

# Recruitment of Disabled Athletes : Hong Kong Perspective

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### Abstract

This paper is a further elaboration of the power point presentation at the CPISRA Conference and General Assembly held in November 2006 in Lisbon. Aging problem has been prevailing in the disabled sports globally and phenomenal particularly in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Paralympic Committee & Sports Association for the Physically Disabled (HKPC&SAPD) has organized and will continue the beneficial and affective programs in recruiting disabled athletes with a hope to attain more and the best athletes for Paralympics.

### 摘 要

本文乃國際痲痺人士體育及康樂聯會於2006年11月在里斯本舉行研討會暨同人大會之延續。傷殘人士運動員老化已成世界性問題，該現象香港則始於2000年悉尼殘奧運後。本文描述香港殘奧會暨傷殘體協致力舉辦及持續推行各項有效活動，務求招募更多更佳傷殘運動員於殘奧運達致佳績。

### Background

When we talk about recruitment of athletes we cannot ignore to mention the objectives and concept of FESPIC Games. It is the Games where we could identify a lot of new blood or young athletes because 30% of each participating delegation must be novices. The 9th FESPIC Games 2006 was held on 25 Nov. – 1 Dec 2006. It was the last Games before the merge with the Asian Paralympic Council. “FESPIC” stands for the Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled. Objectives of the Games are (FESPIC Constitution, 2002):

- ◆ To encourage sports participation among the disabled;
- ◆ To improve social perspective towards the disabled through sports participation; and
- ◆ To enhance mutual friendship and cooperation among the disabled.

The Games is an international multi-sports meeting held every 4 years, just second to the Paralympic Games, and parallel to that of the Asian Games of our able-bodied counterparts. To encourage an active participation of more new disabled athletes the FESPIC Games has stipulated that one third of their athletes from each individual nation/territory must be “novices” of not taking part in the Games before. This would expedite and boost the countries to identify, develop and train their novice athletes for the Games. For the furtherance of the concept and recruitment of new blood Hong Kong initiated to host the first ever FESPIC Youth Games in 2003 bearing the aim of allowing even more novices (hopefully 100%) especially the youths to compete in the FESPIC Region.

## Introduction

The host of the FESPIC Youth Games in 2003 was actually sparked off by the aging phenomenon of the Hong Kong team after their return from the 2000 Sydney Paralympics (Chiang, 2000) and the 2002 Busan FESPIC (Ng, 2002). It was visualized that most of the disabled athletes had reached to a retirement age and their performance commenced to deteriorate. The FESPIC Youth Games would possibly provide avenues for the youths with potential to try and touch the sport, to be identified, trained and finally to be selected and be represented to compete in the Games. As it was a participation oriented competition, social and fun elements were emphasized. Youths would be more than happy to join in the squad and compete with less pressure. This Games actually served a stepping stone to the normal FESPIC Games and perhaps to major competitions for disabled, say Regional or World Championships or Paralympics in future.

## Athletes & the Recruitment

No matter how well and how attractive we organize any activities athletes are the prime element in forming the integral part of the whole program. The Hong Kong Paralympics Committee & Sports Association for the Physically Disabled (HKPC&SAPD or "The Association") had launched programs incorporated with the funds already supported by the government, sponsors or the Association reserve. On account of the need and success, the programs so organized have thus been recognized and normalized. The HKPC&SAPD has categorized them as the "Athletes Recruitment Model" embracing Training Courses, Competitions (Local & International), Promotion & Development Activities (Identification of Potential Athletes, Centre Base Training Scheme & Seminar for PE Teachers) and Media Coverage.

