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SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS),
AT THE FIRST FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE (FAS)
REFEREES MONTHLY DISCUSSION AT THE NATIONAL STADIUM
THEATRETTE ON MONDAY, 5 MARCH 1984 AT 7.30 PM

I am pleased to be here this evening at this 1st FAS Referees Monthly Discussion. I am informed that these monthly discussions will be a regular feature and are specifically aimed at upgrading the standard of refereeing in Singapore. This is an encouraging sign and can only contribute to improving the standards and entertainment value of soccer.

Your voluntary services as referees is most important to soccer in Singapore and is fully appreciated by the Council and I am sure by the Clubs and soccer enthusiasts. For good soccer to exist, and even develop further, there is, without a doubt, the need for good refereeing. You have provided invaluable service in the past, of course not without its problems, and for this service I thank you. However, we now need to look to the future.

You would be better aware than I, that the football calendar in Singapore gets busier by the year. The National Football league and the President's Cup competitions alone constitute some 350 games. Then there are other FAS sanctioned competitions organised by affiliates which are very much an important part of the soccer scene. The Inter-Constituency, the Government Services and the Business Houses competitions in themselves constitute a few hundred more games. For all these

competitions to run smoothly and, more importantly, to get the desired spectator support, the referees play a significant role. There is no doubt in my mind that the referees and linesmen can mar an otherwise good game by poor and inconsistent decisions. Such decisions lead to frayed tempers among players resulting in dissent, violence and deliberate rough play out of sheer frustration. All this detracts from the entertainment value of the game resulting in loss of spectator support. It is detrimental to the future of soccer in Singapore. This, to my mind, is a state of affairs which must be corrected as a matter of priority.

During the course of the game, the role played by a referee is too important for it to be left to chance. We have to accept that teams train hard to prepare themselves for a match. At the match, they play hard to win using superior skills and tactics. This is only to be expected and is all perfectly acceptable. All teams expect opposing teams to muster all they can to stymie their efforts. Of course, from time to time, teams and players try to take unfair advantage of their opponents. This is where the referees and linesmen come in. I see their main function, in layman's terms, as seeing to it that the game is being played in a sporting and fair manner. They must do the needful, and only the needful, to ensure that this is so and in the process be absolutely unobstrusive. Players do not go onto the field to be subjected to the whims and fancies of referees and neither do spectators turn up to watch referees. Hence, the lime-light rightfully belongs to the players and their skills.

Let me now cite some figures to give you an idea of the scope of the problem. Last season, the National Football League and the President's Cup constituted 350 games. For these 350 games, there were 40 cases of referees and linesmen being absent. This is about 13 per cent, a high percentage by any count. Such absenteeism

resulted in games having to be called off, ad hoc arrangements having to be made or worse still games having to be played without the necessary match officials. Besides absenteeism,, there were also numerous complaints of inept refereeing, referees turning up late for games, being absent from disciplinary hearings etc. From all this, I can only arrive at the unfortunate conclusion that there are members amongst your ranks, who adopt a very irresponsible and nonchalant attitude towards their refereeing responsibilities. Surely you must agree with me that such conduct cannot and must not be condoned.

Let us look at this year. The National Football League is only about six weeks old, and I am informed that there are already five cases of match officials not turning up, one case of a match official being late and one case of a match official failing to turn up for a disciplinary hearing. Though the situation may appear slightly better than last year - perhaps it is too early to say this just yet - I do not consider it satisfactory. The damage is already done and it only means the further tarnishing of the referees' image. What do we do to correct this?

Let me first touch on volunteering one's service. In this respect, all of us present tonight have volunteered our services in the cause of football. In fact, everyone involved with football in Singapore, be they FAS officials, club officials, coaches, players or referees, are there of their own free wil. They do so because of their various interests in football. So the referees are not an exception.

When we decide to volunteer our services to further a particular cause, we automatically agree to accept responsibilities and to abide by unwritten norms of conduct, reasonably to be expected. When you decide to volunteer your services as a referee, you must accept that

you tacitly agree to shoulder the responsibilities of living up to the image of a good referee. Without this tacit understanding the cause of football in Singapore will not be advanced.

Perhaps it will be useful for me to give my perception of the image of a referee. The referee must display the highest standard of moral courage, professional conduct, professional competence and possess a high standard of physical fitness. Only then can he expect to perform his duty as a referee efficiently and expect to command the respect of players, officials and spectators, which he must if he is to succeed in his duties. I hope that the Referees Committee and you will deliberate over this carefully in your discussions as a matter of urgency. Past performance standards cannot be accepted as a satisfactory norm. Referees must keep up with the latest developments in the game and the tactics employed by teams. While there may not be big changes in the Laws of the Games, new tactics employed by teams can cause big changes in the interpretation of the laws and how they have to be applied. Consistency and fairness must be maintained in their interpretation and application.

These matters which I have raised this evening are within your capability and the capability of the Referees Committee to look into and resolve. With a spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding as, after all, we are here because we are dedicated to a common cause, we should be able to progress. You should be forward-looking and aim at higher standards for the future. While overall Singapore referees are well regarded in the region, this cannot be said for the local scene.

I look forward to seeing continued progress and developments in refereeing standards and wish you and the Referees Committee success.

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