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Harris needs to move quickly

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BY ANDI THORNHILL | WED, OCTOBER 03, 2012 - 12:00 AM

He craved it and now he's got it.

The ball is now in the court of new Barbados Football Association (BFA) president, Randy Harris, to make a big difference in the fortunes of the game he loves so passionately.

He won by a comfortable margin at the annual general meeting and that was the surest indication that he has massive support and goodwill as he takes the reins of an organization he has been part of since 1977.

Harris should know the workings of the BFA inside out and should use that knowledge to place football on a more fertile footing.

He should have more clout and leverage now to move his revolution at full pace.

There's no more time to lose even though I imagine that Harris will be entitled to a grace period as did those who preceded him in the top post.

He has a strong mandate and plenty to accomplish. Much has been given, much will be expected.

Harris is very affable, but at the end of the day, he will be judged on what was achieved under his guidance and not his personality.

I think he must act quickly to improve the training facility at Wildey. There are no changing rooms, bathrooms or running water, so it is a white elephant, as you can't make much use of it in its current state?

This FIFA Goal Project has fallen way below what is required and is still a laughingstock after over ten years of construction.

There is a need to foster more cordial relations with organizations like the Brewster Trust which has proven through its development programmes for youth that it has good intentions for the growth of the sport.

We have to make a very special effort to encourage these entities especially when there's no cost to the association.

The youth tournaments need to be overhauled and re-examined in terms of their organization and, more important, the support of sponsors has to be justified.

We have heard too many stories of games not starting on time, perennial shortage of referees and other officials to ensure the smooth running of tournaments.

We have to be careful that we don't discourage the youngsters or tempt their parents to move them to another sport because of dissatisfaction with the lack of proper organization.

It is necessary to have youth tournaments run with the same vision and efficiency as when Englishman Graham Adams introduced the mini league in the mid-1960s.

It was set up to be a feeder system for our under-19 and senior national teams. I don't think too many would disagree that as a result of the mini league we produced some of our best national teams of all time during the 1970s.

The Harris-led team must put the wheels back on the wagon urgently.

In a related matter, a way must be found to keep our national teams practising all year round and wherever possible organize more internationals for the teams so that they won't continue to be under-prepared for major tournaments.

If it is insufficient funding that might be one of the biggest obstacles, the BFA should challenge itself to devise tangible fundraising methods instead of sitting back and playing dead or just waiting for a fairy godfather to show up bearing gifts.

Proactive marketing is a must even though I believe that football, as the biggest mass sport in the country, merits some special attention.

Where successive Governments have failed to recognize this, they can correct their mistake and commit more funds to assist in its development.

I think there's also a need to work much more closely with the private academies to see how best the association can facilitate them in their efforts to forge stronger ties with international colleges and universities that might want to offer scholarships or try-outs for some of our emerging stars.

The heads of the academies are making a sterling effort and the BFA must join hands with them and seek opportunities which aren't available at home.

But what about exploring the possibility of partnering with the Cave Hill Campus to set up a programme similar to that of cricket where well-rounded individuals can stay here and study while developing their football?

The leadership of the university must see that it's time to diversify its sporting interests in a meaningful, sustained way if it is to serve the needs of all the masses and not just some.

Perhaps Harris' biggest dream is to have a professional league in Barbados. He is not short on will but he will have to convince all stakeholders that it can happen.

The dream weaver must instil a sense of purpose amongst all ranks to ensure his dreams have a great chance of coming true.

• *Andi Thornhill is an award-winning free-lance sports journalist.*

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