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Subject: (EMBARGOED) SPEECH BY ASSOC PROF HO PENG KEE, 15 NOV 99, 7.30 P.M.

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SPEECH BY ASSOC PROF HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HOME AFFAIRS AT THE  
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 6TH ANNUAL ACADEMY SESSION OF THE SINGAPORE OLYMPIC ACADEMY  
ON 15 NOVEMBER 1999 AT THE NTUC RESORT AT 7.30 PM

Mr Ng Ser Miang, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Singapore Olympic Academy

Professor Leo Tan, Director, National Institute of Education

Participants of the Third International Session

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening

I am happy to join you tonight in support of sports, something close to my heart.

2 It is appropriate that this international session brings together representatives not only from South East Asia but also from Canada and New Zealand. The new millennium presents opportunities for ties between countries to be strengthened through sports. Indeed, sports is a good way to bridge international boundaries and help the inhabitants of our global village understand each other better. After all, ping pong diplomacy played a part in bringing China and the USA together.

3 Most of you gathered around this pool will graduate as students of the School of Physical Education next year. New professional challenges will confront you. You have heard Mr Ng Ser Miang and Professor Leo Tan emphasise the need to nurture and harness the talents of our young athletes. I endorse their sentiments. Individual development is an important key to enhancing the standard of sports in Singapore. Compared to past heydays, the standards of sports in Singapore has somewhat slipped although there are some bright spots, for example, the recent successes of our disabled athletes in international competitions. It could be that other countries have done more to raise their standards. It could be that not enough of our young take competitive sports seriously enough. It could be that economic pursuits have blunted our sporting competitive edge by drawing away promising sportsmen. Whatever it is, nurturing young talents in our midst and encouraging them to continue taking sports seriously is a key approach to improving sports standards in Singapore.

4 All of us in Singapore are familiar with S21. Sports can play a key role in achieving the goals of S21. Even as S21 focuses on the uniqueness and worth of every person, emphasising his or her individuality, we must guard against excessive individualism rearing its ugly head. Our society will then be torn apart as a "me first" mentality takes an ugly grip on us. We must also guard against getting soft, mentally and physically, as a society. Moreover, as we seek to stimulate creativity in our young, they must continue to value discipline, perseverance, commitment and teamwork. They must feel proud to be part of the Singapore Team, and be quietly confident about their own ability to contribute. Sports can play an important role in shaping all these important values our young must have in order to keep Singapore strong and vibrant in the next millennium.

5 The role and function of sports can be viewed at different levels. For

many, sports is simply an enjoyable pastime, indulged in for recreation or to strengthen friendships or relationships. For the more serious competitive sportsmen, sports encapsulates the ultimate in human achievement, the attainment of set objectives such as winning a medal in an international competition. At yet another level, in many countries, sports has evolved into an entire industry, involving large sums of money. In the life of a nation, sports can therefore play many roles. Hence, the different thrusts of the Singapore Sports Council such as Sports For All and Sports Excellence Programmes. At the highest level, sports can help in nation-building as sports draw citizens from different socio-economic backgrounds together in participation, and to express shared pride in supporting our national teams. Indeed, sports can tap the potential of Singaporeans who may not be academically inclined but who as players, managers, sports media professionals, event organisers, sports medicine specialists and coaches can help put Singapore on the world map. It provides yet another platform for Singaporeans to contribute to Singapore's social and economic progress.

6 I am confident that sports will play an enhanced role as Singapore matures as a society. An analogy here is how the arts and culture have helped Singaporeans become more rounded as individuals, as well as contribute to our economic progress by nurturing creativity which then impact on areas such as Information Technology, advertising and fashion.

7 Like other fields of human endeavour, there are different types of sportsmen. The analogy applies across all games but let me take football, a game which I play, as an example. It has been said that there are three kinds of players -

- (i) Those who watch the ball;
- (ii) Those who watch the other players; and
- (iii) Those who watch for space.

The most limited players are those who watch the ball only. The most advanced players are those who look for and exploit available space, whilst watching the ball and other players at the same time. That requires vision, creativity and stamina. Indeed in the next millennium, we will need people of this calibre in all spheres of activity in Singapore, - people who can create a goal out of nowhere, people who can make things happen, people who can inspire the other players to perform beyond their normal capacity, people who can turn impending defeat into glorious victory.

8 In the context of Physical Education or PE teachers, there are three types of teachers:

- (i) Those who demonstrate skills and give their pupils the opportunity to practise;
- (ii) Those who understand their pupils well enough to know which are the most appropriate skills and abilities that can be learned and utilised, and
- (iii) Those who can appreciate the capacity for learning of each and every pupil

and who can help them to fulfil their potential.

The most limited PE teachers are those who give their pupils skills to learn. The most advanced PE teachers are those whose worlds exist beyond the physical. They recognise and nurture the various latent talents within all their pupils, so that all may benefit.

9 Our young today are Singapore's future leaders in politics, government, business, the professions, culture and the arts and sports. They must be imbued with the Olympian spirit of endeavour, commitment and fairplay. This is a high calling which you have taken upon yourselves. What you do to help shape the values of our young can be very satisfying if you do it well. As you do this diligently, to the best of your ability, you are contributing to nation-building in a special way.

10 I wish you all the best in attaining your objectives.

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