

JAMAICA “READY TO RUMBLE” AT 42ND WORLD CHESS OLYMPIAD IN BAKU

After travelling for more than a day Jamaica’s fifteen-person delegation touched down safely in Baku, Azerbaijan on August 31, a day ahead of the official arrival date. Although there were some issues (*several players are still without their luggage!*) the players have settled in nicely and are looking forward to combat.

GLITTERING OPENING CEREMONY

The host country, Azerbaijan, staged a fabulous opening ceremony which began just after 7:00 pm on Thursday, September 1 at the National Gymnastics Arena. There was variety, the performances involving acrobatics, music, dance and impressive graphics highlighting, understandably, the chess pieces and themes.



National Gymnastics Arena – site of Opening Ceremony.



Jamaicans outside the venue before the opening ceremony.



Beautiful display during the ceremony.



Majestic pieces (courtesy of the brilliant David Llada)



Grace on show (courtesy of David Llada)



The opening ceremony in its glory.

The country's President **Ilham Aliyev**, who later declared the games open, led the applause from the audience represented chiefly by players and delegates from the approximately **one hundred and eighty** countries present.

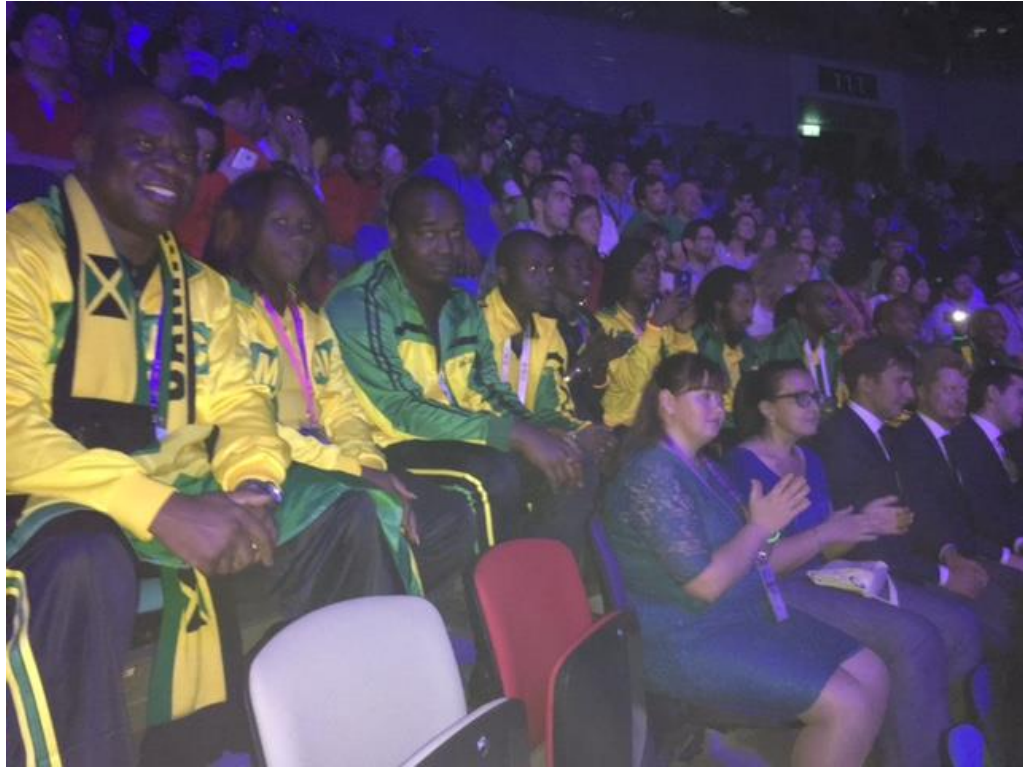
The cheers rang out (*Jamaica's arguably being the loudest – Russia coming a close second!*) when the names of the countries were called and their respective flags highlighted. A nice, piquant touch was added by the organizers - countries being identified, additionally, on a map of the world graphically mounted on the "*Chessboard*" stage.



