

**The Business of Play: Protecting Workers, Elevating Legends,
and Rebuilding the Jamaican Sporting Economy**

Wavell Hinds, MP

Clarendon Northern

Opposition Spokesperson on Labour and Sport

Madam Speaker, I rise today to make my presentation to this honourable House for the 2026 Sectoral Debate. I do so on behalf of the resilient, dignified and proud people of Clarendon Northern - a people who understand struggle, sacrifice and survival. To my family, my supporters and my formidable team, thank you for grounding me in this journey of public service. I also thank my colleagues and specifically the Leader of the Opposition for entrusting me with this honour.

Madam Speaker, today is also special as I make my presentation during Workers' Week. I want salute the unyielding workers of Jamaica, who have built the bedrock of our democracy. From our public sector workers to the informal labour force, I extend my profound gratitude to the men and women who keep this nation moving forward. I also extend my congratulations to the IDT on their ongoing 50th Anniversary Celebrations.

Madam Speaker, I begin today with what should have been an uncomplicated national celebration. This August, cricket fans will pack the stands at Sabina Park to welcome our brand-new local franchise: The Jamaica Kingsmen. The CPL franchise is finally returning to Jamaica - after a long, painful absence, which has left our local fans starved of home-ground tournament action since 2019.



Now, Madam Speaker, I can already see the members on the opposite side puffing their chests. I can see the Minister of Sport, Member Grange, and her PR team preparing for the photo ops and the ribbon-cutting. But before they try to take a lap of honour, let us remind this honourable House that it was not by accident that the Jamaica Tallawahs left our beautiful shores. For years, private stakeholders have been pleading for meaningful structural support, strategic partnership, and vision, to no avail. The franchise packed up and left Jamaica because this administration refused to create an environment in which professional sport could survive sustainably. The Jamaica Tallawahs, like so many Jamaicans, were neglected, starved out of their own home and driven away by governmental indifference!



So, to the members opposite, I say this earnestly: You cannot purposely mash up the house, leave the yard empty for years, wait for private investors to rebuild it, and then expect the public to treat you like a hero for standing in the doorway! We welcome the franchise, but let us not confuse private-sector rescue missions with governmental success. We are glad the Kingsmen are awake, because the Government has been fast asleep!

THE LABOUR CRACKS: STAGNANT PROTECTION, RE-BUILDING THE SECTOR

Madam Speaker, before we talk about the economy of play, we must talk about the reality of work. Sport is work, and athletes are workers, and under this administration, the entire labour landscape is fractured.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Labour spoke immediately before me in this debate, and while listening closely to his presentation, I found it highly unfortunate that his carefully crafted talking points did not address the harsh, systemic realities on the ground that his Ministry continues to overlook. My colleague, Member Brown Burke, spoke eloquently and extensively during her contribution regarding the broader macroeconomic challenges facing Jamaican workers. However, as the Shadow Minister, I must narrow our focus to the immediate, dangerous policy gaps, leaving our workforce exposed.

Let us consider the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). This vital piece of legislation has been dragged through the corridors of bureaucracy by this administration for three consecutive terms! Generation after generation of Jamaican workers have gone to their graves waiting for modern safety laws. While the government continues to delay, our citizens, especially those in the rapidly expanding construction sector, are stepping onto job sites without adequate, modern legislative protection, risking their lives in workplaces that remain dangerously underregulated. That is not administrative delay; it is policy negligence.

Three terms of 'soon come' policy is an active failure of the Government toward the Jamaican working class. We are, therefore, calling for the passage of OSHA in this legislative year.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, let us consider the plight of our private security guards. Four years ago, this government removed the legal distinctions that separated the security guard minimum wage from the regular national minimum wage. By flatlining that structure, they effectively froze specialised wage adjustments for the men and women who face the highest daily risks, protecting our banks, our schools, and our lives, yet their specialised hazard pay has been entirely eliminated.

I now turn to another deeply concerning trend: the expansion of unregulated contract work arrangements for our carrier workers. These individuals function as the logistical backbone of commerce, yet they are treated as perpetual independent contractors, stripped of basic job security, sick leave, or severance protection. Similarly, our small farmers and fisherfolk, the very people who feed this nation, remain entirely outside the formal safety net.

A progressive labour policy would actively create structural pathways to mandate and incentivise the inclusion of these traditional sectors under the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), guaranteeing them dignity in retirement.

