Sports medicine in Thailand

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History

Sports medicine in Thailand was born in 1965 during preparations for hosting the 5th Asian Games. A subcommittee was formed with the medical committee of the Games to deal with the health and fitness of our athletes, with **Professor Ouay Ketusinh** in charge of the examination and testing*.

He was sent on a study tour of sports medicine and science institutions in Japan, USA, UK, Sweden, Denmark and West Germany. On his return he submitted a report recommending that a permanent body should be established to deal with medical and scientific aspects of sports. The 5th Asian Games organizing committee approved his idea and called the **Sports Science Centre** into existence with Prof. Ketusinh as honorary director. For some time it was a one man affair. He borrowed instruments and a few assistants in his university department helped on a voluntary basis. In April 1966, a young doctor and a nurse were recruited and the Centre became a division of the **Sports Organisation of Thailand** (now the **Sports Authority of Thailand**). During the 5th Asian Games in December 1966, with the personal help of Prof. Dr Harald Mellerowicz of the Institut für Leistungsmedizin of West Berlin, we were able to test the physical fitness of some 200 athletes from the participating countries. That event was a turning point in our

* Prof. Ouay Ketusinh was at that time the head of the Department of Pharmacology, Siriraj Medical School, Bangkok. After his retirement in 1967 he became the first full time Director of the Sports Science Centre. In 1972 he was appointed permanent special adviser to the Sports Science Centre and has continued to play a significant role in sports medicine in Thailand.

In 1988 at the age of 80, he was unanimously titled 'Father of Sports Medicine in Thailand' by the Sports Medicine Association of Thailand.

Treadmill and cycle performance assessment facilities at Hua Maak Sports Medicine Centre in Thailand.

history when science and medicine began to play a significant role in the practice of sport.

Just after these 5th Asian Games the **Sports Science Centre (SSC)** moved from the Siriraj Medical School to new quarters in the national stadium.

Its activities during the first year were mainly physical fitness tests and research into sports physiology, which were not very successful due to lack of both medical interest and the athletes' cooperation. Although it was generally known that the Centre had been

Above and left; the main entrance to the Centre – with below the gymnastes hall and Landing pit.

Outdoor swimming facilities and volleyball court

established to help them, the athletes were strangely reluctant to make use of the services because of their fears that examinations might find reasons for disqualification. To overcome this difficulty we included a clinical section in the Centre from 1968 to give first aid and primary treatment of sports injuries including simple physical therapy. This quickly yielded the desired results as the athletes gained confidence in, and understanding of, the activities of the Centre. The number of athletes having physical fitness tests increased from 291 in 1968 to 674 in 1969, and to more than 2000 in 1980. The clinical section also improved rapidly since the radiography unit was installed in 1969. The SSC remained for ten years in the National Stadium before moving to its present quarters in the Hua Maak complex, headquarters also of the Sports Authority of Thailand.

The Hua Maak Stadium Complex was built on the eastern side of the city to house an indoor stadium and sports hall, an outdoor competition pool, archery range, shooting range, velodrome and in- and out-door training facilities, together with a hostel. It houses the Sports Science Centre.

Current sports medicine facilities at the main National Stadium (Sanaam Keelah, Rama I Road) comprise a sports injuries clinic and physical performance training centre under the control of the Department of Physical Education of the Ministry of Education. Sports injuries are managed by orthopaedic consultants on a part-time basis along with two full-time physiotherapists.

The Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) comes under the policy control of a Minister attached to the Prime Minister's office. The Board of Administrative Direction is appointed by the Cabinet for a tenure of two years. SAT consists of six divisions, responsible respectively for administration, finance, services, sports promotion, training and coaching and research. They cooperate with the sports governing bodies in both financial and technical preparation for international Games (SE Asian, Asian, Olympic and world championships). SAT receives a total budget from central government of 379.7M Baht (approx. £8.8m/US\$15M), of which 9.8M Baht (£229,000/US\$393,000) are allocated to the Sports Science Centre.

