

## **SINGAPORE NATIONAL PARALYMPIC COUNCIL FINAL LAP TO PARALYMPICS LONDON 2012**

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The paper aims to share with supporters and sponsors SNPC's (Singapore National Paralympics Council) intention to intensify the athletes' preparation for London 2012 Paralympics which will be held from 29 Aug to 9 Sept 2012.

### **BACKGROUND OF PARALYMPICS**

The Paralympics, the equivalent of the Olympic Games, is the premier sports competition for disabled athletes. It is held "parallel" to the Olympic Games at four year intervals. It is every disabled athlete's dream to compete and stand on the podium at this glamorous international event.

Singapore's inaugural participation in the Paralympics was in Seoul, South Korea in 1988. Thereafter, Singapore was represented in Barcelona, Spain in 1992; Atlanta, USA 1996; Sydney, Australia 2000; Athens, Greece 2004; and Beijing, China 2008. The best achievement was in Beijing, where Singapore's contingent of six athletes won four medals. Yip PinXiu won a gold and silver medal in Swimming and Laurentia Tan won 2 bronze medals in Equestrian. This was the first time that the Singapore flag was raised at the Paralympics Victory Ceremony.

For London 2012 Paralympics, seven athletes have qualified for their respective events at International Paralympic Committee (IPC) sanctioned competitions.

### **SINGAPORE DISABILITY SPORTS COUNCIL**

The preparation for London 2012 Paralympics began soon after Beijing 2008 Paralympics. Between 2009 and 2010, the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) has sent athletes to compete in a number of IPC sanctioned competitions to provide them the opportunity to compete and qualify for London 2010.

In addition, SDSC also invested in High Performance Developmental Coaching and provision of high performance equipment and facilities.

Nearer London 2012, the seven athletes would require more intense competitions to fine tune their training programmes and performance.

### **FINAL LAP TO LONDON PROGRAMME**

The Final Lap to London 2012 (FLLP) aims to support athletes that have qualified for London 2012 with more competition experiences and training clinics so that they would peak just before the Paralympics. FLLP's intention to expose the athletes to more international competitions would increase the frequency and

intensity of training prior to the competitions and thus avoid athletes hitting a training plateau, normally seen in prolonged training programmes.

As the athletes move nearer the pre-competition phase of their training programme for London 2012 Paralympics, they need to remain focused on their goals. They need confirmation and motivation on why they are training and how they are progressing. As many of them still require exposure at international competitions, they would need to compete against the para athletes preparing for London 2012 to know who their competitors are and how they match up against them. Such participation is very useful in many ways.

Firstly, athletes would have to train harder to prepare for the competitions. Secondly, the competitions would provide them with feedback on their strength and weakness in their techniques and strategies, their mental preparation prior to the start of the event, and thirdly a greater awareness of their overall performance. FLLP would have achieved its goals if the athletes, after each outing, return with more determination and commitment to train harder and be mentally psyched to perform better at London 2012.

FLLP is critical to the athletes' preparation for London 2012. Besides the motivation and additional competition experiences, athletes would have learnt how to cope under actual international conditions. They might have to make changes to their pre-competition preparations and improve on some of their practices. The competitions will enable the coaches to gauge the level of the athletes' physical, mental and tactical readiness; fine tune their training methodology and go back to the drawing board to re-look at each athlete's training programme. Feedback on the athletes' performance would also enable SNPC and SDSC in preparing future athletes for international competitions.

With just 10 months to go before London 2012, the implementation of FLLP is crucial if Singapore were to perform better than what it did at Beijing 2008.

## **NEED FOR THE FINAL LAP TO LONDON PROGRAMME**

The need for FLLP cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Our athletes need all the support if we want them to do Singapore proud at London 2012.

The athletes preparing for London 2012 Paralympics are the best in the nation. They are dedicated in their respective sports and have committed themselves wholeheartedly in their training. In spite of the challenges in many aspects, they have persevered to reach this level of their performance. They need that little extra encouragement to get them to the top.

The disabled athletes would need to compete in actual IPC competitions to bring out the best in each of them. Time trails and competitions with able-bodied athletes

would not achieve the same stimulus, as the motivation and mindset is entirely different. The equestrians, swimmers and sailors could compete in national competitions organised by the respective national sports associations, but the results might or might not be their best. Optimum performance in any given competition depends on the athletes' skills and mental makeup at that specific moment. It is a combination of sports science and sports psychology at work.

Participating in IPC competitions against their rivals, before London 2012, would spur the athletes to train harder. Given the importance of the competition, they would have to ramp up their training and give more attention to mental preparation, diet and use of leisure time.

Sending the athletes to IPC competitions where the world's top coaches are usually gathered would give our coaches the opportunity to tap on the expertise of these world class coaches to improve on the performance of our athletes. Surprisingly the coaches of disabled athletes are very friendly and open in sharing their experiences and expertise. We could even engage their services to fine tune our athletes' techniques. Our coaches know that the athletes need to break away from their mundane training schedule otherwise they would hit their training plateau and this would be disastrous. Our coaches are committed and we are certain that they would take advantage of the competitions and find ways to improve the athletes' performance and bring them to their peak for London 2012.

## **CONCLUSION**

Singapore has improved so much since its participation in the first Paralympics in Seoul in 1988. The achievements at Beijing 2008 were the results of the consolidated efforts of the athletes, coaches, administrators, supporters, parents, well-wishers and sponsors. SDSC has brought the athletes this far, and has prepared them well. SNPC's Final Lap to London will put them on the last lap and bring the athletes across the finishing line and onto the podium. For London 2012, we draw on the same spirit of everyone, involved in sports for the disabled, coming forward to support the athletes who have set their sights at the Paralympics. We are confident that with your support, our athletes will have more competition exposure and experience to prepare themselves adequately for the competition.

***Let's together, help our athletes in their last lap to London 2012.***

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