

Former Prime Minister, the Most Hon. P. J. Patterson, says Jamaica must capitalise on sports tourism, to create wealth and grow the economy.

He said that sports is now worth 10 per cent of the global tourism market and is growing faster than any other single sector.

Citing recent studies done by the World Tourism Organization, he said that sports tourists spent more than any other category of tourists during the Beijing and the London Olympics, and the World Cup in South Africa.

Mr. Patterson, who was addressing the recent opening of the G.C. Foster College Museum of Sports and Recreation in St. Catherine, said sports is one industry where Jamaica enjoys a comparative advantage, which it must exploit.

"Instead of looking at other areas to virtually start from scratch, let us seize those in which we have the capacity to grow, to expand and perform with excellence. Let us grab these huge opportunities and not squander this legacy," he emphasised.

He noted that sports is big business, run by powerful international bodies and huge conglomerates, and Jamaica must be prepared to fight to secure its fair share of the money associated with the industry or "others will capitalise on the Jamaican brand and exploit us to their advantage."

Mr. Patterson stated that while the country does not have much monetary resources, there is physical capital, which he said, must be fully utilised in order to benefit from sports tourism. He made reference to the Trelawny Multi-purpose Stadium and Sabina Park in Kingston.

"When we built the Trelawny complex or expanded Sabina Park, it wasn't just for the Cricket World Cup... it was the realisation that Jamaica, and indeed the whole Caribbean, had the potential to establish sports tourism as one of the major sectors to fuel economic growth in the entire region," he stated.