

**Presentation Transcript**

Topic: Hangout with our Athlete, Intellectual Impairment

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Loh: Hello, I'm Loh Ngiap Kiang from Singapore Disability Sports Council Pathway and Participation Team. I will be co-hosting this breakout session with Cassandra Lee.

Cass: Hi everyone, I'm Cassandra, Communication and Partnership Executive from Special Olympics Singapore.

Cass: Well, hey Loh. So, you know, a lot of people get confused between us, Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) as well as Singapore Special Olympics Singapore (SOSG).

Loh: Yes, I think same, same but different this term can be used.

Loh: We are both sports organization for persons with disabilities impairment. While SDSC is the only organization in Singapore which reaches across all disability groups, physical visual, intellectual hearing, impairment, ASD, offering a wide range of sports for both recreational and competitively

Cass: Indeed, same same, but different because SOSG is also part of a global inclusion movement using sports, health and leadership programs every day around the world to end discrimination and empower people with intellectual disabilities. So originally Special Olympics International was founded in 1968. And a movement has now grown to more than 6 million athletes and unified partners around the world in more than 190 countries. So, for us, SOSG in Singapore, we will actually set up in 1983 MINDS and APSN. We have been offering spots for people with special needs since.

Loh: The similar thing here is that both organizations help person with intellectual disabilities, intellectual impairment in sports.

Cass: And the key differences are the disability categories of athletes that compete in the programs are different. The training criteria, philosophy under which the athletes compete, are actually different as well.

Loh: Okay, this table summarises some of the key areas of the two organizations. First, the definition of Intellectual Disabilities/ Intellectual Impairment. For SDSC, in sports, we have rules and regulations. And we take reference from International Sports Federation or the IFS, if you're familiar the term. For intellectual impairment, we look to Virtus, get the other International Federation for athletes with intellectual impairment. Athletes go through classification to determine whether they have an eligible impairment in reference to the sports rules.

Cass: So, for us, Special Olympics is as long as the athlete is certified by a health professional to have intellectual disabilities, they can enroll into our program, and they actually compete in a structure called divisioning. So, the fundamental difference between Special Olympics competition and those of other organizations is that athletes of all abilities are encouraged to participate, and every athlete is recognized for his or her performance. So, evening out skills level and matching for age and gender makes Special Olympics events more exciting and meaningful for the athletes and fans watching. So, this is actually quite aligned with our athletes oath, which is "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt", which goes to teach them that, everyone is a winner, as long as you are courageous enough to try. And Loh, I believe that SDSC's competition, athletes with intellectual disabilities impairment will compete in one class, and then they go for placement like the first, second and third, right?

Loh: Yes, that brings us to the next point on the types of sports and programs the two organizations offer. SDSC, development and high-performance program. Typically, an all-year round, intense daily and highly specialized training in the specific sports.

Cass: And for Special Olympics Singapore, generally, athlete going to a competition may spend one season for example, learning to swim, practising swimming in our outreach program and then going to a swim meet. But in the next season, the same athlete can practice another sport like athletics, and then compete in an athletics competition. So basically, we allow them to try different sports.

Loh: The athletes in SDSC development and high-performance program trains to compete at the following major games or competition. International Paralympic Committee, we call it (IPC), they have para-athletics, para swimming, table tennis, then Virtus. And they have athletics, basketball, cricket, cycling, equestrian, football, handball, rowing, skiing, swimming, table tennis and tennis. Asian Paralympic Committee the ASEAN Asian para game sorry, para-athletics, para swimming and table tennis. ASEAN Sports Federation, which called ASEAN para games, para-athletics, para swimming, table tennis, and then they have 10 pin bowling, and the ASEAN para games level.

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Cass: So, for SOSG, right, other than sports, we actually offer five other non-sports related programs that focuses on health education, personal development, involving families, as well as reaching out to young athletes as young as two years old, or athletes with multiple disabilities. And you know, that's what encompasses the whole philosophy of what SOSG is about. And for sports, right, we actually offer nine official sports which training is actually provided year-round free of charge. And the main aim is to help athletes develop physical fitness, excel in the sports which they enjoy, and most importantly for them, you know, as an outlet to demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate with fellow teammates and as well as our volunteers.

Cass: So, let's not you know, not just share among ourselves, why not we speak to the athletes themselves and you know, let them share how sports have benefited them through their journey.

Loh: Okay, hello. Welcome back to this sharing session. Okay, often, the things that we don't talk about create the biggest problem. So, let's start a conversation here move beyond fear and misunderstanding about intellectual disability, intellectual impairment.

Loh: Today I have Suhairi and Salihin, I actually know Suhairi as a friend as an athlete, not someone with a disability. And now I met a new friend along the way, Salihin.

Loh: So, Salihin, can you tell us more about yourself and your impairment

Salihin: Hey everyone, my name is Salihin, I'm twenty-three years old this year. To say a little bit about myself. My disability was caused by high fever when I was young. I went an operation for my spinal cord, and I was in an ICU for two or three weeks. When I recover my development was slower than my brother and that was when my mum noticed I was different. Currently, I am studying web application, in ITE college West and working part time in Pizza Hut.

