

Champion sprinter Usain Bolt visits Cricket Hall of Fame



From Left (1) Bolt shows off his lightning pose to delight of the crowd. (2) Bolt meets 1952 Olympic 100 meters champion Lindy Remigino. (3) Bolt views exhibits at Cricket Hall of Fame

By STAN WALKER

The Cricket Hall of Fame was abuzz with excitement on Monday, September 28, as the world's fastest man Jamaica's Usain Bolt stopped by for a brief tour of the facility and to give hundreds of his admiring Jamaican fans in Hartford, Connecticut, a chance to see him.

Olympic and World champion in the 100- and 200-meters sprint race, Bolt who was in the U.S. on a promotional media tour, spent the earlier part of the day at the ESPN complex in Bristol, Connecticut, where he shot a commercial, appeared on ESPN's news and even ran a race with some of the station's sports anchors.

Bolt who was influenced by his cricket coach to consider a career in track after he observed how fast he was moving on the field, reportedly learnt about the Hall of Fame and of the strong Jamaican population in Hartford and had expressed a desire to visit the area whenever he was in Connecticut.

However, to the disappointment of the more than 500 fans, which showed how to greet him, like his Olympic and World Championship feats, his visit to Hartford was very brief. He arrived earlier than expected and before many even got to the Sportmen's Athletic Club, where he was welcomed at a brief reception, he was whisked away by his handlers to a waiting limousine for the journey back to New York where he was staying.

On his arrival at the Sportmen's complex, Bolt and his entourage which included manager Norman Peart, was treated to a sumptuous Jamaican-style meal in the back lounge of the club, then taken next door to the Cricket Hall of Fame for a brief tour. While at the Hall of Fame, he was presented with an appreciation certificate by the institution's president, Shirley Matthews, a miniature cricket bat signed by members of the Hall of Fame's committee and a Bible. He was also given an appreciation certificate to take back to his coach Glen Mills.

Highlights of his visit was the presentation of the key to the state by Lt. Governor Michael Fedele, who read a proclamation declaring the day "Usain Bolt's Day in the State of Connecticut" from Governor Jodi Rell and a meeting with 1952 Olympic 100 meters champion, Lindy Remigino, a resident of Newington, Connecticut. Remigino was declared winner at the Helsinki games, after he crossed the tape in a dead heat with another Jamaican, Herb McKenley.

Bolt, who was loudly applauded during the reading of the proclamation, responded that he was honored and appreciated the recognition by the governor. "I'll try to come back and show my love and I'll actually use the key. Thank you for supporting me and I'll try to do my best to make you proud. Thank you very much."

He was also scheduled to receive the key to the city and a similar proclamation from Hartford's mayor Eddie Perez, but he left before the mayor arrived.

While at the Hall of Fame, Remigino who was meeting Bolt for the first time, quipped: "You're the only guy who can hit a golf ball and catch it before it hits the ground." The 5 feet 6 inches Remigino, who looked like a midget as he posed for pictures with the 6 feet 5 inches Bolt, said that "Usain is an unbelievable sprinter." The 76-year-old Remigino also gave Bolt copies of pages of stories from his scrapbook.

Despite Bolt's quick departure and complaints by the local media who felt slighted because they did not get a chance to interview him, most of the admiring fans which represented a cross section of ages, from small children to seniors, were happy that he had come after all. Some lucky persons got the opportunity to pose for pictures with him, while a limited number were able to get him to sign a few autographs.

Michael Chambers, director of the Hall of Fame, who was one of the persons who worked very hard to help make the visit a success, said that Jamaicans have a special love for their new sports hero. Bolt is worshipped even more so by those who live abroad, he said. "We were hoping that he would have been here until 8 o'clock. Because he left early, many of the things that we planned in the program did not materialize. I am disappointed that the news media and many of the youngsters in attendance did not get a chance to see and interact with him, however, everyone enjoyed the few minutes that he spent with us," he added.

Please Note: "Sportmen's" is spelt without the 's' after 'sport.'