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Is motorsports not a sport?

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CONGRATULATIONS to All-England badminton champion Mohd Hafiz Hashim. For his achievement, the Sport Ministry recently announced he would become the first recipient of a grand plan that offers long-term incentive.

Hats off as well to Malaysia's national bowlers who will also be included in the scheme for winning the World Tenpin Team Cup.

Under this incentive scheme, national athletes who excelled at international level will be given a reward that will help them upon their retirement - either in the form of an insurance policy or savings account.

This came about after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the nation not to spoil athletes by showering them with money and land.

Though Hafiz brought home Malaysia's first All-England singles crown in well over 30 years, the tournament was not listed in the National Sports Council's incentive list.

If that is so, I wonder where Malaysia's most successful rally duo of Karamjit Singh and Allen Oh stand in all this? Never mind that their names or achievements didn't cross the minds of the officials during the recent press conference to announce the new incentive scheme.

As far as the NSC is concerned, rallying I believe, has never been recognised as a sport, never mind that Karamjit last year became the FIA Production Car World Rally champion. Karamjit and Oh also clinched two overall Asia Pacific Rally Championship titles, and four Asia Pacific Rally Championship Group N titles.

As I have mentioned on numerous occasions, Malaysians tend to dream and rally in support of sports that have done so little for the country. And the authorities concerned keep throwing money at undeserving athletes.

We have proved to the world that we can produce world champion grade rally drivers, yet we spend millions in just trying to get a Malaysian into Formula One. So much so that at the height of all the excitement, there was even a national and international motorsports convention organised to chart Malaysia's motor-racing future.

Today, we're still waiting for the proposed national blue print on motorsports that was supposed to have been unveiled last year. Never mind. My question now is, why bother?

First and foremost, is motorsports and all its disciplines recognised as sport in the first place, or is it merely classified as a pastime?

If it's not a sport, why mislead the many individuals and teams, who give their heart and soul to excel at their respective disciplines, with false words of encouragement and hide behind the 'Malaysia Boleh' banner?

We have Malaysians in Formula One, MotoGP, World Superbike Championship, British Touring Car Championship and numerous single-seater events around the world but what good is all that if we have yet to recognise motor-racing as a sport?

Frankly, winning the Thomas Cup and All-England tournaments will inspire just as many youths as winning the world rally championship, yet the latter, is treated so indifferently.

And just to illustrate how insignificant motor-racing is, Karamjit and Oh were recently honoured with a mention in the Malaysia Book of Records for becoming the most successful rally duo. Great, except for the fact that it was not because they won six APRC titles and the world championship, but for only winning the 2001 APRC title.

Either they'll continue to get another award for 2002 or someone from

the company conducting the research, overlooked the importance and significance of what truly constitutes a record and record-breaking achievement.

You'll be amazed at what other things have been recognised as a record.

And while we're on the subject of recognising sporting events, what do you tell the teenagers who in pursuit of excellence, suffer bruises, scars and even broken bones in extreme events such as skateboarding, roller-blading, BMX stunt riding and rock climbing?

What do you tell the seven-year-old who has taken up karting? That he's just doing it for fun and that it would never be recognised as a sport? Is Formula One a sport?

If such sports can be accepted internationally, just as rallying is as big as Formula One and equivalent to badminton's Thomas Cup, does this mean that Malaysia's definition of what is sport and what is not, is out of date and out of touch?

If we claim we are aiming at sporting excellence, surely, we should first begin by recognising and acknowledging the new sporting disciplines and their athletes.

I say forget the national blue-print on motorsports. At least until everyone concerned has addressed the very basic question of whether motorsports is a sport or a pastime.