

# Commission would give athletes input, says SNOC chief

By CHUA SIANG YEE

LETTING athletes have a say in decisions that affect them is crucial.

But while having the right to vote in their national sports association (NSA) elections is an option, it is not the only way, according to Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) secretary-general Chris Chan.

He suggests an alternative: setting up an athletes' commission in the NSA, comprising former and current athletes, so that the voices of sportsmen and sportswomen are heard on a regular basis.

Chan's comments come in response to Singapore swimmer Rus-

sell Ong's call for national aquatic athletes to be given voting rights at the upcoming Singapore Swimming Association (SSA) elections.

Ong believes doing so would give athletes a voice in the association, especially when it comes to implementing policies across the board.

Chan told The Straits Times yesterday: "I applaud Russell for having the courage to come up with this suggestion. Certainly I think it is right for athletes to have a voice.

"I've been trying to get NSAs, especially the bigger ones in Singapore, to set up an athletes' commission since the International

Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes' Forum held last year in Singapore.

"I don't think there's a need for athletes to be taking part in the elections, but we need to have a group managed by athletes to address the practical issues they face."

When informed of Chan's proposal about establishing this athlete body, Ong said he was keen to pursue this avenue.

Said the freestyle sprinter: "The athletes' commission is a very good idea, and I am keen on working with officials to get it started."

Ong, who is entering his final

year in Singapore Management University, is willing to sacrifice time to push through the athletes' commission, hopefully before next year's Singapore SEA Games.

Said the 25-year-old: "It is important that athletes are not overlooked when it comes to making key decisions. Our opinions matter, and I am confident something like this can be done."

Chan believes this can be achieved soon. Citing the SNOC's own Athletes' Commission, he said: "It is not a tedious process, and the NSAs shouldn't feel threatened."

The SNOC Athletes' Commission was set up in 2003 to give ath-

letes a say in issues such as selection procedures and competitions.

It is modelled after the IOC's Athletes' Commission, and has helped organise several events to promote the interests of national athletes.

Last June, for example, Olympic windsurfing champion Barbara Kendall spoke to some 50 local athletes in an Athlete Career Programme forum about transitioning to life after sports.

Ex-national water polo player Yip Ren Kai is the chairman of the current commission, which is made up of 11 former and current national athletes.

Members include retired ath-

letes Yip, Ruth Ng (fencing), and Mark Chay (swimming), as well as current stalwarts Dipna-Lim Prasad (athletics), Derek Wong (badminton), and Jasmine Ser (shooting).

Yip said: "It is important to have a group to look after the welfare of athletes, whether it is welfare at major games, or transitioning from sports into the workforce.

"We're looking at how we can try to set up athletes' commissions in NSAs, and hope to get their buy-in. It is important to look at things from an athlete's viewpoint as well."

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