

'It's done, now what?' - Young Jamaican pilot sets two world records

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Twenty-three-year-old Jamaican-born Barrington Irving Jr. (centre), who has set two world records by being the first person of African descent and the youngest person ever to fly solo around the globe, is greeted by his parents, Rev. Barrington Irving (left), his mother Clover (second left), brothers Christopher and Ricardo. Irving arrived at the Opa-Locka Airport in Miami yesterday morning to hundreds of cheers from onlookers, the media and dignitaries who came out to welcome him. - photo by Janet Silvera

Janet Silvera, Senior Gleaner Writer

Miami, Florida:

"They told me I was too young. They told me I didn't have enough money and that I couldn't do this, that I don't have the wisdom, the strength or the experience. They told me I would never come back home."

Safe and sound! Standing tall on the tarmac of the Opa-Locka Airport in Miami yesterday, Barrington Irving, the world's youngest and first black man to set two world records by flying solo around the globe, responded to all those who didn't believe in him.

In an emotional and touching speech, he said, "Guess what? All those people who tried to put me down, it's done, and now what?"

Arriving to a water salute from two fire trucks, a praying group of clergy, youth drummers, thunderous cheers and flag-waving Jamaicans, complemented by cameramen and journalists falling over each other, Irving disembarked from his US\$600,000 Lincair Colombia 400 single-engine aircraft, escorted by his younger brothers, Ricardo and Christopher.

The 23-year-old, Jamaican-born, raised in inner-city Miami, Florida, pilot stood proud.

In the midst of the excitement, his mother Clover Irving fought back tears, his father Barrington Irving took giant steps, and Jamaicans in the audience applauded, having witnessed the historic moment.

Housed in the veritable Ferrari of small aircraft, Irving traversed four continents, clocking more than 130 hours of flight time on a 97-day, 26,800-mile 'World Flight Adventure' that included stops in the Azores, Spain, Greece, Egypt, Dubai, India, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan.

In the tradition of Charles Lindbergh

Returning two months later than expected and at a cost of US\$2 million, the young pilot has followed in the tradition of Charles Lindbergh, the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, his heroes the Tuskegee Airmen, and his mentors Erik Lindbergh, Steve Fossett and Dick Rutan, who supported his efforts.

Paying tribute to his family and sponsors, Irving, whose purpose in making the flight was to inspire inner-city and minority youth to consider pursuing careers in aviation and aerospace, said there were times during the flight that he became mentally and physically broken, but it was worth it.

Irving, who named his aircraft 'Inspiration', told the hundreds that gathered that there were times when he became very discouraged and frustrated, "mentally frustrated", to the point that he lost 15 lb.

"And I now need a haircut," he quipped.

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