

Revised

**Legislative Council Home Affairs Panel
From the Office of Timothy Fok
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And Olympic Committee**

Date of hearing: October 12th 1998

Preamble

I am sorry about rushing through with this briefing paper at the eleventh hour. I had to postpone submitting this digest of Amateur Sports Federation and Olympic Committee opinions to await our Chief Executive's Policy Address so that we may freshen our views accordingly. The Policy Address did exactly as we expected as it not only extolled the benefits of comprehensive sports programs but outlined the future and echoed our conviction that sports could build character, foster unity, enhance the quality of life, and shape the community's identity. We are also vindicated in our belief that, with persistence and coherence, we could sway not just the government's but public sentiments our way.

The government rightly spends enormous amounts on welfare, health care and education with sports far down the list of priorities. We suggest that, nevertheless, sports should not be seen in isolation as expenditure without widespread public benefits. Sports, if properly promoted and developed, can improve the physical condition and advance the hale lifestyle, resulting in less health care spending. What is more sports can give juveniles an outlet for their excessive energy and divert them away from delinquency, bringing down crime. When we look at society from a holistic perspective, then it is obvious that sports are important to its overall wellbeing.

Bold strides forward

The ASF&OC have been the foremost proponents for not only more sports funding but also a more effective use of scarce resources. We insist that, as much as possible, bureaucratic costs be pared and the funds passed to the

athletes, whose interest matters most. This is especially urgent since sports organizations can no longer rely on tobacco sponsorship and must therefore depend almost exclusively on government subsidies. We are pleased that the Chief Executive has heeded our suggestion and given his commitment to our shared vision.

We of the Committee are uniquely placed to furnish the government with ideas on sports because, one, we are elected and, two, we are experts in the field. To us, a sport is not a past time but a consuming passion. The Chief Executive is of the same suasion for he agrees with us that sports are not just good for the body but also the soul - and can be a tourist attraction and a rallying point, noting how, for example, the World Cup victory has rejuvenated France.

Hong Kong once neglected sports, thinking such "carousing" was unbecoming of a serious people desperate to scrape a living. This society's indifference resulted in our athletes of the past being dissuaded from pursuing their dreams. To them, sacrifice was much and prospects few in sports. This public aloofness also skewed public education, which stressed exclusively, even obsessively, on academics to the detriment of sports. What ensued was a single dimensional approach not just to education but also to life. Our youths were conditioned not to be the best they could be in all areas but be employable within the narrow confines of their place and time.

As our community enters a new century, an advanced cosmopolitan city, it can no longer afford to waste talent and it has to broaden the priorities - as well as career choices for the younger generation. Our people too are coming around to the consensus common in the West that society must strike for balance and diversity, diligence and creativity. In such a scheme sports are not superfluous but an integral part of everyday living.

Without the Municipal Councils

The Chief Executive was emphatic about abolishing the Regional and Urban Councils, whose historic role as the incubator of Hong Kong democracy had been served. Today our citizens are represented by elected legislators at one end and by district boards at the other. We could no longer justify the duplication of duties among the three tiers of representation when the public is clamoring for efficiency and effectiveness. We also applaud the government for letting the Municipal Councils serve out their terms and

naturally expire next year to ensure that there would be minimal disruptions in the transition.

The time between now and then should give us a pause in which we may reflect and exchange views on how to discharge the Municipal Councils' responsibility for arts, sports and recreational venue management that last year accounted for \$2 billion worth of services. We must decide among ourselves whether these services should be overseen by government agencies, statutory bodies or privatization; else, a combination of the options. Haste would only sow confusion and breed resentment. This orderly change lasting a year should enable us to involve the whole community in the decision making process.

We of the ASF&OC Council will not preempt our members' opinions and recommendations. We intend to collate the views democratically and prepare a thorough report for both the Home Affairs and Constitutional Affairs Bureaus. We urge all other groups affected by the reform to do the same, just as the Chief Executive has enjoined us to participate in what amounts to a plebiscite. Within hours of the Policy Address, many members approached me to express their views on the subject. Such heartening enthusiasm convinces me that the ASF&OC will be a factor in the final reshuffle of sports facility management to make our services more user friendly and accountable.