The director of the SSC is directly responsible to the governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand. In sports science, it is understood that the SSC works in conjunction with the Olympic Committee of Thailand and all the sports governing bodies. Its work covers all levels from the mass

participant through to the elite. SSC staff also fulfil team physician functions at national and international competitions.

In sports medicine education, the SSC collaborates closely with the Sports Medicine Association of Thailand in organizing, *inter alia*, biannual seminars for medical doctors all over the country (including the basic FIMS courses) and health promotion through sports among people from all walks of life. Through its team doctor functions, the SSC has brought an increasing number of clinicians into the field of sports medicine and this includes recruitment through its university programmes.

The SSC's test protocols comprise medical check-ups, including biochemical studies and physical performance tests such as omnikinetic muscle testing, tests of speed, agility, balance and response time as well as determination of aerobic and anaerobic capacities.

The SSC's clinical back-up consists of physical therapy and dental services. The staff consists of four doctors, one dentist, two physiotherapists, five nurses, five scientists, seven technicians and eight officials, all appointed by the governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand.

The Sports Authority has nine regional sports science centres at: Chiang Mai, Songkhla, Ubon Rachathani, Phitsanuloke, Phuket, Lopburi, Rachaburi, Chantaburi and Khon Kaen. Each branch has a director answerable to the director of the central SSC, with supporting technical and scientific staff. The testing policy is to encourage the population to participate in sports and active recreation in order to create a strong and healthy body. The director of the national SSC regularly visits each regional centre.

Another major feature is the growing number of exercise parks, attractively set in beautiful country and linked with a regional SSC. Outstanding examples are seen at Chiang Mai, Phuket, Chantaburi and Khon Kaen.

Sports medicine education

Sports medicine had to seek its popularity through seminars, congresses, courses and lectures in educational institutions. The most successful sports medical education in our country until now has been the basic sports medicine under the patronage of FIMS (International Federation of Sports Medicine). The first course was held in 1972 and four experts from the UK (Dr J.G.P. Williams and Dr P.N. Sperry) and West Germany (Prof. H. Mellerowicz and Dr E.D. Lübs) gave 40

Physiological assessment

hours of lectures in one week. This course was received with great enthusiasm from the doctors in various medical fields from all parts of the country. Ninety doctors had successfully passed the course examination and received a FIMS diploma. With this achievement, they were given permission by the Medical Council of Thailand to use the title 'Sports Doctor' following their MD. Since then similar courses have been organized biennially up to the eighth course in 1988. Thus we have already some 700 sports doctors for our population of 55 million.

The first IOC Olympic Solidarity Sports Medicine Course in Thailand was successfully completed in Bangkok in April 1990, with the participation of 45 Thai doctors and representatives of Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Myanmar (Burma) and Pakistan.

All our eight medical schools have gradually increased their interest in sports medicine. Most have already brought it into their current curriculum, for periods ranging from just one-three hours introduction in some up to a full subject of two credits in the army medical school. Three medical schools have already set up a sports medicine unit in their existing departments of orthopaedics and/or physiotherapy and rehabilitation. They are, unfortunately, dealing more with sports traumatology than physiology.

However, these activities are closely coordinated with the Sports Science

The main indoor area at the Hua Maak Stadium Complex

Centre since most of the lectures have been given by the medical personnel of the SSC while athletes with complicated injuries who come to the SSC are sent to the academic units for further management.

Another successful sports medicine education programme is for paramedics, physical educators and sports coaches. Various aspects of sports medicine have been taught in the nursing schools and faculties of PE, physical therapy and medical sciences at every level of education up to doctor degree. A Masters degree programme in the physiology of exercise, was set up four years ago at Mahidol University, and has already produced five graduates a year since 1987. For sports coaches, specific three day courses have been organized twice yearly since 1978. The curriculum comprises basic sports physiology, sports traumatology and selected topics such as nutrition, age, sex, climate and doping.

