

Supporting the Laos' Middle Distance Athletic Squad for Arafura Games 2011



Background Information

After the completion of the games in 2009 in Vientiane, support for sports development in Lao has practically ground to a halt. Internationally funded coaches (both Lao and foreign) that previously provided structured programs for Lao athletes training for the games have returned to their home countries or stopped coaching due to the discontinuation of funding. Sports facilities built for the games have also started to deteriorate as maintenance costs can no longer be met. As a result several athletes who were able to compete at an elite level at the SEA Games are now in a state of limbo, with no facilities, coaches or competitions and hence little motivation to continue pursuing their sporting dreams.

However, the Laos' Middle Distance Athletic Squad is an extremely dedicated group of athletes. The squad consists of 4 girls and 6 boys. Disciplines range from 800m to 10km. All 10 athletes are aged in between 15 and 24 years. The squad is currently being coached by Spanish marathon runner Alex Van der Meer and Lao national Sirivanh Ketavong. Sirivanh is a dual Olympian who was once described as 'the best female distance runner in Laos'. She has been coaching Laotian athletes for a number of years. Alex began voluntarily working with the Lao athletes after the completion of the SEA Games. Alex and Sirivanh are assisted by Australian sprinter, Emma Zalzman who began running with the squad in March.

Despite limited facilities and the few competitions in own country, all athletes have continued training a minimum of 5 times a week, with some training up to 8 times a week. During the last national track and field championships athletes 7 of these 10 athletes won a total of 17 medals together. Training 8 times a week is a challenging task for any athlete, let alone when there is no apparent purpose for the training.



Alex, Ya and Tom at Training

Suok and Emma at training

Lao Athletes Victorious in Angkor Wat

For this reason, Alex and Emma looked for sponsors to take the squad to the Angkor Wat International Half Marathon which was held in Cambodia on December 5th, 2010. After raising more than \$4000, 7 athletes travelled to Cambodia. The race was a phenomenal success. Lao athletes came 1st and 4th in the Men's 10km race and 1st, 3rd, 5th, 6th and 8th in the women's 10km race against strong international competition. A new 10km road race national record was set by Suok Malivan, who at just 19 years old won the 10km convincingly. In addition to this, many athletes gained an invaluable experience by travelling outside their own region for the first time. The majority of athletes had never travelled on a plane and were challenged to use the English they had learnt at school for the first time.



Ya (19) running to Victory in the 10km



The complete squad and coaches



Lao girls run for Athletics Essendon in Angkor Wat

The Arafura Games 2011

The Arafura Games is the leading international sporting competition for emerging athletes from the Asia Pacific region. Held every two years in Darwin, the capital of Australia's Northern Territory, the Arafura Games features many different sporting disciplines including athletics. The event is as much about cultural integration as the sports themselves, with the games being billed as a 'meeting of sporting neighbours'. The next Arafura Games will be held between 7-14 May of 2011. It is a great opportunity for some of the athletes of the Lao squad to continue fulfilling their sportive ambitions and become leading sports ambassadors of their country. Therefore Emma and Alex are looking again for donors to allow for 6 athletes to participate in the Arafura Games. Two athletes are expected to participate in the 5.000 meters race, another two will race the 800 meters and the remaining two will represent Laos in the half marathon.

Budget

Travel from Vientiane to Darwin - \$500 per athlete

Australian Visa Cost - \$100 per athlete

Food & Accommodation will be provided by Alex and Emma

Entree fee for the races is provided by the Arafura Games Organization

Therefore $6 \times \$500 = \3000 for 6 athletes

For further Information

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