



Gov. Cane calls PalaroTuAgSur fulfillment of AgSur's long-awaited dream

By: Pruvi Kaye T. Masendo

Agusan del Sur Governor Santiago B. Cane Jr. named the 2026 Palarong Pambansa the fulfillment of the province's 33-year hosting dream, dedicating the national sporting event to more than 13,000 Filipino athletes and emphasizing that the games would not exist without them.

In his message during the opening ceremony at the Datu Lipus Makapandong Gov. D.O. Plaza Sports Complex yesterday, May 24, Gov. Cane highlighted that the long-awaited hosting began as a vision of the late former congressman and governor Democrito O. Plaza.

Cane accentuated the province's determination and hospitality despite geographical challenges and distance from the country's urban centers.

"This province is not easy to reach. Wala po kaming coastlines, walang airport. You must follow the roads that bend mountains and cross rivers that don't apologize for being wide. But today, the center of Philippine sports is here. The people of this province did not wait to be told to prepare—they showed up before sunrise and stayed past dawn, working towards one idea so when the country came into our door, we would open it wide. That is not hospitality as an obligation; that is hospitality as love," stressed Cane.

Moreover, he recognized the athletes' sacrifices and encouraged them to win, also calling them "the stars of Palaro."

"You, young athletes, wake up at 4:00 in the morning or even earlier. Kulang sa tulog, nag-eensayo, because you have a dream to bring home the gold, silver, or bronze medal. Mga batang atleta, do not fail your dream of getting or winning a medal in the Palarong Pambansa. You have strived hard enough, this is your time to realize your dream," added Cane.

He then urged the national and local government to finance young athletes more sufficiently, supporting and boosting their skills.

"I'm calling on our national government and local government to support and formulate a sports program that would truly give a fair chance to every Filipino athlete to excel, not only at the national level but also at the international level," he punctuated.

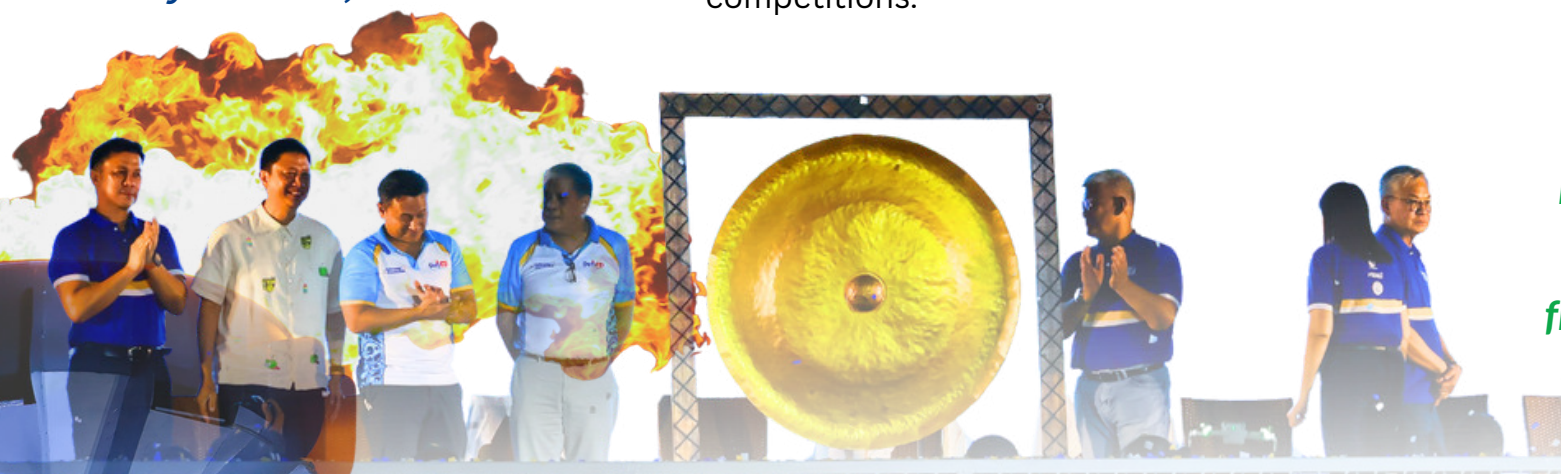
"Ang bilis po nating bigyan ng karangalan ang mga nananalo internationally, but think of it, for them to become excellent athletes, gaano ba kalaki ang suporta na ibinigay ng ating gobyerno para sila ay maging excellent athletes?" Cane further added, emphasizing that the participants could be the next generation of Filipino Olympians.

Furthermore, Cane shared his own experiences as a former athlete, saying the province's hospitality went beyond expectations because he understood firsthand the importance of making athletes feel valued during competitions.



Today is the tomorrow that the people of Agusan del Sur dreamed about 33 years ago. The holding of Palarong Pambansa in AgSur started as a dream by former Congressman and former Governor, the patriarch of Agusan del Sur, the late Democrito Otaza Plaza. People from every region of this archipelago: different faces, different stories, one field. Now, I can say that this historic hosting stands as fulfillment of his dream.

Gov. Santiago Cane Jr.





Editorial

VISION

REALIZED

Ronald Allan A. Arcayera, PhD
Principal II, Anomar National High School

In a message delivered by Governor Santiago B. Cane Jr. during the opening ceremonies of the Palaro TuAgsur last May 25, the national event, which converged 13,000 sports enthusiasts and officials, is a fulfillment of the province's dream after 33 years- a perfected vision of the late former congressman and governor Democrito D. Plaza.

The message is clear, and this long-held dream has become a reality in partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd) Caraga with the leadership of Regional Director Ma. Ines C. Asuncion.

Thirty-three years of waiting is more than just a one-day dream. In the world of sports and governance where local government units pitch their resources, the long years of preparation have come to its full realization and support- a narrative by which three perspectives worth to share on as sports advocate.

