

## **Wavering Coordination and Hosting of University Games in Cameroon, 1985-2017**

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### **Abstract**

The University Games in Cameroon like elsewhere in the world has been annual events integrated in higher education public policy where students from different institutions of tertiary learning converge and compete in different sports discipline. Like any evolving activity, the games have not been consistent in their coordination and organization since 1985. This paper analyzes the origins, wavering management structures and organization of the University Games in Cameroon from 1985 to 2017. It argues that from the origins of the university games in Cameroon; its agenda vacillated between yielding to statutory missions of promoting inter-university dialogue through sports and succumbing to the pressure of uncontrollable socio-economic and political circumstances. Informed by primary and secondary sources and employing a qualitative analytical approach, the paper establishes that, the origins and oscillations in the summoning and organization of the university games was consistent with the ambient social climate in the university institutions as well as the socio-economic, political opportunities and constraints that characterized Cameroon especially from 1985 to 2017. These developments largely shaped the protocol and dimension to which the University Games were organized in the country.

**Keywords:** University, Games, Culture, Sport

### **Introduction**

The concept of University Games is not new, perhaps for reasons of its long practice and its widespread nature all over the world. The original intention was to emulate the tradition of the “Oxbridge” athletic heritage in Britain.<sup>1</sup> While the practice of the games could be traced from the “Oxbridge” athletic heritage in Britain, in continental Africa, credit for the origins of university games is undeniably attributed to Sir Samuel Manuwa who in 1964 presented two giant trophies for competitive sports among some West African Universities.<sup>2</sup> Hardly could anyone have suggested

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<sup>1</sup> Josephine Chika Ifedili and Stella Omium, “Management of Nigeria Universities Games Association for Better result,” *Ozean Journal of social sciences*, (2011): 64.

<sup>2</sup> David, Anderson, *The Discipline and the Profession: Foundation of Canadian Physical Education, Recreation and Sports Studies* (Dubuque, IA: WM. C. Brown Publishers, 1989), 32.

that the gesture was destined to be the initiator of larger sporting events in the entire continent. Hence, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1965, the first West African Inter-University Games (WAUG) was organized at the Ibadan University in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> The participating universities were English speaking and mainly drawn from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra-Leone and Liberia<sup>4</sup>. The success of this game inspired many other African countries to embrace the games socialization component as complement to the academic laden programs. In 1966, the Nigerian Sport Council seized the moment and set up the Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA) in charge of university games. As in Nigeria, these inter university competitions all over the World became a nursery for many budding sportsmen and women to chart careers in the national and international sporting arena.

In Cameroon, most communities engaged in sports as a way of life and as a form of social cohesion, solidarity and oneness. Common sports activities included; canoe racing, swimming, tug of war and traditional wrestling. Interestingly, wrestling featured prominently in initiation rites of some ethnic groups such as the Bakweri and Duala. Such occasions were appealing moments for spectators and participants.<sup>5</sup> However, in the colonial period and thereafter, sport disciplines such as football<sup>6</sup>, basketball, volleyball, handball, boxing, table tennis, cycling, baseball, golf and sprint became popular and featured more prominently in University games. Sports undoubtedly, is widely practiced in Cameroon and it is a major concern in the national agenda of the government. This is evident in government's provision of sports infrastructures at the basic, secondary and university levels where sporting skills could be nurtured and exploited for top-notch competitive sports. In addition, the Cameroon government's promotion of the different sports federations in the country is a clear indication of her interest in that line. Today, the Cameroonian people take pride in sports disciplines and the victories that accompany them at both national and international levels. Considering the relevance of sports to general wellness and as an exhilarating extra-curricular activity in the academic milieu, the Cameroon government decided to place emphasis on extending these range of sporting activities to the universities that later stood as a levers for national unity and integration.

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<sup>3</sup> Josephine Chika Ifedili and Stella Omium, "Management of Nigeria Universities Games Association for Better Result", 64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Ambe, "Sports in Cameroon,"

<http://www.irb.com/unions/union=11000046/index.html>, accessed online 28 September 2020.

