Course aims to produce qualified professionals to prop sports industry

By LIN XIN YI

THOSE who still feel that sports and studies do not gel will be made to think again, after Nanyang Technological University (NTU) announced the introduction of a Bachelor of Science in Sport Science and Management degree yesterday.

The four-year, direct-honours programme is the first of its kind in the Republic. It aims to produce qualified professionals to support the growth of the sports industry here.

The Singapore sports industry is expected to contribute $2 billion to the country’s gross domestic product by 2015 and bring employment in that sector to 20,000, up from the current 14,000.

With Singapore to host the inaugural Asian Youth Games this year and the first Youth Olympic Games next year, NTU’s senior associate provost, Professor Er Meng Hwa, believes that the introduction of this degree could not have been better timed.

He says: “We’re pleased to launch this degree to nurture professionals in sport science and management at a time when there is unparalleled national interest in sports.”

Singapore has just come off one of the most successful years in its sporting history.

The women’s table tennis team of Li Jiawei, Wang Yuegu and Feng Tianwei won a silver at last year’s Beijing Olympics, ending the country’s 48-year wait for a second Olympic medal.

At the same Games, Tao Li became the Republic’s first Olympic swimming finalist.

There were plaudits too for teenage Yip Pin Xiу, who became the country’s first Paralympics gold medallist, and bowler Jasmine Yeong-Nathan, Singapore’s first World Cup champion.

In addition, the country staged several high-profile international events – golf’s HSBC Women’s Champions tournament and Barclays Singapore Open, a Formula One race (the sport’s first night race) and sailing’s Volvo Ocean Race.

The Singapore Sports School’s director of sports, Dr Irwin Seet, agrees with Prof Er that the launch is timely.

He says: “There is an increasing market for well-trained graduates in areas like sports marketing and sports science.

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STUDENTS KEEN ON SPORTS DEGREE

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They will then specialise in either sport science or sport management, and will also be exposed to an internship programme.

For national paddler Zena Sim, the course is something she will consider enrolling in once she has completed her Auckland University of Technology diploma programme in Sports Management & Exercise Science.

She says the 18-year-old: “In the past, you would probably have to go overseas to pursue a degree like this.

“Now, it’s much better for us because we have the option of doing that here.”

Applications are open until Feb 18 for students with polytechnic diplomas, and Apr 1 for A-level students.

Classes will begin in August for the first cohort of 40 students.

Already, the sporting fraternity is looking forward to their graduation.

Oon Jin Teik, the Singapore Sports Council’s chief executive officer, says: “We need a steady supply of manpower with the right skill sets and competencies to address the needs of the sports industry... NTU’s launch of the sports degree is well-aligned with the advancement in Singapore sports.”

Singapore Sailing president Low Tee Ping adds that the specialised degree augurs well for the future as it sets the stage for the future core of sports administrators.

Prof Michael Chia, who is overseeing the programme, expects the places for the first cohort to fill up fast.

He says: “This being the only sports degree programme in Singapore, admission is likely to be competitive.”

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