

Meet the unlikely real estate backer behind Jamaica's Olympic dreams

BY [MATT CARTER](#)

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Jamaica hopes to send an ice hockey team to compete at a future winter games — with support from what might seem like an unlikely Arizona-based real estate backer



From left to right, Rachel Caple, Teegan Moore, Sean Caple, and Jaden Lindo at the 2021 LATAM Cup in Coral Springs, Florida.

Credit: Rachel Caple

Jamaica's storied bobsled team [returns to the Olympic games](#) this week for the first time in 24 years, and the Caribbean island nation hopes to send an ice hockey team to compete at a future winter games as well — with support from what might seem like an unlikely backer.

The story of how Chandler, Arizona-based direct mortgage lender [Geneva Financial Home Loans](#) became a corporate backer of the Jamaican Olympic Ice Hockey Federation begins in the year 2000. That's when a Canadian hockey player turned coach, Sean Caple, arrived in Denver, Colorado — and fell in love with and married the single mother of one of his youth players.

“Sean and I met through hockey — it's a hockey household,” says Rachel Caple, Geneva Financial's chief sales and revenue officer. “My four sons played growing up, and he was my oldest son's coach. That propelled the relationship.”

Sean and Rachel married in 2010 and, a year later, the Jamaican Olympic Ice Hockey Federation (JOIHF) was founded in Colorado — with Sean serving as the group's director of hockey operations.

Sean, who played junior and college hockey in Canada before getting into coaching, was invited to serve in the role by Edmond “EJ” Phillipps, an American hockey player of Jamaican descent who [founded JOIHF](#) with his parents Mary and Ed, and the late G. Webster Smith.

“I grew up in Canada, where hockey's in your blood,” Sean says of the invitation to take on a pivotal role at JOIHF. “I'd been hockey director at a couple of associations and you jump at an opportunity like that. I'm always excited to be a part of the game, to help grow the game.”

The Jamaican diaspora

There's a rich pool of talented players of Jamaican descent who grew up playing hockey in Canada, the U.S., and other countries in northern latitudes, many with experience in the National Hockey League (NHL) and other professional leagues. More than 300,000 [people of Jamaican descent call Canada home](#), with most residing in [Toronto](#) and the surrounding province of Ontario.

Jamaica's ice hockey team has already proved its mettle in tournaments like the [Amerigol LATAM Cup](#), an annual tournament in Florida for Latin American, Caribbean and Middle Eastern countries, which Jamaica won in 2019.

The tournament wasn't held in 2020 due to the pandemic. But the Jamaican team that showed up at the 2021 LATAM Cup was so talented that organizers asked them to compete only in exhibition games, so other teams would have a shot at winning the tournament, [NHL.com reported](#). Team Jamaica won all six exhibition games it played.

JOIHF has been an [associate member](#) of the International Ice Hockey Federation since 2012. But in order to send a hockey team to the Olympics, Sean says Jamaica will need to build an ice rink, and start a grassroots youth development program.

In 2011, Sean was a member of the first JOIHF delegation to visit Jamaica to further those goals. The delegation included [Willie O'Ree](#), the [first black player](#) to skate in the NHL, and [Devon Harris](#), a founding member of the Jamaican bobsled team that competed at the 1988 Calgary Olympics. O'Ree's story is the subject of an award-winning 2019 documentary, "[Willie](#)," while the Jamaican bobsled team's exploits served as the inspiration for the 1993 Disney movie, "[Cool Runnings](#)." "To have those two support us gave us credibility right off the top," Sean says.

After that initial success, there have been “ebbs and flows, highs and lows” in the quest to raise funds to build an ice rink and a grassroots hockey program in Jamaica, he says.

JOIHF President Don Anderson, a veteran of the Jamaica Olympic Association, has been working to build support for the effort, Sean says. While there were hopes that a Jamaican national hockey team might make an Olympic debut in 2026, Anderson [told The Gleaner](#) in December that there are still too many unmet requirements, and that 2030 is now the goal. Funding to build an ice rink in Jamaica is still an obstacle, Sean says, but “we have a couple of parcels of land we’re looking at.”

While the “the big focus is getting the rink down there,” Sean says JOIHF is planning to hold a 5-day clinic in Kingston, Jamaica this summer “teaching boys and girls the basics of hockey” by playing floor hockey in a gymnasium, or street hockey outdoors.

Last year, former NHL player Chris Stewart [agreed](#) to become co-coach of Jamaica’s national ice hockey team and serve as JOIHF’s “ambassador to ice hockey.” Stewart connected JOIHF with the NHL Players’ Association in the hopes that it might help pay for equipment, [NHL.com reports](#).

This year, rather than going back to the Amerigol LATAM Cup, Sean said JOIHF is planning to hold a prospects camp and tournament in the Toronto area, where most Canadians of Jamaican descent live. In addition to providing an opportunity for young players to showcase their talent, the hope is to have at least four adult international teams compete.

Corporate sponsors keeping the dream alive

All of this costs money, which is where Geneva Financial and other [corporate sponsors](#) come in. “Without Geneva Financial’s support, we wouldn’t have gotten to [the LATAM Cup in] in Florida in October, and received the publicity we got,” Sean says. Geneva Financial’s corporate office provided platinum level sponsorship of \$20,000 to JOIHF, while Rachel Caple’s [Englewood, Colorado branch](#) was a \$10,000 gold level sponsor.

Rachel says Geneva Financial [founders Aaron and Telle VanTrojen](#) got involved because they like helping people achieve their dreams, and also want “to hire people who are good humans.” The company markets its mortgages as “Home Loans Powered by Humans,” and the slogan “Be a good human,” is emblazoned on the Jamaican hockey team’s uniforms.

Geneva Financial is a direct mortgage lender that operates on a profit and loss (“P&L”) branch model, with more than 130 branches in 46 states. The company is looking for [loan originators and branch managers](#), and also has openings in [operations](#).

“Like any sponsorship, it gives you exposure,” Rachel said. “For me, I was also interested because Sean is so passionate about it.” That passion is spreading.

“Loan officers reach out to me all the time,” she says. “They want to know, is this like ‘Cool Runnings?’ Are they going to make a movie? We’d love to raise more support with other branches.”

Companies that want to become sponsors can find more information on the [JOIHF website](#), or send an email to business@joihfederation.org.

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