

For The Want Of A Belizean Flag

Kim Hernandez

When the Belize Olympic team passed through Los Angeles on their way to Beijing, for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, the Belizean community certainly looked forward to hosting them during the brief layover. Preparations were made and a welcome delegation consisting of Consul General Roland Yorke, Mr. Merve Hendy, Mr. Fred Westby, Ms. Verona Burks and Ms. Kim Hernandez were in place; but regrettably no athletes were in sight.

After about two hours of unsuccessful sightings, Consul General Roland Yorke took matters into his own hands. Accompanied by Mr. Hendy, they proceeded to try and track the athletes through the airlines. After some diplomatic maneuverings, Air China reluctantly agreed to page via intercom two of the names they were given. Simultaneously, other members of the delegation worked on airport officials and individual passengers to get word to the athletes. After about 20 minutes, Jayson Jones and Tricia Flores emerged in the check in area.

Flores and Jones were excited to meet the small delegation. They explained they were unaware of the layover plans that included the welcoming party. Both displayed much enthusiasm and were genuinely eager to speak about their expectations in Beijing.

Jones, who resides in Florida, will be participating in the two hundred meter race. And explained he ran his qualifying race in Florida. He is heading to the Olympics with a 20.70 seconds time, which is the current record holding time for Belize. The 30-year old has high expectations for a good performance. He previously represented Belize in international races at the 2004 Olympics, the 2003 Pan American Games and the 2001 World Games.

28 year old Trisha Flores lives and trains in Belize. She will represent Belize in the Long Jump competition. She is the current Belize record holder in long jump with a 5.96 meters jump distance. She is an educator at Nazarene Primary School and a student at the University of Belize. Her focus is Primary Education. Flores is looking forward to and is excited about her Olympic appearance as well.

Flores and Jones provided information about the other athletes; Jonathan Williams of Los Angeles who will be performing in the 400 meter hurdles is a Belize record holder for that event. There is also Alfonso Martinez who will be representing Belize in Taekwondo. He lives and trains in Taiwan.

Unlike the confusion surrounding the meeting of the delegation that included the athletes, two nights earlier when the two Belizean students representing Belize at the Olympic Youth Camp were in transit via Los Angeles, things were more organized. Ryan Zuniga and Kara Kisling, both eighteen, wore their Olympic jerseys and carried the Belizean flag. The Consul General and Mr. Hendy also had a Belizean flag so it was easy for the delegates to be identified and, consequently retrieved from the airport; Recognition was incredibly instantaneous. If only there was a Belizean flag present in the delegation carrying the athletes that night, the reception would have been less hectic.

Both students spent their layover at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Merve Hendy. They were able to unwind, ate, napped and prepared, for the ten-hour flight to China. We bade them adieu and good luck.

Kisling and Zuniga submitted essays/resumes about their involvement in Belizean sports to win the honor to travel to China. They were both looking forward to the visit and expected to visit the games, see the sites of China and interact with others attending the youth camp.

The Belize delegation to the 2008 Summer Olympic Games is made up of fourteen people; four athletes, two youth camp participants and eight officials and attendants. All attended the opening ceremonies. Belizeans around the world tuned in for the opening ceremonies and watched with great pride as Jonathon Williams proudly carried the Belizean Flag.