<sup>6</sup> TO note is the fact that football was the first western game to be introduced in Cameroon since 1923, see Ongene Manga Jean, "Le Football Cameroun, Evolution et Perspectives, L'importance de la Relevé; *Mémoire pour le diplôme de conseiller sportif*", (CAPEPS I Dissertation, INJS Yaoundé, 1986), 21.

At the dawn of the independence and reunification of Cameroon in 1960/61 respectively, there was hardly any institution of higher learning. However, in 1962, a Federal university was opened in Yaoundé accompanied by some university centers in Buea, Douala, Dschang and Ngaoundere.<sup>7</sup> This set up remained in place throughout the Federal period and overlapped into the unitary state era. In the years that followed and, more especially from the early 1990s, demographic pressure in the lone university of Yaoundé coupled with petitions and public demonstrations by some English speaking Cameroonians demanding for an Anglo-Saxon styled tertiary education, led to the 1993 university reforms. Broadly speaking, these reforms created out of the existing higher education university and learning centers, six state universities which were spread in (Yaoundé, Buea, Dschang, Douala and Ngaoundéré). A welcomed feature of this reform was the liberal but regulatory policy by the state, which permitted private initiatives to accompany the state in the provision of higher education. This ground breaking reform led to a gradual but systematic broadening of the institutions of higher education in Cameroon. By 2009 and 2010, the universities of Maroua and Bamenda were created to add to the numbers of state universities.<sup>8</sup> The creation of these university institutes provided a base for the state through the Ministry of Higher Education and closely related ministries to chart, organize and orientate the states vision of national unity and integration through the vehicle of sports. It was also visualized as a platform to nurse and exploit budding sporting talents that could proudly represent the nation in international competitions.<sup>9</sup> Given its festive atmosphere, university games in Cameroon impressed on the minds and hearts of Cameroonian students and onlookers as well. The competition solicited extensive mobilization on the part of participating universities in the different sports disciplines and by extension boomed local businesses for the host university towns. These mobilizations were expected to keep pace with the annual agenda of organizations but, unabatingly, certain compelling factors somehow truncated the continuities that the games were planned to experience. It is in this perspective that the study analyzes the origins and management structures and changes in the organization of university games in Cameroon.

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<sup>7</sup> Nantang B. Jua, Francis B. Nyamnjoh, "Scholarship production in Cameroon," <http://www.nyamnjoh.com> accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Mourine, "Teaching: Paul Biya signs a decree creating three universities, Decree No. 2022/003 of January 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 portant creation d'Universites", <http://www.ocamer.com>, accessed on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Wango Tama, Head of Service for Sports and Socio-cultural Activities, University of Bamenda, by Nsha Donna Yuninui, in Bamenda on November 7<sup>th</sup> 2020.

### **Nascent Phase of the University Games in Cameroon**

Remotely, the history of University Games in Cameroon could well be traced from the efforts of the *l'Organisation des Sport Scolaires et Universitaires du Cameroun*, better known by its acronym (OSSUC).<sup>10</sup> Formed in 1952 in French Cameroon, this entity was tasked with the responsibility to organize and control yearly competitive sports in the educational milieu in Cameroon.<sup>11</sup> The first OSSUC game was organized six years after its creation precisely in 1957 between primary and secondary institutions.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately and at this time, there was no higher institution of learning in Cameroon to partake in this ground breaking event. That notwithstanding, the opening of a somewhat higher school of learning known as the National Institute of University Studies took part in OSSUC organized games from 1961, a year preceding the creation of the Federal university of Yaoundé in 1962.<sup>13</sup> From then onward, the animation of sporting competitions in primary schools, colleges, Universities and other higher institutions of learning were done under the auspices of OSSUC. To ensure order and achievement of set objectives, the organization classified sporting activities in to three groups:

- OSSUC A for Universities and other institutes of higher learning
- OSSUC B for Secondary schools
- OSSUC C for Primary schools

Following decree N° 62/DF/289 of July 16, 1962, that created the Federal University of Yaoundé, a university sports department was opened with the objective to put in place structures for the organization and functioning of university sports. The participation of institutions of higher learning at the OSSUC national competitions from 1962 to 1984 was consequent to this legal framework.<sup>14</sup> Viewed as a plausible move, the progressive development of university centers and the inability to combine competitive games with athletes of the Primary and Secondary school levels nursed the desire for the creation of a distinct organizational competition that could group the higher institutions and separate them from the primary and secondary levels.

