

Presentation Transcript

Topic: Inclusion of ALL in sport: a life span and community

Speaker: Dr Teo-Koh Sock Miang, Singapore Disability Sports Council

Good morning everyone. Thank you for attending this presentation entitled:

“Inclusion for All in Sport”, a lifespan and community-based approach. Over the years, the sporting landscape in Singapore has changed dramatically. In the infancy years of nation building, “Sport for All” initiatives were seen as crucial in the development of a strong, rugged, fit and healthy nation.

In his speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Kallang National Stadium, on the 21st of July 1973, then Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew said, and I quote: “From time to time, there will be spectacular, world-class, star-studded teams, clashing in this arena. They can show what some human beings can do, if they are born with the physical attributes, of co-ordination of the eye and muscle, plus intense and professional training. But let us not deceive ourselves, that they are any credit for us in our trying to do this. Our best return is to generate happy, healthy, vigorous exercise for the whole population, young and old, enhancing the valuable qualities we have. A keen, bright, educated people who will lead better and more satisfying lives if they are fit, and healthy”.

Sport was then promoted as the social glue for uniting a young nation of migrant citizens from very diverse racial and religious backgrounds.

Early sport programme participation were very much driven by the sport preferences promoted by the very different migrant communities. As well as by the accessibility to the sports available in those schools, in the race based communities, and in the playing spaces and resources that were available then.

Segregation and inclusion sport participation issues, due to individual-centric characteristics, probably did not rise to the general level of consciousness then. This essentially meant, that not everyone was included in sport, and that not everyone was able to access or participate in sports, especially for those with disabilities or with special needs.

INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE

Fast forward to 2021, present day Singapore acknowledges that everyone is entitled to participate in sport. And hence, there is a need to go beyond sport for all and to promote inclusion for all in sport. But what does it mean to promote, to support, and to provide inclusion for all in sport?

First and foremost, we need to define “INCLUSION”. Inclusion is more than just sharing the same playing field, the same playing spaces and playing “parallel” next to each other. For example, abled & disabled athletes playing parallel, sharing the same space, but not playing together with each other is not truly Inclusion. Inclusion in sport, in its most idealistic form, is about individuals with different demographics, with and without disabilities, playing on the same team in the same playing space with each other as equal partners. Inclusion in sport therefore, seeks to ensure that everyone has opportunities to train, to play and to compete together on the same playing field, courts and arenas. Inclusion in sport requires everyone to be welcoming and respectful of athletes with very different abilities. Inclusion in sport can truly happen when we are willing to think out of the box and when we are willing to see the hidden potential that each individual brings to the playing field. Inclusion in sport opens up limitless possibilities for bringing different segments of community together to play sport and to bond over sport.

Are we ready for inclusive competition? This is Danielle Brown, the first archer to represent England at the abled-bodied archery competition at Commonwealth Games.

So, inclusion in sport also needs to look at competition. Will the day come when Singapore's own World Number One Para-Archer, Nur Syahidah, compete for selection to represent Singapore at mainstream, regional and international archery competitions? So, will Nur Syahidah compete to try and represent Singapore at the SEA Games and at the ASEAN Games?

What does it mean to promote inclusion in sport? It means supporting the individual in the sport that she or he can participate meaningfully and successfully. It means understanding the diverse needs of the individuals in the team and using appropriate pedagogies to coach. It means ensuring that qualified and trained coaches, volunteers and sport providers available to provide sports for the different individuals and the different diverse groups.

Second, we need to define the “ALL” in Sport. The “ALL” refers to EVERYONE. Every single person, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, gender preference, sexual orientation.

EVERYONE includes those with and without disability. It also means that everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, regardless of class, regardless of ability, must have equal access to sport.

Inclusion in sport also means encouraging individuals and volunteers with different abilities, different demographics to come together, to serve together. There are tremendous needs and there are tremendous opportunities for volunteers in the sport ecosystem. As I have always said to anyone, to any potential volunteer, share with us your interest, share with us your expertise, and we will be able to find and to propose to you a role, for you to play in the sport ecosystem.

I would like to move on now to the 2nd message of this presentation. That is, the need to consider, to support, and to encourage the evolving changing sporting needs and aspirations of the individuals using a lifespan approach, which is a cradle to grave perspective. What does one do in one's early years, and how does one transit from one stage to the other?

