

Open Letter To The Ghana Hockey Association President, Dr. Ben K.D. Asante
Subject: Restarting It Right
Date: 21st September, 2020

Dear Sir,

On Sunday, we received the President of the Republic, H.E Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in our homes once more for his 17th address to the nation on Covid-19. He announced the lifting of ban on contact sports of which includes hockey. This announcement brought joy to our hearts because the game we love is finally returning after several months of suspension as a result of the pandemic.

The sports news, both in print and on electronic media in Ghana has been dominated by football even though Covid-19 has barred all form of contact sports.

For an entity (Ball and Stick) with the sole aim of promoting field hockey, our fear is that, the country is on the verge of experiencing a plummeted interest in the game courtesy the silent of the sport's governing body (GHA) and its affiliates. This development undermines global effort in growing the game.

In order to overturn grim predictions, tailored measures ought to be deployed using Covid-19 as springboard. Leadership must be committed to bringing situations under its control to avoid the flare-up of conditions that pertains currently and of which demands urgent modifications.

So what is going on in the Ghana Hockey Community?

Martin Luther King Jr. once said "the silence of the good people is more dangerous than the brutality of the bad people". When a problem exists, there are two approaches in handling it. The first approach is to ignore it, it then multiplies in the background and weakens the foundation and finally collapses the established. The second approach is to appreciate the problem, discuss it and deal with it appropriately.

Under this era of Covid-19, increased testing is good since it provides a clearer picture of how much effort is required in fighting the virus but at the same time, it makes a country or government look bad. Speaking about these issues is likely to make the hockey community look bad but on the other side of the coin, it will open up discussions for pragmatic steps to be taken in making the community a pleasant one.

Hockey is a team sports with international dimension. Club competitions are not as high as inter-nations tournaments. For this reason, things must be done or seen in a way that depicts the international bearings of the sport. As concerned citizens in the hockey community, we owe it as a duty to safeguard the community that sustains our being to some extent. There's no debate over whether the mentioned (below) are true since they are easily seen upon a visit to the stadium. We look forward to a critical analysis of the following and the actions needed taken thereof, so in the near future, hockey can dominate the news through satisfactory commentaries from all stakeholders.

- i. Spectator Seat: The very first thing your eyes will glance at which of course will attract a gaze, the moment you enter through the gates of the Theodosia Okoh National Hockey Stadium is the spectator seats, located, east of the stadium which has its back facing the Accra Tema station bus terminal. The dirty and fading look of the seats makes it unappealing for hockey lovers and prospective enthusiasts should promoters like ourselves intensify marketing tactics to attract. Again, the weather condition we have as Africans demands the provision of sunshade at all seating areas for the instances of sweltering afternoons. Provisions must be made to increase the seat capacity for spectators. It is to be envisioned that, hockey following will grow and therefore becoming proactive is in its right direction.
- ii. Washroom: We are particularly concerned about a facility like the washroom in public places. You are likely to writhe to escape shame unless you act expeditiously and locate a public facility outside the hockey stadium if you are to visit the washroom and this is because the washrooms are not in good shape so the place is locked up. The male washroom on the second floor is the only one that is mostly opened and it is shared by both gender. I do not think that, this will happen if a maintenance culture is in place.
- iii. Use of technology: Underscoring the importance of technology in an ever changing world is the most positive thing to do. If umpires and technical officials are of interest to fit into international appointments and recognition, the use of radios is one critical thing worth introducing, edged up and made a standard operating practise by the Ghana Hockey Association. Can we introduce video umpiring too?

Scoreboard is also one use of technology that must be ardently ensured it is operational, for the purpose of convenience and to assist both playing body and spectators in appreciating statistics (current quarter, number of goals scored, time countdown) for the making of

informed decisions. What exist now doesn't serve the complete purpose and therefore a replacement is in order.

There is one seemingly simple solution: appreciate the impact of technology and allow it to run its course.

- iv. Playing Body: Amid all of the fears about talking to reality, the maintenance of a semblance of enthusiasm in the few is our driving force. Hopes are that, the enthusiasm will peak back and be at their most intense level when things are done differently in the interest for growth and standardization. Applying the most stringent control to this particular issue and presenting it in a plain and unambiguous manner to all concern is a sure way to go.
- a. Team Officials: Just a few dress properly to sit at the bench when their team is playing. Many come onto the pitch wearing slippers and dresses in a manner that robs away the seriousness of the game.
 - b. Player Identification: Most players wear jerseys with faded numbers, and others come with totally erased numbers on both the top and that of the shorts or skirt. Players do not have their names behind their jerseys.
 - c. Protective Gear: A dangerous but trending act critically observed is the **not** wearing of shin-guard, mouth guard for general play and face mask during penalty corners. In other jurisdiction, reinforced hand gloves are sometimes worn for absolute safety during penalty corners.
 - d. Attack On Officials: A campaign worth waging by the Association is the attack on officials especially during and after a playing session. Some coaches and team mangers on the bench verbally attack table officials and umpires when they disagree to decisions made by umpires. In other frequent cases, players charge on umpires when verdicts are against them. There are lots of moving pieces to why this happens and we will discuss them further in the future. With cautious optimism, we feel this will not be that challenging to address immediately.

- e. **Water Bottle:** In efforts to suppressing Covid-19 surge within the hockey community and those outside it, the Association must ensure that, players are provided with water bottles so they discontinue the use of sachet water that generally litters and makes the bench area bad for camera.
- f. **Publicity:** The Association must consciously market the game through the teams by encouraging players to use social media as a momentous platform to draw the attention of the public on the game and also on themselves. There is the likelihood of players being attracted to a brand because of their popularity and to be engaged as its ambassador.
- v. **Side Attraction:** Beyond the game either as a player, official, fan or visitor, something must magnetize you to the stadium especially since major events occurs on Saturdays (workers in mind). Questions that may require considerations; To The -
 - a. **Player:** Will I be able to offer or extract the needed support for my advancement?
 - b. **Parent-Player:** Is the stadium child friendly so I can bring my wards to enjoy the game and even spark a craving in them?
 - c. **Fan:** Are the stakes in the tournament so high that, my team is poised on improving week after week, so I can enjoy skillful play for bragging right?
 - d. **Visitor:** Is the stadium environment advantageous enough to build goodwill and better friendships?

We will end here and continue another time as grace carries us. Our contribution in supporting the growth of the game by informing when possible, performing what is necessary and appearing where needed. It is our wish that, you will journey on a race to providing solutions to the above mentioned.

We wish you well.

Ball and Stick
Hockey Enthusiasts/ Promoters