2010 YOUTH OLYMPICS

Rogge promises the best athletes

IOC chief gives assurance after chat with students and visit to Games' venues

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SINGAPORE — International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Jacques Rogge faced a media scrum yesterday morning and was asked if the best athletes from around the world would compete at the inaugural 2010 Youth Olympic Games.

In the late afternoon, at a dialogue session with 150 tertiary students, he was asked if the Games were “not for competition, but for fun”. One student wondered if it was an “experiment”.

Each time, Rogge gave the assurance the Republic would see the top athletes from the 205 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) do battle here from Aug 14 to 26.

“This is not a mini-Olympic Games and this is not a World Junior Championship,” said the IOC chief, after addressing 30 young ambassadors for the Games at the National Community Leadership Institute at Pasir Panjang. “It is the combination of the highest level of athletic performances, you will find the best athletes in their age category.”

With little information on who the various athletes headed here are, and with strict restrictions on the number each country can field, there are fears nations will use the Youth Olympics to give youngsters their first taste of a multi-sport event and not field their elite performers.

But Rogge insisted otherwise at the dialogue at the Youth Olympic Village at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), when he said: “There will be high-level athletic performances, and the best athletes of their generation will compete here, and you will see fantastic things in terms of sports.”

Rogge is here on a three-day visit to observe preparations for the Games and address the chefs-de-mission seminar today.

The Games will feature over 200 events across 26 sports, with about 3,600 athletes aged 14 to 18 from 205 NOCs taking part.

It will also include a Culture and Education Programme (CEP), which will feature more than 50 activities in seven formats as part of the IOC’s efforts to school young athletes on Olympic values.

Rogge toured three Games sites yesterday, starting at the Bishan Stadium and Sports Complex, followed by the Marina Barrage, and finally the 55-hectare Youth Olympic Village.

The 67-year-old had only arrived in Singapore less than 24 hours earlier, and while he looked tired, he gamely participated in the events lined up for him.

“What do you think of my life line?” he asked IOC vice-president and Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee chairman Ng Ser Miang, after he sank his right palm into clay, to be stored in the NTU museum. He even tried writing his name in Mandarin next to the imprint.

Later, during the 35-minute long dialogue session, he was asked about the role of sports in his family.

The Belgian quipped: “My son is active in sports, my daughter is active in sports, but my wife is not. That is why I love her.”

When asked by a female student from Kazakhstan if he had a way to gauge if the Games would be a success, Rogge, an orthopaedic surgeon by training, responded: “I have a magic measure.”

Amid laughter, he said: “No, I mean that. I only have to look at the eyes and smiles of