First. The story of this vision is attributed to the commitment and persistence of the province. The preparation is not just a simple national convergence, but a collective effort of all stakeholders and agencies supporting to the 33-year-old vision. The security task group, along with the command units, officers, and volunteers in the region, showed up and supported to this logistical feat.

Second. Continuity matters. Great leadership is not about starting new projects and activities for the sake of optics and popularity but it is about having the humility, motivation, and stamina to finish what was started by those before us. Cane's sports leadership, with his fortified officials, is transformative- assuring that all playing venues are set, prepared, and compliant to the national standards. His old account as an athlete serves as his inspiration in transfiguring this athletic competition.

Third. Governor Cane Jr.'s message to all athletes serves as a bridge between the past and the future. By invoking the late Plaza's vision, he reminds the stars of Palaro TuAgsur that they are competing on ground that was dreamed of before most of them were even born. The athletes' early wake-up call and daily grueling practices find a spiritual echo in the province's 33-year wait. These are defined most importantly by long-term sacrifices for a moment of glory, pride, and honor to the school, district, division, and even regional stage.

Agusan del Sur, along with Bayugan City, made waves in this historical sports achievement, claiming to be the first province to have improved facilities, air-conditioned billeting rooms, and a remarkable opening program with air exhibitions, drone shows, sing and dance fusion, guests, and cultural presentations.

They say that a vision delayed is not a vision denied. After 33 years, Agusan del Sur hasn't just hosted a game, but it has validated its place as a powerhouse of hospitality and unique cultural heritage. The dream of Democrito Plaza is no longer a blueprint, but a cheering crowd from all Agusanons and supporters, the sprinting athlete, and the beating heart of a province that refused to give up on its goal.

The province has opened its doors wide amidst backlash, but it has turned its perceived isolation into an intimate, high-stakes arena. This isn't just logistical preparation, but it is, as Cane beautifully phrased it, "hospitality as love."

The Palarong Pambansa is held in the Province of Agusan Del Sur, and with the support of DepEd Caraga Region, is viewed as the best national event that occurred through the lens of spectators.

The province has already won its "gold" by proving that it belongs on the national stage- ready to compete and set the international standards. Now that the stage is set, the mountains have been crossed by some regions, and the preparations are now realized to serve the stars of Palaro TuAgsur, the heart of Philippine sports finally beats the loudest in the highlands that no one can ever discount.

MORE THAN MEDALS

Sec. Angara lauds AgSur hosting, honors athletes in Palaro Tu AgSur opening

By: Pruvi Kaye T. Masendo

Recognizing the province's preparations for the national sports meet and the sacrifices of the young delegates, Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Juan Edgardo 'Sonny' Angara praised both the hosting efforts and athletes during the Palaro Tu AgSur 2026 opening ceremony.

In his message, Angara commended the province's accommodation and planning, citing positive feedback received within the first 24 hours of the event.

"Ganda. 24 hours pa lang panay magagandang banggit na po tungkol sa hosting from the billetings, to the quarters and dugouts to the libreng sakay. Nitong nakaraang dalawang taon pinag-aralan nyo talaga yung Palarong Pambansa sa Cebu City at Ilocos Norte at talagang sought to improve," he remarked.

Angara also highlighted the sacrifices student-athletes endure in preparation for the competitions, including balancing their training with academic responsibilities.

"Napakalaki sa sakripisyo ninyo. Ang training bago sumikat ang araw, ang pagtutok sa academics, ang pressure galing sa sarili na makasungkit ng medalya," he said.

Moreover, Angara reminded athletes that qualifying for the national meet already stands as an achievement beyond podium finishes and medals.

"Achievement na po ang makarating dito, kaya 'wag mag-alala sa podium finish at medals. You have already embodied the spirit of Palarong Pambansa: discipline, teamwork, respect, and resilience," he stressed.

Angara likewise reassured the delegates of the unwavering support coming from their families, communities, schools, and the DepEd.

"Ngayon pa lang, saludo na kami sa inyo. You are the next generation of Filipino athletes who will bring great honor and glory to the country," he stated.



PBBM TO STUDENT *Athletes*

Incentives await Palarong Pambansa medalists

By: Pruvi Kaye T. Masendo

“Sa kauna-unahang pagkakataon, maglalaan ang Philippine Sports Commission ng mga incentives para sa mga medalista sa regular sports at para games bilang pagkilala sa inyong husay.”

President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr.

President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr. announced during the opening of the 2026 Palarong Pambansa on May 24 that medalists would receive incentives from the government in recognition of their hard work and athletic excellence.

Through a video message, Marcos underscored the historic initiative by the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) as recognition of excellence.

“Sa kauna-unahang pagkakataon, maglalaan ang Philippine Sports Commission ng mga incentives para sa mga medalista sa regular sports at para games bilang pagkilala sa inyong husay,” he highlighted.

Marcos likewise pushed athletes to fully embrace the competition while learning values beyond sports.

“Marami kayong matutunan sa palarong ito na madadala ninyo kahit saan man kayo magpunta. Dito nyo matutunan ang disiplina, tiyaga, respeto, at malasakit sa kapwa,” he noted.

Moreover, in a separate written message read on Marcos’ behalf by Antonio Lagdameo Jr., he cited ongoing government efforts to strengthen school sports programs nationwide, including the distribution

of sports equipment to more than 6,000 schools from 2022 to 2025, with more schools set to benefit this year too.

“Sa sports hindi lamang lakas ng katawan ang hinuhubog kundi ang disiplina, teamwork, respeto, at tibay ng loob. Pinapalakas natin ang mga school sports clubs sa buong bansa bilang pangunahing daan ng pakikilahok sa organisadong sports at pisikal na aktibidad sa ating mga paaralan,” he stated.