Salihin: My involvement in Special Olympic Singapore goes beyond sport, I am also an athlete leader and assistant coach in Bocce. I have known Suhairi since we were 13/14 years old, as we went to the same school. So Suhairi, can you tell me more about yourself?

Suhairi: Sure, no problem Salihin. My name is Suhairi, I'm 24 this year. I'm a para-athlete and also my classification is T20. What T20 is, is intellectual impairments. So currently, now my full time is a SPEX scholar. So, what is the meaning of SPEX scholar? SPEX scholarship is when high performance athlete to develop to achieve your dreams and also my disabilities is intellectual like I say, how I become intellectual is when I was born, I was a mainstream student.

I went to mainstream schools and I get when I was in primary three. That's when I get a totally high fever above limits. I was shaking. I was very, very sweaty at night so my mum does not know what to do at night. So she gives me a Panadol instead. So after the night, I never recover well, so my mother decided to bring me to the hospital. So that's where the doctor told me that when I wake up, I might not recover well, when I go back to school. That's where my IQ cannot adapt to my education. So yeah.

Cass: So boys, tell us when was the first contact with sports and how was your experience? And how was your experience? Maybe we can start with you, Suhairi?

Suhairi: My contact of sports. I don't born with such industry for my body. I can remember my first CCA was in primary school was dance CCA. That's totally different sports, like new dance CCA you know, can't imagine. I'm on a scholarship and I'm in sports. Yeah, I wanted to do dance CCA why because in that time I was hyperactive you know. I don't know about sports because in primary school you don't know anything about that it. So, I go musical, dance CCA, so and got this one PE teacher introduced me. Do you want to try to play soccer? And I say, why not? Let's try. So, I play, and I dribble the ball. My teacher said you're good, talented. Never know, got skills, dance also can move. Some of that and then yes, and then that's where I decide to step one step ahead.

Okay, let's try something new. Let's go to soccer instead. And then after that soccer, I try new things again. Track and Field, because my friend cannot fight with me because every time, I touch the wall and run back, I always win. So, my friend said, your cheated? I said no! I never cheat, did you see me cheat? So, my friend brings me to. No, not my friend. My school, Chaoyang school. I remember I was there in Chaoyang Primary School. So, my teacher put me and also with SDSC,

Suhairi: introduce a competition. So, Chaoyang bring me to the competition at SDSC meet. So, I dominate all the events. So, I won everything. Thirteen years old so that's how I started to take sports.

Cass: Multi-talented. So how about you, Salihin?

Salihin: So when I was 10 years old, and a friend introduced me to running. We went to take part in track and field competition. I enjoyed bonding with my friend and got to experience how it feels like running with my peers.

Cass: But did you enjoy right?

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Salihin: Yes, but very tiring, but my friend told me to never give up as long as you did experience in running.

Cass: So, you actually enjoy bonding with your friends and that was your first contact with sports. That's nice.

Loh: Next, can you tell us what sports have you engaged in through these years? And most importantly how sports benefited you.

Salihin: I was introduced to many different sports. I first joined the Special Olympic Singapore, through my teacher who taught me bocce. I also start DanceSport in my school and was training hockey with my friend SOSG, at the same time, offers what I was interested in, it was an easy change to floorball which is similar to hockey. When SOSG started DanceSport in 2019, I was naturally involvement in the program too. Now, I am an assistant coach in Bocce and have represented Singapore in floorball competition at the World Winter Games in Austria.

Salihin: Through my sports and leadership trainings, I am more confident now than when I was younger. I get to share my knowledge with younger athletes with or without disability. I also meet more friends who became like my family. For my health, I feel I am more fit and healthy even my doctors said so during my medical checkup

Cass: Can you flex and share? You see how confident you are on the picture on the right hand side when you're coaching your friends and your peers.

Loh: Okay, so you do DanceSport, Hockey, Floorball, Running. Now sports also helped you to be more confident, fitter on the inside.

Salihin: So Suhairi, what sport have you done and how did it help you?

Suhairi: Yeah, thank you Salihin. Like I say, I was in dance CCA and not similar in sports. So I started to play soccer, track and field. badminton, table tennis, ice skating, which is very new for me. SOSG introduce me ice skating, it was my first time going to a winter game. I also went to the winter games with you. It's a surprise for me like winter ice skating. The most I don't like is when I fall down, that is hurting for me. So, yes, it is a new skill that I learnt and knowledge through all the sports that I learned. Because different types of sports have different type of knowledge of coaching the athletes. So, I learned along the way, what the coach taught me so, I take that benefit, I gain knowledge, what the coach told me. So, like I say I have tried various sports and activities in my life.

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Suhairi: The most difficult sport I find is ice ice skating, the skills of the skate is not normal. It's not normal because we are on the land we can work properly. When on ice you need to balance, you need to stay strong and also focus on the things your coach gave you advice for and bring that advice to train every day with your coach. Yes, I'm seven years now in High Performance Sports. Like in long jump, so why did I pick up long jump? I know that long jump makes me stronger and believe that I can go further in my long jump so what why it is known as athletic. Athletic showed me that I can go further into my future that I want to dream of so that's why. I stay in track and field and focus on one sport only because I know that track and field can bring me to the future that I want.

