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## Sporting Gem In Treasure Beach

Published: Sunday | February 16, 2014

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Business partners Cubie Seegobin (left) and Jason Henzell.

### Andre Lowe

Located on Jamaica's southern coast, community tourism haven Treasure Beach has built a solid reputation for being one of the island's unspoiled escapes.

But there is so much more happening there.

"Our goal is to become the leading community-based sports park and academy in the Caribbean by 2015."

Jason Henzell's vision for his brainchild, the Breds Treasure Beach Sports Park, seemed a little too optimistic, as we made our way past the signpost and down a long, narrow dirt road flanked by cow-grazing lands.

However, as the less-than-modest entry opened up to a well-conceived spread of sporting and lifestyle offerings, the concept became clear; Treasure Beach, it seemed, had found its true gem.

Henzell, of Jake's Hotel fame - a cheerful, rainbow-coloured boutique getaway, has been somewhat of a pioneer where community tourism is concerned. What he is hoping to achieve with this sports park, is a similar level of local engagement, interwoven with top-class facilities and instructors.

sports development

The aim, to create an environment that caters to the holistic fusion of sports and wellness as a conduit for sports development and a catalyst for community-based sports tourism - an aspect that is well under way with several English County teams, fitness enthusiasts from all over the world, football coaches from Ajax and Valencia, as well as tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams already utilising the venue.

Bordered by farm-ready lands with a gently sloped hill forming a postcard backdrop, the space has grown tremendously since former member of parliament, the late Donald Buchanan, leased the property to Breds, with the 21-acre venue now featuring one of the best cricket ovals in the country, three football fields, the General Colin Powell Challenge Course, the Gatorade Fitness Trail, the Wray & Nephew Pavillion, kids' play area, tennis, netball and basketball courts, as well as bathroom and changing facilities.

It doesn't stop there, with work currently taking place on a US\$75,000 400-metre all-grass athletics track, the contribution of noted athletics manager Cubie Seegobin, who purchased an adjoining two acres of land and handed it over to Breds.

Ground will also soon be broken on a 9,600-square foot, \$38-million conference centre, fitted with a commercial kitchen and emergency room/clinic, with plans also afoot to develop a meditation/yoga area around an existing on-property pond in addition to a running trail.

"What we really wanted to do was create a community-based sports park and academy with professional facilities, professional coaches so that we could give kids at the grass-roots level an opportunity for greatness," said Henzell, while making a note of one of the park's cricket academy participant, Marquino Mindie, who is currently with the West Indies at the Under-19 World Cup in Dubai.

"We are linked with all the primary schools in the region, we have a programme called Edusport where we provide a sports and education programme to 11 primary schools and that is done through the United Nations International Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF) and caters for 1,500 kids per week. That is more about playing and having fun, gender equality, child protection and the more talented kids will come up in the academy structure where they will get more sports-specific training," Henzell added.

Meanwhile, Seegobin, who manages star Jamaican sprinters Yohan Blake and Warren Weir, shared his chance meeting with Henzell at London's Gatwick Airport. A get-together that led to him visiting the facility, falling in love with the project and spending US\$45,000 (\$4.8 million) to purchase additional land to facilitate the addition of a running track.

"I just want to build the best athletic facility here at this level, we have the space to build. I want to put in a running trail and that is my commitment personally and financially," said Seegobin, who is hoping that an all-weather track can be added later on.

"As long as I am managing athletes they will be committed to this and indirectly it's a part of Warren (Weir) and Yohan's (Blake) commitment as well," added Seegobin, a man who Henzell described as the perfect partner for the ongoing project.

"The experience he (Seegobin) brings is tremendous and the support by contributing money to buy two acres of adjoining land for track and field is going to give the complex a massive boost," Henzell offered.

"This park is going to transform this community and what better way to do it than through sports, health, and fitness."

It's still a work in progress, but Henzell's sporting treasure is expected to also help the region's economy, with US\$7 million in new revenue projected over the next five years through the expected creation of new hotel rooms to satisfy its traffic.

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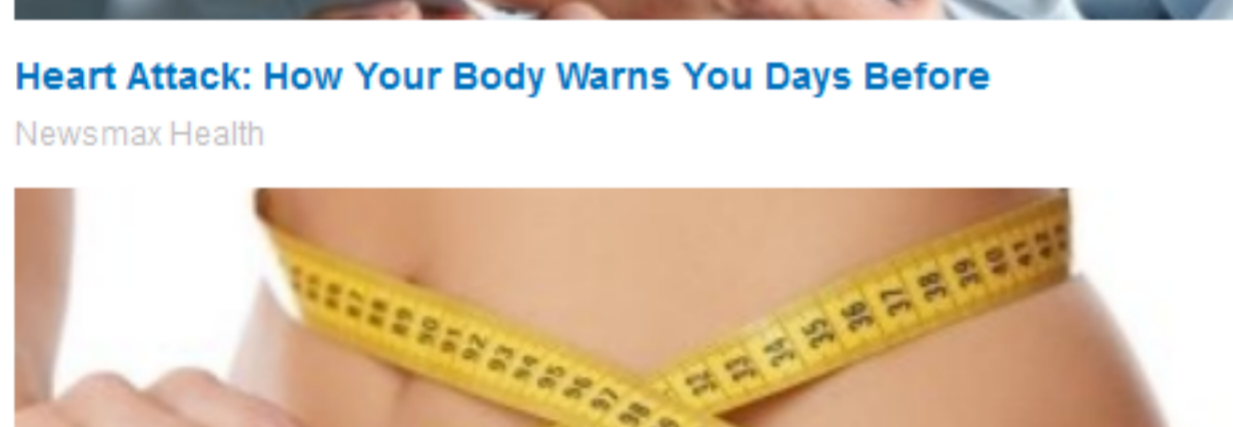
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