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<sup>10</sup> The English equivalence for OSSUC is the Office of Schools and University sports Competitions MINESUP, *Jeux Universitaire 2004*, Data collected and collated

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Noah Euloge, aged 49, Account Commissioner of FENASU, Yaoundé, December 14<sup>th</sup> 2021

<sup>12</sup> Luc Angoula Nanga, In *Cameroon Tribune*, March 26 1999, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Ebeney Moise Andoche, "Matérialisation et Déposition des Aires de jeu lors des jeux Universitaire, impact sur les résultats techniques", (Dissertation CAPEPS I, INJS Yaoundé, 2005), 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

It is in this background that the Minister of Youth and Sports, Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya in April 1984 during the OSSUC games in Bertoua, informed the public of government's decision to take the University athletes out of the OSSUC Games. This pronouncement was greeted with joy and ecstasy by the university institutions who saw it as an opportunity to trade their marks of their respective programs and sporting talents. The University Games was founded as a substitute to this exit.<sup>15</sup> From 1985, OSSUC A Games ceded its place to University Games. In this connection, the games had as main objective to consolidate and foster national unity and integration among students of higher education, through competitive sporting activities.<sup>16</sup> At the nascent phase of the conception, the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the Ministry of Higher Education took control of the organization of the events. At the beginning, the games were opened only to public institutions of higher learning<sup>17</sup> notably: the University of Yaoundé, the University centers of Buea, Dschang, Douala and Ngaoundéré, the National Institute of Youth and Sports (NIYS) and *L'Ecole Militaire Inter Armees* (EMIA). After its split from OSSUC, the first autonomous University Games organized by higher institutes of learning in Cameroon in their own merit, took place in the Douala University Centre from the 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 1985. It had an impressive turn out of about 1085 participants from the seven public higher institutions of learning.<sup>18</sup> In prelude to the gaming, a financial package of 40,000,000FCFA was disbursed by the State as subvention for the renovation of sports infrastructures notably, the handball municipal stadium at Ngodi, Akwa.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the state, the host center also received assistance in cash and logistics from business promoters like; *Groupe Fotso*, Cameroon Telecommunication (CAMTEL), *Cimenteries du Cameroun* (CIMENCAM), *Societe Nationale d'Investissement du Cameroun* (SNI), National Electricity Company (SONEL) and *Credit Foncier*. On the heels of Douala, Maroua became host to the 1986 games. By 1987, Buea played host followed by Yaoundé in 1988 and Bafoussam in 1989. In 1990, the Games

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<sup>15</sup> Ebeney Moise Andoche, *Matérialisation et déposition des Aires de jeu lors des jeux Universitaire*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Sah Khan in *Cameroon Tribune*, April 25, 2008, 30.

<sup>17</sup> The games were opened only for public institutions because of financial constraints and the economic crisis which stroke the country at the time. Private institutions later came into play in 2008 with the condition of contributing a participation fee for the games and also because the games will serve as an avenue for them to sensitize and advertise their educational opportunities to Cameroonian youths. Their participation sensitized the games on the various educational opportunities available in these institutions. Some private universities even emerged victorious in general trophy classifications more that state universities which brought honor and fame to these institutions and made the games more competitive.

<sup>18</sup> Denis Malaquais in *Cameroon Tribune*, March 25, 1998, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Luc Angoula Nanga, In *Cameroon Tribune*, March 26 1999, 15.

competition was planned for Yaoundé but was later moved to Ebolowa following directives from the Minister of Youth and Sports, Dr. Joseph Fofe.<sup>20</sup>

The euphoria that surrounded the split of institutions of Higher learning in Cameroon from the OSSUC games was just to last for a while. This was so because of the enduring economic crisis that Cameroon suffered from 1984 to 1994 in addition to strikes and public demonstrations by students of the University of Yaoundé in the early 1990s which considerably perturbed the practice of sporting competition among institutions of higher learning. Thus, the activities of the University Games were temporarily interrupted due to the socio-political turbulence and by extension financial crisis that characterized most part of the 1990s. In this regard, the Games suffered a hibernation period of seven years, from 1990 to 1997.<sup>21</sup>