Loh: That's athletics. Higher, Faster, stronger, further.

Cass: So what sports have you not done?

Suhairi: My weakness is aiming sports. So I don't do basketball, bowling, and also shooting. I'm weak in that of sports, aiming sports. Like I said, I like to learn new skills, learn new knowledge. When I try bowling and basketball, I keep failing, you know, bowling ball is always in the side of the lanes. Okay, bowling is not my type of sport. And I try basketball, then I know I cannot shoot properly. But I can pass the ball and communicate with my team, that's what I'm good at because I'm also a leader. I'm a good leader, and I motivate my teammates along the way. Yes, I'm good at communicating with my teammates. In basketball, I keep foul as I'm too aggressive.

Loh: You hit people but not the ball.

Suhairi: And so, for me, I don't like the sports I only like individual sport for me. That's why I stick to track and field and gain more knowledge for it.

Loh: But you also make friends through sports, right? I mean your competitors, international one and also off the field they are friends.

Suhairi: Correct, like sportsmanship like we say. In competition we focus in mind to to reach our goal. And off the field, that's where we talk and joke around with peers and other athletes you know.

Loh: So, you widen up your friends from Singapore going to international.

Suhairi: We exchanged contacts while we are overseas when we meet them.

Cass: That's the beauty of sports, bring people together.

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Suhairi: Together and also gain more knowledge. I'd learn new culture from each other and new words from them. It's interesting when you go overseas, and your other competitors speak different language which you can't understand. That's when you search using Google to translate. That's where I learnt from it.

Suhairi: Sports bring me knowledge. Because we are two intellectuals, we need more time to learn, and understand things. So that's where sports give me knowledge and also give me confidence.

Cass: So, what advice would you give to peers who wish to get fit like the two of you? Salihin, maybe you can go first?

Suhairi: My advice to the peers is always motivate yourself and always think that on new days, new skills and knowledge you need to learn every single day. Everyone way you will always face on day of difficulties. So, for me, I will always face difficulties one day. Difficulties can make you stronger the next day, because you will learn from mistakes. My advice is to keep motivating yourself to learn new things, to upgrade yourself. Your brain is like a memory card, you cannot stick one thing and then store that brain and stick for you in your brain. So, you need to change it and learn new skills, and also keep yourself healthy.

Suhairi: You need to keep your brain healthy, healthy lifestyle is important. Eat well, sleep well. And also, drink plenty of water, hydrate yourself, get your body more energy.

Loh: Do you agree just to get active, starts with just playing first?

Suhairi: No! Not just play, you cannot only play. Because get active also can become. Not only play, you can walk around, walk around also consider doing cardio. Like taking the stairs, start small. Walking around consider cardio already. Like walking in the park. After that then you start jogging. Or brisk walk. Take it slow, walk, brisk walk, jog and then play. That's where you team bonding with your friends so you can keep healthy.

Cass: What's your advice for peers out there Salihin?

Salihin: My advice to everyone is to try different sports when you are young, do not be afraid. You can explore different sports through SOSG and move on to different organisation such as SDSC to level up your skills too.

Loh: Tell us what are your hopes and dreams for the future? Salihin?

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Salihin: My hope is to come to second year in ITE and I wish to future my studies in polytechnic after this. My dream job is in sports management or IT industry. I also hope to continue to give back to the community by sharing my sports knowledge and taking part in events like Chingay, National Day. How about you Suhairi?

Suhairi: My dream and future is I've been in sport industry for a long time. I have goals, me and my team always set goals. My goal is to win medals, the biggest medal is Paralympics, so that is my dream. Because Paralympics is something for me to get closer to my dreams to achieve that medal, because I learned difficulties in sports industry. Not only me, but other athletes have also been through all that. To stay strong, that's why I need to work hard every day, day and night to keep motivating myself to achieve that goals. And my dream is after I retire from sports, I want to give back to the community and go back to APSN to teach and to teach as a PE teacher, to help my fellow intellectual peers and students to motivate them. Don't look down on yourself, you're also able-bodied. You also human and you give others your time and motivate them through sports, gain them and motivate them so that they believed themselves and what we went through are the same. Baby steps, always baby steps.

So that's my future. And also, I want to tell the community that intellectual is something that you can work together as a Singapore so we can bring the society bigger and gain knowledge together as a team.

Cass: Thank you. Very inspiring boys. Good luck to you in reaching your goals and dreams, and always aim high. And we're really glad that you know that both SDSC and SOSG. We are here. To guide you along your journey as you achieve your goals. So, I guess our main, purpose here is to raise awareness that to the audience out there that there are organisations out there like us, providing training and opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. So, if you know of any athletes or any people with special needs, that may benefit from our programmes and training do reach out to us. And we hope you all enjoy the rest of the sessions today. Thank you, boys.

Loh: Focus on their ability and not the disability.