

**The speech of the Free State MEC for Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation,
Mr D A M Kgothule, on the occasion of the launch of the
Metsimaholo Local Talent Development Centre, Sasolburg**

4 June 2011

Programme director
Honourable Minister, Mr Fikile Mbalula
Colleagues
Honoured guests
Ladies and gentlemen
Comrades

We are aware that the identification, development and nurturing of young sports athletes was a privilege that was afforded to a select few during the previous dispensation. Our present government realises the importance of sports as a key factor in ensuring nation building and social cohesion.

Many of our sports legends are products of years of training and guidance and most of them were identified as talented individuals from an early age. It should be our concern that many young people in our communities are not able to develop their talents be it in sports, the arts, education or any other field because there are no programmes in place to identify and nurture them.

The launch today of the Metsimaholo Local Talent Development Centre, here in Sasolburg, is a progressive initiative to ensure that talented young athletes are offered an opportunity to develop their talents and therefore excel in whatever sports activities they are involved in.

For far too long sport in our communities has been underestimated as a means of developing and defining the psyche of our nation. It is important to realise that sport is an integral part of the life of a nation. Sport can be a catalyst for economic development. It is important that we collectively identify the problem areas in our communities that impact negatively on the development of sport, and that we put in place strategies to resuscitate sport in all areas of our province.

As government we are prepared to engage in programmes that ensure and create conditions in which our young can excel in sport. This means providing sports fields, training equipment and facilities and sports equipment.

We have huge social problems in our communities, including drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS and lack of discipline among the youth. Sports is an indispensable means of improving the social fabric of our society, and can make a very real contribution to ensuring our children and the youth lead meaningful lives.

We launch the Local Talent Development Centre (LTDC) against the background of two challenges that are confronting us with regard to sport and recreation as a province. Firstly, we face a challenge of an inability to systematically identify, develop and retain the raw young talent that must eventually represent not only the school or sport club but also the Free State province and, eventually, the country. Secondly, another challenge is

regarding making sport science and injury rehabilitation services more accessible to the broader sport communities in the Free State.

I am sure all of us can relate to these challenges. For example, more often than not, our talented athletes tend to get glory and attention only after they have been identified by other provinces. We can count a number of athletes who are from this province but are shining stars for other provinces. Through the Local Talent Development Centre we aim to address this very factor.

With regard to sport science and injury rehabilitation we have for years only had this service at the Free State Sport Science Institute in Bloemfontein. As such hundreds of athletes who needed these services could not access it. We have now moved towards localising these services across the province. This centre that we are launching today we ensure that those athletes who sustain injuries in the sporting and training fields are able to have those injuries treated immediately and embark on a rehabilitation programme instead of living with those injuries for the rest of their lives.

Through the LTDC programme we have therefore developed a system where talented athletes are identified, developed and nurtured in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. We have also embarked on the establishment of District High Performance Satellites as an integral part of the LTDC with the support of these stakeholders.

These stakeholders include: the Free State Sport Academy; District and Local Municipalities; Provincial Sport Federations; District and Local Sport Councils; Corporate Partners; National as well as International Partners. The LTDC will be guided by a talent development strategy which is informed by a talent development continuum. According to the talent development continuum an athlete will move from a particular lower level to a higher level of development which will include the Free State Sport Science Institute.

An athlete will be able to benefit from a wide range of training programmes within the centre and these include: sport specific skill coaching; sport conditioning and strength training; athlete development and support; capacity building programme as well as team preparation programme. The centre is constituted by a fully equipped sport gymnasium and a multi-purpose training facility.

I have no doubt that if we are to follow this kind of an approach and do sport and recreation the right way this time around, the Free State will not lag behind in terms of medal tallies at various sporting tournaments.

I thank you.