### **Relaunch of the University Games**

The economic crisis and strike actions in institutions of higher learning in Cameroon brought pressure to bear on the government to make certain structural adjustments. According to Eloge Noah,<sup>22</sup> the economic crisis led to a reduction in state budget and consequently a reduction of the budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which was charged with the responsibility to run the program. Hampered by this, the university games among other activities in the country had to be suspended for a while until such a moment when the financial situation was to improve.

Within the years of the existence of the university games and even after going in to oblivion, to when it was re-launched, a number of university reforms continued to be made by the government that later served as conduits for the future games especially the 1993 reforms, right up to reforms in the 2000s. Initially, these reforms were generated by the advisory body of the National Council of Higher Education and Scientific Research chaired by the Head of State. By its composition, the advisory body comprised of government officials, university staffs, students and

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<sup>20</sup> This was in accordance with the Rotatory University Games law because university games came along with certain benefits and developments in and around host universities such the construction and rehabilitation of sport facilities, roads, availability of water and it also brought revenue to business centers and hotels. Thus it was intended to be rotatory in terms of hosting in order for state universities to benefit from these opportunities and the surrounding areas. Andoche, *"Materialisation et Desposition"*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Luc Angoula Nanga, In *Cameroon Tribune*, March 26, 1999, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Noah Euloge, aged 49, Account Commissioner of FENASU, Yaoundé, December 14<sup>th</sup> 2021.

representatives of the private sector and civil service<sup>23</sup>. This body made proposals to reduce the overcrowded amphitheaters and laboratories, which was making learning ineffective. It is in this line that, four university centres were created in Buea, Dschang, Douala and Ngaoundere.<sup>24</sup> Although applauded, the specialized nature of these new centres contributed little to the decongestion strives of the University of Yaoundé. While the population of the University of Yaoundé kept on increasing, the four created centres remained grossly under-utilized. To understand how acute the problem was, the Buea University Centre which was built to accommodate 2000 students had only 60 students in 1991 while the University of Yaoundé designed for 5000 students enrolled almost 45000 students around the same year.<sup>25</sup>

Evidently, the four university centers created in 1977 did not help cut down on the student population in the University of Yaoundé. This was eminent because by 1985, the problem of overcrowding was still lingering. The outcome of this condition was low success rate, high attrition and dropout rate.<sup>26</sup> As could be expected, students agitated, and it became imperative to decongest and to decentralize the University of Yaoundé. It was in this light that series of reforms and presidential decrees were put in place between 1992 and 1993 which transformed the higher education landscape profoundly.

The years 1992/1993 could be considered as milestone periods which redressed plenty of concerns in universities and institutions of higher learning in Cameroon. Consequently, such changes influenced the manner in which university games were to be coordinated and hosted. Following Decree No. 93/027 of 19 January 1993, six state universities were created with the transformation of University of Yaoundé.<sup>27</sup> After the reform, the University of Yaoundé was decentralized to the universities of Yaoundé I and II, and the four other University centers of Douala, Dschang, Ngaoundere and Buea were transformed into full-fledged universities.<sup>28</sup> These transformations naturally had to expand students' enrolments and elicit a more competitive extra-curricular sporting life among the new university institutions.

The fundamental institutional aspects of the 1993 university reforms were the reorganization of the academic year into two semesters and the introduction of the

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<sup>23</sup> Terfot Augustine Ngwana, "The implementation of the 1993 Higher Education Reforms in Cameroon: issues and promises," (International Centre for Education Leadership, UK), 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy L. Njeuma *et al*, "Reforming a National System of Higher Education, The Case of Cameroon", Washington DC, USA, (1999): 2.

