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Sport as a National and International Integration: The Case of the 1981 Manila Southeast Asian Games (11th SEA Games Dec. 6-15, 1981)

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Sports Symbolize the sense of unity that we seek to foster among our diverse people... let them help bring together our plural societies in an endeavor that transcends barriers of race, politics, language or religion ---President Ferdinand E. Marcos ("New Direction in Sports Cited," December 5, 1982, Bulletin Today, p. 12)

Abstract:

The Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) is a biennial multi-sport event involving athletes in countries in Southeast Asia. Its precursor is the South East Asian Peninsular Games (SEAP) that was established on May 22, 1958 with Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam as the founding members. In 1977 Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines were formally admitted that coincide with the changing of SEAP to Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF) and from there on the games were known as Southeast Asian Games.

In the case of the Philippines, the country first hosted the event in December 6 to 15, 1981. Sports and politics has long functioned as a means of forging unity in national and international level. This paper seeks to understand the context, intended aim, and pragmatism of such sporting event. At a national level Marcos believed that "the real lesson and the lasting legacy of our sports heroes is one of discipline, hard work, perseverance, will, determination and character. These are the virtues that make champions of men in the athletic field or in real life. These are the virtues that enrich our everyday lives. The most urgent problem that faces us today is how to make every citizen a productive member of his community." At the international level, a sport event was a valuable aid to diplomacy in promoting the Philippines to be politically stable and economically progressive despite the stigma of Martial Law in the country (Martial Law was formally lifted in January 17, 1981 through Proclamation No. 2045). Sports and politics as a tool is very potent in promoting unity, camaraderie and brotherhood, values that are essential in nation building and molding an image indispensable in a regional scale--- sport as a political apparatus for national and international integration.

Key Words: 11th SEA Games; Martial Law; Sports and Politics; and Sports and History.

INTRODUCTION

The study of sports in relation to politics and nation-state building are often understudied and neglected. Correlation and value between sport and politics has been long established. The Ancient Olympics that began in 776 BC as a religious festival originally intended to honor Zeus, evolved into a sporting competition among Greeks. A sporting event that began to foster good-will, harmonious relation and the

avoidance of conflict among Greek city-states. As a matter of fact, during games, truce between participating polis and athletes were formed that included safety of passage, avoidance of combat or war, momentary cancellation of disputes and among others (Murray & Pigman, p. 1).

In the modern era, the association of sport and politics can be clearly realized. One obvious utilitarian function of sport and politics was the promotion of certain ideology and beliefs



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in fascism and white men's supremacy like in the case of the Berlin Olympics of 1936. It can also be a tool for projecting world hegemonic status during the Cold War like in the case of US and USSR basketball games in the Olympics. In some case, sports and politics can be used for the avoidance or management of conflict. It can also be used to consolidate political development and preserved union between two contracting powers (Murray & Pigman, pp. 2-5).

METHODOLOGY

The Manila 1981 Southeast Asian Games or the 11th SEA Games will be used in this paper as the prism for looking into Martial Law in the Philippines. Moreover, it seeks to understand the correlation of sports and politics in both national and international level. The paper will also elaborate how former President Ferdinand Marcos through his program of a New Society (Bagong Lipunan) utilized the sporting event to further consolidate authoritarian power and at the same time promote the Philippines in the international arena. The paper hopes to understand the context, intended aim, and pragmatism of such sporting event. Sport and politics has long functioned as a means of forging unity in national and international level a valuable aid to nation-building, diplomacy and foreign relation.

The study is a descriptive historical paper. It will apply the idea of Victor D. Cha in his study about the Theory of Sports and Politics (pp. 6-7). He pointed the following key points:

1. Sport offers a powerful prism through which national identify gets refracted. It affects how a nation sees itself and the image it wants to portray to the rest of the world.
2. Sport captures the national imagination. When an athlete representing her country competes and wins, she elicits a feeling of success and a patriotic identification among her countrymen that no other form of art, music, entertainment or politics can replicate.
3. Sport can be a powerful symbol of nation-building. This is because it promotes a sense

of unity and identify in young nations or newly formed ones.