The President also mentioned the “Grassroots to Gold” program of the Department of Education (DepEd) and the PSC, aimed at developing athletes from school-based competitions to international competitions.

Lastly, PBBM encouraged the delegates to be inspired by their victories as motivation for future competitions, reminding them that setbacks are not the end but opportunities for growth and success.

“Sa mga mananalo, nawa’y maging inspirasyon nyo ang pagkakapanalo para sa susunod pa na mga laban. Para sa mga hindi mananalo sa palarong ito wag kayong mawalan ng pag asa ang bawat pagkatalo ay hindi wakas kundi isang hakbang upang lalo pang tumatag, matuto, at magtagumpay.”



L

ong before the first whistle of the 2026 Palarong Pambansa, the work had already begun in boardrooms, planning sessions, and coordination meetings across DepEd Caraga.

At the center of that massive undertaking on the part of the Department of Education was Regional Director Maria Ines C. Asuncion, CESO III, whose leadership transformed a complex national hosting responsibility into a synchronized system of execution.

Working closely with Governor Santiago B. Cane Jr., local government units across Caraga, and the National Palaro Secretariat led by Undersecretary Malcom S. Garma, Asuncion helped steer preparations covering logistics, transportation, security, billeting, athlete welfare, and venue readiness. Every detail was treated as critical to the success of an event of national significance.

The result was historic.

For many observers, it was not simply successful. It was world-class.

Praise poured in from delegations, coaches, guests, and spectators across the country. For many, Caraga did not simply host the Palaro; it set a new standard.

Though never one to seek the spotlight, Asuncion's leadership was evident everywhere: in the seamless transport operations, the secure billeting quarters, the prepared venues, and the warm welcome extended to thousands of participants.

While the public celebrated the athletes and spectacular opening ceremonies, those behind the scenes understood that the success of the 2026 Palarong Pambansa was built on years of preparation, relentless coordination, and decisive leadership.

For RD Asuncion, the Palaro was more than a sporting event. It was a demonstration of DepEd Caraga's capacity to lead on the national stage. In the end, the triumph of the 2026 Palarong Pambansa was no accident; it was deliberately built through vision, discipline, and collective resolve, with Governor Cane and RD Asuncion helping orchestrate one of Caraga's proudest moments.

The WOMAN BEHIND THE GLORY OF THE PALARO

How RD Maria Ines C. Asuncion Led DepEd Caraga to a National Triumph

By: Pedro A. Tecson





Feature PARADE OF PRIDE

By: Pedro A. Tecson

The streets of Agusan del Sur came alive with color, rhythm, and regional pride as delegates from across the country proudly showcased their identities during the grand parade of the Palarong Pambansa 2026.

Clad in vibrant uniforms and carrying the spirit of their respective regions, the young athletes marched with confidence as their official monikers echoed throughout the parade route, from the fierce "Storm" of Western Visayas, the determined "Tamaraws" of MIMAROPA, to the proud "Caragold" of the host region.

Each delegation brought with them not only athletic excellence, but also the culture, identity, and aspirations of their communities.

More than a ceremonial march, the parade became a powerful celebration of unity in diversity, where every banner waved and every chant heard symbolized the shared passion of Filipino youth for sportsmanship, camaraderie, and national pride. In the heart of AgSur, the nation did not merely gather, it marched as one.
(Public Affairs Unit)



CARAGOLD RECLAIMS GLORY: Wrestlers Assert Dominance on the Mat

By: Pedro A. Tecson

The CARAGOLD Wrestlers of Team Caraga surged back to national prominence after reclaiming the overall championship in the wrestling event at the Palarong Pambansa 2026.

Caraga topped the medal standings with an imposing haul of 6 gold, 7 silver, and 2 bronze medals, sealing a decisive return to the summit of the sport after last securing the overall wrestling championship in the 64th Palarong Pambansa held in Cebu City in 2024.

Boys' Team Coach Glann Castillon attributed the team's dominant performance to discipline, preparation, and technical mastery across divisions. She also underscored a rare and historic achievement for the squad, noting that, for the first time in their storied participation, every single Caragold athlete brought home a medal.

Girls Team coach Wingel Mondigo echoed Castillon's assessment saying that cohesion and discipline are the keys to their success. "This championship is ours. It belongs to us. And it will always belong to us," he proudly declared.



Gold Medalists

Cadet Category: Shane Kany B. Carillo (44 kg), Jovannie R. Bongado (46 kg), Alez Jazz L. Mejia (50 kg)
Junior Category: Maries P. Martin (52 kg), John Kentchen R. Genotiva (54 kg), James Clony A. Sinzo (56 kg);



Silver Medalists

Cadet Category: Roce Jean G. Jamero (40 kg), Princess Kiara P. Lobo (48 kg), Tricia Nicole D. Murilla (32 kg), Alfred D. Elhig (54 kg);
Junior Category: Venus C. Pellejera (48 kg), Leonilo H. Tecson II (62 kg), Sherlia Granada (56 kg, Butuan City);



Bronze Medalists

Junior Category: Roginieto Jr. M. Quiniones (68 kg), Liza Mae Velarde (60 kg, Surigao City)

The team's depth was anchored by the strong showing of athletes from the Team Kamayo Wrestlers of Aniborgan National High School under the Division of Surigao del Sur, alongside contributors from Surigao City and Butuan City divisions, underscoring the breadth of wrestling talent across the Caraga Region.

The victory cements Caraga's resurgence as a powerhouse on the mat, with a performance defined not only by medals, but by completeness—every athlete finishing as a podium finisher in a rare regional sweep of excellence.