## Training Courses

There were 13 different kinds of sports organized by the HKPC&SAPD. Because of the 9th FESPIC Games tenpin bowling was added to the list. In regard of the level of performance, training & competition arrangement, and funding source the 13 sports (plus the new one) have been categorized into 3 tiers, namely elite, development and recreation level. They are as follows:

1 <sup>st</sup> tier (Elite) :	Wheelchair Fencing, Athletics, Boccia, Lawn Bowls, Table Tennis
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier (Development) :	Shooting, Archery, Badminton, Judo
3 <sup>rd</sup> tier (Recreation) :	Power lifting, Swimming, Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Tennis (& Tenpin Bowling)

Regular training courses and technique refinement courses are organized starting from grass root to competition level. This serves an excellent feeder system as potentials from the courses will be recommended by respective coaches to climb to a higher rung of the ladder with the squad training. The annual expenses for the training courses and the squad training were recorded \$2,180,000 and \$730,000 respectively (Annual Accounts 2005-2006, p18) out of the total expenditure of \$9,360,000. This indicates 31% of the total expenditure revealing a big sum has been invested in running training courses for the disabled.

## Competitions

### ● Local

Annual competitions are scheduled for each sport so that participants in the courses plus the elite athletes will be exposed to local competition experience. The competition is either arranged separately for the junior/novice and elite or in a combined fashion. Competitions have actually provided good opportunities to athletes to excel themselves after year-long training. Whether or not they register for competition would depend very much on the social interaction among fellow athletes, the encouragement of respective coaches, and push by the Association Secretariat. Comparatively speaking it is natural that the number in competition is far lower than that of the training. The same applies to the expenditure recording \$135,000 (1.4% of the total). This can easily be shown in the data collected from 1996-97 to 2004-05 which receive tremendous support from the government in the elite sports with a bigger number of athletes. This corresponds to the categorization of the 13 sports (1st tier). Recruitment of athletes is thus more geared for the 5 sports. Details are presented in the Figures below corresponding to the line graphs (Annual Reports, 1996-97 to 2004-05)

