

LCQ6: Selection of athletes representing Hong Kong to participate in international sports events

Following is a question by Hon Lam Cheuk-ting and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

It has been reported that the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) earlier selected swimmers to represent Hong Kong to participate in the 18th Asian Games. Two swimmers nominated by the Hong Kong Amateur Swimming Association (HKASA) to participate in three events were not selected and their appeals were also dismissed. On the contrary, three other swimmers with inferior results were selected to participate in the competitions, and it was reported that the father of one of the selected swimmers was a member of the Executive Committee of HKASA and a director of two big swimming clubs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) if it knows, in respect of the swimmers selected to represent Hong Kong to participate in 50m butterfly, 50m backstroke and 100m breaststroke events at the Asian Games, whether the best results they had obtained in the relevant events were better than those of the unsuccessful nominees; if their results were not better, why they were selected;

(2) whether it knows SF&OC's justifications for its dismissal of the aforesaid appeals and the details of the appeal system in question; and

(3) given that those swimming clubs which have trainees selected for international competitions will be accorded priority by HKASA in the allocation of swimming lanes at public swimming pools, and such clubs can therefore secure the more sought-after swimming lanes and time slots, thereby admitting more trainees and earning more income, whether the Government knows what measures SF&OC has adopted to prevent role conflicts and transfer of benefits in the selection of swimmers to participate in international competitions?

Reply:

President,

The Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) is a member of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Council of Asia. It is responsible for selecting the Hong Kong Delegation (the Delegation) to compete in major international multi-sport events, including the 2018 Asian Games. For each of the 40 sports in the 2018 Asian Games, the

related "national sports association" (NSA) nominated athletes for inclusion in the Delegation based on its established nomination criteria. These nominations were then submitted to the Selection Committee of the SF&OC for consideration with the established selection criteria. Based on the information provided by the SF&OC, my reply to Hon Lam Cheuk-ting's question on the selection of swimmers is as follows:

(1) There were a total of 34 men's and women's individual swimming events and seven relay swimming events at the 2018 Asian Games. All athletes who competed in these events were nominated by the Hong Kong Amateur Swimming Association (HKASA). In general, the HKASA would nominate the two fastest swimming athletes based on their results in recent years for the SF&OC's consideration.

The Selection Committee of the SF&OC held its meeting on April 24, 2018 to consider the HKASA's nominations of 37 swimming athletes based on the SF&OC's established selection criteria. In the light of the gaps between local and international levels of performance in certain swimming events, the SF&OC had to give consideration to the athletes' performances in major international competitions in addition to their rankings in Hong Kong. The SF&OC had accordingly informed all NSAs, including the HKASA, in March 2018 that the athletes' attainment of the specified levels of performance, i.e. top one-third ranking in related events, at the specified major international competitions (note 1), for example, the Olympic Games, Asian Games, World Championships and Asian Championships would be a major factor for selection. In other words, a swimming athlete nominated by the HKASA but without a top ranking result in major international competitions would not be selected as part of the Delegation. Apart from the athletes' results in recent years, the Selection Committee would also take into account the HKASA's preparation plan for the Asian Games, including the training and competitions of swimming athletes, in an overall assessment.

After detailed discussion, the Selection Committee accepted the nominations of 33 swimming athletes and selected them as part of the Delegation. The nominations of the remaining four swimming athletes were rejected because their best results could not meet the selection criteria of the SF&OC. As a result, some events such as men's 50 metres butterfly and men's 100 metres breaststroke were left with no swimming athletes selected; while some other events such as men's 50 metres backstroke were left with only one swimming athlete selected.

According to the rules promulgated for the 2018 Asian Games by the International Swimming Federation, Hong Kong was allowed to send a maximum of two athletes to compete in each individual swimming event. For swimming events with no or only one athlete selected, the Head Coach of the Hong Kong Swimming Representative Team would, subject to the competition schedule and the athletes' participation in relay events, assign athletes, who had been selected to be part of the Delegation on the basis of results attained in other swimming events, to compete in these swimming events. In such a scenario, the athlete assigned to compete in a swimming event might not have the fastest result among all swimming athletes, as some other athletes might have a faster result in the same swimming event but still failed to secure

selection to be part of the Delegation because the result did not meet the selection criteria of the SF&OC.

(2) In accordance with the selection mechanism of the SF&OC, if an NSA is dissatisfied with the decisions of the Selection Committee, it may provide supplementary information and request for a review by the Selection Committee. If an NSA is dissatisfied with the result of the review, it may again submit supplementary information and request for a further review by the Selection Committee. There is no limit on the number of rounds of review requested. If the NSA is dissatisfied with the result of a review, it may also elect to file an appeal to the Appeal Panel of the SF&OC.

According to information provided by the SF&OC, the HKASA received the selection results of the Selection Committee on swimming athletes on May 17, 2018. The HKASA provided supplementary information and requested for a review by the Selection Committee on the nominations of three swimming athletes on May 29. The SF&OC informed the HKASA on June 19 that the Selection Committee maintained its original decision. This was because the supplementary information provided could not meet the selection criteria. The HKASA did not file an appeal on the results of the review.

(3) According to information provided by the HKASA, it adopts an annual accumulative scoring system to determine the priority to be given to its affiliated clubs when recommending them to apply to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) for use of swimming lanes in main pools and sessions allocated to it under the Central Lane Allocation Scheme (the Scheme). Under the scoring system, the score of each affiliated club depends on a number of factors, including the history of the club, number of registered members, number of members participated in competitions and their achievements, whether its members are selected as the HKASA's training team members, whether its members are selected to join the Delegation, whether its members are record-breakers or record-holders, and its members' rankings in Open Water Swimming or other swimming competitions. In other words, whether club members are selected to be part of the Delegation is only one of the factors for earning points under the scoring system. Affiliated clubs which are recommended for taking up the swimming lanes allocated to the HKASA under the Scheme must be non-profit-making in nature. All proceeds from the activities must be used for the purpose of the same activity. Any surplus generated from these activities can only be used by the affiliated club concerned for development of the sport. Income or surplus from these activities are not allowed to be directly or indirectly channelled to any member of the affiliated club concerned or any other organisations or persons.

A mechanism for preventing conflicts of interests is in place under the selection process of the SF&OC. The relevant requirements to the members of the Selection Committee include declaration of interests in writing prior to the selection, the need to withdraw from the selection or refrain from taking part in the discussion of the related events, and prohibition from voting. For example, if the Selection Committee were to discuss nominations by an NSA, of which the Selection Committee Chairman is a committee member, the Chairman is required to withdraw from that part of the meeting, and the

Vice Chairman should be asked to chair the discussion and resolution of the selection; or if the Selection Committee were to discuss nominations by an NSA, of which a Selection Committee member is a committee member, the member concerned should only take part in the discussion in the capacity of a representative of the NSA and is not allowed to vote. According to information provided by the SF&OC, the Selection Committee followed the mechanism for preventing conflicts of interests at its discussion of nominations by the HKASA. Thank you, President.

Note 1: The specified major international competitions in the selection criteria included the 2016 Olympic Games, the 2014 to 2018 World Championship recognised by the International Federation, the 2014 Asian Games, the 2014 to 2018 Asian Championship recognised by the Asian Federation, the 2017 National Games, the 2017 World Games, the 2017 Universiade, the 2017 Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games and the 2016 Asian Beach Games.