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The Department Saddened by the Sale of BFN Celtic:

The Free State Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation (DSACR) is saddened by the news about the sale of Bloemfontein Celtics. The news has not only dampened the spirit of the soccer loving and passionate supporters of Bloemfontein Celtic but also the Free State Provincial Government as well.

While Bloemfontein Celtic is a private enterprise, the management of which government cannot interfere with, the Free State Provincial Government, through DSACR, strived to ensure the success of the club as the pride of the Free State province.

Cognizant of the **sport tourism value of sport in general and soccer in particular**, the provincial government invested considerably in Bloemfontein Celtic, Free State Stars and soccer generally. Just in the last Financial Year an amount of **R5 million** was spent in supporting the following professional sport clubs: Bloemfontein Celtic, Free State Stars, Free State Cheetahs, Free State Knights as well as Netball Federation and Boxing in a Bubble Tournament. This is indicative of the commitment of this government towards sport promotion in our province.

Following these unfortunate and very sad developments around the sale of Bloemfontein Celtic questions have arisen regarding the role of government in as far as the possibility of ensuring the retention of the club in Bloemfontein is concerned. The Department would like to emphasize that, as already alluded above, interference in the affairs of private football entities such Bloemfontein Celtic could not have been possible even if the Free State Provincial Government had desired to.

The Department would however want to put it on record that everything possible has been, and continues to be done, on our side to ensure the thriving of sport in general and soccer in particular in our province. The following are some of the investments injected in soccer at a professional level in the province:

- 1) An **annual financial injection of R1 million** in Celtic as well as same amount for Free State Stars.
- 2) **Financial support during various tournaments** whenever reaching the final stages to both teams. Transportation costs for ferrying supporters to these final matches were borne out by the Department to ensure that there is maximum support for the teams at these matches.
- 3) Periodic **financial support to Mangaung United** during their various campaigns in the Glad Africa Championships or Play-Offs.
- 4) The **Free State Sport Science Institute sport science services** have been availed to these clubs as part of efforts to ensure their high level of participation at professional level.
- 5) **Dr Rantlhai Molemela stadium** in Mangaung was upgraded to the tune of about **R414 million** to ensure that Celtic has playing ground of high standard.
- 6) **Fezile Dabi stadium in Parys** has been built to the tune of R91 million for Phase 1 and R81 million for Phase 2 of construction.
- 7) **Charles Mopeli stadium** in Phuthaditjhaba is earmarked for a multi-million Rands total revamp to upgrade it to a soccer/sport facility of high caliber. The work has started already at this stadium.

The above efforts have been undertaken to ensure that soccer in particular is developed in our province even at a professional level even though **the primary mandate of government is grassroots or community sport development**. Support to professional sport clubs, which are private enterprises as stated already, is a cherry on top though an important intervention. This support to professional sport bodies is despite very serious financial constraints that the Department has faced over the years.

The Department will continue to be actively involved at community level in terms of promotion of sport in general and soccer. Budgetary limitations are a reality that constrain our ability to do as much as we desire to. Some of the programmes being

implemented annually to promote sport and soccer particularly include the following, amongst many others:

- 1) **Distribution of sport equipment and attire** to community and school sport clubs. In the last Financial Year only, the Department delivered sport equipment and attire to 40 identified community sport clubs and six (6) sport Hubs to the value of **R3 million**.
- 2) **Community access to sport facilities** like District High Performance Centres, Local Talent Development Centres as well as the Sport Science Institute which form part of the Sport Development Continuum.
- 3) **Implementation of Mass Sport Participation programmes** from local to district and provincial level. Amongst these sport programmes are the multi-coded sport tournament such as O.R Tambo Games, Rural Sport Development Games.
- 4) Staging of **Football Referee training** and other capacitation programme for participants.

In conclusion, the Department calls upon the private sector to play an active and meaningful role in a quest to ensure that sport, and soccer particularly, thrive in our province. Government cannot undertake this task alone with all the competing priorities. The Free State is unfortunately one of those small and rural provinces with a small fiscus. However, despite this limitation, the province had succeeded over the years to ensure presence at professional league level through two soccer clubs. History has unfortunately come to show that this could not be sustained only with support from government.

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