Statistics of Attendance in Activities from 1995 -96 to 2004-05

Figure 1. Athletics

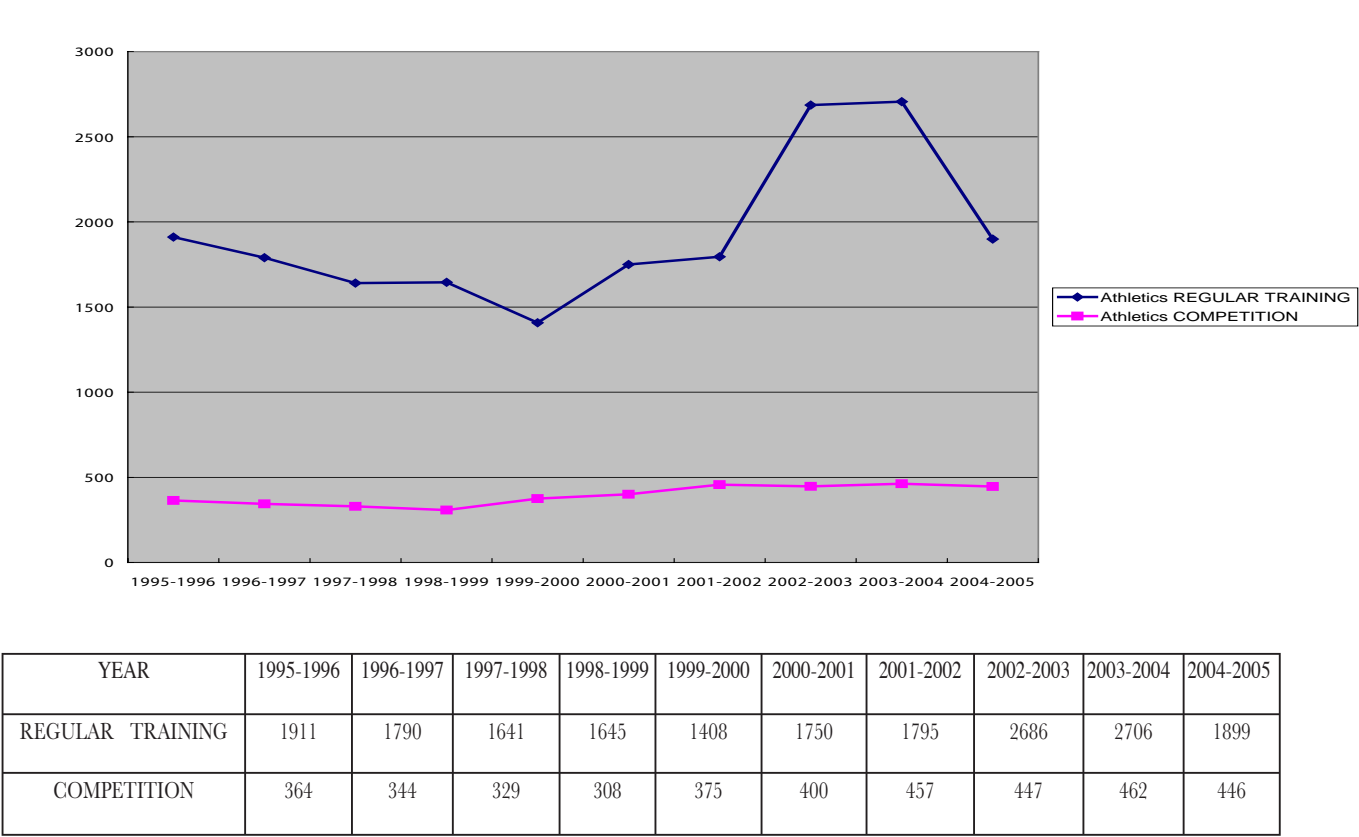
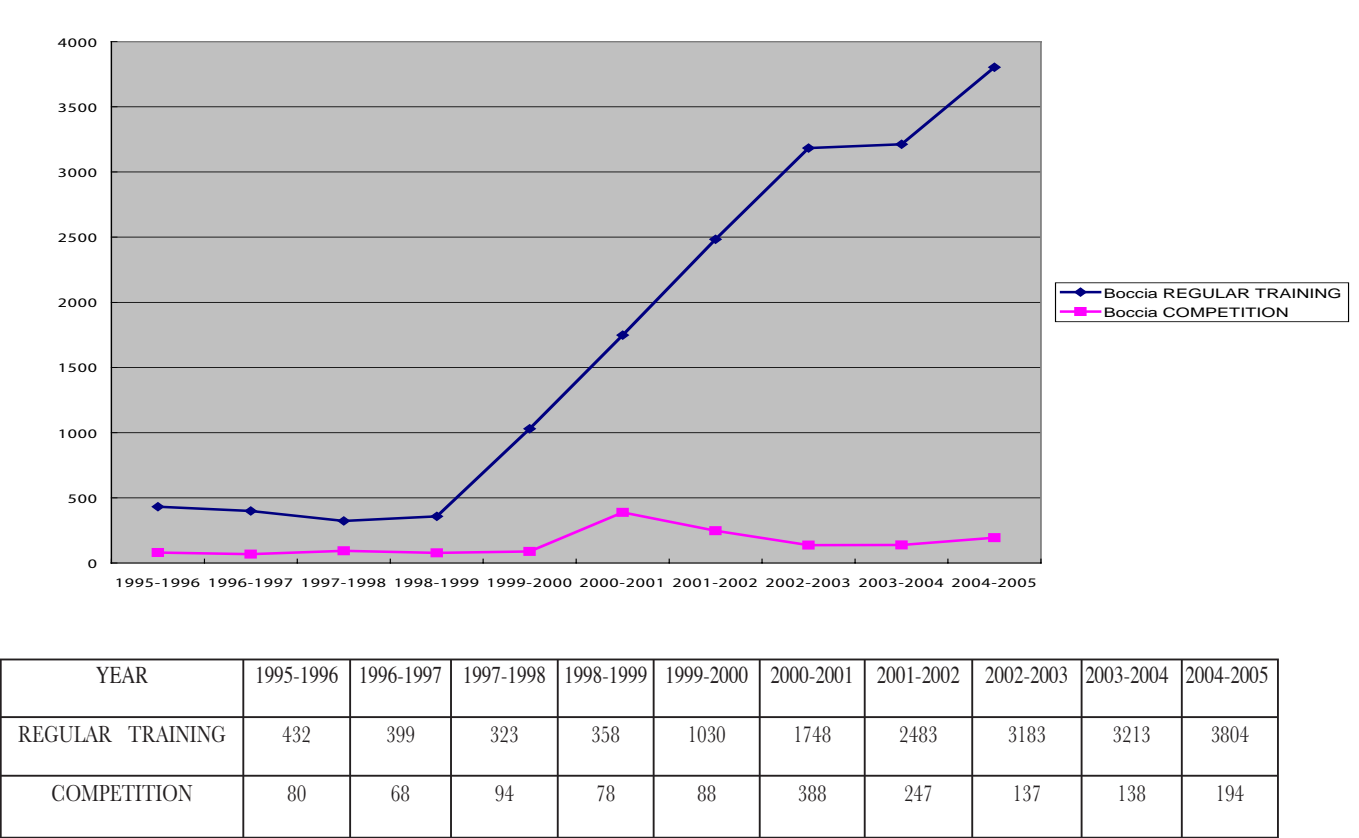
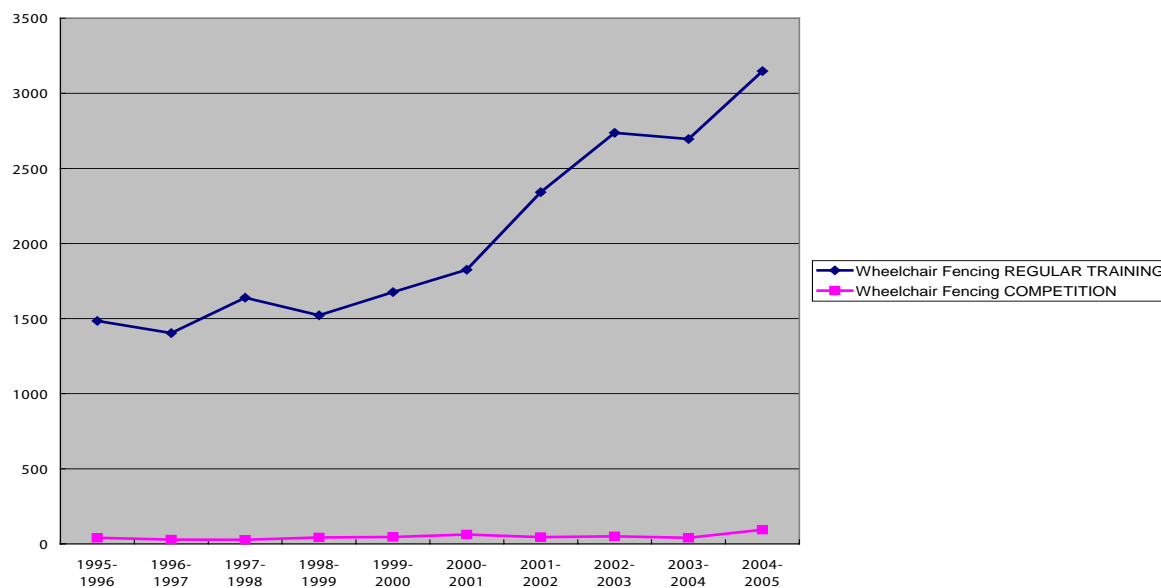


