

Hong Kong Elite Athletes: Roles & Needs

Submission to LegCo Home Affairs Panel

20 July 2005

This paper is submitted by the Hong Kong Elite Athletes Association (HKEAA) upon request by the Legislative Council's Home Affairs Panel for its meeting on 20 July 2005, in relation to government's arrangements for 2008 Olympic Equestrian Events. There are three sections: (I) Position of HKEAA relating to relocation of Hong Kong Sports Institute; (II) Real-life examples on impact on performance; and (III) Achievements and Roles of elite athletes in recent years as background reference.

(I) POSITIONS OF HONG KONG ELITE ATHLETES ASSOCIATION

The HKEAA welcomes and support Hong Kong co-hosting the Olympiad Equestrian event. In fact, like many people in Hong Kong we would feel honoured to be awarded the opportunity to host such an event and welcome the accompanying exposure it will bring to sport in Hong Kong.

However, it is unfortunate that the hosting of such an event results in the need to relocate the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) at a critical time for elite training leading up to the 2008 Olympics and other upcoming major competitions. **While the primary role of elite athletes is to train and compete for Hong Kong, we cannot pretend to have no emotions when it comes to compromising our chances and performance after all these years in preparation towards the Beijing Olympics.**

We are **pleased that the government listens to views and concerns of elite athletes, and particularly delighted that the Secretary for Home Affairs promised to redevelop the HKSI to a better facility after the 2008 Olympics.** We eagerly await a concrete timetable and **we pledge for the support from LEGCO Members to the upcoming funding requests** made by the Government to redevelop the HKSI and other initiatives to improve the sporting culture and raise the image and status of athletes in Hong Kong.

During our recent visit to the proposed replacement facility at Wu Kwai Sha Youth Village on 14 July, we confirm the inadequacy of the village for temporary elite training purpose. Our concern over the significant time lost as a result of separating the sport-specific training facilities and the support services could not be resolved. As a counter-proposal, **we suggest to relocate HKSI temporarily to the Chinese University of Hong Kong which already houses a variety of up-to-standard sports facilities on campus as a more practical alternative.**

(II) REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES ON IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

At present, athletes of various sports are focusing their preparation towards upcoming major Games such as the 2005 All China Games and East Asian Games (Macau), 2006 Asian Games (Doha), 2008 Olympic Games (Beijing), 2009 East Asian Games (Hong Kong), plus the many regional and world championships leading up towards these major Games. Every split second counts and makes the difference between winning a medal or not winning.

The low morale created by such relocation plans during this critical moment and the interruptions to training after relocation could lead to reduced performance at those major competitions, meaning less medals for Hong Kong and perhaps more importantly the thousands of hours of training and the sacrifices made by our athletes over the years leading up to these Games will be nullified.

Whilst the Government's proposal is to move the elite training base temporarily to the YMCA Wu Kwai Sha Youth Village between early 2007 and the end of 2008 for an initial period of 24 months, initial consultation with architects suggests that redevelopment of the HKSI complex to a better facility could take at least 2 to 3 years. This means athletes would not be able to move back to HKSI until 2010 or 2011, hence a total of 4 to 5 years of interruptions. This is by no means ideal but perhaps more acceptable if we see a better and bigger Sports Institute established for Hong Kong during this period. To meet such a schedule, the design and planning of the new HKSI needs to commence in early 2006, in addition the support of LegCo members on the government's application for funding is crucial.

At present, there are some 177 athletes in the elite category, and over 318 athletes in the junior or potential categories training at the HKSI. Amongst them, only 70 athletes are residing in the Athletes' Residence (due to lack of beds at the HKSI), the remaining athletes travel to HKSI for training. Most of the juniors are still in schools.

The following tables illustrate a day in a life of two elite athletes training at the HKSI, and the likely impact after the training base is to move to Wu Kwai Sha Youth Village.

