

## **TTOC AWARDS CEREMONY - 29th December 2021**

**ADDRESS by Her Excellency Paula-Mae Weekes, ORTT,  
President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

Good evening and Seasons Greetings to the sporting and the national community.

Many years ago, in the early days of the National Lottery I would buy a ticket for every draw. At the appointed time I would settle myself in front of the TV dreaming about what I would do with my first prize. And when I didn't win that, I would simply go along adjusting my fantasies as the second and third winning numbers were drawn and so on and so on. When it was all over and I had not won a red cent I would say philosophically, 'oh well there's always another chance'. And that is how I and I suspect the rest of the nation felt about the 2020 Olympics held this year. Given the totality of the circumstances leading up to the Games, it was perhaps unrealistic, though not impossible for our elite athletes to excel but we the die-hard supporters held out hope to the very end and we keep hope alive, secure in the knowledge that there will be another Olympic Games in 2024 and with it another opportunity for our sportsmen and women to shine.

With a lottery, sheer luck is the determining factor and while serendipity may indeed be a minor contributor to Olympic success, it is overshadowed by painstaking preparation and practice, raw grit, near heroic sacrifice and mental toughness, all of which our Olympians have time and time again displayed. The celebration of excellence in athletic performance is the reason we gather virtually this evening for the 27th iteration of the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee's annual awards ceremony.

Voltaire captured it best when he said, "appreciation is a wonderful thing, it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well". The national community is thrilled to share in the achievements and recognition of our sportsmen and women who distinguished themselves over the past season, a hard won accomplishment given the challenges that confronted them over the last two years.

I salute this evening's awardees and wish them every success as they continue to fly the red, white and black. While the Trinidad and Tobago flag was not hoisted at any of the medal ceremonies in Japan, our athletes persevered, distinguishing themselves and doing us proud on the international scene later in the year, reminding us all that they were still a force to be reckoned with.

Whether or not they are in the running for an award this evening and let me say that even as the Patron of the TTOC, I am kept in the dark until the awardees are announced, I must mention Dylan Carter who continues to break records, recently winning silver in the 50M Butterfly in Abu Dhabi. Teniel Campbell for her recent successes in Chile and Australia and Nicholas Paul whose recent silver medal was the nation's first World's cycling medal in thirty years.

And I anticipate that Kelsey Daniel and Tyriq Horsford who earned silver and bronze in the Men's Long Jump and Men's Javelin respectively at the Junior Pan American games in Columbia and Akil Campbell with his gold medal win in the Nation's Cup in Columbia will soon enjoy these august ranks. They are but a few examples of the talent, determination and prowess possessed by our sporting vanguards. These key attributes are best synthesized when buttressed by a strong, responsive, reliable structure.

The TTOC with its seven-plus decades of selecting, training and preparing our athletes for the biggest stage of sport is such an institution. As you celebrate your 75th anniversary you continue to support and champion the well-being of your charges, a critical responsibility during this trying and volatile period.

On behalf of the nation, I thank the TTOC for its unstinting service and commitment to our nation's brightest sporting stars. The theme you have chosen for the 2021 awards ceremony, The Glass Is Not Half Empty, is indicative of a positive and resolute mindset; an organization realistic but undaunted. I commend you for your innovative methods of raising funds, including a virtual marathon and was delighted to note that you had not abandoned real experiences altogether when you hosted your in-person marathon walk from Saint Mary's Junction to the Queen's Park Savannah, of course with all COVID protocols observed.

I was further heartened when in October 2021 you advanced your Future is Female initiative hosting your 2nd virtual webinar, Advancing Women in Leadership: Overcoming the Economic Financial Challenges of COVID-19. I take this opportunity to appeal to the Ministry of Sport and other sponsors to continue and increase funding for our elite athletes, financial constraints notwithstanding.

Our athletes require tangible and sustained support if they are to realize their full potential and new donors are always welcome. I could not leave you this evening without mentioning an issue that has been front and center for elite athletes internationally.

They push their bodies to extremes, training all year round for a few minutes at a time of competition, they face injury, disappointment, burnout and the relentless expectation of the public, all of which can have a deleterious impact on their mental health. Athletes I encourage you to prioritize your emotional well-being. Your mental health is as important as your physical health.

We are on the cusp of a New Year, the ideal vantage point from which you can look back and appreciate small triumphs, even where you did not accomplish all your goals and identify your errors, challenges and frustrations for the lessons they have taught you. And a point also from which to look forward, committing yourself wholeheartedly to going faster, higher, stronger together.

I wish you all a happy, productive and successful New Year.

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