Figure 2. Boccia



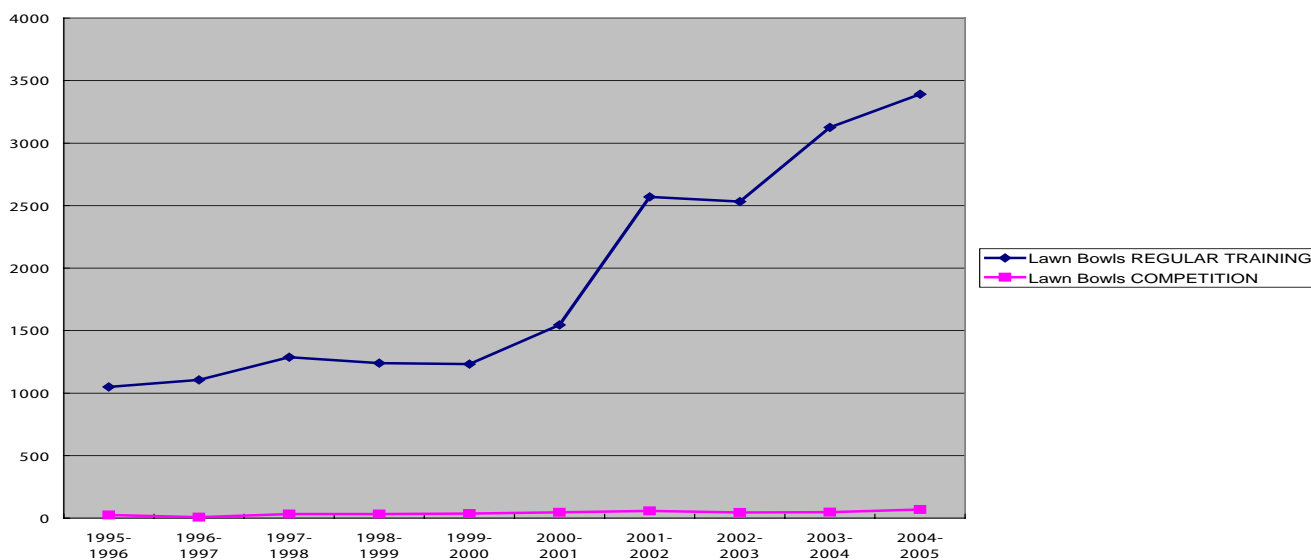
## Statistics of Attendance in Activities from 1995-96 to 2004-05

Figure 3. Wheelchair Fencing



YEAR	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
REGULAR TRAINING	1485	1404	1639	1522	1677	1826	2342	2737	2696	3148
COMPETITION	40	29	27	43	46	62	45	50	40	94

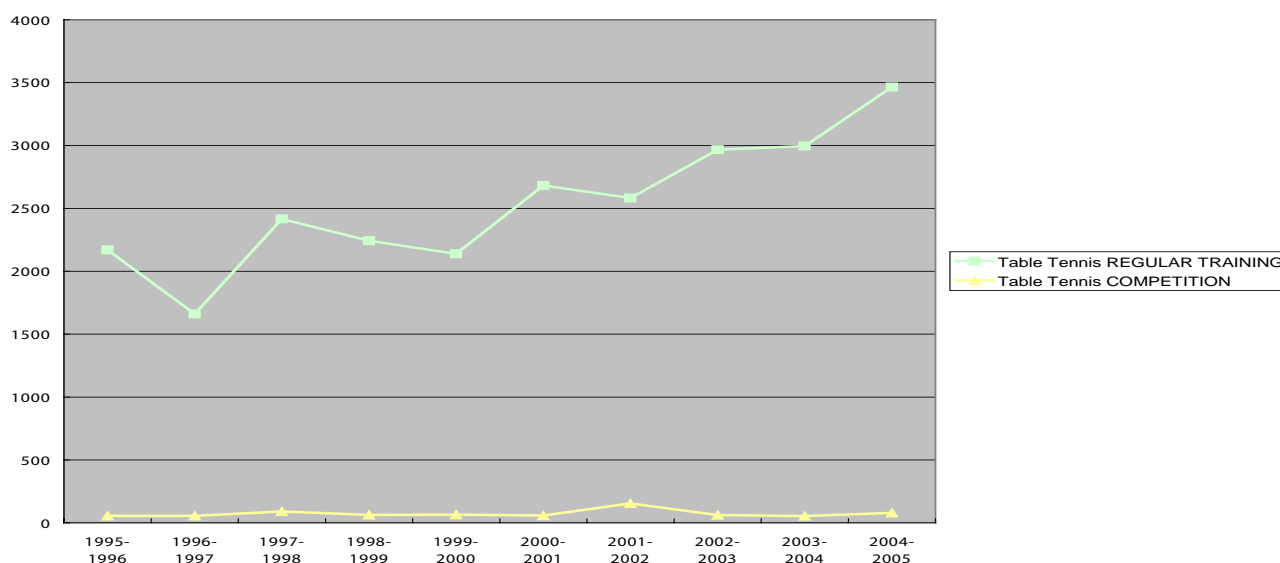
Figure 4. Lawn Bowls



YEAR	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
REGULAR TRAINING	1050	1106	1288	1240	1232	1545	2570	2532	3126	3391
COMPETITION	25	7	33	33	36	46	58	45	48	69

