

# *Singapore Government*

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**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI  
MINISTER OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPORTS  
AT THE TEA WITH OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC TEAMS  
ON WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2000, 4 PM  
AT HILTON HOTEL, BALLROOM 1, LEVEL 3**

RAdm Admiral Teo Chee Hean

President SNOC, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence,

A/P Ho Peng Kee

Deputy President FAS, Minister of State (Home Affairs and Law)

His Excellency Murraray McLean

Australian High Commissioner

Members of the sporting fraternity

Ladies & Gentlemen,

### **Introduction**

Thank you for coming to this tea party in honour of our Olympic and Paralympic athletes. This year, Singapore is sending 14 athletes to the

Olympic Games and 2 athletes to the Paralympic Games in Sydney. Our Olympic team will be competing in sailing, shooting, swimming and table tennis, while our Paralympians will compete in the tandem cycling and athletics events.

## **The Olympic and Paralympic Teams for Sydney 2000**

2 Participation in the Olympic or the Paralympic Games is the pinnacle of any athlete's sporting career. Past Olympians and Paralympians will testify to this. I would like to commend our Olympians and Paralympians for their many months or even years of sacrifices and hard work. I would also like to applaud the coaches, principals and teachers, employers, corporate sponsors, the media and the parents and family members of our athletes without whose guidance and support our sportsmen and women would not be able to achieve much.

### **Olympians Past and Present**

3 Our national athletes are a special breed of people. I heard Tan Howe Liang speak last week at the SNOC flag presentation ceremony for the Singapore Olympic Team. Bad as my command of Chinese is, I could feel the passion and fire to win still burning in him, 40 years after he won the silver medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics. Ang Peng Siong is another giant of Singapore sports whose will and determination to push himself to the limits is exemplary. At 35, he won a silver medal in the 50m butterfly event at the World Masters Championship in Munich last month, some 16 years after he came in 9th fastest in the 100m freestyle event at the Los Angeles Olympics. He now has his own successful swim school. We are happy for him.

4 In our current contingent, Joscelin Yeo, who at 21 years old and mounting her third Olympic campaign, has qualified for the Fina's more stringent A standard for the 100m butterfly event. Azman, at the 1999 Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled, clocked a time of 13.21 seconds in the 100m, well above the 'A' qualifying mark of 13.7 seconds for the Sydney Paralympics.

## **The Olympic Dream and its impact on Society**

5 Our Olympians and Paralympians demonstrate what winners and champions are made of: passion, commitment, and the unquenchable desire to give of their very best and utmost to win. We need more of such Singaporeans, not just in sports, but in every endeavour in our society. But sports is an activity that easily inspires and lifts the human spirit, and is thus an excellent medium to promote the development of a nation of winners.

6 This is why we place significant emphasis on sports excellence. It gives us the stretch target to push ourselves to the limit. At the same time it helps to produce a groundswell of interest that will motivate people to take up sports. The man in the street may play sports for a number of reasons: to keep fit, for the social interaction, or for the thrill of the sport. But in all this it is often an elite athlete who first inspires him or her to take up the sport.

## **5 Keys Areas to Develop Singapore Sports**

7 Our vision is of a *Sporting Singapore*, where sports excellence and sports for all help build character in the individual, and impassioned us with national pride; our vision is of sports inculcating a healthy lifestyle among our people and bringing Singaporeans closer as a people. Our vision is of sports helping to fly our Singapore flag high in the international arena. To achieve this vision, my Ministry has formulated five key strategies.

### Adopting a Team Singapore Approach

8 The first strategy is to **adopt a “Team Singapore” approach** to sports development in Singapore. I am happy that there are already many organisations involved in sports. These include the National Sports Associations, each looking after the development of its respective sport. There are also grassroots organisations, sports clubs, and schools which are active promoters of sport. We also have sports marketing companies, event organisers, and media players who are in the business of creating and attracting sporting events.

9 It is crucial that a common vision is shared by all these organisations and institutions so that we can move in the same direction as one team, rising above individual interests, for the larger good of sports in Singapore and for the pride of our nation.

