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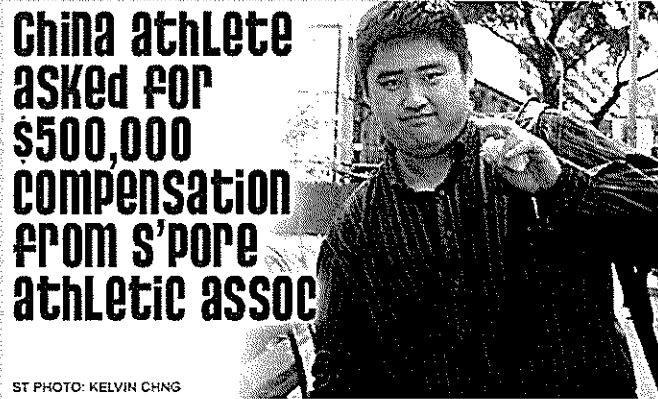
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CHINA ATHLETE ASKED FOR \$500,000 COMPENSATION FROM S'PORE ATHLETIC ASSOC

03 Dec 2009

Was your son in Singapore to undergo full-time training or part-time training?

This was the question posed to Madam Zhang Ping, 54, whose son, China-born athlete Luan Wei, is suing the Singapore Athletic Association (SAA) for breaching promises made in a 1999 agreement.

This question took up more than a third of Madam Zhang's cross-examination by SAA's lawyer, Senior Counsel Giam Chin Toon, yesterday.

One of the alleged promises was that the SAA would provide Mr Luan with English tuition and arrange for him to attend school in Singapore, or train and attend school in China.

It was also agreed he would be provided education up to university level, he and his mother claim. The SAA denies the promises were made and that there was any breach of contract.

Mr Luan, 27, who became a Singapore permanent resident in 2003, claims the SAA did not fulfil its promises made at a meeting between his parents and SAA officials in Shanghai in May 1999. He is claiming damages for loss of opportunities that he suffered in his education and athletic career.

The shot putter, then 16, was one of several Chinese athletes handpicked by the SAA to come to Singapore under the Foreign Sports Talent Scheme. Mr Luan was then studying and training at a sports school in Shanghai and coached by a former Olympic silver medallist.

He and his mother claim he came to Singapore because of the alleged promises. He arrived in Singapore in July 1999.

Four years later, Mr Luan was dropped from the scheme by the SAA after failing to meet targets set by the association.

In June 2005, he started legal action against the association. Madam Zhang had told the court on Tuesday that her son was supposed to train and study in Singapore in line with the agreement.

But the SAA's position is that Mr Luan was invited to come to Singapore for full-time training as it was seeking candidates prepared to become professional full-time athletes. Yesterday, Mr Giam questioned Madam Zhang about court documents dating back to September 2005 in which her lawyers had stated that Mr Luan's training in Singapore was full-time.

He told the interpreter who was translating the English document into Mandarin

for Madam Zhang: "Explain to her that we asked her lawyers to clarify whether the training was part-time or full-time. Your lawyer said full-time. So your lawyer was wrong or you were wrong?" Madam Zhang remained silent. "One of you must be wrong," Mr Giam said.

Pressed for a reply, she said she could have made a "verbal mistake" and that "it could have been an error that occurred" during "our exchanges because of the language."

Madam Zhang had earlier said that she could barely understand English. Mr Giam pointed out that her lawyers had also mentioned in the same reply that Mr Luan trained six days a week and rested on Sundays. He asked: "In other words, full-time training. Agree or disagree?" She agreed. Mr Giam asked: "So your evidence yesterday and today that it was not full-time training is wrong?" No, what I said was not wrong, she replied.

Sounding exasperated, Mr Giam told her to decide whether or not it was full-time training. She said that in a discussion with SAA officials on 15 Apr 1999, they had promised schooling and training for her son. "This was a prerequisite," she said. It was the SAA that suggested that Mr Luan "study and train at the same time".

Mr Giam put to Madam Zhang that "it could not be that he came here to train and study at the same time because he was a full time athlete." She agreed, but added that full-time training was not part of the agreement. But when Mr Luan arrived in Singapore, the SAA put him through full-time training.

Mr Giam then said: "I put it to you that your evidence today is inconsistent with your stand taken in 2005 because it's full-time training, because the agreement was full-time training." She disagreed.

The trial continues today.

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