

Powell's absence clears way for Bolt

Season's fastest man pulls out of 100m crunch with groin injury

PHILIP GOH

philipgoh@mediacorp.com.sg

DAEGU (South Korea) — Asafa Powell rarely upstages Usain Bolt on the running track but he surely did yesterday at the Jamaican team's press conference — and he was not even there.

And it was the manner in which his absence from this weekend's highly-anticipated 100m showdown with Bolt was made known that was sensational.

Before entering the conference venue, representatives from Puma, the Jamaican team sponsors, had informed some of the media that Powell would not take his place for the session as planned.

But it was 40 minutes into the event at the Daeduk Cultural Hall during a question and answer segment with selected Jamaican athletes that things descended into a farce.

Sprinters Nesta Carter, Yohan Blake and Michael Frater were on stage when the emcee asked Frater an innocuous enough question about whether he had been doing any special training for the 100m.

The 28-year-old, who was part of the 4x100m gold medal winning quartet at both the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and Berlin world championships in 2009, replied: "It's my speciality and what I have been training for all year. Uhm ... I didn't



With Asafa Powell and Tyson Gay injured, Bolt should have no difficulties winning the 100m. AP

come here expecting to run the 100m but unfortunately Asafa wasn't able to make it, so ... uhm ... I'm here and I'm ready to go."

The impact of those words streaked like lightning through the 400-strong media present in the auditorium and soon the questions, in many variations, came thick and fast as many sought to clarify the statement which implied the man many had expected to end Bolt's stranglehold on the 100m was a non-starter.

Jamaican team leader and former

sprint queen Grace Jones sought to quell the disquiet by saying she is not privy to a technical meeting running concurrently elsewhere in the city but by then the news was beyond control.

Even when Bolt took to the stage later on, it was clear that the absent Powell was going to steal the headlines and there was nothing the world-record holder could do about it.

Asked about Powell's pullout, Bolt said: "Asafa's out? This is the first I'm hearing

about it so I can't really answer that question. I saw Asafa yesterday so I don't know."

Since setting a new world record in June 2005 — the 9.77sec mark stood for one month short of three years — Powell has been beaten at major events, first by American Tyson Gay at the 2007 Osaka world championships and then by teammate Bolt at the Beijing Olympics and in Berlin the following year, leading many to question his mental toughness.

With this season's leading time of 9.78sec, the 28-year-old Powell was expected to finally do one over Bolt as Gay had also begged out of the race with injury.

Powell's agent Paul Doyle confirmed later that the groin injury his runner sustained on July 30 had not healed sufficiently but that he could still take part in the 4x100m relay.

But even if his spirit is strong, Powell's body has failed him yet again for the showdown that all fans want to see and the path is now open for Bolt to strike gold yet again.

But the 25-year-old, dubbed "Insane Usain", doused all talk of threatening his own 100m world record of 9.58sec: "This for me is a comeback season. I need to get back to tip-top condition, I don't think I'm in 9.5 shape at the moment.

"A lot of guys are running fast, I'm not in tip-top shape but I'm focused and I'm ready."

Plans to prepare Singaporean sailors for America's Cup in tow

SINGAPORE — A team of Singapore sailors could soon be challenging the likes of 2010 champion Oracle Racing and Team New Zealand in the prestigious America's Cup if a plan by the owners of the Audi ultra Super Maxi racing yacht takes off.

Two-time world champion and sailing legend Ludde Ingvall, YuuZoo Corporation co-founders Ron Creevey and Thomas Ziliacus have launched a programme here to help groom and develop Singapore sailors in big boat racing and become world-class yachtsmen.

Part of their initiative will also include anchoring the 30-metre-long, 40-metre-tall Audi ultra Super Maxi (picture) at Marina Bay for a month before moving it to One Degree 15 Marina Club on Sentosa.

Speaking to the media at yesterday's launch, Super Maxi skipper Ingvall, who has competed in the Whitbread Round the World Race twice and won the Sydney to Hobart Race in 2000 and 2004, said: "I spoke about this with Thomas 10 years ago but it was too early for Singapore to get into this. With the talent pool available today, we feel we can help advance them into big boat and professional sailing.

"If this runs well here, in 2013, we could have a Singapore-built boat racing

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in the United States, Europe, and win. The objective is to have the Number 1 Super Maxi in the world.

"The talent is here and they just need to be given a chance. We are quite happy to have people sail with us and move on. If we become the stepping stone, in 2013 we could have five big boats competing for Singapore as individual groups and have a big skill set and crew pool to think about the America's Cup."

Singapore Sailing Federation (SSF) general manager Jason Lim was delighted with the initiative.

"This is an opportunity for young sailors to have a shot and jump start into big boat sailing, which we could not afford", he said.

"They will get a chance to leap frog into a new level of sailing and we don't want to miss it," he said.



PHOTO COURTESY YUUZOO CORPORATION

Selection of the 28-man crew has already started with the 20-tonne Super Maxi to be manned by a 50-50 balance of international and local sailors.

These could include world-class sailors who were part of the owners' Big Boat Racing Team such as America's Cup sailors Will McCarthy (Alinghi), Anthony Nossiter (Team Origin) and Oracle Racing skipper James Spithill.

Some 70 Singaporeans have already

sent in their applications and the SSF will be recommending 12 sailors and six reserves for the team.

The crew will be selected by Sept 23 and are scheduled to compete in the China Coast Regatta from Oct 14 to 16, the Hong Kong to Vietnam race (Oct 19) and the 25th Phuket Kings Cup Regatta from Dec 3 to 10.

Visit www.bigboatracing.com for more information on the Audi ultra racing team.

LOW LIN FHOONG