



INTERVIEW WITH DR. EMAD EL BANANNY

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NATIONAL SPORTS COUNCIL OF EGYPT

By Khaled Assem

What can you tell us about the strategies of the National Sports Council of Egypt (NSCE) when it comes to developing sports in Egypt?

Several years back Egypt had programmes that were held on a small scale named 'Sports for All'. Recently after the constitution of an International and Arab Federation for 'Sports for All', an Egyptian Federation was also constituted; by that we mean

that we would employ our efforts in activating the role of organisations of the International Community and Non-Governmental Organisations. When we took the direction of activating such roles, our aim was to concentrate on how to develop sports as a whole before having it reach Championship Sectors or levels; such sectors are usually an area of expertise of the Olympic Committee that plays the role of preparing talented

individuals to being able to participate on the international level.

What is the function of the Ministry of Sports when it comes to activating this role and developing a programme for sports, lets say, in Cairo?

This task was initially run by the Ministry of Youth & Sports and the High Council for Youth & Sports, but now it is the responsibility of the NSCE

which is a part of the Ministry. Many public schools do not have a playground let alone a programme for sports, and so our role is to construct such grounds and introduce such programmes in as many schools as possible. A child is usually born with an instinct for sports, and so growing up to find facilities available would be of added value; as much as education is important, sports should be as well. Introducing sport as part of the syllabus was part of the major step to implementing the NSCE project.

What can you tell us about the challenges that the NSCE faces?

What was very challenging was how to implement such a project since Egypt has numerous schools with lots of children; do not forget we are 80 million in a developing country! Furthermore, a huge number of those schools are not constructed with playgrounds or any sorts of facilities and even more, lacks qualified trainers and instructors. It is quite a sensitive topic because this is the responsibility of the Ministry of Sports to construct fully prepared schools. Nevertheless, to lessen the challenge, we decided to work on this project on a small scale and start with only three Egyptian governorates; Alexandria, Asyout and Giza. With the cooperation of the Ministry of Education, we set up a plan and went on with this project through firstly, composing a Civil Union for Sports within the schools themselves, and secondly, through ensuring that any newly constructed schools will include all sorts of sport facilities, the least of which are multi-purpose playgrounds. Thirdly, to construct schools specialised in enhancing the abilities of potential athletes. By this I literally mean something that is nearly similar to a boarding school where students fully study in the morning and at other times, dedicate their lives to developing their athletic talents. Such schools will be fully equipped when it comes to facilities from grounds, swimming pools to all sorts of sport services. There was only one such school in Cairo, and now we are in the process of establishing two more in Minya and in El Sharkia. As you may know, several of our national football team players graduated from the school in Cairo: Mido, Shikabala and Ahmed Hossam. On the same note, the graduates of this school do not



usually represent just one sport like judo or boxing, but they usually represent the school as a whole. Each school would be specialised in a specific sport; for example the school in Ismailia would graduate football and water polo players. In 2006, we established three schools like I have mentioned earlier, currently, we have more than 15 schools in 15 governorates and our three year plan is to expand our efforts to all Egyptian governorates.

You do follow a special scheme to implement what you have mentioned above; is the NSCE partnering any other Ministry?

Yes; it was imperative for us to work with the Ministry of Education in specific because through it, sports would be adjoined to the school syllabus as a key component of education. In addition to our cooperation with the Ministry of Education, we also work along with the Directorate of Education, the Directorate of Sports in each governorate, and finally the Sports Unions and Federations within the schools. After the constitution of the Federation for School Sports in Egypt, the Pan Arab School Games took place in Algeria in August 2008, and Egypt as a country came in 1st place; Egypt participated in basketball, handball, football, volleyball, table Tennis, badminton, swimming, and athletics. We came out with a total of 74 medals, Syria with 39 medals and then Tunisia with 27 medals.

These achievements are not really publicised; is there a specific reason?

I have to admit that we have a flaw when it comes to full communication with the

media. You for example, are an equestrian rider who is interested to learn about all sports news, but the majority of Egyptians are keen to learn about only one sport unfortunately which is football! All major sports magazine headlines are about who scored the latest goal, who got injured, etc. And so football takes away all the attention. However, we are working hard as well on cooperating fully with the media to cover news in general. To assist in this, the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has set a date for the 'Egyptian Sports Day', which is March 3rd, where he usually honours top Athletes, and top pioneers in sport movements. The media would usually cover this.

To implement ideas such as working hard on having the media publicise what you have mentioned, does the NSCE have a special department for funding such matters, or does it cooperate with sponsorship companies?

When we compare the budget of the NSCE spent on public school activities, plus the budget for constructing fully equipped schools in all the governorates, with the budget provided by the government, it would be shocking to state a number. To answer your question, no, we are not really working with sponsorship companies. However for example when any department of any Ministry invests a huge sum in sports, they decide to cut down on medical expenses, or crime, or production. When we have individuals who play sports and therefore are fit, they will produce more, they will be efficient and going for a general medical check up will be limited to two or three annual visits. **HT**