FROM BLADES TO GLORY: CARAGA ERUPTS AS ARNIS CHAMPIONS WITH 14 MEDALS

by: Charlotte Nicole A. Acero
Butuan City School of Arts and Trade
Butuan City Division

Agusan del Sur — Caraga's arnisadors once again proved their mettle on the national stage, tallying an impressive 14-medal haul composed of six golds, one silver, and seven bronzes at the 2026 Palarong Pambansa held in Agusan del Sur.

Representing the region with pride, the athletes from Butuan City and from Surigao del Sur displayed exceptional skill and determination throughout the tournament. Competing against the country's finest young arnis practitioners, the team consistently delivered strong performances that translated into podium finishes across several events.

The medal haul reflects not only the athletes' talent but also the dedication and sacrifices made during months of rigorous training. Guided by their coaches and trainers, the Caraga delegation remained focused on its goal of bringing honor to the region, earning medals in both individual and team events.

More than the medals, the team's performance showcased the growing strength of arnis in Caraga. Their success in the Palarong Pambansa reinforces Caraga's reputation as a breeding ground for champions and highlights the region's continued commitment to developing young athletes capable of excelling on the national stage.

These young and skilled athletes were coached by Eldridge Troy D. Go, Erwin Hora, and Rodrigo C. Gibalay and trained by Brian Ellodar, and Christian Irag.



ANGELA M. MEJIAS

*2 gold
individual espada y daga weapon anyo synchronized single
weapon synchronized espada dagay,
1 bronze individual double weapon)*



KYLE GIO ROSALES

bronze karatedo



CHIN-JO A. AUXTERO

*2 gold
(individual single weapon, anyo mixed double,
1 bronze (anyo synchronized))*



RAYVEN MARATAS

bronze (likha anyo individual double)



ARIELLE ASHLEY C. LAPE

bronze (individual espada y daga)

HERSHEY ANN ADARIO

bronze- extra lightweight

**ANGELA M. MEJIAS
CHRISTELLE AIRAM SASUMAN
LYKA R. ESPLAGUERA**

gold (anyo team synchronized espada y daga, 1 silver

**ARIELLE ASHLEY C. LAPE
QUEEN FAIRYROSE O. RANTE
CHARLANGE JEEN L. LUNA**

gold (anyo team synchronized double weapon)

**CHINN-JO A. AUXTERO
CHRIS ALEXIOUS C. ARDIMER
STEPHEN B. MEJIAS**

bronze (anyo team synchronized single weapon)

KARATEDO RANKING

1ST NCR
2ND R-XII
3RD R-XI

SOFT TENNIS RANKING

1ST R-II
2ND R-XII
3RD R-XIII





OPINION

The Game Ends. The Humiliation Doesn't

by RICHARD DAVIDE

A final buzzer should have ended the game.

Instead, it opened floodgates of ridicule online.

Within hours, social media comment sections were flooded with laughing reactions, regional insults, humiliating remarks, political comparisons, and mockery disguised as entertainment. Screenshots spread faster than highlights. Memes traveled farther than sportsmanship. And behind the endless reactions and viral engagement were student-athletes, young learners old enough to compete, but still too young to become public punching bags.

This is the reality of sports in the age of social media.

Today, losing no longer ends inside the court. It follows learners home through shared posts, edited content, comment sections, and digital humiliation that strangers casually consume for entertainment. A difficult game becomes a permanent online spectacle. A single result becomes material for ridicule viewed by thousands of people who know nothing about the athletes beyond one scoreboard.

And perhaps the most disturbing part is how normal this behavior has become.

People now laugh at humiliation as if it were harmless fun. The louder the insult, the more engagement it receives. The crueler the comment, the more it spreads. Social media algorithms reward outrage, mockery, and division because these generate reactions faster than empathy ever could.

In this culture of virality, compassion is often the first thing sacrificed.

Unfortunately, even youth-centered spaces are no longer protected from this toxicity.

The Palarong Pambansa was created to celebrate discipline, excellence, camaraderie, and unity among young Filipinos. It exists to teach learners resilience in defeat and humility in victory. But how can these values survive when adults themselves normalize public humiliation online?

Instead of teaching sportsmanship, many comment sections teach cruelty. Instead of promoting healthy competition, online platforms encourage ridicule. Instead of protecting learners, society turns them into content.

What makes this situation more painful is that student-athletes already carry immense pressure before entering national competitions. They train for months under physically exhausting conditions. Some come from families making sacrifices just to support their participation. Others carry the expectations of schools, coaches, communities, and regions on their shoulders.

Then one difficult moment happens, and suddenly the internet reduces them to jokes.

People forget that these learners will eventually read the comments. They will see the laughing emojis. They will encounter posts mocking not only their performance, but sometimes even their identity and where they come from.

For some netizens, it may only be "biruan" or jokes. For learners, it can become humiliation remembered long after the tournament ends.

This reflects a deeper societal problem: the inability of online culture to separate competition from hostility. In today's environment, everything becomes polarized. Every event becomes content. Every issue becomes an opportunity for clout, mockery, or political noise.

Even children are no longer spared from becoming targets of viral ridicule.

***This
should
concern
everyone.***

Because learners absorb the behavior adults normalize online. Every viral insult teaches young people that cruelty gains attention. Every humiliating meme teaches them that empathy is less valuable than entertainment. Every comment celebrating mockery slowly shapes a generation becoming desensitized to public humiliation.

And that may be more dangerous than any defeat inside the court.

The responsibility now extends beyond athletes and organizers. Netizens, content creators, media pages, and ordinary social media users all contribute to the digital environment learners are exposed to every day. Freedom of expression should never become an excuse for dehumanizing children simply because they lost a game.

The scores will eventually fade. The standings will change next year. Another tournament will come.

But the emotional impact of public humiliation can stay with young people far longer than the internet realizes.

The Palarong Pambansa should remain a safe and empowering space where learners build confidence, character, and hope. It is not a stage where they are consumed by viral cruelty.

Because once society begins treating children's pain as entertainment, the real loss is no longer the game.