4. Sport can translate into soft power for some countries. Sport is not just a tool to express national identity or to convey an image of modernity, but in some cases, a positive reputation in sport can augment a country's global status a position in the world stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Declaration of Martial Law

The 1960's and 1970's were turbulent decades in Philippine history as a result of massive discontent from the inability of the government to address poverty and corruption, promote economic progress and institute genuine social transformation. Mass protest against the Marcos administration became more pronounced as students, labor groups, and political opposition lead mass demonstration against the government. The so called "parliament of the streets" threaten the internal peace and order of the country. Violent clashes epitomized the struggle between protesters and the police and military. Aside from this growing discontent, in the global arena, the Cold War was being staged between two world power the US and USSR. As US implemented the policy of containment throughout the world, by the 1960's and 1970's the new battle ground to counter-check Communism shifted in Asia. In the Philippines, the Communist Party together with its military arm the New People's Army (NPA) lead by Jose Ma. Sison was gaining ground and support in the rural areas, this reality imposed real threat against the Marcos administration (Agoncillo, p. 572).

Out of this delicate situation of the country, President Ferdinand E. Marcos issued Proclamation 1081 on September 21, 1972 which placed the whole Philippines under martial law. Through the power vested by the Constitution (Art. VII, Sec. 10) the President governed the country by decrees, general orders and letters of instruction. President Marcos claimed and justified martial law as a necessary political apparatus to counter "communist threat,"



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address rebellion in the South by the Mindanao Independent Movement (MIM) and to instill peace and order in the Greater Manila area. But for some opposition leaders, they viewed this only for Marcos to consolidate his power and extend his term as president beyond the allowable two-term limits as prescribed by the 1935 Constitution. With martial law in place and the power of the president guaranteed, Marcos began to lay down the foundation of re-building the Philippines and he called this program of change the “New Society” or “Bagong Lipunan” (Agoncillo, p. 573).

The “New Society” or “Bagong Lipunan”

The “New Society” propagated values such as self-discipline, independence and self-reliance, progress and peace. Key development and reform were initiated in the field of economy, social development, politics, education and culture. To give teeth in implementing his program of re-building Philippine society, Marcos issued general orders and presidential decrees.

In order to address the economic state of the Philippines, President Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 1, 4 and 2 on September 24, 1972. Presidential Decree No. 1 created the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), the primary function of which was to promote economic development and planning for the country. Presidential Decree No. 4 created the National Grain Authority (NGA) to increase and meet the demand of grain supply and production of the country. And Presidential Decree No. 2 declared the whole Philippines as a land reform area and subsequently created the Department of Agrarian Reform. Under Marcos program in land reform, tenants were given three hectares of irrigated rice or corn lands and five hectares if not irrigated (Agoncillo, p. 574).

To counter problem of peace and order President Marcos issued General Order 2 ordering the Secretary of National Defense to arrest and detain individuals who committed crimes of insurrection and rebellion and crimes against society such as kidnapping, carnapping,

smuggling, robbery, drug trafficking, price manipulation, tax evasion and among others. Marcos also set curfew hours from midnight to four in the morning to eradicate robbery and other unlawful activity at night.

On January 17, 1973, President Marcos issued Proclamation No. 1102 certifying and proclaiming that the 1973 Constitution had been ratified by the people through barangay’s general assembly or Kapulungan. As a result of the new Constitution, the legislative body was abolished, Marcos exercise the power of both president and prime minister, and the new Constitution paved the way for a new form of government--- from a presidential to parliamentary form (Agoncillo, pp. 574-576).

Sports, Politics and History: The Philippines in 1980’s and the Manila 1981 SEA Games

Martial Law was Lifted

President Ferdinand Marcos issued Proclamation 2045 that lifted martial law on January 17, 1981 amidst extreme pressure from international community. The church and the US leadership were alarmed by the growing number of President Marcos human rights violation. According to the reports of Amnesty International from 1978 to 1980, more than 8,000 individuals were salvaged and kidnapped and 50,000 more were arrested on mere suspicion and opposition to the government. The lifting also was calculated to coincide with the inauguration of the new US President Ronald Reagan and the visit of John Paul II in Manila. Proclamation 2045 was a political move designed to silenced the Catholic opposition and criticism to the Marcos regime and at the same time to achieve political advantage on dealing with a new US president thereby establishing a new foreign policy for the Philippines (De Dios, p. 78).

