

THE ARMED FORCES AS A PROMOTER OF SPORTS - THE CASE OF BOTSWANA DEFENCE FORCE

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INTRODUCTION

1. Over the years the armed forces all over the world have played a significant role in the development, conduct and performance of sports at all levels. These contributions have come at different levels and different angles. We have seen athletes from the armed forces appearing at national and international competitions and winning medals. Many BDF personnel have contributed to national teams as trainers, coaches as well as administrative staff. Not only has the armed forces contributed in terms of personnel, but they have also contributed financially and with material or facilities. The armed forces particularly in Botswana has done that at various levels. From primary and high school levels as well as university level and professional sports levels.
2. This paper examines how the armed forces, particularly in Botswana conduct business of promoting national sport. It will examine this case at different levels and looking at various sports as well as physical education. It will also examine how various armed forces through CISM are fulfilling this prophecy and as well as the best alternatives to make this prophecy more effective. Finally it will offer recommendations based on the responses of questionnaire that was circulated amongst fifty civilians at the Botswana National Sports Council and Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs-Directorate of Sports and Recreation.

ACADEMIC /PHYSICAL EDUCATION LEVEL

3. The Botswana government in 1994 decided to introduce physical education as a subject in all secondary schools. Because Botswana “Vision 2016”, a document that airs views and ideas of the aspiration of the nation as regard to their long term future calls for the public and private sectors to develop the education system in partnership.¹ The Ministry of Education invited the BDF to take part on the drafting of the curriculum with a specific focus of we interpret the utilization of a high school graduate in the armed forces who has a basic knowledge of physical education. I was privileged to be a delegate of such a consultation process as well as a member of the committee that was formulated to draft a physical education syllabus for Botswana secondary schools as well as a pilot programme to implement the programme. Projects like this where the military involved do not only promote sport but it is also a tool for improving the public image of the armed forces as well as legitimating the existence of the military in the current diminished inter-state conflicts scenarios in Africa and elsewhere. The Vision 2016 of Botswana also calls for good civil-military relations for the nation to feel secure.²
4. When the University of Botswana started its Physical Education programme, the BDF availed swimming instructors to assist in the university swimming program. In several occasions the University of Botswana have invited the BDF to come and make a presentation at its yearly sports and physical education workshop. The BDF as well has engaged the university in its Physical Education programmes such as the yearly sports management workshop, personal fitness instructor’s courses and the physical training instructors’ courses.

¹ Presidential Task Group for Long Term Vision for Botswana, Long Term Vision for Botswana: Vision 2016, p5.

² Ibid, 56.

THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES.

5. The BDF in partnership or with the assistance of CISM solidarity programme has in the past and continues to donate sports apparels for both elementary and secondary schools sports programs. The military also has been donating used sports equipment to the needy sports programs of various school sports programme. I also wish and think it is a good idea that these types of social responsibility programmes also extends to needy communities, especially neighborhoods of the military community. The neighborhoods of military communities should really feel privileged to be around military communities.

6. The armed forces in Botswana also continue to borrow various sports equipments such as gymnastics items and track and field equipment just to mention but a few to many schools for both practice and competition purposes.

7. We have a programme whereby members of the BDF volunteer to be coaches of many secondary schools who requested us to assist. This programme has helped developed various school sports such as football, volleyball, basketball, karate, gymnastics just to mention but a few. Members of the BDF have been doing these after working hours as well as during the weekend. This has demonstrated the social responsibility of the BDF as well as personal commitment of various individuals. This degree of caring and compassion demonstrated by members of the BDF is another call of Vision 2016.

8. The armed forces in Botswana have also gone an extra mile by conducting sports clinics for continuous period of more than two weeks for some secondary schools. The pilot programme was started in Maun in 1999 with Delta Waters International School. The directorate of sports rounded the best coaches in all the services and put them together and disbursed them to Maun for a two week coaching clinic every semester. The coaching clinic covered the following sports: football, basketball, track and field, tennis and karate. The BDF also in a yearly basis brings one of the top Japanese karate instructors to Botswana, Shihan Keiji Tomiyama. In various instances the BDF availed him free of charge to some secondary schools to conduct training. A pilot of programme was conducted in Lobatse Secondary School in 2001. This has actually led to the promotion of karate and today karate in Botswana remains has been the most popular winning international honors and prizes.

