

***The Report of the Sports Policy Review Team***

***Preliminary Comments***

***by the***

***Hong Kong, China Rowing Association***

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## *Sport & the Community*

- Regular physical recreational activity is essential to the physical and psychological health of the individual and of the community.
- Sport is literally *RE-CREATION*, i.e. the restoration and maintenance of the mind and body in a healthy condition.
- Most Hong Kong people get far too little physical recreational activity. This is a major cause of the increasing health problems within the community, from obese children to early heart attack victims to the frail elderly.
- Hong Kong's suicide rate is testament to the unhealthy state of our society. Obesity, diabetes and other diseases are increasing. Public and private health care costs are escalating.
- Although they will usually agree that they need more exercise, most people find that exercising for the sake of their health is boring and unmotivating and few people are prepared to do it.
- By contrast, people enjoy sport because it is fun and they can do it with, and in competition with, other like minded people. As a by product of participating in sport, they get a dose of physical activity that brings with it considerable health benefits.
- **Sport is by far the most effective means of delivering physical exercise - because sport is predominantly an enjoyable social activity.**
- However, sport does not just happen. There has to be an organisational system for delivering sport that draws people in and keeps them motivated and involved and that provides other benefits in addition to the recreational activity itself.
- Sport must be recognised as a "demand-led" activity if large numbers of people are to continue to participate in it over the long term. People will participate if they enjoy sport. No amount of money spent on promotion and publicity will attract sustained long-term participation if people themselves do not positively want to take part. It is this factor that is the key to developing a culture of sports participation and it is this factor which governments the world over cannot provide.

## *Sports Delivery Systems - Clubs*

- The Report points out that in many countries with a high level of participation in sport, it is the existence of an extensive network of sports clubs that is responsible.
- In Denmark and Sweden most sport is done through clubs. In Denmark more than 35% of the population belong to sports clubs. In Sweden it is close to 50%.
- In Denmark, 75% of young people belong to sports clubs.
- **Clubs, managed by their members in a voluntary capacity, are the most effective means of delivering sport to the community.**
- Clubs are also cost effective because much of the work is done by volunteers.
- Sports clubs alleviate stress and promote health and self confidence. They channel the energies of young people into healthy lifestyles, rather than unhealthy ones such as watching TV, hanging out on the street where they can become targets for triad recruitment, petty crime, experimentation with drugs and other socially undesirable and self destructive traits.
- Clubs provide a valuable social focus for all age groups within the community. Children, parents, teachers, workers, bosses - all can belong to sports clubs and participate together in sports activity and in the administrative aspects of running a club.
- Club members learn that they need to contribute to running their club by serving in various voluntary capacities. In this way they learn to become socially responsible members of the community and become more willing to contribute their time and energy to serving in other volunteer based community service organisations. They also gain organisational experience, self confidence and self respect.
- **In addition to organising sports activity, a well run club will also organise a range of other activities and social events for its members. This 'added value' helps attract and retain members. Clubs are an essential element in building a socially responsible and integrated community.**

## *Sports Delivery Systems - Schools*

- School based sport is a relic of Britain's colonial empire. In 18th century Britain, the major boarding schools, such as Eton, Harrow, Rugby etc. which were educating the children of Britain's upper and middle classes for future careers in the army, navy and colonial service understood that sport could teach the principles of discipline, self reliance, endeavour, teamwork etc., characteristics that would be of value in their pupils' future careers. Subsequently, through British colonial administration, the concept of school sport was exported to countries which were under British influence.
- Other countries developed their sports system later and followed a different route. In many European countries clubs, not schools, are the means of delivering sport to children as well as the rest of the community.
- While most educationalists acknowledge the value of sport, Hong Kong's educational system lacks the resources, the desire and the capacity to significantly raise the level of school based sport.
- **Any attempt to implement universal school based sport will be doomed to failure and, in any case, school sport is not the best means of delivering sport to children.**
- School based sport suffers the serious disadvantage that there is a large dropout rate when children leave school, resulting in a low participation rate within the adult community.
- School sport is a one way street from which only a handful of students graduate to adult participation. It's only advantage, if you can call it that, is that it can be imposed on children. It lacks the community integration that club based sport possesses and many children are glad to escape it when they leave school. By contrast, children who have been members of a sports club for most of their lives, appreciate the value of their club membership and willingly continue it after they leave school. Why would they not, when their families and many of their friends are members of various sports clubs?
- Children who are introduced to sport within clubs at a young age will usually continue to participate after they leave school. For many of them, club membership will become a lifetime habit.
- **Clubs, not schools, are the best means of delivering sport to children.**

