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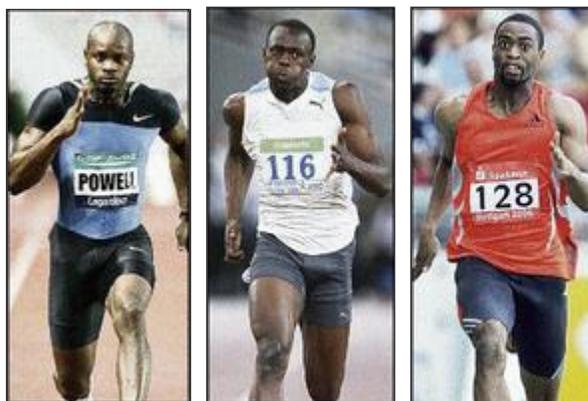
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In a class of their own

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Gordon Williams, Gleaner Writer



(L - R) Powell, Bolt, Gay

WINTER GARDENS, Florida:

The world's fastest men have been separated into two distinct levels, an American track expert believes, with Jamaicans Usain Bolt and Asafa Powell occupying places among an elite trio.

But the chasing group is not far behind, according to Lance Brauman, who trains Tyson Gay of the United States, the third member of that top tier, helping to establish the current era of sprinting as the best of all time.

"You've always got to be looking for the next guy, but at this point, on paper, there's probably three that are setting themselves aside," Brauman said here last week of Bolt, Gay and Powell. "And then a very good pack coming right after them."

Record times

Bolt is the current world record holder and Olympic champion in the 100 and 200 metres. He has run under 9.8 seconds in the 100 four times, with a best time of 9.69 in last year's Olympic final.

Powell, a former world-record holder in the event, has been clocked below the 9.8



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mark seven times, making him and Bolt the only two to do so more than once. His personal best is 9.72.

Gay, the 2007 world champion in the 100 and 200, holds the American record of 9.77 seconds in the shorter sprint. He also clocked the fastest time ever recorded under any condition with a wind-aided 9.68 at the 2008 US Olympic trials.

Brauman expects Bolt, Gay and Powell to go into this year's IAAF World Championships of Athletics in Berlin, [Germany](#), as firm favourites to win [gold](#) in the 100 metres.

Gay, as reigning champion, automatically qualifies for a lane at the [championships](#) in both events.

Bolt, who, like Powell, must earn his spot at [Jamaica's](#) trials, is expected to run the double in August in Berlin as well. However, the coach has not ruled out other competitors in the 100 metres, who he believes are not that far behind. He would not be overly alarmed if any from that secondary tier topples the elite trio this summer.

DEPTH

"I don't want to call it a big surprise," said Brauman, who coaches several other Jamaican sprinters, including Dwight Thomas and Steve Mullings, plus Veronica Campbell-Brown, a world and two-time Olympic champion, and Olympic relay gold medallist, Aleen Bailey.

The current field of world-class sprinters, he believes, is very deep.

"I mean, you've got (2008 Olympic 100 metres silver medalist) Richard Thompson from Trinidad (best time of 9.89), Walter Dix from the US (9.91). There's always gonna be fast people," Brauman explained. "Just like before this crop, (American) Maurice Greene (a former Olympic and world champion and world-record holder). Well, who's gonna be next? Well, obviously, next is now."

Despite Bolt's heroics in [Beijing](#) and Powell's consistent times over the shorter sprint, where his 48 is second only behind Greene's 51 for the most sub-10 seconds clockings in history, Brauman believes Gay should not be overlooked.

He said the American has fully recovered from a hamstring injury suffered in the 200 metres at the US trials that possibly hampered his preparation - and chances - at the Olympics.

Brauman is confident that the extra time Gay will have to prepare for Berlin, since he will not have to peak to qualify for the World Championships via the US trials, will help bring him back to his best. He is looking forward to meeting Bolt's challenge in both sprints.

"(Gay's) fitness is going fine," the coach said Thursday. "Training is going well ... He's got a bye in both events. The plan, as of now, is to run both (100 and 200). Usain had a great year last year. Tyson had a great year before that. I mean, three really, really good sprinters in the world right now and (Gay) is one of them. So, when it comes to a championship, you throw your hat into the ring and see where the chips fall.



"(Bolt and Powell) are very talented," he added. "On any given day, I think anybody is beatable. It's been proven. We've seen (Bolt) lose a race last year. Asafa beat him once, at least that I know of. Anybody can be beaten on a given day."

Sprinting era

According to Brauman, the elite trio has helped to stamp the current age as the greatest in sprinting.

"All you have to do is look at the clock," he said. "That's the easy answer. I mean, you've got the three fastest people (Bolt, Powell and Gay) of all time running at the exact same time. So sure, yeah, I mean it states the height of the sport, in that event."

Top US coach, Brauman, says Bolt, Powell and Gay in a different league

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