EXAMPLE 1: A Badminton Player, full-time athlete, lives at Jubilee Garden, Shatin

Existing Timetable at HKSI	
0800	Walk down to HKSI
0815	Breakfast
0900	Training on court
1000	Weight training
1100	Fitness training on track, e.g. shuttle run or long distance run
1200	End of morning session; shower
1230	Lunch
1330	Rest in Athletes' Day Hostel
1500	Light training on court
1600	End of afternoon session; shower
1630	Physiotherapy / massage
1830	Dinner
1915	Walk home
2200	Sleep

Likely Timetable at Wu Kwai Sha Youth Village, assumed keeping the same training duration	
0730	Depart home, <i>travel to Wu Kwai Sha</i>
0800	Breakfast
0845	Take shuttle bus to Ma On Shan Sports Centre
0900	Training on court
1000	Take shuttle bus to Wu Kwai Sha
1015	Weight training
1115	Fitness training on track, e.g. shuttle run or long distance run
1215	End of morning session; shower
1245	Lunch
1345	Rest in Athletes' Day Hostel (1 hour only)
1445	Take shuttle bus to Ma On Shan Sports Centre
1500	Training on court
1600	End of afternoon session Take shuttle bus to Wu Kwai Sha
1620	Shower
1650	Physiotherapy / massage
1850	Dinner
1935	Travel back home
2200	Sleep



Other regular activities:
Team meetings, equipment maintenance, video reviews of training and competition, public engagements and charity work.

Transportation time = approx. 120 mins/ day
Assuming 300 days training in HK a year while other time travelling, the additional transportation time =
600 hours =

LOST 50 to 70 TRAINING DAYS A YEAR

+

REDUCED RECOVERY TIME & QUALITY

+

MENTAL DISTURBANCE



Reduced Performance

EXAMPLE 2: A Rower, full-time athlete, lives at HKSI Residence

Existing Timetable at HKSI	
0515	Light breakfast
0530	Cycle to Rowing Centre
0600	Training on Shing Mun River
0830	End of morning session; cycle back to HKSI; shower
0850	Breakfast
0930	Rest in hostel
1015	Physiotherapy treatment
1100	Weight training session
1215	End of session; shower
1230	Lunch
1330	Rest in hostel or work in library
1400	Massage & Rest
1530	Cycle to Rowing Centre
1600	Training on Shing Mun River
1800	End of afternoon session; cycle back to HKSI; shower
1830	Dinner
1900	English tutorial
2100	Sleep

Likely Timetable at Wu Kwai Sha Youth Village, assumed keeping the same training duration	
0500	Light breakfast
0515	Take shuttle bus to Rowing Centre
0600	Training on Shing Mun River
0830	End of morning session; Take shuttle bus to Wu Kwai Sha; shower
0905	Breakfast
0945	Rest in hostel (30 mins only)
1015	Physiotherapy treatment
1100	Weight training session
1215	End of session; shower
1230	Lunch
1330	Rest in hostel
1400	Massage & Rest (1 hour only)
1500	Take shuttle bus to Rowing Centre
1600	Training on Shing Mun River
1800	End of afternoon session; Take shuttle bus to Wu Kwai Sha; shower
1945	Dinner
1715	English tutorial
2130	Sleep



Other regular activities:
Team meetings, equipment maintenance, video reviews of training and competition, public engagements and charity work.