## *Should the Government Organise Sport?*

- No government, anywhere, should attempt to organise sport. Sport belongs to the people and the people should be allowed and encouraged to organise it themselves. Government organised sport is not needed and, ultimately, is counter productive to sports development because it creates the mindset that the government is responsible, whereas people should be thinking about what they can do for themselves.
- The overwhelming problem with government organised sport is that it can never expand participation beyond a relatively low level. This is the situation in Hong Kong. The government does not have the resources to do more. The government currently has significant resources dedicated to the organisation of sport. If sports activity doubled, tripled, or quadrupled government resources could not cope. Clubs and volunteers organising their own sport is the only way sport can develop.
- A high level of participation in sport is only possible with the help of an army of volunteers. In contrast to the limited government resources, there is an unlimited supply of volunteers available from within the community.
- In Denmark, a country with a population of only 5.3 million, there are 50,000 volunteers organising sport. Can the Hong Kong government commit 50,000 civil servants to organising sport? Could we afford to pay them? Obviously not.
- Although there are many dedicated, enthusiastic and experienced staff in the LCSD, government employees cannot be expected to have the same degree of enthusiasm and knowledge of sport as sports people themselves. Past experience shows that government, administering public sports facilities, does not welcome significant expansion. It creates problems and difficulties for the staff concerned.
- It seems that the government's policies on sport have not been successful. They have:-
  - given priority to casual (i.e. unorganised) use of facilities,
  - failed to generate widespread participation,
  - obstructed the development of club based sport,
  - kept overall standards of performance at a low level,
  - adversely affected Hong Kong's results internationally,
  - deprived the community of the benefits of club membership,

- The proper role of the government should be to facilitate, encourage and support growth in the number of clubs. As the club network expands, so will the number of volunteers involved in organising sport.
- Encouragement of clubs should be, as in Denmark, through allowing them free or subsidised use of facilities. As an expanding network of clubs takes over the role of organising sport any loss in revenue would be offset by the savings in the government's own internal expenditure.
- As in Denmark, additional encouragement of clubs should be through subsidising junior membership, thus providing an incentive for clubs to develop links with schools and recruit school children.
- **The government should progressively withdraw from organising sport and concentrate on assisting the development of an extensive network of clubs. During this process Hong Kong will experience:-**
  - **growing participation rates,**
  - **progressively higher standards of performance,**
  - **Increasing numbers of volunteers organising sport,**
  - **a larger pool from which to identify potential international athletes,**
  - **a reduction in this suicide rate,**
  - **improved health among the community,**
  - **an increase in the number of socially responsible citizens and**
  - **an increase in civic pride as Hong Kong's international performances improve.**

## *Sports Facilities*

- Do we have enough facilities?
- Do we cater to a wide range of activities?
- Are facilities being used to the maximum?
- Chapter 4 of the Planning Standards & Guidelines sets minimum standards of provision for a few sports, however Hong Kong has no overall sports facility development plan. Some sports, e.g. squash, appear to have been over-provided, while other sports lack adequate facilities.
- Hong Kong has very few facilities of international standard, making it impossible for most sports to host international events.
- **A facility development plan is needed aimed at providing a wide range of sports facilities for use by clubs and for national team training. All facilities should be designed to allow clubs to function effectively as social organisations and all facilities should have adequate provision for spectators.**
- Existing public facilities are underused. Under-usage occurs because the government attempts to organise activity itself, instead of delegating it to clubs. Government organised activity relies heavily on paid employees, in contrast to club organised activity which relies mainly on volunteers.
- To facilitate increased participation, the government should build more sports facilities and the range of sports available should be expanded. For example, ice skating rinks are needed for figure skating, ice hockey, speed skating and curling. All of these can be done indoor and year round and are therefore suitable for Hong Kong. Specialised permanent facilities are needed for many sports, such as gymnastics and cycling. Multi-use facilities are inefficient due to the time wasted setting up and removing equipment.
- The Report notes that development of 64 new public sports facilities will begin at a district level over the next five to ten years. The opportunity is there to create the right environment with these new facilities if they are well planned in the context of sports development. In the absence of a comprehensive facility development plan these new facilities may, in the long term, be a wasted resource.
- A healthier population will reduce the need for healthcare facilities. Far better to build sports facilities than hospitals.
- Is it possible that the community could take responsibility for organising activity in public facilities? Why not? There are many examples of long established clubs where the members organise their own activity to a high level of intensity and success.

## *The State of Sport in Hong Kong*

- **The Report recognises that, notwithstanding government promotional efforts, only a small percentage of the adult population take part in sport and sport among school children is also at a low level.**
- **Hong Kong's achievements in international competition are poor in relation to the size of its population and its financial strength.**

To illustrate this, consider the medals won at the last two summer Olympic Games by three small Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Denmark and Norway in comparison with Hong Kong:-

<u>Country</u>	<u>Pop.</u>	<u>1996 Summer Olympics</u>			<u>2000 Summer Olympics</u>		
		<u>Gold</u>	<u>Silver</u>	<u>Bronze</u>	<u>Gold</u>	<u>Silver</u>	<u>Bronze</u>
Sweden	8.9 m	2	4	2	4	5	3
Denmark	5.3 m	4	1	1	1	3	1
Norway	4.4 m	2	2	3	4	3	2
Hong Kong	6.8 m	1	-	-	-	-	-

The average population of the Scandinavian countries is 6.2 million. Hong Kong has 6.8 million.

