DO WE HAVE PRO-ACTIVE ATHLETES AND MINDSETS?

ENCOURAGING PRO-ACTIVE ATHLETES

MICHELLE Sng is like many struggling and up-and-coming athletes here in Singapore. She's not a household sporting personality like say, winning swimmer Tao Li, who will easily have sponsors knocking on her door.

That being the case, it could be easy for Sng to point her finger at others or at the current system for their lack of instant fame.

But the 20-year-old national high-jump record holder stands out for starting a debate through The New Paper in September.

That was when she decided to be more pro-active about her own sports excellence path, and secured her own educational sponsorship from local electronics firm Akira.

Sng set a national record of 1.80 metres in July last year, and was given a three-year Akira scholarship worth more than $23,000 to help cover her tuition fees and textbook costs at Singapore Management University until 2010.

This undergraduate will complete her double major – in business management and marketing and corporate communications in 2010.

LOCAL ATHLETES IN COMFORT ZONE?

MINISTRY of Community Development, Youth and Sports Parliamentary Secretary Teo Ser Luck, agreed, saying: "There's a funding process for promising individuals. But they must take ownership of themselves too."

"I've met overseas athletes, and I've seen how they interact with others outside of their own circles. It's an eye-opener."

"They haggle and sell themselves so well, especially those from less glamorous sports and it always makes me wonder about the majority of our athletes here."

"Here, you can feel that our guys and girls are in a comfort zone."

"It's not about getting funding from your own association and aiming for just sports excellence at the major Games."

"Being pro-active is about doing something concrete for your sports career and life as a whole."

"You need to develop PR (public relations) skills, learn to engage deal with the media and not expect them to show up at your beck and call, and deal with various authorities in different positions."

"You need to make moves. That's why some are sorry about the state they're in, and some are not."

FIGHT, NOT ACCEPT CIRCUMSTANCES

NATIONAL cyclist Low Ji Wen also spoke in our series in September. He said the problem for such athletes worsened when they come from less well-off National Sports Associations (NSAs).

As he said then in an article dated 23 Sep: "I feel that it's a Catch-22 situation for most of us who belong to the lesser sports. Sponsors are always looking for successful athletes. For up-and-coming athletes like me, we don't have any significant results to show for."

"If you ask me, it's a never-ending cycle. The Singapore Sports Council (SSC) demands results before they give out funding, but to get results, we need funding in the first place."

"But I do agree with Michelle that the timing is very important. Companies usually allocate their sponsorship budget at the start of the year. If you go to them in the middle of the year, chances are they will ask you to wait till next year." Given Ji Wen's poser, Teo replied: "On Ji Wen, I was like that before when I used to rail against the 'system'. But I didn't cry over spilt milk."

"Look at the inaugural Aviva Ironman 70.3 triathlon in September. We fought hard for it. We had to win over the authorities for the logistics. Sponsors eventually came knocking."

"You wouldn't know if you don't try. What I'm saying is that here in Singapore now, you can try."

As Sng and Teo have pointed out, it's hard to argue with that logic.