Madam Speaker, we recommend a robust labour policy comprising a long-term national development framework that connects education, employment, productivity, worker protection, business growth, and social mobility. Such a strategy must first acknowledge Jamaica's harsh realities. We are a country where many workers struggle with functional literacy and digital skills, while at the same time, thousands of highly educated Jamaicans are underemployed, migrating, or trapped in systems with limited upward mobility. We have sectors where the rights of our labourers are poorly enforced, informal employment is widespread, and too many employers still operate with minimal accountability.

Madam Speaker, a foundational flaw in our current labour framework is the chaotic fragmentation of how we manage our working people. Essential components of workforce capacity are scattered across separate, uncoordinated siloes. Employment matters are isolated under the Office of the Prime Minister, Skills issues sit under the Ministry of Education, and Industrial Relations and general labour issues are handled by the Ministry of Labour. This bureaucratic scatter means that our workforce has no centralised access to support. If an individual needs upskilling, registration, or dispute resolution, they are forced to navigate an uncoordinated maze of separate state agencies.

I propose that we consolidate these fragments into a single, cohesive bucket under the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development. All workforce training, legal protections, and certification programs belong under one administrative roof, ensuring every working person has unhindered structural access to economic advancement. This strategy requires the implementation of several key localised measures, including but not limited to:

Making our adult upskilling and digital literacy certification programmes more accessible, especially to those living in rural Jamaica. Madam Speaker, how

do we expect a young man or woman in Clarendon Northern, in areas like Aenon Town, Kellits, Gayle Town, Crooked River, or Brae Head, to advance in a global workforce when adult upskilling tools remain completely out of physical and digital reach? We must establish targeted, rural literacy and skill-building centres to lift our people out of structural stagnation.

Enforcing Workers' Rights and Workplace Protection: One of Jamaica's biggest labour failures is not merely weak laws but weak enforcement. Workers' rights without enforcement are meaningless. We must therefore strengthen enforcement capacity to reduce incidents of worker abuse and exploitation, such as unpaid overtime, lack of contracts, denial of leave and dismissal without due process.

Reforming the Security Industry: The security industry is one of the clearest examples of structural labour exploitation. Thousands of guards work excessive hours under dangerous conditions while earning wages that often do not reflect the risk or responsibility of the job. We also should enforce employee classification for security guards, including mandating pension and insurance coverage and providing minimum training and certification standards. Security guards are essential workers and should not exist in permanent economic insecurity.

Wage and Productivity Reform: Jamaica's economy has historically depended on low wages in many sectors. Low wages do not create sustainable development. A modern labour strategy would connect wages to productivity and national growth.

Labour Market Data and Planning: Too often, we train workers without coordinated national planning. A coherent strategy requires leveraging real-time labour market data to forecast future industry needs and coordination between universities and employers. Government policy must stop reacting unthinkingly and start planning strategically.

THE EXODUS AND THE NATIONAL ALLEGIANCE SWAP

Madam Speaker, when labour policy fails and sports development stalls, you create a national disaster: The Great Jamaican Brain Drain.

Let us look at the empirical data. A recent UNDP migration poll reveals an absolute, though not surprising, horror show for our future: 71% of Jamaican youth plan to migrate within the next three years. Nearly three-quarters of our young people are actively planning their exit strategy.



And if you want to see exactly how this toxic reality plays out in the sporting world, look no further than the shocking ruling handed down just last month on April 16, 2026, by the World Athletics.



Madam Speaker. Four of Jamaica's absolute finest, elite field-event superstars, our reigning 2024 Olympic Men's Discus Champion Roje Stona, our Olympic Shot Put Bronze Medalist Ra-jin-dra Campbell, our World Championship Long Jump Silver Medalist Wayne Pinnock, and our Triple Jump Junior World Record Holder Jaydon Hibbert, all completed documentation to switch their national allegiance to Turkey, not because they lack patriotism, but because like so many Jamaicans, they no longer see mobility, growth, or stability within the current system. Today, I ask this House: Why should an Olympic Gold Medalist need to look elsewhere to secure his or her financial future?

This is because our local system is underfunding their potential. These athletes are watching other countries invest strategically in athlete welfare, training infrastructure, rehabilitation science, sponsorship structures, and professional development pathways, while Jamaica continues functioning on symbolic patriotism and outdated systems.