SEAP to SEAGF: Historical Context

The Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) is a biennial multi-sport event involving athletes in countries in Southeast Asia. Its origin can be traced back to the South East Asian



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Peninsular Games (SEAP) that was established on May 22, 1958 with Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam as the founding members. In 1977 Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines were formally admitted that coincide with the changing of SEAP to Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF) and from there on the games were known as Southeast Asian Games (Official Report SEA Games 1981).

The Philippines first participated in the 9th SEA Games that took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from November 19-26, 1977. The Philippines participated in 10 out of 13 events and placed third with medal tally of 31-30-30 (gold-silver-bronze) behind Indonesia the overall champion with 62-41-34 medal tally and Thailand with 37-35-33 (Official Report SEA Games 1977). During the 1977 Philippine participation that sent 172 athletes, expectations were very high with the intention of becoming the over-all champion. Sport as an economic indicator would show the outcome with the Philippines placing third. Indonesia on the other hand, also a first timer in the sport was awarded the over-all champion for the 9th SEA Games. The poor showing of the country was also evident in the Asian Games winning medals in a declining fashion: 9 gold medals in Jakarta Asiad (1962-Indonesia); 2 gold medals in Bangkok Asiad (1966-Thailand); 1 gold medal again in Bangkok Asiad (1970-Thailand) and 0 gold medal Tehran Asiad (1974-Iran) (Bulletin Today, Nov. 25, 1977 p. 20). In the 10th SEA Games that was held in Jakarta, Indonesia from September 21-30, 1979 the Philippines placed 4th with 24-31-38 gold-silver-bronze medal tally. Indonesia was still the region's best with 92-78-52, Thailand garnered 2nd with 50-46-29 and Burma 3rd with 26-26-24 (Official Report SEA Games 1979). In 1981 when Manila played host to the sporting event, the Philippines placed 3rd with 55-55-77 gold-silver-bronze medal. Indonesia won 1st with 85-73-56 and Thailand ranked 2nd with 62-45-41 (Official Report SEA Games 1981).

The Manila 1981 SEA Games

Sport as Aid to Diplomacy and Foreign Relation: International Integration

The Philippines performed poorly in international sport competition like in the two previous SEA Games. In an article by Sport Columnist Apolonio Batalla of Bulletin Today in 1977 Malaysia SEA Games, he expressed the value and conceivable benefit of sport in relation to politics in building friendship among nations. He stressed the real objective of sport as a representation of every country and that is to be culturally intelligent--- meaning possessing good values, sportsmanship, and friendship above winning. He further explained this in the following words:

“Conceivably if a people is culturally immature they think that winning a particular competition is the most important thing in the world. The attitude can result in many complications, including cheating and violence. It can result in utter in hospitality to the visiting players. Conversely, if a people is culturally mature, it is able to put a competition or sports in general in their proper perspective, that is, that friendship is above winning.... The international image of this country will be immeasurably helped if no unfairness is done to visiting athletes and if their excellence is acknowledged by local sporting fans.... Sports, then, has much to contribute to our international relationships. They are a valuable aid to diplomacy.” (Bulletin Today, Nov. 27, 1977, p. 6)

Batalla further added that sport can be used as a tool in promoting stability, economic strength that will serve as model to other parts of the world where conflict exist. During this time the world was preoccupied with conflict like war between Iran-Iraq, nuclear threat in Europe and Korea, conflict between China and Taiwan, and War on Vietnam. (Bulletin Today, Dec. 16, 1981, p. 6). In an editorial article this idea of sports as means of providing political solution to



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conflict expressed the following idea, “The Southeast Asian Games are competition, but they also underline the common desire of nations in this part of the globe to cooperate fully with one another in all fields of endeavor in order to give more meaning to life” (Bulletin Today, Dec. 16, 1981, p. 6). In his paper a “Theory of Sport and Politics” Victor Cha stressed the following importance of sport in politics and international affair. In the following idea:

“Sport offers a powerful prism through which national identify gets refracted. It affects how a nation sees itself and the image it wants to portray to the rest of the world.... Sport can translate into soft power for some countries. Sport is not just a tool to express national identity or to convey an image of modernity, but in some cases, a positive reputation in sport can augment a country’s global status a position in the world stage.” (p. 6)

