

**Malaysia's Olympic Legacy: Stop Moaning, Start Planning**  
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It's an established fact: Sportsmen like Lee Chong Wei unite Malaysians like no politician can. Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak struggles with his '1Malaysia' slogan just as Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's promises of change, fail to convince some Malaysians.

There is a disgusting predictability whenever a high-profile tournament fails to deliver the expected victorious result.

In last weekend's Olympic badminton finals when Malaysia's hopes of her first Gold medal were dashed, we blamed the athletes, their lack of determination, their weak fighting spirit, their ineffective coaches and the useless accompanying officials.

We praised the victors for their superiority. We blamed the presence of certain personalities for bringing bad luck to the players. A few of us even introduced the racial element, to sport.

Why are our hopes pinned on a handful of sportsmen? Why do we have so few world-class athletes?

If blame has to be apportioned, then do not have a dig at our players. They did their best and they are champions in the true sense of the word - they united the whole nation, all the way, to the bitter end - win or lose. Now which politician is capable of that?

If anyone wants to seek answers for the lack of talented players on the international arena then try these two ministries - Education and Sports.

It is their lack of direction, their failure to increase investment in sporting facilities and their unwillingness to promote a variety of sports in schools that has led to a decline in participation in sports, in schools.

No-one wants to go the way of China or the previous cold war countries like East Germany and the Soviet Union, where children as young as four were plucked from their parents, treated like automatons and dropped into a harsh regime of training to become Olympic champions in their teens or early adulthood.

The older reader will remember a time in schools when there were fewer sports, and a small budget for sport in schools, but there were dedicated Physical Education (PE) teachers who were passionate about sport.

Schools had playing fields for children to play games. Some schools with generous benefactors would share facilities like swimming pools, with the 'poorer' schools. Schools could also use the local town padang for games.

A few decades ago, it was compulsory for children to choose two sports for their after-school activity, at least twice a week. Today, teachers complain that much of their time is taken up by administrative and other non-essential work.

Nowadays, the Education Ministry is intent on children scoring a string of As in exams whilst neglecting the mental and physical well-being of the child, which can be developed through sport.

If Malaysia is to emulate the success of other nations in producing sportsmen of high calibre then the answer lies in increased funding for school sports programs.

Why only offer financial rewards to successful athletes once they win gold at the Olympics? Why not pump money into potential athletes, earlier? Money should be invested in attracting, nurturing and training a crop of potential champions at the school stage.

Children must be inspired to take up active participation in sport, but they cannot do this without adequate equipment and teachers. Many parents and teachers bemoan the fact their schools lack sporting facilities and that playing fields have been built on, or sold.

What have the appropriate ministries done to promote healthy eating in schools? Our school canteens still sell a lot of food with low nutritional value.

Fat children aren't the only problems we face in schools. There is a high level of truancy, a lack of aspiration, plus the rise of gangsterism. What has the Ministry of Education done to engage restless students in sport? As the self-styled First Lady Rosmah Mansor is showing us, if you can't be an athlete, be an athletic supporter.

Children are easily bored, especially at the weekends and during the holidays. A combination of sporting activities, clubs and facilities, should help keep our youth occupied and out of trouble.

Housing estates rarely have sports facilities or parks nearby. Many roads are dangerous for cyclists. Gyms are too expensive. Public sporting facilities are sparse, inaccessible and costly.

Sports promote good health and a healthy lifestyle. Children who take up a sport, develop leadership skills, determination, discipline, drive and the desire to succeed. They also learn that they cannot be winners all the time. Most important of all, these children grow up to become confident adults.

Najib said he is listening to the rakyat. One of his latest slogans is: "We hear you and understand your needs on education."

If the government is serious about wanting to produce generations of world-class athletes, then the hard work has to start at the early stage.

Invest in our school children. Increase funding for sporting facilities in schools. Allocate more dedicated sports teachers. Introduce cheaper and more accessible sporting facilities.

Malaysians should stop blaming sportsmen. Instead they should question the government's commitment to sport. The talent is out there, but first it has to be found, and then nurtured.