

COMMUNITY SPORTS COMMITTEE

Establishment of the Hong Kong Football Association Football Academy

PURPOSE

This paper briefs members on the initiative of the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) to establish the HKFA Football Academy at the Tseung Kwan O landfill site to help promote football development in Hong Kong, and other relevant issues related to football development in the territory.

BACKGROUND

2. Football is the most popular sport in the world, as well as in Hong Kong, in terms of participation and as a spectator sport event. Hong Kong's position in football was high in Asia in the past but the standard has dropped in recent years, and local football has become less popular as compared with the past. However, according to an opinion survey conducted by the Central Policy Unit, over 81% of the respondents supported that the Government should give more support to help raise the standard of football game in Hong Kong. We also note that football is a sport which could readily enhance social cohesion and should be promoted. Moreover, Hong Kong's position in international football has moved slowly but gradually up the ladder in recent years. Our Fédération Internationale De Football Association (FIFA) ranking has jumped 15 spots since September 2003 to the current position of 119th, the highest in ten years.

3. Redevelopment of the local football game is a long-term process but we should have the potential to re-gain our leading position as in the past. As in other successful cases elsewhere, we should start with developing a progressive and systematic youth football training programme. We need to work for the provision of a steady supply of young talents to the local 1st, 2nd, 3rd division football clubs as well as district football teams. This will form the foundation of our future football development. There is also a need to provide more high-quality football pitches to support the overall development. As such, the HKFA has planned to establish a football academy as the training base for football development in Hong Kong.

CURRENT POSITION IN YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

4. Through the joint efforts of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the HKFA, the local youth football development programmes have been restructured and strengthened since 2002. More systematic training and playing opportunity are offered on district basis so as to provide the local football sector with talented new blood and to enhance the sense of belonging among the local community. A youth football development pathway for youngsters to move up the ladder from beginners' training all the way to professional football has been established. A diagram showing the ladder system of the various training schemes involved is at **Annex I**.

5. A description of the various youth football training schemes ranging from youth summer training programme to district football teams is set out in **Annex II** which depicts the various opportunities for youngsters to receive football training in the territory. To help develop talented youth football players for the 1st division football clubs and to make preparation for the 2008 Olympic Games, the HKFA has formed a 'HK08' Team (a youth squad with players aged under 23 to prepare for participating in the qualifying round of the 2008 Olympic Games) since 2002. In the coming football season in 2005-06, the HKFA has made arrangement for the HK08 Team to actually take part in the 1st division league competition. It is encouraging to note that most of the HK08 players were selected from the training schemes organized by the LCSD and HKFA. The participation in 1st division league will provide the much valuable competition opportunity and experience for the HK08 Team before it would represent Hong Kong to compete in the qualifying round for the 2008 Olympic Games.

HKFA FOOTBALL ACADEMY

6. To support long-term football development in the territory and at the same time to maximize the recreational afteruse of landfill sites, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), LCSD and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) have been working together to assist the HKFA in setting up a football academy at the Tseung Kwan O landfill site.

7. Located at the south-east of the Tseung Kwan O Town Centre, the proposed academy will occupy 19 hectares of the Tseung Kwan O landfill site. According to the plan of the HKFA, there will be five natural grass football pitches, a multi-purpose training ground, a gymnasium, as well as dormitories (with residence capacity to accommodate around 80 trainees), and ancillary support facilities including conference room, medical and physiotherapy room, lecture rooms, cafeteria/canteen (with capacity to serve 200 trainees) and car-parking spaces in the proposed football academy. The academy will provide intensive football training programme to young people and high quality

football pitches for training and competition for various local division clubs, national and youth squads, as well as members of the public in the following directions -

- (a) to provide a home base for the training activities of the national and youth squads, as well as various local division clubs which do not have their own home base, so that a steady and regular training schedule could be provided for these teams;
- (b) to further upgrade youth football standard by expanding the various youth football development programmes to all 18 districts;
- (c) to strengthen the intensity of the youth football training programmes by organizing special residential training camps for promising players, in particular during long school holidays. Training could thus be provided in a more focused, organized and comprehensive manner. Experienced overseas coaches will be invited to teach advanced football skills to young players and friendly matches with overseas youth teams will be organised to upgrade the standard of local youth players and enhance their skills through actual match playing. Tournaments involving overseas teams can readily be organized at the academy which will provide valuable competition opportunity for local players;
- (d) to promote the popularity of the sport among school students by organizing tailor-made school football training programmes including school sport educational camp for upper primary/secondary classes; and
- (e) to strengthen the training of local football coaches at all levels by employing experienced overseas coaches to host seminars and organize training courses to enrich the knowledge of the local coaches.

8. With various Government departments' support for the project, the HKFA has successfully obtained the approval from the Town Planning Board to develop the HKFA Football Academy at the Tseung Kwan O Landfill. The Hong Kong Jockey Club has also approved a donation of \$103 million for the HKFA to develop the project and the HAB has also granted policy support for EPD to issue a land licence (valid for around 21 years) for the HKFA to operate the academy at nominal premium. It is anticipated that the construction of the academy will start from 2006 and will be completed by the end of 2007. The academy will be managed by the HKFA in future on a self-financing basis. The HKFA has developed a business plan for the purpose.

9. To enhance the nurturing of young footballers and to strengthen the attraction and reputation of the proposed football academy, the HKFA also plans to form joint venture with renowned international football clubs to set up the academy and draw on their expertise in the training activities.

10. With the establishment of the academy, it will also provide dedicated turf pitches as a training base for local football development. Long-term and regular football training and development programmes could be effectively organised which will facilitate the development of football standard at all levels in the territory.

CONVERSION OF NATURAL GRASS PITCHES INTO ARTIFICIAL TURF PITCHES

11. As a related issue to promote local football development, we will convert many of our existing natural grass pitches into artificial turf pitches to enhance the supply of football pitches which are under heavy public demand. At present, the LCSD manages 50 natural turf pitches and 19 artificial turf pitches. The utilization rates of these pitches reach 100% and 80% respectively. As such, the lack of turf pitches to meet public demand has been a major concern of the LCSD in promoting football development over the past years. In order to provide more football pitches to support local football development, the LCSD has drawn up plans to convert 14 natural grass pitches into third generation artificial turf pitches so as to substantially increase the overall available sessions for booking (60 matches per month can be played on natural grass pitches whereas 270 matches can be played per month on artificial turf pitches) by members of the public. The first pilot third generation artificial turf pitch has already been provided in Kowloon Tsai Park and it has received positive and encouraging feedback from the HKFA and the public. The phase I conversion of five natural grass pitches will commence in October 2005, and is expected to be completed by May 2006. A further eight pitches are now under planning for conversion in Phases II and III. The LCSD will closely monitor the progress on the conversion projects. Details of the soccer pitches to be converted are at **Annex III**.

12. In addition, the LCSD has also developed third generation artificial turf pitches at new leisure venues. Up to now, four new artificial turf pitches located at Kowloon Bay, Ma On Shan, Tung Chung and Tai Po respectively have been opened for public use.

CONCLUSION

13. The Government will continue to support the development of football in the territory and work with the HKFA in raising the standard of the local football games, and the proposed football academy to form a training base

will play a crucial role in the process. The LCSD will partner with the HKFA and other parties concerned to promote and improve our future football development programmes, with the long-term view for Hong Kong to regain our leading position in Asia.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. Members are invited to note the establishment of the HKFA Football Academy and to comment on the support needed for the development of football in Hong Kong.

**Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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