<sup>26</sup> Terfot Augustine Ngwana, "The implementation of the 1993 Higher Education Reforms in Cameroon: issues and promises," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Grace Yoke Motove, "The University of Buea 1993-2007: *Evolution and socio Economic Impact on the Buea Municipality*," (Dissertation, History department, University of Buea, 2013), 40.

modular or course credit system. This system intended to make programs more varied, professional and relevant to the job markets and to reduce failure rates since it allowed students to move at their own pace.<sup>29</sup> This modular or course system led to the revision of course programs, the content, and improved relevance.<sup>30</sup> Another importance of the 1993 reforms to the university games in Cameroon, was the leverage it provided for the creation of private higher institutes. These institutes by 1999 were authorized to join in the annual university sporting jamboree. Their involvement in the university games increased the number of participants and added color to the sporting bonanza.

It could be deduced from the aforementioned that, the government took advantage of university games to instill the concept of national unity and national integration. This is evident by virtue of the different chorographic cultural displays during such events. The interaction and camaraderie created collective memories which were difficult to undermine. In fact, the 1993 reforms that developed and increased the number of higher institutions in Cameroon to six full-fledged universities and other private institutions made it a necessity for a social forum to bring these students together.<sup>31</sup> As a fallout from these reforms, the Government put in place a structure that will once again bring youths together in order to provide them space to interact and exhibit their wherewithal in the domain of sports and entertainment,

As an effort towards revamping sports in university circles, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1996, Law No. 96/09 was put in place, on the organization of sport activities in Cameroon. This law culminated in the creation of a national federation for university sports, known by its French acronym, FENASU. To give it legitimacy, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2001, Decision Number 386\MJS\MINESUP was put into place and Article 13 of that decision, created *Federation Nationale du Sport Universitaire* (FENASU) that is National Federation for University Sports as the coordinating structure of the University Games with its head office in Yaoundé.<sup>32</sup> It took this long for a text application to create FENASU bureau because the sources of FENASU income was ambivalent and it relied mainly on the Ministry of Higher Education for financial support in the organization of these games. The organization of the games within this period witnessed a limited number of sports disciplines to be competed upon as well as a limited number of participants as a result of deficiency in finance

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<sup>29</sup> Terfot Augustine Ngwana, "The implementation of the 1993 Higher Education Reforms in Cameroon: issues and promises," 5.

<sup>30</sup> Grace Yoke Motove, *The University of Buea 1993-2007*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ngwana, *The Implementation of the 1993 Higher Education Reform*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ack Wendeu, in *Cameroon Tribune*, March 19, 2002.



from the FENASU. It was only when financial provisions for FENASU were set in 2012 after Decree No. 2012/PM of 10<sup>th</sup> September on fixing the modalities for the organization and functioning of the National Federation of University Sports, before the delegation could better organize the university games.<sup>33</sup> The FENASU was centrally charged with the responsibility of the organization and promotion of University sports.<sup>34</sup>

After a few years of inactivity, in December 1997 Jean Marie Atangana Mebera, the Minister of Higher Education took the initiative to re-introduce the University Games. At the beginning of the 1997/1998 academic year, Mebera announced the resumption of the University Games. The first edition of the games was baptized the “Re-launch Game.” It was scheduled for the University of Dschang in March 1998. Participants’ came from the six state Universities that were created consequent to the university reforms of 1993. From 1998, when the University Games started with six Universities, the Ministry of Higher Education was solely in charge of financing all the Games activities. The participating universities and institutions handled only basic expenses like financing the transportation of their various delegations and sporting materials for their athletes.<sup>35</sup> But with the increase in the number of Universities and competing disciplines, the number of athletes tripled and the financial cost of meeting up with the various exigencies became a burden for the Ministry of Higher Education to support. To enliven the situation, the Ministry of Higher Education solicited the various Universities and private institutions to contribute in order to participate in the University Games in 2008.<sup>36</sup>

From 1998 when the University Games in Cameroon was re-launched, there were just six sport disciplines namely; football, basketball, handball, volleyball, athletics and judo. These sports were only for men but the sport disciplines increased as new initiatives were detected by FENASU. To give taste to the games, the Fan Clubs competition was introduced in the 2001 edition of the University Games in Ngaoundéré which brought major changes in the organization of the Games.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Noah Euloge, aged 49, Account Commissioner of FENASU, Yaoundé, December 14<sup>th</sup> 2021.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Alain Ndio Bakangzia, aged 48, (Technical Coordinator of FENASU CMR), Wednesday December 16, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> The introduction of the Fan Clubs created a festive atmosphere during the games as the various fan clubs could be seen displaying Cameroonian cultural diversity while supporting their teams. Many participants in the games attended the event just to see the manner in which the various fan clubs displayed and portrayed the different cultures and traditions which existed in Cameroon in the form of dances, ceremonies and masquerade dances which attracted the attention of the

