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Dominican Olympian Thea LaFond Reflects on Historic Gold Medal Win and Plans for Homecoming

After capturing gold in the women's triple jump, LaFond reflects on her journey, the impact of her victory on Dominica, and her plans to inspire the next generation of athletes

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Nelcia Charlemagne **August 20, 2024**

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Thea LaFond celebrated her historic victory at the 2024 Paris Olympics in the Women's Triple Jump final.

Thea LaFond is Dominica's first Olympic medalist, after capturing the gold medal in the [women's triple jump final](#). She was one of five Caribbean women to reach the final of the event, earning the coveted medal at her third Olympic Games.?

As [Julien Alfred did earlier](#), Ms. LaFond also told the Consortium's Nelcia Charlemagne that she's still trying to wrap her mind around her massive accomplishment. It's a win that thrust Dominica — a nation of just over 72,000 people — into sheer ecstasy. "I hear it, but it doesn't resonate...it wasn't until yesterday that I even cried between competing and being back in the States," she admitted. What moved her to tears was a book authored by a young British-Dominican girl who detailed her experience watching Ms. LaFond at the games.?

"I think it was for the first time I realized that the next generation, for the first time, got to see someone wave their flag, and [hear] our national anthem played on the podium," she said. Thea was raised in Dominica, the Nature Isle, where football (soccer) and cricket are the popular sporting pastimes. When her family emigrated to the United States, she played volleyball as a means of keeping busy after school. "My mother had a rule that I was not allowed to come home directly after school," she laughed. When the winter temperatures became unsuitable for the game often played on Caribbean beaches, Ms. LaFond turned to the triple jump.

"My friends were all talking about this track team that they joined and how they really liked it. They were like 'Come on, Thea. Just try it out'." She did more than just try it out. Ms. LaFond has now achieved what she describes as "my greatest accomplishment in my athletic career" and "the greatest athletic accomplishment for any Dominican in the history of Dominica."

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A [clip](#) of Ms. LaFond describing her home country and making the distinction from another island with a similar name went viral in the days after her win. Her accomplishment, she said, is "a reminder that we are very powerful...We might not have all the resources of a mega-developed European nation, but to me, our greatest resource is people. I hope that they see that it is about quality, not quantity, and we are a great representation of that."

?Her story — like many star athletes — involves facing adversity and navigating soul-crushing setbacks. Ms. LaFond competed in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics where she was confident she would medal. "When it didn't go well, it really broke me," she confessed. "I would hide and sob." Facing a mountain of emotions including feeling like she failed her country, Ms. LaFond turned to sports psychologist Julia Francis. Open in her description of her mental health challenges, she profusely thanked Dr. Francis for equipping her with the tools that eventually propelled her to Olympic fame. "She reminded me that I'm good at what I do, and a setback isn't a pure denial," Ms. LaFond told the Consortium.



Thea Lafond brought Dominica its first ever gold medal during the 2024 Paris Olympics (Shutterstock)

Like medalists from other small Caribbean nations, Ms. LaFond is pleased to have put her country on the map. Known for its lush forests, cascading waterfalls, Bouyon music and 365 rivers, Dominica can now tout an Olympic gold medal as well. “I want them to enjoy being noticed,” Thea told the Consortium. “These tiny islands are just having their moment in the spotlight.” Dominica, Jamaica, Cuba, Grenada and Saint Lucia are among the smaller nations that made waves at the Olympic Games.?

With plans to return to Dominica on August 24th, Ms. LaFond is looking forward to indulging in simple culinary pleasures like stuffed crab backs, fish broth, raisin slices, and bakes and saltfish — a preference she shares with fellow Olympian Alfred. Apart from an official welcome and meeting with Dominican Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit, Ms. LaFond will visit her old primary school and the villages that shaped her – Mahaut and Canefield. “I’m looking forward to bringing the medal home so people can see it, so the children can hold it, to realize that it’s more than just a lofty goal; that it is tangible and achievable.”

The triple jump is not a popular sport in Dominica. Nonetheless, Ms. LaFond agrees that there is space within the sporting environment to do more for budding athletes in all disciplines. “I don’t think the issue is lack of talent. It’s a lack of resources to help develop the talent,” she offered, remembering competing at the Carifta Games alongside impressive Dominican youth. “They do well...then afterwards, I don’t really hear from them ever again.” The Olympic Champion is aware that she is now in a position to make a difference.

“I have the ear of people that can make things happen,” she acknowledged, committing herself to trying to improve conditions for budding Dominican athletes. “I don’t want the youth of Dominica to have to travel to Guadeloupe or Martinique to get a track to train. I want them to be able to go down the street or go over to the next village to compete there,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with training on grass, but we’re trying to develop the next generation of athletes. They need to at least have access to the bare minimum that their neighboring peers have access to,” declared a passionate LaFond.?

It’s a cause that will weigh on Ms. LaFond’s mind as she returns to Dominica this weekend. A planned knee surgery completed after the Olympic Games means the athlete will be required to navigate on crutches during her trip home. She was amused by the offer of Dominicans to carry her around to make her visit a little easier.

For Thea LaFond, rest and reflection are her priorities for the immediate future. “I really want to enjoy this moment. I’ve been trying this year to be grateful and constantly live in a space of gratitude.”