## Statistics of Attendance in Activities from 1995 – 96 to 2004 – 05

Figure 5. Table Tennis



YEAR	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
REGULAR TRAINING	2170	1660	2416	2243	2139	2682	2582	2967	2995	3465
COMPETITION	55	55	90	63	65	57	154	61	54	79

### ● International

Outstanding and/or potential athletes from respective squads are selected and recommended to expose to the international games and competitions. The opportunity will definitely serve the competition experience purpose, gain ranking points for World Championships/Paralympics, and also an award or incentive to their dedicated long term whole year training. An amount of \$3,250,000 (34.7%) was spent last year (Annual Accounts, 2005-06, p17) illustrating the huge sum spent on overseas competitions.

Though a total sum \$6,295,000 out of \$9,360,000 (67.2%) on training and competition of different nature it has been fully agreed by the Association worthy to do it. The public are aware of the "Sports for Disabled" and they know the existence of the Association through the excellent performance achieved by the disabled athletes in the past years. The money is worth spending!

It is factual that competitions are directly linked with the broad base of athletes (number in training) and the frequency of their training time. More competitions are required as these are the best means to test and verify their standard of performance. Good results of respective sports after any major competitions would have a positive effect entailing a better participation in both the programs and competitions in the current year. (Athletics in 1999 & 2002 FESPIC Games but drop in 2003 because of athletes retirement; Boccia in 2001 Regional Championships & 2004 Paralympics; Wheelchair Fencing in 2000 & 2004 Paralympics; Lawn Bowls in 2000 & 2004 World Championships; Table Tennis steady growth with more regular programs and competitions, but with a sharp increase in 2001 competition because of the introduction of school competition). The retired athletes have been recruited to act as assistant coaches and organizers in helping to run the programs and competitions because they are familiar with the sport, understand the need of participants and able to share their experience more closely and easily.

## Promotion & Development Activities

Prior to training programs and competitions a lot of promotion and development activities have to be organized to ensure good participation and organization of related activities. The Association organizes visits to schools (mainstream & special schools), shelter workshops, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and related organizations to promote sports participation among the disabled. Demonstration of sports, promotional talks and experience sharing (with coaches & athletes) form the core of the visit. "Have-a-Try" concept is also introduced to the audience so that they would be able to touch & feel the sports, and to get the first hand experience through practice. Usually a few athletes can be identified. Appropriate arrangement of retired and current athletes has expedited the task effectively with their featured stories.

### ● *Identification of Potential Athletes*

Members of aged below 25 are also invited to "Have a Go" on the specific sports like athletics, table tennis and wheelchair fencing in the Hong Kong Sports Institute (Sport training centre for elite athletes). Respective coaches endeavour to observe and identify the potentials for further training. The same format will be extended to selected sports on a regular basis.

### ● *Centre Base Training Scheme*

Upon the request of individual special schools the Association arranges respective coaches to organize specific sports training course in the special school as a pilot program. Students would need not travel a long distance for sports participation. As time and transport are saved students would have more time and attention in training. More potentials would hopefully be recruited. All schools welcome this "Centre Base Training Scheme" as it is tailor-made program to interested schools or parties. However time schedule of both the school and the coach has become the deciding factor of whether such course be possibly organized.

### ● *Seminar for PE teachers in mainstream schools*

The "Whole School Approach" has been carrying out in most of the mainstream schools in Hong Kong. A school integration policy has been established by the Education & Manpower Bureau of the Government with the implementation of the school head. Students with special need either physically or mentally disabled will be integrated and well taken care of in the school.

Knowing that a "Seminar for PE Teachers" being organized the HKPC&SAPD aims to provide the teachers the basic information and teaching techniques of disabled students. This would follow the ideal that Chow (2002, p10) had emphasized in the 7th International Symposium of Asian Society for Adapted Physical Education and Exercise held in Hong Kong. In the PE Seminar, doctors, physiotherapists, adapted PE professionals, teachers in special schools, coaches and athletes of the Association were also invited to attend in sharing their expertise and experience on sports for the disabled with teachers. It was quite a successful program attracting over some 80 participants who would not only acquire some basic knowledge but gain practical experience of teaching/training disabled. Some of them had even registered as volunteers to involve in the activities of the Association at the end of the Seminar. Some teachers were also keen to refer their disabled students to participate in the programs organized by the Association.

