

## VIEWPOINT

# Spotting an Olympic champion



Under-15 athletes who competed in a triathlon in Port Dickson recently.

**+ GREAT POTENTIAL:** Budding athletes need parental, government and private sector support

**W**ILL our Olympic champion come from this motley crew of young boys and girls? Will they bring us the elusive gold medal glory on the world stage? There could very well be diamonds in the rough here.

How often have we seen our athletes falter at the last hurdle? There are exceptions, of course. But we need to produce potential champions all year round, in all kinds of sports. They may not be as physically endowed as some of their international opponents, but this is no stumbling block. Our Olympic bronze cycling medallist Azizulhasni Awang is a pint-sized rocketman,

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PAHITMANIS



AHMAD A TALIB

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In recent years, our boys and girls have been showing signs of excellence. If you take a ride to Putrajaya on weekends, you may just find a candidate who can compete in the international arena in a few years time. These boys and girls are from the Triathlon Tri-Amateur Club, run by individuals committed to sports excellence. Parents are among the club's strongest supporters.

Putrajaya Perdana Bhd is the club's corporate sponsor. Members are thankful that the company has made a ringgit-for-ringgit pledge in support of their club.

Coach Peter Lau, one of the most

dedicated local sports gurus, said: "We don't just help produce athletes. We help these children build character and boost their confidence."

"To put it simply, we are building blocks for the sports of triathlon in the years to come."

I also met Lee Chun Fai, a club stalwart. Lee said: "Parents are spending weekends with the children from various backgrounds to train and have fun together."

"Triathlon is very effective to develop their physical fitness and mental strength."

Apparently, these teen athletes are just as driven as their parents and coaches. Apart from meeting like-minded friends on most weekends, they are also inspired by the achievements of current athletes.

Parental support could very well be the decider for some of these boys and girls. How come, you may ask.

One parent I know has dedicated his life around his children's academic, sporting and musical pursuits. Weekends revolve around cycling and ballet training, saxophone and violin classes and then they are off to the kampung for some back-to-the-roots engagements.

Parents like these are the unsung heroes of our sports champions. A father I met a few days ago, A. Rahim Salleh, said: "Malaysian sports has a bright future. More young people are into sports and competing in numerous events. Both locally and in the region."

"With parents' participation and encouragement, we have a strong base to seek international excellence. But at the same time, we need the government's and private sector's support."

"Sports equipment is not cheap. Technology and new materials have made them essential for our athletes. I'm optimistic our boys and girls can do well. I've met many parents. We are hopeful that a sports-friendly tax structure could be put in place. Just look at a pair of a reasonably good jogging shoes — they cost no less than RM350 a pair!"

I asked the parents how they motivated their children. They said there's no simple formula but providing support is important, besides being there for them if they should fall or falter.

Good luck boys and girls! Some of you will be worthy champions and achievers, God willing!

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Primary and secondary school triathlon athletes taking a break from training. Is there a budding Olympic champion here?