

**17 September 2007**

## **House Spirit**

There were two events last week that as a spectator I really enjoyed watching. The first, of course, was the annual swimming gala at the Victoria Park Pool on Thursday. The second was the football match between 7A and 5F in the Lower Playground at lunchtime on Friday. This morning, I would like to share with you some of my observations and thoughts on those two activities.

The 'finals' day of the swimming carnival is a colourful occasion with plenty of excitement and anticipation for the events on the programme. Unlike the 'heats' day the previous week, the 'finals' day sees the emergence of flags, drums, banners, umbrellas, balloons and anything else that can make a noise; be it musical or not. While I was looking closely at the fine performances taking place in the swimming pool, I was also really interested in observing what was unfolding in the grandstand. After only a short time, the cheerleaders were taking up their positions at the front of their house, ready for battle with other cheerleaders be they in front, behind or to the side. It is no easy task getting 200 boys to clap, cheer and wave, particularly if they were the two houses sitting in the sun. However, succeed they did.

It soon became apparent to me that Oak and Ginkgo were determined to go head-to-head in the quest to win the 'best cheering team prize', a quest helped by the fact that they were sitting next to each other but hindered by being the two houses in the full sun. As the gala unfolded, the noise from the two houses increased and the cheerleaders worked hard to present the most innovative method of supporting their swim team. The Ginkgo House presentation of the Mexican Wave was highly commendable. But the defining moment came when Oak House erupted in song with their rendition of 'we are, we are, Oak House', a chant that I will not attempt to sing at this assembly! This was the first and only attempt by a House to include singing in their repertoire of cheering techniques and Oak House did it well. What Oak House did not realise at the time was that their bursting into song started at 10.40am, ten minutes after the judging of the 'best cheering team' had come to a close. However, it mattered not as Oak topped Ginkgo in a very close finish that was judged by the Vice Principals and myself.

I also observed that the efforts of all six houses were not simply for the benefit of the judges. The spectators were determined to support the boys in the swimming pool who were giving their all not only for themselves but also for their house. There was loud cheering at the start of each race and as the swimmers, one by one, completed the task. But I wonder if you noticed that the greatest cheering was not for the fastest swimmer or for the closest race. The loudest cheers and most enthusiastic clapping were directed at the boys who were the slowest in the pool; the boys who were struggling to complete 50 metres or in some cases swam 50 metres and then turned for another 50 metres and home. Maybe you wondered, like me, if they would actually get to the other end without disappearing below the surface. But in each case finish they did, and that is we you gave them a big cheer. We wanted to congratulate them for being prepared to compete, for

understanding that they would not win the race and in all probability would come last, but for knowing that by simply getting in the water they were representing their House.

I also mentioned the football match last Friday lunchtime. The temperature was high, the grandstand was full and the spectators were enjoying their lunch boxes. The 'lions den' of the Lower Playground was ready for action. The boys played out an exciting match with great passion and effort from both teams. But once again, I was watching the spectators as well as the game. The lines were clearly drawn; 7A classmates in one half and 5F classmates in the other. This was no setting for a neutral supporter; you were either for 7A or for 5F. You sat with your class; boys in Oak sitting beside Ginkgo, Rosewood next to Pine, Yew beside Banyan. House affiliations were put to one side; you were at the match to support your class.

At last Monday's assembly I spoke about the Scout Movement and in particular the College scout troop, the 10<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong. You may not know that our scout troop is divided into five Patrols: Fox, Hound, Panther, Tiger and Wolf. When a boy first joins the troop he is placed in one of the five Patrols. Each Patrol is under the direction and guidance of a Patrol Leader and Assistant Patrol Leader who are senior boys in the troop. To a new scout, the Patrol is everything. The Patrol will work together during troop activities, often competing with other Patrols. To a scout, the Patrol is his second family while he remains in the troop.

I am sure that you can see the similarities between the College Houses and the Scout Patrols. Both are built on the notion that boys and girls should be placed in teams made up of students of different ages. The reason for this is that teenage boys and girls need to belong. Being a member of the 2B class, Yew House or Tiger Patrol gives you that sense of belonging. Where membership of a House or Patrol is different to membership of a Class, however, is that in a class you associate only with students of your own age. In a House or Patrol you get to interact with boys of different ages. This is important. It is important for a younger boy, eager to watch and learn from those with more knowledge and experience. It is also important for an older boy, who has a responsibility to support, guide and pass on his acquired knowledge and experience.

I fully support the passion of our class groups and I want you to continue supporting your class; be that 6B, 4F, 3D 1E or any of the other 32 classes. But I also want you to be just as passionate about your House. At the last assembly we were introduced to the six new House Captains. I know that these boys are passionate about their Houses and determined to raise the profile of the House system in our College. I look forward to the day when our Houses will be just as strong as our Classes and that each boy and girl in St. Paul's College will be just as proud of their House and they are of their Class.