The Seminar of this nature has been very popular and welcomed by the teachers. It serves a good purpose of publicity in making the schools and teachers understand the importance of adapted PE in school curriculum. It really enriches the confidence of PE teachers and their adaptability in teaching students with special needs as stated in the objectives for the Seminar (Brochure, 2005). A similar program would hopefully be followed to enlarge the scope of recruitment of both athletes and volunteers in future. It should be treated as an ongoing program.

### ● *Media Coverage : VCD, Newsletter and Newspaper Supplement*

To publicize "sports for the disabled" a promotional VCD on the HKPC&SAPD and the programs being organized was sent to the mainstream schools (secondary students of age 11 – 20) in addition to the regular newsletter printed quarterly. It is hoped that the young disabled from the schools would possibly be interested in the disabled sports and participate in the Association activities. For the furtherance of boosting the programs for the disabled and highlighting the outstanding disabled athletes the Association has publicized a quarterly supplement in one of the top local newspapers. Feature stories would be depicted, programs be highlighted, enrollment be welcome and membership registration be possible (Sing Tao Daily, 2006). Though potential athletes are yet to be identified enquires have been received from time to time. It does show the effect of publicity.

## Observation & Conclusion

From the Hong Kong Census & Statistics Department (2001, pviii-ix) approximately 177,400 (prevalence rate of 2.6% among the total population) were physically disabled with some sort of restriction in body movement or with seeing difficulty. The membership of disabled in the HKPC&SAPD was recorded 2400 including 1003 persons from eight special schools (Annual Report, 2005). It was only approximately 1.3% of the physically disabled population and some 100 members of the Association have however actively participated in different kind of activities organized by the Association. In fact there are less than 100 in number as elite athletes receiving regular training. The Association is still not satisfied, but strives to carry on with the athletes recruitment exercise as stated above.

The aging problem is universal to both able and disabled associations. We all endeavour to recruit athletes. Fortunately there is the FESPIC Games in the FESPIC region propagating the concept of 30% novices in the quadrennial Games. Hong Kong can manage to do it throughout the years, and this should be re-iterated and enforced from time to time.

Despite the merge of the FESPIC and the Asian Paralympic Council, it is hoped that the concept of FESPIC Games on 30% novices participation be continued and extended in future Asian Paralympic Games of the APC (Asian Paralympic Committee). In addition, the Asian Para Youth Games would hopefully be considered so that Asian countries / territories will henceforth endeavour to identify more young athletes for sports training and competition, hopefully attaining a 100%, and the issue would become one of the agenda items in the future Executive Board Meeting of the APC.

The Policy Address of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR Government (2006, p10-11) has affirmed a further \$30 million a year setting aside to increase subvention to national sports associations and grass-roots sports promotional initiatives; \$40 million a year for elite athletes for their current financial support, their future career & education; and earmarked funding for redevelopment of the Hong Kong Sports Institute (Training centre for elite athletes) to provide world-class training facilities for athletes after the host of the 2008 Olympic

and Paralympic Equestrian Events. This good news beneficial to sports development applies to both the able and disabled athletes.

In the 2008 Paralympic Equestrian Events our disabled rider Nelson Yip recently attained the qualification to represent Hong Kong in participating in the first ever Paralympic Equestrian Events held in Hong Kong. A great impetus would thus be created to draw the attention of the public. It is also a golden opportunity of initiating publicity and recruiting more disabled athletes the young in particular. The HKPC&SAPD is looking forward to more disabled athletes from Hong Kong for the 2008 Paralympics with the motto of "One World, One Dream together with the added, "One Vision" as presented by Patrick Ho (2006) in his speech anticipating the best Olympics and Paralympics with the best and more athletes from both China and Hong Kong in 2008.

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