The Sports Development Foundation (SDF) public bodies document tells a sobering story. While administrative expenditures and executive salaries are climbing, funding for athlete welfare decreased this year. We cannot continue asking our athletes to survive on vibes, speeches, and flag-waving. We cannot keep underfunding our talent, and then we act shocked when they look toward foreign borders!

THE STADIUM COMPLETION CLAIMS & JADCO'S STRUCTURAL FAULTS



Madam Speaker, I now turn to the physical state of our sports infrastructure. On February 27, 2025, the Minister of Sport confidently assured the nation that the resurfacing of the running track at the National Stadium was fully on track to be completed on time. However, during the PAAC hearings, the Permanent Secretary, with responsibility for Sport, admitted that the contractors received payment before certification was secured, leaving the track entirely uncertified by World Athletics.

A specialised international measuring lab visited Jamaica in April to see if the track can be certified. We are now in May 2026, and the Ministry is sitting on the report from that investigation. Why is this important? Next month, in June, we are hosting our National Trials to select teams for the Commonwealth Games and the World Under-20 Championships. If one of our young sprinters shatters a world record, that once-in-a-lifetime achievement will be completely erased from history due to administrative incompetence! World Athletics will refuse to ratify it because the track lacks international certification. This administration is actively playing Russian roulette with the life-changing career moments of our youth.

For over eight straight years, we've seen architectural drawings from different expensive firms. We are paying millions for sketches, while our actual National Stadium is a crumbling monument to unfulfilled promises.

JADCO's Testing Gaps



Madam Speaker, let us consider the institutional deficiencies within the Jamaica Anti-Doping Commission (JADCO). At the CARIFTA Games, a brilliant Jamaican Under-20 women's quartet clocked a blistering 42.58 seconds to smash the 4x100m World Record. Let us cement their names into history: Serena Cole, Tina Clayton, Tia Clayton, and Brianna Lyston.

Madam Speaker, JADCO committed a grave administrative oversight when they failed to drug test all four runners on the night of the race. Because of that gross procedural error, World Athletics invalidated that historic 42.58 world record. Do we understand the implications of this, especially for our young athletes? World records attract sponsorship. World records create leverage in contract negotiations. World records build global marketability. JADCO's mistake directly impacted the earning power of these young Jamaican women.

Yes, the team later returned at the World Under-20 Championships in Colombia, and broke the record again with a ratified 42.59 seconds. But unfortunately, Brianna Lyston was not a part of that final quartet. Because of JADCO's failure, she permanently lost the opportunity to share that specific world-record legacy. No administrative apology can restore that moment.

Madam Speaker, JADCO must pivot its operational model. Instead of allocating the lion's share of public funds toward holding centralised, high-cost symposiums in hotel conference rooms, which grassroots coaches and rural sporting associations simply cannot afford to attend, JADCO must

decentralise. They must take their anti-doping education workshops out of the luxury hotels and bring them directly into our community clubs and primary schools, where the talent is born!

CRICKET ACCOUNTABILITY & MISSED SPORTS TOURISM

Madam Speaker, let us expose the numbers directly from the audited books. If you look at the screen, the Sports Development Foundation's own financial statement details an alarming trend in governance priorities.

Income Statement			
	Sm		
	Audited 2024	Estimated 2025	Projected 2026
Income			
Grant - CHASE Fund	675.19	678.41	700.70
Interest	4.84	4.03	1.97
Miscellaneous	1.94	3.00	0.70
Total Income	681.97	685.44	703.37
Expenditure			
Administration	150.32	166.34	239.02
Grants to - Govt Agencies	-	0.30	-
- Associations	178.51	201.55	171.51
- Athletes' Welfare	12.00	22.34	21.70
Projects	80.94	267.11	152.00
Events Tickets	17.22	19.95	20.65
Track Meets	20.00	10.00	20.00
Special Allocations	90.81	140.61	85.00
Total Expenditure	549.80	828.20	709.88
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	132.17	(142.76)	(6.51)

In 2024, administrative costs stood at \$150 million. By 2025, that figure climbed to \$166 million, and the projected administrative spend for 2026 has ballooned to a staggering \$239 million! While bureaucracy costs are rising exponentially, capital development projects are being systematically choked. Funding for projects has been drastically cut, slashed from a high of \$267 million in 2025 down to just \$152 million for 2026.

