h (Rnd 2) 13.25 Did not advance
Ernst Laraque Judo – light wt Round 1 Did not advance
Neyssa Etienne Women's Tennis Round 1 Did not advance
2004 – Athens, Greece Dudley Dorival Men's 110 m. h (semi-final) 13.39 Did not advance
Nadine Faustin Women's 100m. h (semi-final) 12.74 Did not advance
Dadi Denis Men's 400 m (Rnd 1) 47.57 Did not advance
Moise Joseph Men's 800 m (Rnd 1) 1:48.20 Did not advance
Andre Berto Boxing – wltr wt Round of 32 Did not advance
Ernst Laraque Judo – light wt Round of 32 Did not advance
Joel Brutus Judo – Heavy wt Round of 32 Did not advance
Tudor Sanon Taekwondo >80kg Round of 16 Did not advance
2008 – Beijing, China Barbara Pierre Women's 100 m (Rnd 2) 11.56 31st place
Dudley Dorival Men's 110 m h (Rnd 2) 13.71 25th
Nadine Faustin-Parker Women's 100 m. h (Rnd 1) 13.25 Did not advance
Ginou Etienne Women's 400 m. (Rnd 1) 53.94 Did not advance
Joel Brutus Judo(> 100 kg) Round of 64 Did not advance
Ange Mrie Jn-Baptiste Judo (578 kg) Round of 32 Did not advance
Azea Augustama Boxing (81 kg) Round 1 Did not advance