For individuals with disabilities, with special needs, sport participation and an active lifestyle becomes more challenging when they exit the former setting, the former educational setting. Especially for those with moderate intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, severe physical challenges, and also for those with visual impairment challenges.

During the school growing years, there are support systems in school and there are sporting programmes to engage and encourage sport participation. Many of these students are also able to participate in sporting competitions.

Unfortunately, the ability to participate drops dramatically once the students exceed the former educational system. While there are efforts made to try and provide sport opportunities for these students with special needs, whether it is for recreation or for competition. In fact, recreation becomes more challenging as they exit the school system. Sport participation and recreation is crucial for all our special needs individuals to maintain function & mobility/motoric abilities. Together as a community, we need to come together to provide a seamless transition from school to out of school sporting opportunities and programmes.

INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE

Beyond the school system, we also must find a way to help athletes with disabilities, adults with disabilities, and competitive athletes with disabilities, to transit from competitive sport to recreational sport. The Singapore Disability Sports Council, Special Olympics Singapore, and the National Disability Sports Associations need the support of SportSG, ActiveSG, SportCares, and other National Sport Associations (NSAs) to support these adult athletes to transit. Again, a “Whole of Community” approach is therefore needed to ensure the athletes with disabilities, and retired disabled athletes remain active and engaged in sports for their physical, psychological, and socio-emotional well-being, as well as for rehabilitative purposes. We must advocate and we must promote active & healthy ageing for athletes with and without disabilities.

I would like to propose that the Ministry for Culture, Community & Youth (MCCY), Sport Singapore, SportCares, ActiveSG, Ministry for Social and Family Development (MSF), Ministry of Education (MOE), the respective social service agencies, our donors, our volunteers, our parents support groups, that we can all come together and join hands to activate a “Whole of Community” approach to support the respective special schools and their respective social service agencies in transiting these special needs athletes by supporting the alumni sport clubs, within the very respective schools and workshops that they graduate from, so that they have a place to return for their sporting and recreational needs.

An “Inclusion for ALL in sport” philosophy requires all of us to think out of the box, so as to how we can ensure inclusion of all athletes in sport. It is not about mandating or forcing all sports to include all athletes with disabilities onto their playing fields and their teams. It is about finding the appropriate sports and the appropriate sporting fields, when meaningful partnerships and meaningful relationships between individuals with different needs can be facilitated and nurtured.

I am my brother's keeper. You are also your brother's keeper. Everyone of us have a role to play in creating an inclusive sporting environment, where everyone, regardless of ability, and individual differences is welcome and embraced. For those of us who have retired our sporting attires, there are still many roles that we can play to support and to champion “Inclusion for ALL in sport”.

For those of us working or teaching in mainstream or special schools, we have a role to play in nurturing our students’ sporting interests and talents, so that they can find joy and grow through sport. We have a role to play in facilitating and encouraging students with and without disabilities, to come together to train and to play together on the same field.

INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE

For many of us in the health sector, how can we work with individuals, parents, caregivers to promote health, fitness & wellness for themselves, for their children or their wards? How can we support inclusion in sport initiatives in our work with individuals and caregivers? For those of us in the sport sector, or the social service sector, or if we are just volunteers. How can we facilitate inclusion in sport, and support individuals with and without disabilities to come together to enjoy sports? For parents, how can we encourage our children to play sport and to embrace and support an inclusive sporting environment for everyone? I am going to pause for a few minutes now and I am going to request for you to write down how you have supported the sport ecosystem for “Inclusion for ALL in sport”.

I hope you have written it down.

It has often been said that a thousand-mile journey begins with the first step. Now, I would like you to consider and to write down two other possible roles that you are willing to consider, that you are willing to commit to being a champion for “Inclusion in Sports for All”. If there is somebody sitting next to you and if you are willing to share, and comfortable to share, please share with this individual what are the two other roles that you are willing to consider.

I hope everyone has been able to list out two possible roles that you would like to take on or to volunteer. Together, let's build a Community of Care to support each other on life's journey.

If you are able and willing, please join me and read this together with me. Are you ready?
“I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to my fellow creatures, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall never pass through this way again. “

Let's invest in lives. Let's lend a helping hand, because the return on investment will be life changing and lives changed.

Thank you for your kind attention. Have a great day.