It is our humanity.





FEATURED:
DEPED REGION V-BICOL REGION

The Bicol Region, located in the southern peninsula of Luzon, boasts a landscape sculpted by majestic volcanic peaks and rugged coastlines. At its heart stands the iconic, near-perfect cone of Mayon Volcano, a symbol of both the region's regional identity: natural beauty and its geographical vulnerability.

Deeply rooted in faith, Bicolano culture thrives through vibrant traditions, most notably the Peñafrancia Fluvial Festival. This devotion shapes the traits of the Bicolano people, who are renowned for their profound spirituality, warmth, and hospitality. Living in a typhoon-prone area, they possess an unyielding resilience—embodied by their bold "Uragon" spirit, which is beautifully complemented by a love for fiery, chili-infused cuisine.

The region's basic education landscape, managed by DepEd Region V, emphasizes accessibility and inclusivity. It actively caters to diverse communities especially through the Alternative Learning System and specialized programs. This structural framework nurtures learners who are inherently resilient, highly adaptive, and deeply anchored in core values.

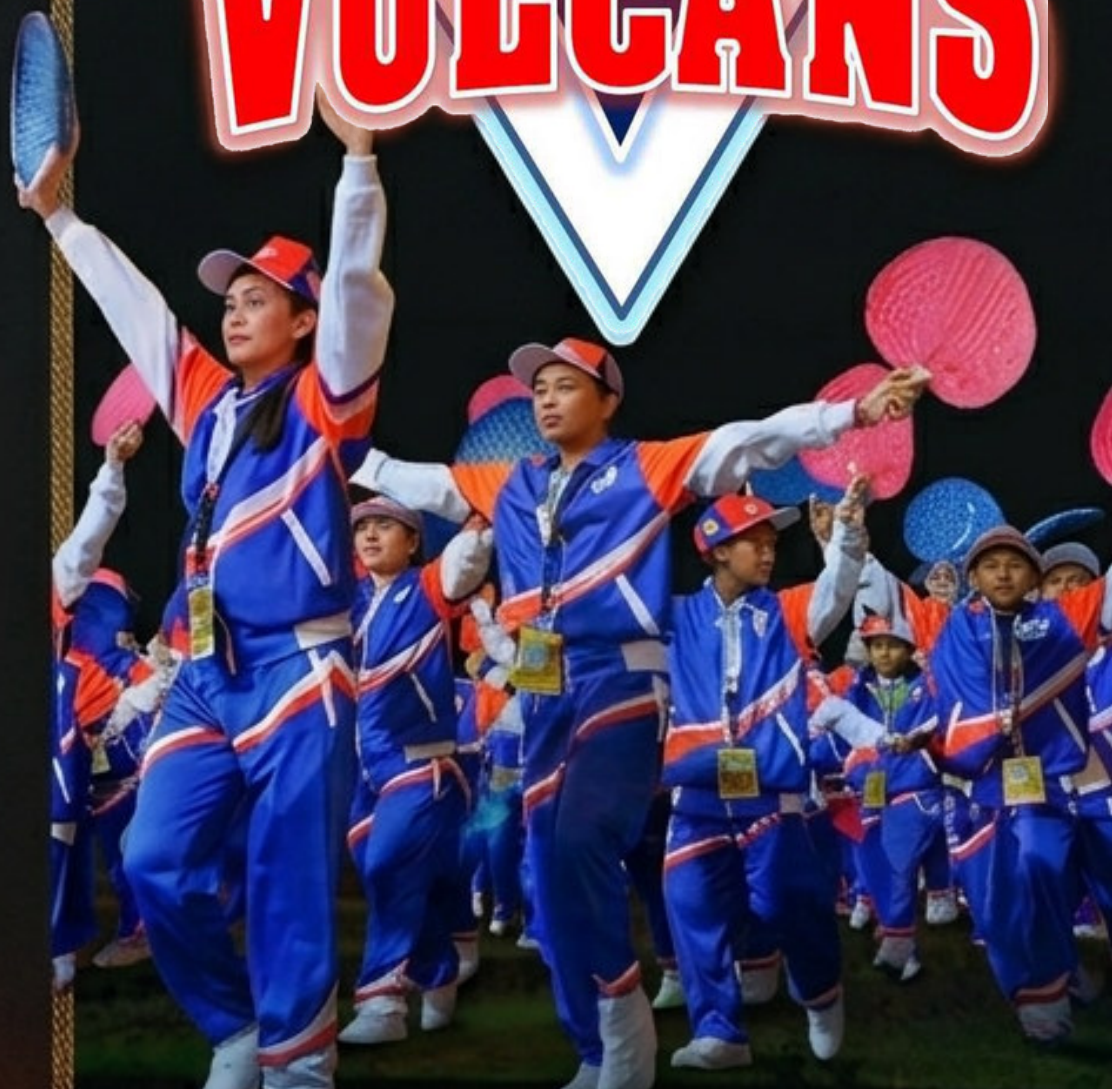
This environment of discipline and grit has birthed legendary sports champions across generations. Bicol boasts pioneering icons like David Nepomuceno, the very first Filipino Olympian, and track legend, two-time Olympian Isidro del Prado. The region's athletic excellence extends from the basketball court, with PBA greats Bogs Adornado and Yoyoy Villamin, to international chess boards dominated by young prodigy Bince Rafael Operiano. From its resilient classrooms to its roaring global arenas, Bicol shines with enduring strength.

Core Values

Uragon Rising: Bicol's Legacy of Faith, Fire, and Champions



By: Mayflor Marie Jumamil
Public Affairs Unit Head, DepEd Region V





WV CHAMPS - STRONGER STORM HEADED FOR GLORY

By **Hernani Escuellar Jr.**
Public Affairs Unit Head-DepEd Region VI



A massive delegation of **1,023** sports heroes is officially taking over the arena. "The Champs" of Western Visayas have dropped their official stats for the Palarong Pambansa, proving they aren't just sending a team—they are deploying an absolute powerhouse.

