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11

Politics in sports

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FROM a spectator's standpoint, sports competitions are sources of entertainment that brings an adrenalin rush when a basketball goes through the hoop or a volleyball smashes on the floor after a spiker's all-strength attack. These athletes, whether competing in local or international tournaments, deliver honor and pride to their nations. They wave their national flags high up, dignifying their country and their fellowmen.

Sadly, however, there have been many occasions in various countries of the world, where politicking in sports hampered sports development and affected athletes' performance in international competitions. The struggle for power between sports organizations had resulted in the demoralization and poor performance of national teams. In the middle of all the squabbling and finger-pointing of sports officials lie helpless athletes who have dedicated their energy and talent to achieve recognition for their respective countries.

Let me share with you dear readers a few examples of the impacts of politics in sports. In Malaysia, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth, and Sports Datuk Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah urged sports associations and sports officials to end politicking and instead focus on sports development programs. This he pronounced after having learned that swimmers from the Malaysia-based Power Aquatics Swimming Club were not allowed to compete

in a swimming event even when the members of the swimming team had proven their worth and had won overall champion in an international competition held in Melaka.

Similarly situated is Sydney Olympic medallist Karnam Malleswari. The female Indian weight lifter was quoted as saying: "...it seems there is more politics in sports than in politics itself..." after having observed how sports federations in the country struggled to ~~overpower one another~~ instead of uniting to map-out long-term sports development plans. Malleswari is saddened that interest for weightlifting, and sports in general, have subsided despite their great feat in the Sydney Olympics. Much like the previous example of the swimmers in Malaysia, enthusiasm to compete for the country dies out when these young athletes receive no support or encouragement from those entrusted with the duty to look after their welfare and development.

Our own athletes in the Philippines might also have a few similar stories to tell. The bottom line, however, is that if we truly intend to generate interest and enthusiasm for sports, especially among young people, every stakeholder in the world of sports - athletes, sports associations, sports officials - should come to terms and collaborate to formulate a sports development program that not only considers the continuous training and development of our present pool of athletes. Such blueprint should also include long-term plans for future athletes.

* SPORTS
* POLITICS