Sports education

The government through statutory bodies began providing for sports scholarships in the early 1990s but these were spotty, even grudging. We applaud the Chief Executive for advocating comprehensive sports programs in schools so that, from the very early phase, children are exposed to the athletic culture. We agree that, for our sports to flourish at the elite end, we must expand the talent pool. This means affording youngsters the opportunities and the encouragement to excel in sports, culminating in scholarships to universities, locally, on the mainland, and abroad, and in career options beyond their fields of discipline when their competition days are done.

Such a strategy goes beyond changes in the curriculum for it must involve in the design of new schools. At present few of the almost 500 secondary schools in Hong Kong feature adequate facilities. Tracks and proper gyms,

standard features in schools in some Western countries, are rare here. Once our standard refrain when we were accused of not elevating physical education in the curriculum was that Hong Kong lacked space. This defense is no longer so tenable or credible because we now have more land through reclamation and no more haphazard urban planning. The truth is the Hong Kong public loves sports just like people everywhere when given the opportunity. Today we have overflowing enrolment in tennis, swimming and skating classes. Parents putting up with all types of inconveniences and expenses to let their children play organized football, basketball and baseball. This craving for sports is none other than the yearning of the community for the nurturing of their broods' athletic potentials. We have the obligation to oblige. We must let our children live up to their promises, in academics, as in arts, as in sports.

Stadium and aquatic sports center

The ASF&OC hail the decision to build a multipurpose stadium and aquatic sports center in West Kowloon, an area being served by better and better transport and other forms of infrastructure. I have discussed the scheme in three newspaper articles and in numerous interviews. Our members are disappointed with the Hong Kong Government Stadium and we must be sure the mistake does not recur. This means in the year during the preliminary stage of planning for the complex there must be widespread consultation involving the districts, environmentalists and representatives of the sports fraternity. We have a wealth of knowledge gleaned from our participation in meets in other major cities. We can, and we want, to assist the government to do this right and right from the start. The administration must not squander the goodwill it has engendered. We hope that for this complex we will have a decisive voice in the policy for the stadium. This is imperative.

The many eminent sportsmen I have met, including the International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch, regularly praise our alluring city and would like to host major events commensurate with our status as a world class metropolis. They are prevented from going further with their good wishes because we simply do not have the facilities to stage spectacular in sports - a global growth industry. During his visit to Hong Kong last month President Samaranch met our Chief Executive and offered to help us prepare a comprehensive plan for sports development. This really is our opportunity to define our sports, determine which areas we should

concentrate because we have the best chances to succeed, and focus. We must seize the initiative as the public mood swings in our favor.

This has to change if we are to achieve our ambitions to be the New York and London of the Far East. A multipurpose complex has to be commercially viable, esthetically stunning and conveniently located. What we need is not another monument to vanity or totem of grandeur but a dynamic sports, arts and cultural center that is no doubt the hub of Hong Kong in which families can spend the whole day. All around Asia cities - from Dalian, Shenyang, Shanghai, Beijing, Taipei, Guangzhou, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore - are busily recasting themselves in a more appealing mold. Sports, arts and culture are beckoning their planners but it is time that they beckon us too. We cannot lag behind in this race in which we are already late in joining.

Conclusion

The ASF&OC are inclined to collaborate with the government, the Sports Development Board, the Legislative Council and other statutory bodies as well as corporations to bring what the Chief Executive envisages into fruition. We prefer a nonpartisan, sporting approach to the issue because ultimately our loyalty and end object are the same. This is our sacred mission, one we must discharge in the Olympic spirit. Thus in the sports hearing we shall not recriminate but exhort everyone to cooperate so that we may-run this race not as a solitary marathon but a relay.