This “prism” was used by President Marcos when Manila host the biennial meet in 1981. Expressing his interest for the Philippines in taking active role in the region. In the opening ceremony of the 11th SEA Games he expressed the following words:

“To me this is the enduring value of sports competitions such as this: that they are able to unify, if only for a few days, peoples of different races and creeds and diverse cultures and political persuasions, either as competitors or as spectators. I can only wish that the same spirit of cooperation and unity of purpose guide the peoples of South East Asia in their endeavors from now on, political, economic or cultural” (Bulletin Today, Dec. 7, 1981, p. 6).

This active role can be best exemplified in tracing the country’s foreign relation in the 1960’ and 1970’s. Prior to 1960, Philippine foreign policy was characterized by close relationship and ties with the US. During the martial law period, foreign policy and relation were meant to strengthen Marcos authoritarian rule and make

it acceptable in the international community. Marcos foreign policy can be sum up in the following: the establishment of trade and diplomatic relations with the socialist countries (China, USSR, Vietnam and the East European countries), the Philippines’ identification with the Third World, and the Philippine government’s demand for sovereignty over the bases. His wife also served as an ambassador to other countries like Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Cuba, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In 1977 Marcos expressed his interest for leadership in the Third World in meeting that was known as “Group of 77” that was held in Manila. He also projected himself as a leader in the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN). In the ASEAN Summit of 1977 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he announced that he would drop the claim to Sabah by the Philippines for the sake of ASEAN harmony (Tiglaio, p. 52).

This act of self-proclaim leadership can be heard echoing in Manila in 1981 when Marcos further stressed brotherhood, cooperation, and unity among Southeast Asians. At the closing ceremony he said:

“This is our hope for unity and brotherhood among all Southeast Asians--- and it is a hope that will not be extinguished, though these games must end and you will move on--- to new triumphs and new fields to conquer. We believe that the records established in Manila will make the sports powers appreciate the sports potential being developed in our part of the world. Tell your people of the splendid spirit that you showed and demonstrated in competition here in Manila. Tell your people of the Filipinos you have met, of their customs and culture.” Dec. 16, 1981 Bulletin Today p. 1 “FM Cites Games’ Goal of Unity

Sport as Aid to Nation-Building: National Integration

Another important aspect of sport to politics is that it act as a catalysis in nation building. In 1980’s, the Philippines began to



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experience the symptoms of an economic decay. Poverty is pulling the country down with deteriorating trade, rising inflation, growing balance of payment deficit, and the accumulation of big external debt (Solon & Floro, p. 14). In President Marcos opening remarks in 1981 Manila SEA Games he called on the Filipino for interest, development and participation in sports as a “national investment.” That sport is paramount in nation building, particularly addressing one social problem that beset the nation and that is juvenile delinquency. He explained how sports will be of good use in battling such social problem. Marcos reiterated the following:

“A motivation can be developed by active demonstration of how easy it is to engage in sports and how it is to be strong, healthy--- *mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body)--- and how rewarding it is to both mentally alert and physically strong. We found out that 60 per cent of crimes in urban areas are caused by leisure time in the hands of young men and women who are idle. It is time to restore sports value for its own sake, for the pleasure it gives both participant and spectators, for the glimpse the athletes gives us of the heights the human body and the human spirit can reach, for the assurance competition gives us that man can still value honor more than material wealth. Symbolize the sense of unity that we seek to foster among our diverse people... let them help bring together our plural societies in an endeavor that transcends barriers or race, politics, language or religion” (Bulletin Today, Dec. 5, 1981, p. 12).

CONCLUSIONS

Sport in relation to politics are often times neglected and given little attention. The Manila 1981 Southeast Asian Games or also known as the 11th SEA Games was used as lens in understanding Martial Law and the program of the New Society or Bagong Lipunan.

Moreover, the study correlated the relationship of sports and politics in both national and international level. Sports indeed offers a powerful prism through which national identity retracted and helps in building an image of a state and the decisive role it wanted to play in international arena. Aside from this, sport can also be used as a tool for nation-building and integration into the political mainstream that is-- the building of a “New Society” or “Bagong Lipunan.”

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