

Olympians' group rejects name change

Written by Taipei Times

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Any unilateral change to the name of the Taiwanese national team for the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics would only hurt Taiwan and could cost the nation its membership in the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Chinese Taipei Olympians Association said yesterday.

The association of Taiwanese Olympic medalists and former participants issued an official statement in response to a proposed referendum that would change the name of the national team from "Chinese Taipei" to "Taiwan."

Olympic Charter Article 30, section 2 states: "The name of a [national Olympic committee] NOC must reflect the territorial extent and tradition of its country and shall be subject to the approval of the IOC Executive Board," the association said.

"The Constitution states that our official title is the Republic of China and the country's territory includes Taiwan proper, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu," the association said. "The title 'Chinese Taipei' is the result of an agreement that was reached on March 23, 1981, between Taiwan's Olympic committee and the IOC in Lausanne [Switzerland], and both the title of the national team and the flag representing the team have been approved and recognized by the IOC ever since."

Taiwanese athletes have used "Chinese Taipei" to participate in various international competitions and people around the world equated Taiwan with "Chinese Taipei" because of its athletes' extraordinary achievements, the association said, adding that international media nevertheless report that the athletes are from Taiwan.

"It takes more than 10 years for athletes to train to compete in international competitions. If the IOC-approved name of Taiwan's national sports team is changed unilaterally, it would only cause trouble and even cost us our membership in the IOC," the association said.

"Athletes would also lose the opportunity to compete internationally," it said, adding that "Chinese Taipei" is an imperfect but acceptable option.

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Meanwhile, the association granted former Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee (CTOC) chairman Thomas Tsai (蔡其昌) the title of honorary Olympian for successfully managing Taiwan's national teams at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2012 London Olympics.

Commenting on the name-change referendum, Tsai said that Taiwan participated in the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, 1964 Tokyo Olympics, 1968 Mexico City Olympics and 1972 Munich Olympics using "Taiwan," "Taiwan, ROC" and "Formosa" as its title.

In 1976, the nation was not allowed to compete in the Montreal Olympics and subsequent competitions, he said.

In 1979, the IOC recognized the Chinese Olympic Committee in Beijing and demanded that Taiwan change the title of its team to "Chinese Taipei," adding that Taiwan could neither use its national flag nor its national anthem at the Games.

Because Taiwan refused to concede to such demands, its IOC membership was suspended and it was not invited to participate in the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

The CTOC later filed a lawsuit against the IOC in a Lausanne district court for unilaterally suspending the nation's membership, and the court ruled in favor of Taiwan, Tsai said, adding that the ruling forced then-IOC chairman Juan Antonio Samaranch to renegotiate the terms of participation with Taiwan in 1981.

"The IOC recognized Taiwan as a regional member, not a national member," he said. "Based on the Olympics Charter, to become a national member of the IOC, a country has to be either a UN or an International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) member."

"Taiwan is neither a UN member nor an ICRC member," Tsai said. "'Chinese Taipei' is not a perfect name, but at least that is the name stated in our agreement with the IOC, which is valid."

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“If we want to change the name of our sports team, either Taiwan needs to join the UN or we need to change the title of our country,” he said, adding that the IOC would also need to approve the national Olympic committee’s new name.

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