Transportation time = approx. 60 mins a day
Assuming 300 days training in HK a year while other time travelling, transportation time = 300 hours =
LOST 25 to 37 TRAINING DAYS A YEAR

+

REDUCED RECOVERY TIME & QUALITY

+

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTURBANCE



Reduced Performance

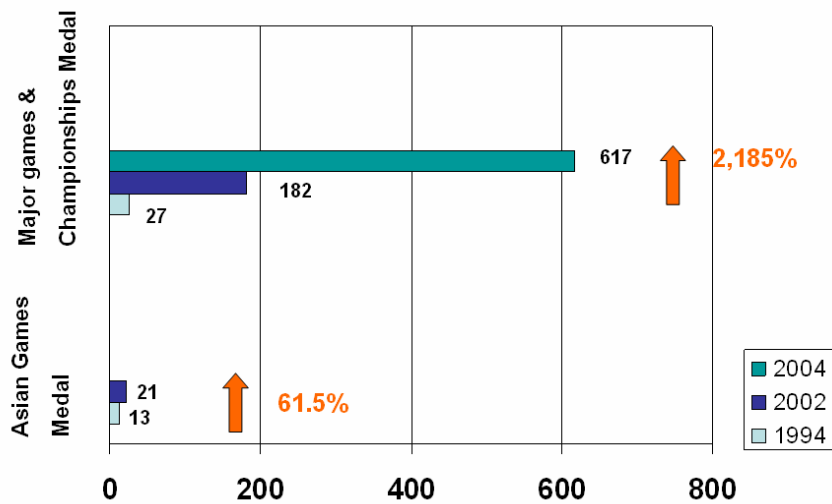
(III) ACHIEVEMENTS AND ROLES OF ATHLETES IN RECENT YEARS

Hong Kong is known to be a highly commercial world, whereas sport has never ranked high on the social agenda. Not in families, schools, corporations or within the community. In recent years our continued growth in sporting success, both in the Asian and world platforms, may be a mystery to outsiders but what is more significant is the fact that it has become something Hong Kong prides itself in.



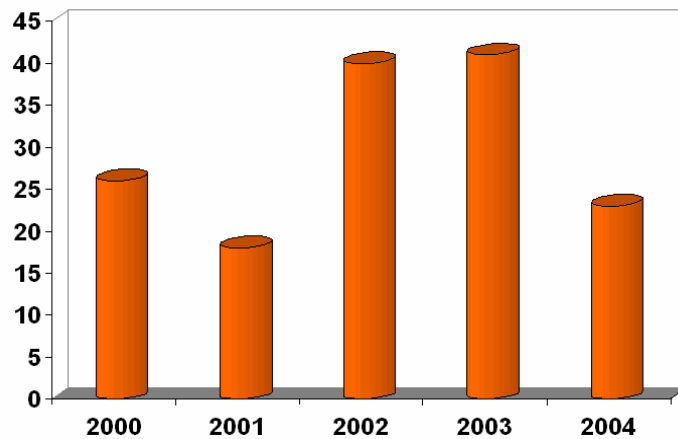
In 1996, the whole of Hong Kong was thrilled and filled with pride when Lee Lai-Shan won the first ever Olympic gold medal in the Atlanta Games for Hong Kong.

Since 1994, Hong Kong athletes have won a total of 130 medals in major games. A comparison of Asian Games results, show a 61.5% increase in Asian Games medals between 1994 and 2002, and in 2004 alone, Hong Kong achieved 210 gold medals, 205 silver medals and 202 bronze medals at National, Asian and International Championships, this represents a 2185% increase over the past decade.



Ability to balance sport and academic performance

Furthermore, Hong Kong's elite athletes have increasingly demonstrated their ability to balance sports training and their studies successfully. Since 2000, there have been 148 elite athletes admitted to universities and tertiary institutions, that is, an average of 30 per year.