Organizations of sports medicine and sports doctors

The development of sports medicine in Thailand has run parallel to that of the SSC. Actually the former may be regarded as an outgrowth of the latter, and the two have remained closely connected. In 1978 the inaugural general meeting of the **Sports Medicine Association of Thailand** was held in the new premises of the SSC. Prof. Ouay Ketusingh was elected president

and Dr Charoentasn Chintanaseri, the director of the SSC (*and a Regional Corresponding Editor of BJSM - Ed.*) was elected secretary-general. The first big task of the Association was to organize the 2nd Asian Congress of Sports Medicine in connection with the 8th Asian Games in Bangkok in 1978, at which more than 400 participants from many countries in Asia and some from Europe, America and Africa were registered. Thereafter, the Association has worked side by side with the SSC in almost all aspects of sports medicine. Their main research included the influence of climate on physical performance and physical fitness tests in the elderly. In terms of health promotion through sports, they have produced a considerable number of leaflets and books as well as video tapes and TV spots about 'sports for health' for public distribution. Many 'health promotion through sports' programmes have been initiated and have gained popularity throughout the country. Amongst the leading activities are sponsored running, fitness parks and the National Sports Performances Pin.

The **Sports Medicine Association of Thailand** was founded in 1978 and now has 336 members (276 medical doctors and 60 paramedics and physical educators as associate members). It is recognized by the government as representative of the country and affiliated to FIMS. Its activities include:

- Promotion of health through sports
- Provision of doctors for sports events and teams
- Sports medicine research etc.

It has an active education programme for medical doctors, including a bi-annual sports medicine course and an annual seminar.

Recognition of Thailand's long-standing commitment to sports medicine programmes, including eight FIMS basic courses, was seen in Dr Chintanaseri's appointment to the FIMS education commission from 1984-1990.

The Olympic committee of Thailand, by law and international constitutions, is an independent body consisting mainly of sports associations. A member's tenure of office is four years between elections. The Thai national Olympic committee represents the country in the international federations, such as the IOC, Olympic committee of Asia and SE Asian Sports Federation. The Thai OC takes part in each games by sending athletes with the cooperation of the individual sports associations concerned.

Regarding high level competitive sports, the Thai National Olympic

Committee has regularly made use of the SSC and the Sports Medicine Association in preparing athletes for the South-East Asian, Asian and Olympic games. Only athletes who have passed the medical examination and fitness tests carried out by the centre are qualified to represent the nation. Recently a new body dealing with sports medicine has been founded - the **Subcommittee for Sports Medicine and Sports Science** - of the Thailand Athletes Preparatory Board (TAPBO), appointed by the Cabinet in May 1989. This subcommittee is chaired by the director of the SSC who is also the vice president of the **Sports Medicine Association of Thailand**. Twenty-three experts in fields related to sports medicine, such as physiology, biochemistry, nutrition, psychology, orthopaedics and physical medicine, have been appointed as members.

Recent topics and problems

A leadership training programme is needed in the promotion of sports for health, since the tremendous increase in participation in the past decade has given rise to many questions concerning quality. After four five-day sports for health leadership courses had been successfully organized by the SSC in 1988, follow-up has shown improvement in the quality of sports for health practice as well as increased participation.

Considering this activity to be an effective measure to promote the health of the population, the Ministry of Public Health granted the **Sports Science Centre** full financial support to organize four such courses within the next year. It is expected that more than half the participants will be medical personnel whose responsibilities include community health promotion.

In competitive sports, the **Sports Medicine and Sports Science-Subcommittee** of TAPBO, which is based in the SSC, has appointed six working groups headed by leading authorities in each field as follows:

- Health care and medical treatment
- Physical fitness
- Nutrition
- Drugs and chemical (doping control)
- Psychology
- Research.

With these initiatives we are looking forward to seeing dramatic improvements in the performance of our athletes in international competitions in the near future.