The Scandinavian countries' average medal haul at the 1996 and 2000 summer Olympics is 7.8 medals each. Hong Kong's figure is half a medal (with no medals won before or after 1996). The Scandinavian results are normal. They regularly garner a clutch of medals in the summer Olympic Games and collect some more in the winter Olympics

The international success of the Scandinavian countries is not due to any overwhelming superiority in economic strength. Comparative Gross Domestic Product figures per head of population for 2000 are:

Sweden	US\$25,521
Denmark	US\$30,630
Norway	US\$36,765
Hong Kong	US\$23,913

Lack of money does not account for Hong Kong's poor results. It is the lack of investment, coupled with ineffective organisation of sport



## *The Report - Our View*

- **The stated objective of the Report is “to identify the key issues that we must address in framing a strategic sports policy for the Hong Kong SAR” (Introduction, para 2).**
- **To the extent of identifying the key issues, the Report has been successful. However the Report then goes a step further, by also suggesting solutions to the problems. It does this based on current structures and policies, rather than taking a fresh look and asking whether the existing structures are in fact part of the problem.**
- To identify the problems is the first step. To then ask the organisation responsible for the current state of sport in Hong Kong to also identify innovative and possibly substantial changes to that structure and to existing policies may not be appropriate. This does not in any way question the intentions or integrity of HAB, but we should seek the best road to arrive at the best solutions.
- **If we are discussing the real and long term future of sport in Hong Kong, it would seem appropriate to commission a truly independent review conducted by a panel of experts drawn from countries of a similar size to Hong Kong with demonstrably successful sports systems. Excellent examples can be found in Sweden, Denmark and Norway, as the Report has noted.**
- The Report proposes abolishing the SDB and absorbing its responsibilities into the HAB and LCSD. At the same time, the Report proposes setting up a purely advisory Sports Commission, possessing no authority and no resources. Since Government involvement in managing sport has not produced the desired results we do not understand the logic behind such proposals.
- The Report notes that the administration of public sports facilities and the sports programmes operated by the government have failed to generate sufficient participation yet does not propose scaling back the government's involvement in favour of any other solution.
- The Report notes that the educational system provides Hong Kong's school children with little opportunity to take part in sport, yet recommends that efforts be made to persuade the Education Department to increase school sport. This is likely to compound past failures as well as putting more pressure on teachers and students.
- **In summary, the Report notes:-**
  - **that Government administration of sports facilities has failed to generate significant participation and**

- **that the education system has failed to provide much in the way of organised sport.**

**If something is not working it needs changing. Without change there will be no progress and to achieve significant progress will require significant change.**

- We applaud the effort at overseas research, but question the conclusion. In Denmark the Report quotes:

*“Danes love sport . ... About 75% of all children and young people in Denmark engage in sport regularly in their spare time, and almost half of the adult population is engaged in sport and exercise. Most do sport as a member of a sports club.”*

- **The Scandinavian lesson seems not to have been understood. Denmark's high participation level is because Danish sport is organised almost entirely by clubs.**
- Danish schools do not organise sport. Children participate in sport through membership of sports clubs, along with their parents and everyone else in the community. The same applies in other European countries.
- The Report notes that government spends \$2.5 billion annually on sport. Of this, 90% is spent by the LCSD. Some of this expenditure is a waste. Significant savings are possible if the government were to progressively transfer responsibility for organising activity to clubs, with some of the savings being directed into supporting the club system.
- It is noted that the SDB's budget is comparatively small at \$195 million. Compared with the LCSD's budget for sport, there is little to be gained by removing the SDB's administrative staff.

## *The Sports - Commission Proposal*

- The Report recommends the establishment of a Sports Commission. Whether it is called a Sports Commission or a Sports Development Board is immaterial. Assuming that the future body is called a Commission, what matters is:-
  - that the Commission contains members elected from various constituent parts of the sports community. The number of elected members should not be less than the number of appointed and ex-officio members.
  - that the Commission has power to decide on policies and to see that they are executed.
- it would be a highly retrograde step if the Commission is only an advisory body, with no power of its own. This would regress Hong Kong 13 years to the time of the Commission for Recreation & Sport (CRS). The CRS had no real authority. Much time was wasted by its members in fruitless discussion, papers were written and debated, and at the end of the day the government and the municipal councils did not act on them. Progress was stifled and CRS members were frustrated by their inability to effect change. Replacing the CRS with the SDB was a major step forward, but the execution of this was hindered by the government's subsequent strategies towards the Board.
- The advantage of the SDB is that it was an independent, executive body, with its own budget and the ability to make timely and appropriate decisions at arms length from the government. This it largely succeeded in doing, particularly in its early years.
- **The proposal to revert to an advisory body will result in the government enlarging its area of direct responsibility. Since government administration of sport has proven to be ineffective, any enlargement of its area of direct responsibility would seem to be inappropriate. A movement in that direction would be to ignore the lessons to be learned from other countries and to ignore the nature of the problems identified by the Report itself.**
- **Following this Report of the Sports Policy Review Team the need for a truly Independent review to be carried out by experts from outside Hong Kong is reiterated.**