Athletes' admission to universities and tertiary institutions from 2000-2004

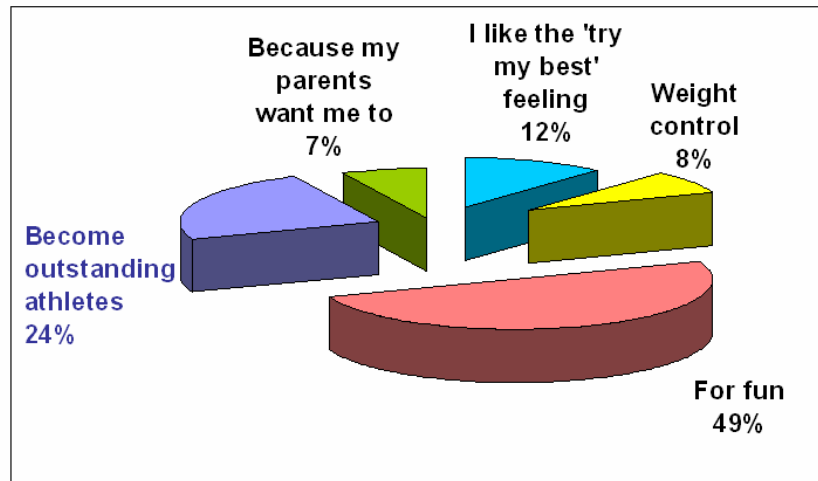
Athletes as role models for young people

Elite athletes are seen by the public as valuable role models, especially to the youth of Hong Kong. Through their achievements and success, we can encourage and promote grassroots participation in sport. With more people actively interested and taking part in sport, we can help to create a healthier society and help reduce many of the social problems associated with the youth of today. The influence of sport participation on society is evident in most developed countries.



Kids are inspired to become outstanding athletes

A recent questionnaire survey on sports participation was conducted by HKEAA in early June 2005, with 1,716 primary school students aged 8 to 12 years old being questioned. The results indicate that 79% of the students regularly take part in sports activity, and a quarter of them (24%) indicated the reason for participation was to become outstanding athletes.



Why do you like to take part in sport?

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR HONG KONG ATHLETES

Taken from the first-person experiences of elite athletes, we have summarized the factors that have led to our success in recent years, as illustrated in the following chart:



International Standard Facilities and Training Atmosphere

HKEAA believes that success in sporting excellence in Hong Kong relies on multiple factors to varying degrees. All these factors contribute to the overall sports culture within the society and also create a greater degree of certainty and security in the minds of athletes when they decide to commit themselves to make the necessary sacrifices required in elite sport. In order to achieve results, athletes have to sacrifice their youth and the normal lifestyle led by young people, sacrifice time with their family and their friends, and in some cases an education and career opportunities in order to meet the demand of training and competition. Meanwhile, their success is subject to the multiple factors, including international standard training facilities and the importance of a good training atmosphere (as highlighted by boxes in the above illustration).

CRITERIA OF AN EFFECTIVE ELITE TRAINING FACILITY FOR HONG KONG

International performance requires international standards in training facilities and support. Elite athletes train an average of 6 hours a day at the Hong Kong Sports Institute. Besides sport-specific training, for example on badminton courts, athletic track, etc, they will also need to spend time with a range of supporting services. These services include sports physiology, sports biomechanics, sports nutrition, sports psychology, sport medicine, strength & conditioning, tutorial, etc. In addition, time may also be consumed in team meetings, video analysis of skills and competition, maintenance of equipment, meeting with sponsors, public engagements, charity events etc.

The Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) has been home for local elite sport for 23 years, providing an integrated and centralized facility for a number of elite sports. The rationale of having everything under one roof in Hong Kong is the effective share of facilities and resources between athletes of various sports. In addition, the centralized facility allows athletes to efficiently and effectively use their time to focus on one and only one thing – to perform and win medals for Hong Kong.

More importantly, for many junior athletes, it means that they do not waste a second between school, training and the support services venues allowing them to balance their time more efficiently in sport with their academics.

Cross-training is an essential element in today's elite sport. Athletes of different sports need to use a range of sporting facilities to achieve the best results in training. For example, a fencer does not only train in the fencing hall, he or she may also require the use the athletic track, basketball court, swimming pool, soccer pitch, weight training room, library and residence.

Another important criterion of an elite training centre is the atmosphere and privacy, allowing a 100% focus on performance and recovery.

Submitted by Hong Kong Elite Athletes Association

19 July 2005