9. As a way of further promoting karate the Sir Seretse Khama Barracks (SSKB) Karate Club in 1999 embarked on a project know as "Project Side Kick". These projects brought young karate practitioners together once a week for tutorials in math, science and English lessons. The coordinator requested for volunteers, especially those who have been teachers before or trained in the teaching profession. The response from both tutors and attendees has been phenomenon. This only did not encourage those kids doing karate, but always brought along their friends for these classes. This is yet one way of not only promoting sports by the armed forces, but also teaching soldiers and young officers social responsibility.

10. The armed forces have always shown that there are part of society and have been actively involved in community projects. Various BDF sports clubs have been part of the national call in raising funds for national HIV/AIDS projects as well as participated in yearly independence celebrations and national productivity week activities. Not only have these clubs participated, but also they have played leading roles. The BDF has always donated toward theses projects or celebrations by way of releasing personnel as well as equipment to assist in the facilitation of the activities.

PROMOTION OF SPORTS THROUGH NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

11. The BDF is continuing to champion sports throughout Botswana, not only within the barracks and at school levels, but has appeared prominently in almost all national associations affiliated to Botswana National Sports Council (BNSC). The involvement has been at administrative, technical and athletes level. The BDF athletes have featured prominently in many national teams as well as brought home medals whenever they embark on international competitions. Many military personnel hold national and international records. That alone is an inspiration and hope to the nation and the youth in particular. Currently, the BDF is represented by 11 qualified administrators in a total of 32 sports codes affiliated to Botswana National Sports Council. These personnel have received various training in sports at certificate, diploma and degree levels from reputable institution in Europe, South America and North America as well as in Africa.

12. The armed forces in Botswana has not only promoted sports in terms of participating, but has provided and continue to avail its training facilities to national teams, community sports and secondary schools for both training and competitions. For example, it has become a tradition that the national soccer team uses the army grounds at SSKB for practice whenever they have international games home or away or they request that the visiting team be allowed to practice there. All these are at a price below market rate at times at no cost. Soccer, volleyball and basketball now have army grounds in their fixtures.

13. The BDF high commander such as, the Commander of the Defence Forces (CDF) has been a patron of Botswana Karate Association as well as Botswana Kofukan Federation for a long time. This sense of commitment to sports has also transcended to all BDF high command. Most of the general staff and senior officers of the BDF serve in various national sports committees. Some have been nominated as Chief Delegates in international competitions, such as Lt Col T Mokhosoa, just to mention but a few, who was the Chief Delegate of the national teams at the All Africa Games in 1999 which we in South Africa, and the list can go on and on.

14. It has also been a practice in the past that the BDF transported national teams with its military aircrafts outside Botswana at a price below market rate.

CONCLUSION

15. The armed forces of any country serve as a key pillar in national sports and always involved at all level. They should support and promote national sport in all possible ways. The Botswana Defence Force (BDF) has been very active and has produced athletes of international caliber over the years and continues to do so. The BDF has done this service to society at both developmental and professional levels and continue to do so. The BDF leadership has been very instrumental and supportive to the ideals and vision on the national sports. It has assisted with both qualified manpower and resources at a time when the nation needed them most. It has also been influential in shaping the physical education programme of the nation by participating in the engineering of the secondary schools' physical education syllabus as well as participating in various physical education workshops of the University of Botswana.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. After a random sample of twenty-five people from the Botswana National Sports Council (BNSC) and Directorate of Sports and Recreation in Botswana Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs I offer the following recommendations based on the most common response to a question: "How/in what way do you think the military could be a promoter of national sports?"

Organizing and running sports clinics.

To offer the public limited accessibility to its facilities.

Organize HIV/AIDS awareness sports activities to sensitize both the military personnel and the public on the pandemic.

Actively involved in grassroots level sports, particularly in rural areas.

Assist the disadvantaged sports teams in fund raising by availing their military bands and traditional troupe teams.

f. Collaborate with women organization in order to assist them bring the level of women sports to that of men.

g. Provide their coaches/trainers who are not utilized by the army to those needy sports teams.

h. Help in the provision of transport where possible to sports teams.