Worse yet, Madam Speaker, look at the direct support for the people who sweat and bleed for this flag: Grants to Athletes' Welfare have been cut from \$22 million in 2025 down to \$22 million in 2026. Grants to the core Sporting Associations have plummeted from \$202 million down to \$172 million. The executives are taking more for administration, while the local projects and the

welfare of our players are given less. This has plunged our agencies from a \$132 million surplus in 2024 into a continuous, structural deficit!

CRICKET ACCOUNTABILITY & MISSED SPORTS TOURISM

(SLIDE CUE: THE JCA FEBRUARY 2026 AUDIT TRAIL)

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the financial commitments made by this administration. On September 23, 2023, Member Grange released a major media statement announcing a landmark J\$100 Million Investment Fund for youth cricket development. The Government reinforced this on March 12, 2024, when then Finance Minister Nigel Clarke announced in his budget presentation that J\$40 million would be allocated in that fiscal year to kickstart this three-year program.

Well, Madam Speaker, I hold the official truth in my hand: The Statement to Members issued by the Jamaica Cricket Association on February 24, 2026. Let us read the unassailable timeline directly into the record: To date, out of that magnificent J\$100 million promise, the JCA has received only J\$7.4 million a single payment disbursed way back on February 18, 2025. That is less than eight percent of the promised development fund!

Madam Speaker, let us look at what this lack of sports tourism vision costs us. On the screen is the true economic impact of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

The Economic Impact of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024



Our regional neighbours submitted their bids, built their infrastructures, and reaped massive economic rewards. Barbados generated \$426 million USD. St. Vincent & The Grenadines brought in \$225 million USD. St. Lucia captured \$133 million USD, Antigua brought in \$114 million USD, Guyana secured \$77 million USD, and Trinidad & Tobago saw an economic impact of \$69 million USD.

And what did Jamaica make from this multi-million dollar regional windfall? Zero! Because this government completely failed to submit a bid to host World Cup matches. When they were pressured and criticised for this massive failure, they used the J\$100 Million Cricket Fund announcement as a political shield to quiet public anger. They failed our sports tourism sector by not bidding for the World Cup, they promised J\$100 million in lieu of that failure, and today they have delivered less than 8% of that promise! A promise made must become a promise kept. And what are the real-world consequences of this underfunding?

While press conferences are plentiful, grassroots cricket continues to deteriorate. Look at our schools. Primary school cricket remains severely

neglected by this Government. INSPORTS does community-based football and other mainstream sports, but INSPORTS does absolutely zero grassroots development for cricket. Community programmes remain inconsistent. Madam Speaker, how do we expect the JCA to unearth and polish the next generation of cricketing masters in rural communities like Croft's Hill, Authurs Seat, Guava Ground, Bog Hole, Desire, John's Hall, or Morgan's Pass when the grassroots pipeline has been systematically starved? We are systematically eroding the foundational sport of the Caribbean out of our school curriculum, leaving our local fields completely abandoned. The pipeline that once produced generations of West Indian excellence continues to weaken.

Madam Speaker, now is the time for structural reform. Not slogans. Not press conferences, not photo ops. Real and meaningful reform.

NETBALL IN CRISIS & THE MULTI-TRILLION DOLLAR ROADMAP



Madam Speaker, if you want to understand how broken our system is, let us look at our historic Sunshine Girls.

On May 10, 2026, Netball Jamaica's leadership put out a desperate public plea. Our netballers won a historic silver medal at the last Commonwealth Games. They are preparing for the upcoming global stage. Yet today, they are in an absolute crisis because they cannot afford a strength-and-conditioning coach due to severe financial constraints.

Our international medalists are begging corporate Jamaica to "chip in" to fund a fitness trainer! It is an absolute embarrassment that a country with our brand equity forces our elite sportswomen to beg just to prepare for international representation.

We must move past this short-sighted model and capture the real economy of sports. The economic data reveal a staggering global reality: The global sports industry is valued at \$2.3 trillion USD today, is on track to hit \$3.7 trillion by 2032, and will reach an unimaginable \$8.8 trillion USD by 2050!