#### Strengthening the NSAs

10 The National Sports Associations, or NSAs in short, are the basic building block of any sports delivery system. They are at the front line developing and promoting their sport. If we want to have high quality sports in Singapore, we must have strong NSAs with the necessary capabilities. A well-managed and progressive NSA is key to the development of any sport. Our second strategy is therefore to **strengthen the National Sports Associations**. To do this, we will look into the resources available to NSAs and how this can be better provided and utilised. We will also look into how key capabilities can be developed and sustained within the NSAs. And finally, we will look into how performance can be enhanced, measured and evaluated.

#### Enhancing the Support Infrastructure

11 Good NSAs will go a long way in raising the level of sports in Singapore. But this is not enough. We need to take a closer look at the entire support system for the athlete and how this can be further improved. Our third strategy is therefore to **enhance the support infrastructure for athletes** throughout their sporting careers.

12 The obvious place to start looking is the school system, as nearly all athletes begin their formative years while in school. We have already identified the need to have a flexible education system catered to the needs of an athlete, and a taskforce has been set up to study the feasibility of establishing a sports school in Singapore. At the same time, several independent and autonomous schools are already placing heavy emphasis on excellence in sports. We should encourage more schools to do likewise.

13 Besides the schools, we will also need to make available proper training facilities, overseas competition exposure, and good coaches for our elite athletes. For male athletes, we should do what we can to ensure that their

competitiveness is kept up during National Service. For working athletes, supportive employers are crucial. Career opportunities for the professional athlete after he or she has retired from the competing arena are equally important, as prospective athletes would naturally want the assurance that they have a viable career path after they retire from competitive sports.

#### Developing the Sports Industry

14 This leads us to our fourth strategy, which is to **develop a vibrant sports industry**. The international sports industry is growing rapidly and becoming very lucrative. World-class sportsmen like Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan have broken all records in terms of income earned by athletes. World-class sports events like Formula One and America's Cup are mega businesses for the event owners and the host countries. And super leagues like the NBA and Premier League are billion-dollar money spinners.

15. The USA and Europe have fairly well-established markets, and industry leaders are looking at expanding into Asia. We should leverage on this to build a sports industry in Singapore. This will add value and diversity to our economy, create meaningful but different kind of jobs for our workforce, generate corporate interest in sports sponsorship and enhance Singapore's international presence.

#### Promoting Sports for All

16. But winning competitions and medals is not all, there is to sports. Indeed, sports has an important role in our daily lives. Playing sports on a regular basis is an excellent recreation. It not only contributes to a healthy lifestyle, it also helps to develop positive mental qualities such as passion, creativity, a risk-taking attitude and an ability to deal with the unpredictable. All these are qualities that are important in the new knowledge-based society. Sports is also an excellent way to bring people from all walks of life together.

17. Our final strategy is therefore to **promote sports for all**. These include the able-bodied as well as the disabled; the young as well as the elderly; the lower as well as the higher income earners. Our organised sports programmes must take into account the preferences and needs of all these

people. Our sports facilities must also cater adequately to all these sectors of our society.

### **Formation of Committee on Sporting Singapore**

18. To be sure, the formulation of these strategies is just the beginning. A lot more effort needs to be put into addressing the various specific issues in each of these areas. There may also be other issues beyond these five areas that we need to work on. I have therefore set up a committee to help review the issues facing sports development in Singapore and to formulate initiatives to achieve our vision. This **Committee on Sporting Singapore**, or CoSS in short will include representatives from government agencies, sports organisations, coaches, athletes, corporations, and the media. Sub-committees will also be formed to look into specific areas and to draw on more expertise from the sports fraternity. Assoc Prof Ho Peng Kee will assist me as the Deputy Chairman of CoSS.

19. I am very pleased that Mr Mah Bow Tan, who is also the President of FAS and RAdm Teo Chee Hean who is also the President, SNOC have also agreed to be special advisors to the CoSS.

### **Conclusion**

20. These are exciting times for sports in Singapore. We recognise the important roles that sports play in our society. And we are determined to turn our vision of a Sporting Singapore into reality.

21. As supporters and stakeholders of sports, your feedback and contributions to this effort will be important. I look forward to your involvement as we chart the future of sports in Singapore, together.

22. Finally, let me wish bon voyage to our Olympic and Paralympic teams and every success at the Sydney Games.

Thank you.