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SPEECH BY TAN ENG LIANG, CHAIRMAN, SINGAPORE SPORTS COUNCIL AT THE
CHECKUP PRESENTATION OF THE PEPSI SQUASH TRAINING SCHEME AT THE
NATIONAL STADIUM CONFERENCE ROOM ON 1 NOVEMBER 1980 AT 11.00 AM

It has been observed that increased affluence in some developed Western countries tends to curtail physical activity, which may result in cardiovascular diseases, obesity and general lack of vigour among the population. Hence, there was a need for governments of some of these countries to finance various kinds of mass involvement programmes to improve the health and well-being of the people.

In Singapore, we have been actively pursuing the 'Sports for All' policy for the last eight years. At the Sports Council, we have tried our best to offer a place, for as many people as possible, to further their sporting interest according to their ability. Those who are talented and committed have risen from the base level to the higher levels of competition and achievement, while the most able and dedicated have moved up to national and international competence.

While 'Sports for All' is important, equally important are the elite sportsmen and sportswomen who serve to inspire and encourage participation at lower levels. Today, I have chosen sport excellence in squash as my subject.

Much has been said about and written on squash in Singapore in the last few years. Generally, the public are well informed of the state of squash's development. What is most admirable about the way squash has developed, is the speed in which it has catapulted to the forefront in a relatively short time. Starting out very modestly, with only a handful of recreational players, we have become champions of East Asia in both individual and team events.

Now that we have a strong base of players to build on, the time is opportune to consolidate our position, lest we lose grip of our standing and eventually be relegated to a lower position in East Asia. I believe, the Singapore Squash Racquets Association (SSRA), which has been instrumental in stimulating this growth, would not sit back but would press on further ahead.

The Pepsi Squash Training Scheme is an attempt to uphold the high status of squash that we are enjoying by injecting excellence into the game. The scheme provides for the accelerated improvement of national-calibre players, up the various strata of achievements, to the national level itself. But the scheme existing in isolation will not be able to contribute fully to the overall search for and growth in excellence, unless there is sufficient promotional efforts taking place outside, which have a bearing on the quality of the scheme. For this, I would like to suggest the following course of action:

First, create a conducive climate for greater interdependence and flow between the various levels - school, club and national. I believe that we have not fully channelled the talents we have discovered, from one level to the other, as it should be. In some cases, it is largely a matter of accident rather than design that a talented player has arrived at the top. Once this is taken care of, the scheme will truly represent the cream of players in real terms.

Second, we can afford to have a more efficient scouting system than presently practised. Perhaps a pool of knowledgeable talent scouts can be assigned to keep their eyes and ears open for young players who are of good physical material to develop into champions.

In this way, the search for prospects will be that much thorough. Talent scouts, by putting ideas into the minds of these prospects, will definitely hasten their maturing.

Third, a training effort such as the Pepsi Scheme will stand to gain further and be enriched, if clinics and coaching are held at all playing outlets. Well-run clinics will inspire and motivate and collectively their contribution will be great. Clubs and other organisations involved in squash promotion should not feel that they can exclude this area since a training scheme already exists. To my mind, there can be no duplication. Even if very few talented players emerge, still well-disciplined clinics will remind the trainees and give them new perspectives in their sport.

Fourth, improve competition. We need more quality competition in squash, although some progress has been made in this direction such as the league competition organised by the travel industry and commercial houses.

Fifth, bring the university and other tertiary institutions into the mainstream of squash. Next year, squash is making an appearance in the schools and this move should see the emergence of some young players. So far, our tertiary educational institutions have made relatively little contribution to sport excellence, although all have reasonable recreational programmes for their students. This may be partly due to academic pressure and also other factors which play an inhibitive part. I think the pursuit of excellence is possible in the field of sports at university level, even though the chase for paper qualification is going on at a furious pace.

With a new squash complex of eight courts coming up at Kent Ridge, the N.U.S. should be contributing some talented squash players in the near future. If my memory serves me right, Roger Bannister ran the first sub four-minute mile when he was still an undergraduate.

Last but not least, we must continue to cultivate mass participation in squash. Not all people are prepared to undergo hard training to be Zainals, Ballards and Hills, but they continue to derive a good deal of satisfaction from playing a sport to an accepted level of competence. Since these people are always in the majority, they cannot be neglected and forgotten. Thus, promotional programmes and provision of facilities for them must continue apace to keep up their interest, fun and enjoyment. They will most likely form the core of active spectators whose physical presence at tournaments will make excellence in squash that much more meaningful.

I would like to thank SSRA, its officials and all coaches in the scheme for their dedication and hardwork in ensuring that the scheme achieves its objectives.

It leaves me now to express our appreciation to Yeo Hiap Seng Limited for generously continuing to sponsor the Pepsi Squash Training Scheme. Their financial contribution in helping Singapore to attain sport excellence in squash is worthy of emulation by other commercial houses.