Look at our competitive positioning. For twenty years, the UAE have completely dominated global cricket pre-season training camps. But right now, due to

intense geopolitical tensions, Dubai facilities are facing mass cancellations and team withdrawals. International sporting families refuse to travel there. Antigua has already capitalised on this window, aggressively launching a world-class sports science and recovery lab this coming January to pull global bookings.

And what is Jamaica doing? We own the undisputed global brand equity for "speed". Our brand value is applicable across track, football, netball, and NFL wide receivers. Yet we have zero sports-industry infrastructure. Many clubs and schools have the raw ingredients for an elite academy, but they lack a strategic state partner. We are treating sports like a casual cultural asset, sitting on a goldmine while allowing foreign nations to extract the wealth!

THE THREE DEFINITIVE SYSTEMIC REMEDIES & THE SPORTING MINISTRY MANDATE

Madam Speaker, I do not stand here merely to highlight structural cracks; I stand here to offer a progressive roadmap of systemic remedies that we must urgently pursue to rescue and rebuild our local sporting ecosystem. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I propose the following four definitive, structured pillars:

1. Establishment of Constituency Sports Officers

Madam Speaker, I propose the structured deployment of dedicated Constituency Sports Officers, where one officer is assigned to manage two adjacent constituencies. We cannot effectively guide community intervention from an isolated central desk in Kingston. The core responsibility of these officers must be to directly manage, secure, and run active, weekly structured programming for our community netball courts, football fields, and cricket pitches. Madam Speaker, let us bring organised, disciplined athletic opportunities directly into the spaces where our youth congregate, providing a constructive, protective outlet for our young people in areas like Jericho, Ballards River, Pleasant Hill, Reckford, Bull Head, and Anderson Town, during the critical summer months when vulnerability is at its highest.

2. A Codified National Sports Policy for Legends

Madam Speaker, I also propose the immediate implementation of a criteria-driven, apolitical National Sports Policy designed to provide structured pension and health insurance frameworks for our retired icons. We must also end the reactive, ad-hoc approach to honouring our greats. Let us honour our giants while they are alive and well. Under this codified framework, I propose the immediate erection of a statue for the legendary Ambassador Courtney Walsh at Sabina Park. Let us erect proper, permanent monuments for our history-makers, such as Deon Hemmings, the first female English-speaking Caribbean gold medalist, renowned boxer Michael McCallum, Footballers Walter Boyd and Khadija 'Bunny' Shaw, and one of the world's best wicket keepers, Jeffrey Dujon, who have not yet been properly recognised.

3. The Reactivation of the National Sports Council

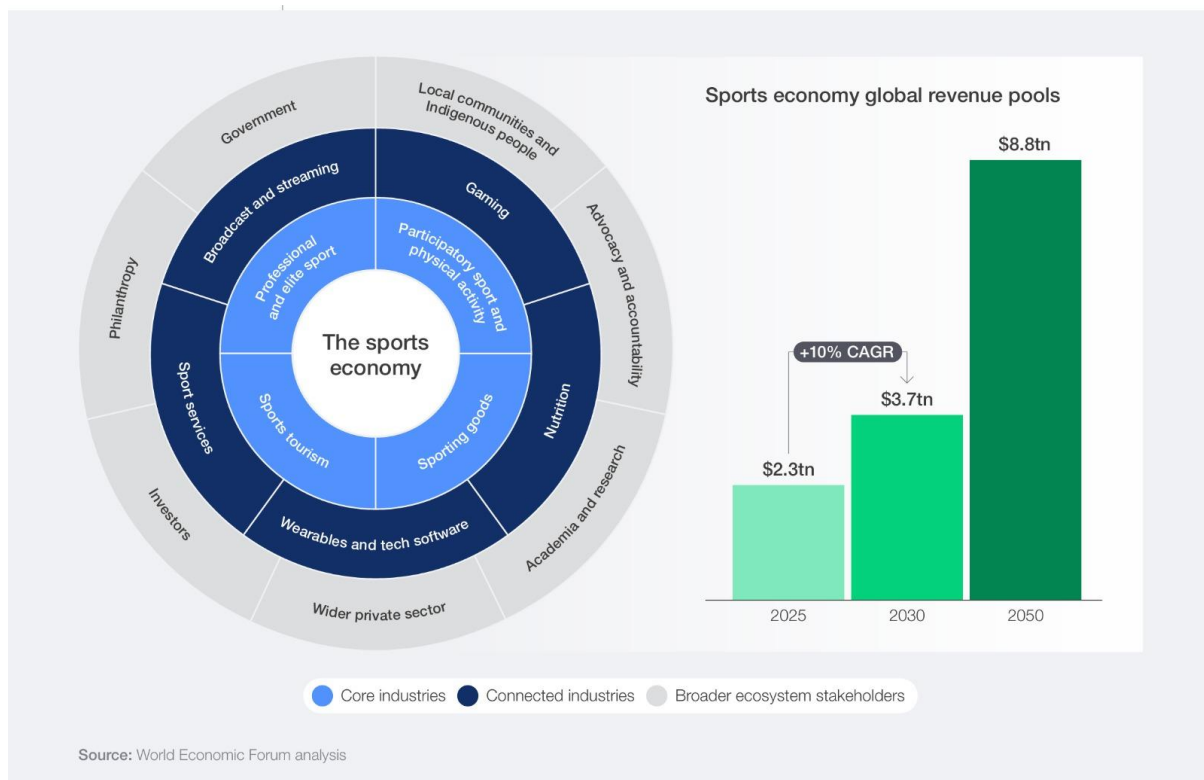
Madam Speaker, for my third pillar, I propose the immediate reactivation and formal reintroduction of the National Sports Council. The National Sports Council has not been convened, has not met, and has been left entirely dormant since 2016. We have experienced an entire decade of complete policy inertia at the absolute highest level of sports governance.