Performers and flags of various countries - See Jamaica's!

Members of the Jamaican delegation were resplendent in their national colours (*black, gold and green*) with the players from **Somalia** giving serious competition for “**best dressed delegation**” in their blue and white regalia complete with hats! Both groups took photographs together.

A number of other teams were well-dressed including the Azerbaijani Women’s team and the Russians.



Jamaica's delegation sitting above juggernauts Russia and below powerhouses Hungary.



Somalia looking regal (courtesy of David Llada)



Jamaica and Somalia at the opening ceremony.

WORLD CHAMPIONS DREW COLOURS

The drawing of the colours for the top boards in the Women's and Open sections, respectively, were done by China's Grandmaster **Hou Yifan** (*the reigning Women's World Champion*) and Russia's Grandmaster **Vladimir Kramnik**, the former World Champion for Classical Chess, in the presence of Azerbaijani International Arbiter **Faik Gasanov**, the Chief Arbiter. This brief ceremony was a crucial prerequisite in determining who plays whom with what colour.



IA Faik Gasanov, Chief Arbiter, flanked by China's GM Hou Yifan and Russia's GM Vladimir Kramnik who drew the colours for the top teams (courtesy of David Llada)

After the ceremony had ended the captains of Jamaica's Women and Open teams CM Russel Porter and IM Jomo Pitterson, respectively, attended the *(technical)* meeting of the captains and officials at the same venue. They collected the packages for the teams with the official team composition, rules of play etc.

JAMAICA'S WOMEN'S OPPONENTS KNOWN!

The first of eleven rounds will "*pawn off*" tomorrow, Friday September 2 (3:00 pm) at the magnificent ***Crystal Hall***. In the Women's section Jamaica (*average rating of 1882 and ranked 75 out of 140 entrants*) will battle the much higher rated ***Bulgaria*** (*average rating of 2387 and ranked # 9!!*) in match 10.

The Bulgarians have a massive **500-point** rating advantage (*akin to a flyweight boxing a heavyweight!*) and one of the world's top female players - former Women's World Champion Grandmaster **Antoaneta Stefanova** – on their top board. The Jamaicans, led by Woman International Master **Deborah Richards-Porter**, will have the black pieces on boards 1 and 3 and White on boards 2 and 4, respectively.

The top ranked team in the Women's section is **China** with an average rating of 2560. The women from the Orient are followed by **Ukraine** (2505). Defending champion **Russia** is rated third (2504). The teams are competing for the *"International Vera Menchik Cup"*.

JAMAICA'S MEN DON THEIR ARMOUR!

Jamaica's male gladiators (*average rating of 2166 and ranked 115 of 180 entrants*) will battle 26th-ranked **Argentina** (*average rating 2594*) in match 25. Argentina's average rating is more than **400** points higher than Jamaica's and each member of Lionel Messi's country is an international Grandmaster. Nonetheless, one must never forget that immortal story involving David and Goliath!

The top ranked team in the Open section is **Russia** with the average rating of the players being a whopping 2768! They are followed by the **United States of America** narrowly behind with 2765. Rounding off the top three is the defending champion **China** with 2740. The winning team in the Open section shall receive *the "International Hamilton-Russell Cup"*.

Each player has 90 minutes for the first 40 moves, an

additional 30 minutes thereafter, plus 30 seconds per move from move 1. A point is awarded for a win; a half-point for a draw and zero for a loss on each board. When the points are tabulated the team with more will be declared the winner and awarded match points. No player is allowed to offer a draw until after 30 moves have been completed.

The top teams with the best combined scores in the Open and Women sections shall receive the ***“Nona Gaprindashvili International Trophy.”***

Jamaica’s participation was made possible chiefly by sponsorship from the Government of Jamaica (*via the Sports Development Foundation*), the Jamaica Chess Federation (***“JCF”***) and the Kasparov Chess Foundation.

Ian G. Wilkinson QC
President, Jamaica Chess Federation
Baku, Azerbaijan

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