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Sport

Fulfilling a vision

Treasure Beach Sports Park moving from strength to strength

By Garfield Myers Editor-at-Large, South Central Bureau
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Land covered by trees in the distance will be incorporated in the planned track and field facility.

TREASURE BEACH, St Elizabeth — The dream of the Treasure Beach Sports Park becoming a world-class facility took another big step in mid-December with the opening of the Donald Buchanan Sports Tourism Centre.

The centre, which constitutes phase four of the sports park development, cost \$38 million to build. The new 7,000 square foot building includes spectator pavilions at top and bottom floors, changing rooms, bathrooms, training rooms, an emergency medical room, a commercial kitchen and a bar.

It is named in honour of late Cabinet Minister and Member of Parliament for South West St Elizabeth Donald Buchanan because of his pioneering work in locating land for the Treasure Beach Sports Park back in the early 2000s.

It was the start of a project considered vital in maximising benefits from sports and entertainment tourism, said to be among the fastest growing niches in the global economy.

Buchanan arranged a 50-year lease of the land to the dynamic community organisation BREDS, led by hotelier Jason Henzell. BREDS, formed in 1998 as a non-profit organisation targeting the needs of this seaside tourism/fishing village, has had increasing and varied impact on the community down the years.

Since 2010, BREDS has raised \$90 million from sources described by Henzell as "60 per cent private and 40 per cent public" in the development of cricket facilities now said to be at internationally accepted standards for warm-up as well as regional first-class cricket; a football field, a small pavilion, courts for tennis, netball, basketball and volleyball; a children's play area; a challenge (obstacle) course for team building named after former US Secretary of State Colin Powell; an irrigation system powered by solar energy and, most recently, the Donald Buchanan Sports Tourism Centre.

The Tourism Enhancement Fund, Digicel Foundation, CHASE Fund, GraceKennedy and Gatorade were the main sponsors of the sports tourism centre.

Henzell says the next phase — phase five of the sports park development will involve the first modern track and field facility in south central/south western Jamaica.

A vital element for the project has already been laid with the donation of \$4.5 million by Cubie Seegobin, manager of track stars Yohan Blake and Warren Weir to buy two acres of land to the east of the sports park, Henzell said.

"By the end of 2016 we want to have a proper track and field facility here at Treasure Beach — a modern mondo or chevron track and then all of the field facilities, javelin, shot put, high jump... all of the other facilities that go along with that," Henzell told Observer Central.

As yet, Henzell has no clear idea of where the money for the track and field complex will come from. But that hasn't stopped him in the past. He estimates the development will cost in the region of US\$1million.

"We are talking to Adidas, we are talking to Mondo, and I know that the funds will come. I don't know when and how but I know I am going to get it done," he said.

Henzell credits strategic planning and, crucially, a sports tourism strategy document prepared by marketing specialist Andre Gordon as crucial to the growth of the sports park thus far.

"It is not by accident that we are here today and I think it's important for people to know that," said Henzell.

The evidence suggests vision and a willingness to adapt and adjust in mid-stride.

Aware that most Jamaican playing surfaces are poor because of the lack of irrigation water, planners at the sports park ensured the development of a well and an irrigation system powered by solar. And when it turned out that the cricket and football fields were prone to flooding during heavy rains, the land was graded to provide water run-off to a pond, now a favourite spot for ducks. Water from that pond also serves field irrigation.

"The problem with most fields in Jamaica is lack of irrigation, that is the problem with 99 per cent of fields," said Henzell.

Crucially too, there must be management. "Let us make no false pretences, it (sports park) is a managed facility it is not a free-for-all," said Henzell, who was praised by a range of speakers including former prime minister PJ Patterson during the phase four opening ceremony, for his commitment to Treasure Beach and community development.

"We have to schedule time for our courts, our fields and community centre because if it is not managed it will go down, and you will have a really sorry-looking facility in a few years," he said.

Henzell says he has a clear vision "of a few years from now" seeing hotel rooms packed because of sports in Treasure Beach with economic spin-offs for everyone, and scores of youngsters gaining scholarships to universities because of their exposure at the sports park.

"I see us building dormitories; I see teams being booked back to back; I see other sports parks in Jamaica starting because of Treasure Beach not being able to fulfil the demand that is coming up on us. That is what I see. I see track stars, tennis stars, cricket stars, football stars coming out of here," said Henzell.

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