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PC Sport & Recreation
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ST CONRADS COLLEGE

P.O. BOX 678
Klerksdorp
2570
21 August 2006

Ntombekhaya Mbuqe
The Committee Secretary
Portfolio Committee on
Sport and Recreation

Fax: (021) 403 – 8231/2808

Dear Madam,

Comment: Transformation of Sport in South Africa

Personal History

My high school career was at St. Barnabas College in Bosmont, Johannesburg. As a young sportsman, I was exposed to the Transvaal High School Sports Association a body representing schools in "coloured" communities. Later I studied education at the Rand College of Education where I majored in Physical Education. Later I returned to my old school where I coached under the U.S.S.A.S.A. umbrella body. Currently, based in Klerksdorp, at St. Conrad's College, I am one of a number of coaches and sports people trying to develop a structure for sport in particular soccer, in the area.

Introduction

The structures that are going to come under international scrutiny over the forthcoming four years are obviously our national soccer development programmes. All efforts to organize, select and develop soccer will be laid before the world to see, this by 2009. For this reason we need to develop this national sport in such a way that it resembles a tier structure from the PSL down to under 6. Basically any child registered to play soccer, at any school, must have a path to the PSL, mapped out. Hence the target for a national sports policy should begin at schools.

The following must then be considered.

- Fields
- Equipment
- First Aid
- Transport
- League fixtures
- Trained coaches
- Provincial champions/National Champions/International Tournaments

Fields

We still have schools in that do not have sports fields! This needs to be addressed urgently, as we cannot develop any sports policy without basic infrastructure.

Considering that this might not always be possible, ensuring that each community has a facility is the next best thing. This would also entail, nets, correctly marked field and clean change rooms and ablutions.

Currently, many communities are using what fields exist in their respective communities, but the one decent area eventually gets monopolized by specific groups or games are played late resulting in a number of safety and security issues.

Equipment

Learners need text books in order to learn. So too if they are to play sport they need equipment. Now the old adage would recommend that just a ball be given. I would then ask if any league, cup or international game has ever been played without a kit, soccer boots, a referee and of cause a proper FIFA regulation ball. It is imperative that we move away from the 'lets just' mentality when we speak about our schools as this is where the interest gets lost when there is no resemblance to what learners see on television – 'the dream'.

First Aid

Who is responsible for a learner, on a neutral ground, when he is knocked unconscious by a clash of heads? How many educators are equipped to deal with such instances? How many learners leave after sport, limping only to return two days later with a cast on his/her leg?

These are situations that happen daily at school sports where the important, first aid preparedness, is missing. It is time that we trained members of the community to fulfill these roles at all sports activities in our communities. Not only would they be trained in first aid but also in the prevention of AIDS, healthy living and basic nutrition. This will result in these people being role models for the youth whilst also aiding adults with their basic health needs.

Transport

As playing fields are far from school buildings, we need to transport learners to and from sport meets. It is also disturbing that learners are paying for their own transport fee when representing their schools.

What we need to consider is for schools to be able to transport teams on a weekly basis to fixtures in and out of the school communities. This in education terms, will be a draw card for learners who want to travel around the country.

Let us not forget that many previously 'white' schools are and have been doing this for decades and are therefore far ahead of the majority of disadvantaged schools. Many of these schools have their own school busses whilst I have yet to see a school from a township with their own vehicle of any kind. This is also why many learners are flocking to those schools but are not equipped to play in the school teams – hockey, cricket, rugby, etc.

League Fixtures

None of the above is worth anything if there are no inter school leagues.

This is the main gripe of most school sport coordinators. As we are competing with other more prominent school sports codes – rugby craven week – we are never going to obtain the same status without a national schools league.

Yes many have tried to form local leagues but are faced with the following problems:

1. Principals will only sanction participation if money is to be won.
2. Schools do not have transport to other schools for fixtures.
3. As these leagues rise and fall so the commitment of educators lessens,
4. So meetings cannot take place to plan, fixtures.
5. This results in possible sponsors not getting involved.
6. Learners get demoralized as they train for one month, to play one game, in a season.

When one looks through the newspaper on a Sunday, one finds many 'white' schools being mentioned as they play each other in national tournaments in various sports codes – hockey, rugby, swimming, etc.

I have always dreamt of two big township schools taking on each other in three age groups, for soccer on a Saturday morning.

It will not be a good impression when during the world cup we see school boy rugby advertised on the pay channel and not school boy soccer.

There should not be a school in the country that does not/can not participate in a school soccer league because 'there is none in the area'. Every Wednesday should be match day. The country's roads should be busy with learners going to take on another school. This should eventually prompt the education department, to shorten Wednesdays, for the purpose of participation in inter school sport leagues.

This might appear fantastical, but it is my opinion that when an area coordinator is appointed, it should be his duty to ensure that all schools in his jurisdiction are involved in sport every week. This will be made even more possible by principles having separate budgets for school sport as well as being accountable for the schools participation weekly in school sports. Municipalities must be on the alert every Wednesday to accommodate all the school sport if schools do not have their own fields.

The list of planning is endless but the immediate execution, dire. All this will come under scrutiny before the world arrives in 2010.

Trained Coaches

Those schools fortunate enough to have physical education specialists, may scoff at the idea that other schools do not have similarly trained people. 'Let's fix it.' Most schools have a person who is in charge of various sports. Let us train these people into being good school sport coaches, at least. This will allow a more professional approach to each sport in the schools.

Also, all schools are supposed to have a sports day. However, educators are given jobs to do for which some training is required. As they do not have this training mistakes are made and we return to facing demoralized learners.

Provincial/National/International Tournaments

Whether or not it was done in the past without my noticing, but I have never come to know which was the best soccer school, in any province. Needless to say, that this includes the best school in the country.

These are statistics that we need to log as this is what drives learners to become better sports people whilst learning to be responsible young adults. The only way to establish this is by having area league winners, league winners cup, champions league (Provincial winners) and finally an inter provincial tournament where the best school in the country will be crowned. This will automatically give the country the top nine schools in the country. Now surely some international company or two will be interested in sponsoring such a tournament whilst others might want to award prizes to the victorious schools?

This will no doubt get those and other schools invited to international school tournaments where the South African flag can show the world how we move!

Conclusion

We all know how South Africa's past affected sport. However we have shone brightly since re-admittance. Yet the true test of this countries achievements and possibilities are beginning to settle on our shoulders.

2010 In plain language I am scared. Sure we will host. Yes it will be a success. But what will South Africans as a soccer nation gain? Is there not something we can put together so that we are more than sure that we have the best soccer team playing and the best development structure in the world? I certainly think that if we commit ourselves to a three year plan that we can have a system similar to that mentioned above, working in our Rainbow nation.

Would it not be an achievement to have our national team stars coming home from teams like Barcelona, Real Madrid, Inter Milan, Chelsea, etc. as the most deadly players in the world? Instead of people uttering the wonders of Brazil soccer, they are in awe of the magic of Bafana Bafana. This is my dream and I do not want to wait for someone from abroad to tell us how we should develop our game and our people.

The best way forward is through education, the schools.

Sidrick Moore
Soccer coordinator
St. Conrad's College
Klerksdrop