

Time to consider Establishing an Ethiopian Sports Academy

Gold produces Gold

By Eyassu Epheraim: you may reach me via email: eyassu.ephraim@gmail.com

For the last two weeks all world eyes and ears were focused on London, for the 2012 Olympics. Here I shall not to waste my readers' time by explaining why or narrating the background history of the Olympics; everybody knows the story. Before I move to my main focus I would like to congratulate the Ethiopian golden girls: Trinush Dibaba, Tiki Gelana, Meseret Defar and all others who participated at the Olympics and gave their all for their country and for their people, those who have won and those who have lost those who did not make it because of injury. In addition I would like to extend my congratulations to the Ethiopian Olympic Committee who has worked so diligently and made the result possible, and I extend my congratulations to the Ethiopian Olympic Chairman Ato Berhane who has lead the Ethiopian Olympic team, congratulations.

As we know the Olympics hold a unique place in the heart of Ethiopian people, despite our poverty, hardship and whether we were in civil war, we were always part of the glory of the Olympics, our fellow citizens always made us proud as a nation. For Ethiopia in Olympics history, no one may have been celebrated more than Abebe Bekela, as we know the Marathon is the climax of the Olympic games, in fact arguably without the Marathon the Olympics may not be exist. That is one of the reasons our Abebe Bekela's name is glorified in Olympics history; he did not win the Olympics once but twice and run barefoot. Now it is not only Abebe Bekela's legacy which is with us but also his spirit which has passed from generation to generation. Here again we put our flag in the London Olympics stadium in front of the world with pride, again thanks to our golden athletes.

This unique international sports event has brought all Ethiopians together across the world in one spirit. Thanks to the cyber world it is easy to follow our national feeling day by day, hour by hour. Now the question we have to ask is whether as a nation we can create more athletes and get more gold. My answer is the London result has showed me that yes it is possible to have more athletes and win more gold in the international events such as in the Olympics. Haile said "Yechalal. It may be time to see sport as a profession, as a mainline job, as something we can export to the world and as industry. In fact our athletes represent other countries, such as Gulf States like Bahrain and so on. In the modern world we cannot only get medals but we can create wealth for the nation, if we follow the Adam Smith's teachings about "invisible hand". The athlete Haile Gebrselassie could be a good example. Even if I do not hold his bank account details I can safely say that he has brought enormous wealth to his country apart from honour and pride. As I have heard others athletes are doing the same. As you may agree with me, wealth is not only farms, or factories but it is anything that could legitimately create money. For example England has exported the famous footballer David Beckham to the USA, that is a part of England's GNDP, in fact most African countries particularly West Africa export footballers to Europe. That has brought back wealth to their

respective nations. So here I can argue that we can see sport beyond one event and one gold. But the question is how we can achieve that as a nation.

The answer may be found within our economic development policy, known as Growth and Transformation Plan, GTP. I do not know how far, how deep this economic policy sees sport as the formation of additional wealth for the nation the same as road and railway construction or building dam and opening over thirties universities across the nation. Randomly I have had an opportunity to see or discuss about the five-year economic plan; in that plan I have not come across anything related to sport. I may need to look hard. However whether the plan is to include sport in the formation of wealth or not, here I can argue that having or establishing an Ethiopian Sports Academy is the way forward to building the new generation, creating additional wealth, keeping our glory and inspire all nations to be sportmen and women. The by-product of that will create healthier, fitter, productive and competitive citizens. Here I am not only advocating for the usual long distance running but I am rather advocating for creating sportmen and women in every aspect of sport as much as possible. No one can tell me that it is hard to find finance and train fine athletes in Ethiopia. We Ethiopians have so much potential if we look carefully apart from finance, our diversity can be the main benefit and advantage for us to create undisputable sportmen and women. Even our landscape can be used to our best benefit. For example we have Tana but we hardly use it for water-based sports. We have long tradition of horse riding but we hardly produce a horseman and women. It is all about focus and investment: and any investment made on sport sooner or later has immeasurable return. It is naive to expect gold after gold without investment, it is an irony that we need gold but not make the investments needed for it. I notice that most our ministers are not personally keen on sport, God bless our PM he may prefer his books than running around, it may be time as well for our parliamentarians to show some love for the sport, even if I do not like to be hard on our President, considering his blessed age, his Excellency might too need some form of sport. Let us leave our public finger alone and move to the final point.

The point is how we may establish an Ethiopian Sports Academy and how we can fund it, like universities we can create a centre of sport excellence across the nation. Each region might establish their own independent centre or within the new universities network we can establish those centres. Financing this kind of centre may seem hard; I can give a hint how to find the finance. Even if I cannot provide a perfect solution for finance there are so many places we can look into for financial support: such as public money, sponsorship, scholarship fund and as usual support from friendly countries, special lottery fund and so on. The sports centre even can be self-funded, that may be a matter of further study, but there is a possibility to do that.

We train our soldiers to be ready and defend the nation in military schools; we have universities to train our young to be academic and productive, even we have a school for our civil servants but we do not have a school for our sport heroes and heroines. It is time to consider Establishing an Ethiopian Sports Academy. If we do that may be at Rio 2016 Olympic we will have not three gold but we will have more gold than ever.

NB: This article was handed to the Ethiopian Olympic delegates by hand