POWER BY NUMBERS

Behind every athlete is a fierce support system, backed by **168** elite coaches, assistant coaches, and chaperones. Keeping the operation running smoothly is a dedicated crew of **210** Regional Working Committee members managing this athletic empire.

The real turbo lies in the frontline, where **645** athletes are ready to chase championship glory. This diverse roster features **217** elementary prodigies ready to make their mark, alongside **372** secondary powerhouse teens locked in for gold.

Demonstrating incredible sportsmanship, **41** inspirational paragames warriors are set to showcase true grit, while **15** cutting-edge competitors lead the charge in demo and exhibition sports. From precision archery to high-octane contact sports. Western Visayas is unified, locked in, and coming for the triumph—watch out, competition, because the storm has officially arrived!

BEYOND THE MEDALS





FEATURE

A SEAT FOR EVERY STORY

by RICHARD DAVIDE

The roar of the crowd may be the most recognizable sound of the Palarong Pambansa. But in Agusan del Sur, another sound quietly carried thousands of stories: the hum of engines transporting athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators from one venue to another.

For many visitors, it was simply called Libreng Sakay.

A free ride. A practical service. A logistical solution.

But for those who experienced it firsthand, it became something more.

As the 2026 Palarong Pambansa unfolded across the host province, the sight of e-buses and tricycles bearing the “Libreng Sakay” signage became a familiar part of the landscape. They moved through highways and municipal roads, connecting billeting quarters to playing venues, carrying exhausted athletes after competitions, and helping spectators witness moments that would later become part of Palaro history.

In an event where distances could easily become barriers, transportation became an equalizer.

For a young athlete carrying years of training on their shoulders, the free ride meant one less thing to worry about. For a coach navigating unfamiliar routes, it offered convenience and assurance. For families and supporters eager to witness the games, it provided access to opportunities that might otherwise have been out of reach.

The significance of the program was not measured by kilometers traveled but by burdens removed.

Hosting the Palarong Pambansa is often viewed through the lens of infrastructure, competition venues, and medal tallies. Yet some of the most meaningful impressions are created by the smallest acts of public service. While stadiums showcase athletic excellence, hospitality is often revealed in how visitors are treated beyond the playing field.

This is where Libreng Sakay found its place.

The initiative reflected a hosting philosophy that recognized the needs of people not only as participants in a sporting event but as guests in a province eager to welcome them. It demonstrated that successful hosting

extends beyond ceremonies and competitions. It is also found in the practical systems that make people feel valued, safe, and accommodated.

Education Secretary Sonny Angara himself recognized the significance of the initiative, describing the Palarong Pambansa as more than a sporting competition.

“Nakakatuwa na itong Palaro natin ay isa ring pagkakataon para maranasan ng ating mga kabataan ang malasakit, kultura, at ganda ng iba’t ibang bahagi ng bansa.”

His statement captures what the Libreng Sakay program ultimately represented. The service was not merely about moving people from one venue to another. It was about allowing young athletes to experience a province’s culture, generosity, and sense of community beyond the boundaries of competition.

In many ways, the vehicles became moving ambassadors of Agusan del Sur.

Every trip carried stories. Some passengers discussed strategies for upcoming matches. Others celebrated victories or reflected on defeats. New friendships were formed between delegates from different regions. Conversations flowed between strangers brought together by a common destination.

Inside these vehicles, the spirit of the Palaro continued long after the games ended for the day.

The initiative also highlighted a broader truth about public service. The most impactful programs are not always the most expensive or the most visible. Sometimes, their value lies in their ability to address ordinary needs with extraordinary sincerity.

Transportation may seem like a simple concern. Yet when thousands of people converge in one province for a national event, mobility becomes essential to participation itself. By making transportation accessible, the host province ensured that athletes could focus on competing, coaches on mentoring, and spectators on supporting.

That is not merely transportation. That is service.

As the final medals are awarded and the banners eventually come down, memories of the 2026 Palarong Pambansa will remain. Athletes will remember their victories and lessons. Delegates will remember the venues and competitions.

But many will also remember the rides.

The rides that arrived when they were tired.

The rides that took them where they needed to be.

The rides that asked for nothing in return.

Sometimes, the best measure of hospitality is not found in grand gestures. Sometimes, it is found in a seat waiting for someone who needs it.



Region X Eyes Stronger Finish in the Palarong Pambansa

By: Lyndie L. Tandugon | Bayugan National Comprehensive High School, Bayugan City Division

The cheers may have just started yet, but for Region X, the battle has long begun.

Months before the opening of the prestigious Palarong Pambansa, athletes from Northern Mindanao were already sweating under the heat of intense training sessions. With determination, better support, and lessons from previous competitions, Region X now enters the national stage with a clear goal — to finish stronger.

“During the 2024 Palaro in Cebu, we were rank 9. Last year, we rank 5. Now, we target number 4 or number 3,” Regional Sports Officer Dr. Richard Dragon shared.

This year’s delegation intensified its training through carefully planned programs designed to sharpen both the athletes’ physical endurance and mental toughness. According to Dr. Dragon, the region ensured that athletes received guidance from qualified experts who could elevate their performance.

“We are more prepared than last year because we had intensive training. We chose and validated

trainers who are experts in their field and will also give technical assistance to the coaches and athletes,” he explained.

Support from local government units and regional leaders became a major driving force behind the delegation’s preparations. Financial assistance poured in from the Regional Development Council headed by Misamis Occidental Governor Atty. Henry S. Oaminal Sr., who granted a ₱3,000 competition allowance and promised incentives for medalists — ₱100,000 for gold, ₱50,000 for silver, and ₱30,000 for bronze winners.