As stakeholders have correctly pointed out, you cannot drive an exponential national plan without a comprehensive supervising body. I propose that we urgently reconvene this apex council, populated with an intentional blend of sporting expertise, representatives from the Ministry, and leadership from the Jamaica Olympic Association. We need a competent, collaborative policymaking body that meets regularly to supervise national deliverables, manage long-term strategic plans, and directly attract international capital to our local associations. We must end the decade-long administrative standstill.

4. The Mandate for a Standalone Ministry of Sport

I conclude, Madam Speaker, on the most critical structural recommendation of all. I propose the immediate administrative separation of Sports from its current arrangement. Data from a World Economic Forum analysis reveals that the global sports economy is projected to reach \$3.7 trillion by 2030 and

skyrocket to \$8.8 trillion by 2050, driven heavily by sectors like sports tourism, academies, and connected technology. You cannot effectively capture a share of this multi-trillion-dollar market when the portfolio is suffocated inside a mega-ministry alongside Gender, Culture, and Entertainment.



Madam Speaker, we need a hyper-focused, singular ministerial mandate backed by an independent budget. We need a standalone Ministry that is structurally equipped to build public-private sports academies, secure our international track certifications, defend our athletic labour force, negotiate global pre-season training contracts, and aggressively position Jamaica as the undisputed sporting and sports-tourism hub of the Caribbean.

Because sport is no longer simply recreation. Sport is an industry. Sport is exports. Sport is tourism. Sport is a foreign exchange. Sport is economic growth. And if we continue managing it with outdated thinking, other countries will continue to monetise Jamaican excellence better than Jamaica itself.

Madam Speaker, Previous administrations led by the PNP always understood something fundamental: sport is not merely recreation, sport is social mobility, sport is nation-building, and sport is economic transformation.

The PNP invested heavily in sports because it recognised the extraordinary power of athletics to change the trajectory of ordinary Jamaican lives, particularly for young people coming from struggling communities with limited opportunities. I stand in this Honourable House today as living proof of that vision. I know personally what investment in sport can do. I benefited from sports scholarship opportunities, provided by the late, great Michael Manley, that allowed me to pursue my education while simultaneously developing my cricketing ability. Those opportunities did not merely produce an athlete; they produced stability, discipline, exposure, and hope. That is the transformational power of sport, Madam Speaker.

For many young Jamaicans, a football field, a cricket pitch, a netball court, or an athletics track is not simply a place of play. It is often the first doorway out of poverty, out of violence, out of hopelessness, and into purpose.

That is why sports policy cannot be treated as ceremonial politics or seasonal public relations. It must be treated as a serious national development policy. Madam Speaker, the time for excuses has expired. The time for structural illusions and broken promises is over. The time for structural transformation is now. The business of play is serious economic business, and it is time we lead it with power. Madam Speaker, I thank you, and I thank the great people of Clarendon Northern.