For the 28-day school-based hybrid synchronized training, Region X allocated ₱8.5 million for trainers’ professional fees, meals, and training materials. Even city officials personally extended encouragement to athletes. Dr. Dragon particularly noted the generosity of officials from Iligan City, whose mayor visited the billeting quarters and provided ₱25,000 assistance to each athlete and coach.

However, the journey was not easy. The team faced challenges, especially in securing proper training venues and equipment. Organizers had to work closely with local government units and

DepEd offices to ensure safe training conditions.

“It was very risky when we provide them a place to play outside. Even with the consent of the parents, the accountability is in us — the organizers,” Dr. Dragon admitted.

Beyond the competition itself, members of the delegation also found inspiration in the host region’s hospitality and preparations. Athletes expressed delight over the comfortable billeting quarters, something many considered a rare experience in national competitions.

“This is an excellent hosting. This is the first time that we were billeted to a quarter that is air-conditioned. For most of the time, only the officials can experience these kinds of rooms. Now, the athletes are very happy,” the RSO shared.

A total of 948 athletes, coaches, trainers, and officials now represent Region X. They carry not only the hope of winning medals but also the pride of Northern Mindanao. For them, reaching this stage required discipline, sacrifice, and long preparation.

Region X continues to rely on its strongest sports events, including arnis, athletics, tennis, swimming, taekwondo, and pencak silat, where it has previously won medals.

With hearts set on victory and eyes fixed on a stronger finish, the delegation proudly raises its banner — Mas Asenso NorMin Stars — determined to prove that Northern Mindanao is ready to shine brighter than ever before.



Photo credit: Palarong Pambansa 2026 Region X -Team NorMin Star FB Page

From coastlines and islets to marshland: Central Visayas sails to Agsur

By: Dexter Talabo Febrio

Region 7, with 965 delegates, anchored the ship in Fili National High School in Bayugan City. Captained by DepEd's regional director, Arturo B. Bayocot, CESO III, the delegate is ready to venture into and unlock new horizon within the marshland of Agusan del Sur.

Despite the regrouping of Negros Island Region in this year's endeavor and relinquishing a two-year stronghold at the fifth position, and 7th last year together, the director does not view the task ahead as a mountain to be aggressively conquered, but rather as a familiar path to be walked at a steady, deliberate pace, ending the issue with

“Para sa akin, equal lang- it does not matter because we want what's best for our learners”. He then painted the competition not as a narrow race, but as a vast coastline dotted with undiscovered islets, offering every learner a unique shore to land on and explore, saying, “with the structure of DepEd’s curriculum like having intramurals in schools to palaro, gives all learners equal opportunity... though not all can go to Palaro at least they had equal chances.”

He is also hoping for all teachers and learners to understand that sport is part of the DepEd's commitment to developing learners holistically not just a mere preparation when competition happens.

Arnis in Lapu-lapu, as he emphasized for instance, where schools are practicing it and forming a club supported by the local government and the Department of Tourism.

Central Visayas- now woven by Cebu and Bohol provinces, known for its mesmerizing and beautiful coastlines and islets is now ready to brave the high humidity of Agsur with their pristine and wild sense of freedom. As for athletes' adaptability, RD Bayocot confidently stated, *“flexible na man ‘yong mga bata- they can adapt to whatever context therein, especially in their generation.”* He also recognized and thanked the comfort provided by the effort of the city mayor Kirk Asis in their billeting quarter leaving the note, “he (Mayor Asis) makes sure that they (athletes) go home with beautiful memories... that's innate of a good mayor in welcoming the delegations”, and the entire of the province marking it as the best host so far. He then summarized the cessation as, “home away from home!”.

With a heart so calm and a flexible free-spirited mind, will the team bring home the gold in unlocking the future? Or will the imprint that will be left by Region 7 be enough to prove that the sea, with all its islets, can conquer the marshland of Agusan del Sur?

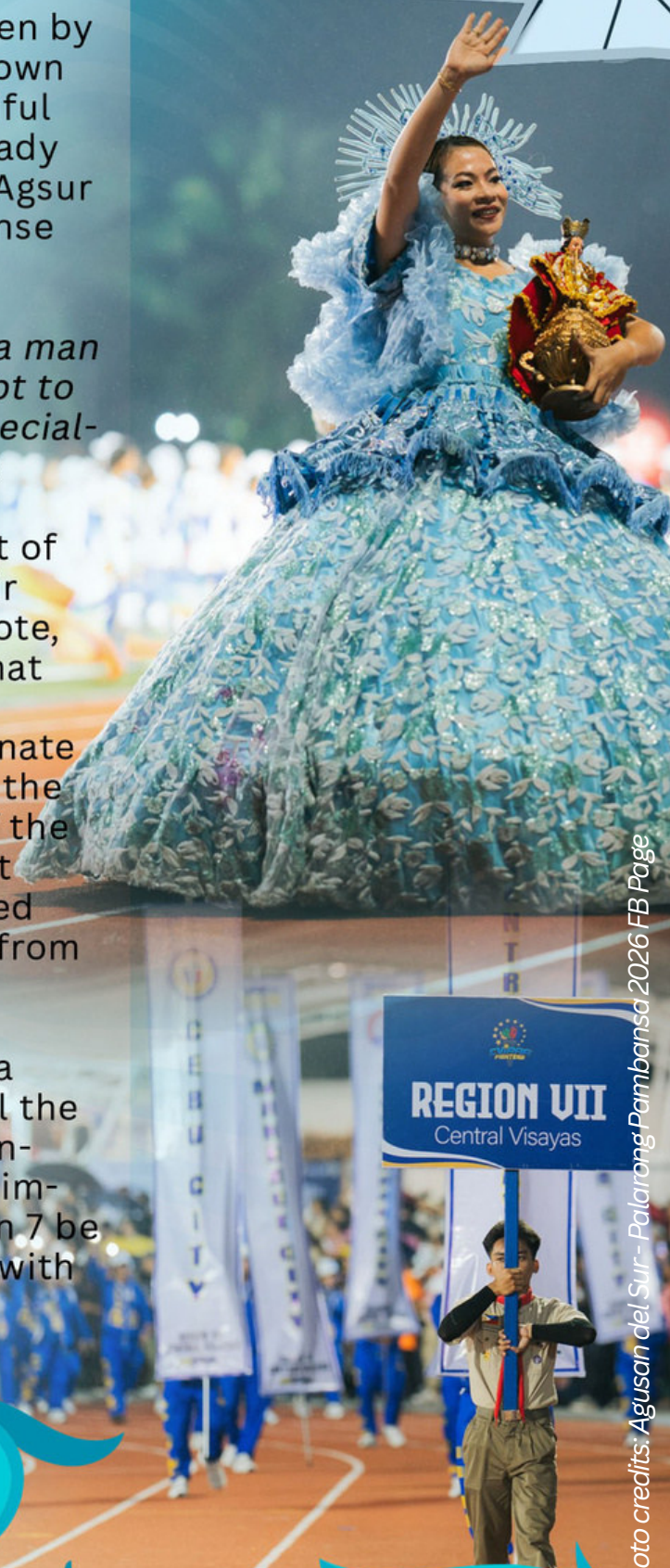


photo credits: Agusan del Sur- Palarong Pambansa 2026 FB Page

The Coldest Warm Welcome

By James Rhen D. Melendrez | Mt. Carmel National High School, Bayugan City Division

The afternoon sun was still burning bright when the first buses carrying the athletic delegation of Region 1 arrived at Salvacion, Bayugan City. As the engines finally shut, a collective sigh of relief filled the vehicles. To Romeo, Ana, Gibryl, Junel, and Leila, it's the end of a multi-modal odyssey that almost covered the full stretch of the archipelago. Now, behind them are the sprawling tobacco fields, sand dunes, and salt beds of the north, which for the next two weeks, they'll trade for the lush inland canopies and winding rivers of the country's largest marshland. And after a long journey of over thirteen hundred kilometers, they finally set their foot on the sun-dappled soil of Agusan del Sur, the host province of Palarong Pambansa 2026.

As they grabbed their luggage and lined at the aisle, the bus door, close for more than 14 hours, hissed and opened. Then, as they come out of the vehicles, what seemed like an ordinary arrival, turned into a welcome as warm as the humid afternoon air. The delegation was greeted with the widest sweet smiles, alongside a band beating festive beats to the tune and melody of the electrifying Palaro jingles.

To first-time chaperones Ana and Gibryl, what should be an unfamiliar place for the Ilocanos and Kapampangans, felt like the familiar comfort of their abodes up north. The hospitality of the locals, especially the staffs of the host school and of the local officials, put the delegates at ease, instantly invigorating their weary bodies and spirits from the arduous journey. For their fellow chaperon,

Romeo, it's as if they travelled for so long only to arrive in a far-away land that still seemed next to home.

Before the games could even officially begin, the delegates humorously shared that they are already saddened by the thought of having to bid farewell to their host city and province. The friendly locals, delicious delicacies, and affordable farm produce are just some of the many things they'll truly miss. Though, it's the air-conditioned billeting rooms that is by far their biggest 2026 Palaro bias, even joking around that it is the coldest warm welcome they ever had.

The Palaro tu AgSur is not just the usual national sporting competition for some members of the Region 1 delegation. To Junel, an education program supervisor, and Leila, an archer, it's a special moment that is history in the making.

Leila, a national medalist in archery, will complete her junior high school as a Palaro qualifier for four straight years. On the other hand, Sir Junel will not just assume the role of discipline dean for the delegation, but also as a proud father witnessing the Palaro debut of his daughter in elementary taekwondo.

As the Palaro tu AgSur is set to officially commence in a few days, the raging buffalos expressed their fervent wish of health, safety, and success not only for their team, but also for the other delegations and the games' host province. They emphasized that while every region's aim is to claim the coveted titles at the top of the podium, beyond the medals, to feel joy in playing and to be in the Palarong Pambansa is already a big winning experience.



Photo Credits: Agusan del Sur - Palarong Pambansa 2026 FB Page



Beyond NASional Win

NAS to train underfunded athletes via scholarships

By: Jenro Jalop | Bayugan national Comprehensive High School, Bayugan City Division

While competing regions aim to secure top spots and improve their rankings in the Palarong Pambansa, the National Academy of Sports (NAS) carries a different mission. As a sports high school that offers full scholarships to qualified Filipino student-athletes, NAS joins the competition not to climb the leaderboard, but to promote the academy and encourage young athletes from different regions to become part of an institution that trains future Olympic champions.

"We are not on the medal tally, the rankings, and other recognition. We are here just to promote and parang ini-endorse lang namin what is NAS at gusto naming ikalat sa ibang regions na merong academy

para sa mga bata," NAS Regional Sports Officer Arvin Gonzales shared.

The sports officer also emphasized that NAS is not just participating in Palarong Pambansa to scout for athletes but rather to help regions train their student-athletes with potential when they lack a budget and training through the scholarship program offered by the academy.

"Kapag magaling na sila, pina-compete namin internationally, trinain, kapag sa Paloro nag-medal sila, yung recognition balik ulit sa hometown and even dun sa division kung saan sila galing pati yung region

nila. Yung recognition wala sa amin, nasa regions po nila," Gonzales highlighted.

NAS has set a path different from other regions where they aim not to compete but to help. As Paloro Tu AgSur continues, it continues its efforts of gaining recognition and building champions beyond borders.

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