In line with external sponsorship, the university games attracted funding from certain multi-laterals, first on the list of sponsors was the British-American Tobacco Company (BAT), Coca-Cola, Brasseries du Cameroun, and Nestle. After the 2002 edition of the university games that took place in the University of Douala, BAT Company in Cameroon ceased sponsoring the games because of the controversy that surrounded the activity of the company.<sup>38</sup> This played in favor of the MTN (Mobile Telephone Network Company) which entered into sponsorship of the University games in 2003. The MTN Company was very instrumental during the games as they provided financial support and made the provision of some sporting materials which assisted in the smooth functioning of the games.

### **The Pre-FENASU Coordination of the Games: 1998-2012**

Following the creation of FENASU, the Ministry of Higher Education was tasked with the responsibility of organizing the University games in Cameroon. In that line, credit was attributed to the Ministry for the successful follow-up of the 1998 games in Dschang, the 1999, Yaoundé I hosting, the Buea 2000 and Ngaoundéré 2001 editions respectively. At the re-launch of the University Games, the preliminary hosting took place at the University of Dschang from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1998. It was baptized “*jeux de relance*”<sup>39</sup> given the hibernation of the activities for over seven years (1990-1997). The participants came from the six State Universities. These institutions competed in six disciplines; football, handball, basketball, volleyball, athletics and judo. There were altogether 632 participants comprising athletes and coaches from the six state Universities.<sup>40</sup>

The second edition of the University Games took place from the 27<sup>th</sup> of March to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1999 in the University of Yaoundé I and was marked by certain changes. First the participating institutions increased from six to eight with the addition of the National Institute of Youth and Sports and the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC) . This edition had a total number of 967 participants who

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public. The Fan clubs were used by the FENASU Committee to create awareness and sensitize the public of an event of this nature. Interview with Alain Ndio Bakangzia, aged 48, Technical Coordinator of FENASU CMR), Wednesday December 16, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> The controversy at this level was that the products of BAT were considered unfavourable. Kingsley A. Ollong, “Contentious corporate social responsibility practices by British American tobacco in Cameroon,” Vol.8 No. 41, (2017): 96.

<sup>39</sup> The Re-launched Games.

<sup>40</sup> MINESUP, *Jeux Universitaire* 1998, 1-2.

competed in eight disciplines with two new disciplines added, lawn tennis and table tennis.<sup>41</sup>

For the smooth functioning of the edition, a sum of ninety million (90,000,000) francs CFA was provided by MINESUP and a subvention from the Ministry of Economy and Finance to manage the affairs of the Games. To this was added the sum of fifty million (50,000,000) Francs CFA that came from the Games sponsors (BAT, *Groupe Fotso*, CAMTEL, CIMENCAM, SNI, SONEL and *Credit Foncier*). These funds were used to rehabilitate the existing infrastructure and a Multi-purpose sports complex with semi Olympic norms dubbed “*stade de renouveau*”.<sup>42</sup> To better stimulate the spirit of fair play and discipline, an award of excellence worth two million was put in place by MINESUP for the delegation among the six state universities that will maintain the best moral and ethical behavior throughout the Games. This prize was won by the University of Buea and the University of Yaoundé II. After the games, the evaluation report presented by MINESUP maintained that the objectives attained were highly above expectations and that the 1999 organization intensified and improved on the quality of sport practices in the state universities as well as encouraged socialization and healthy cultural exchanges among students. The report also mentioned that the Games prepared students for future university sports both at the national and international levels.<sup>43</sup>

The University of Buea was designated to host the third edition of the Pre-FENASU games from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2000. This time, the Higher National Institute of Post and Telecommunication (ENSPT), joined the eight other Universities taking the number of participating institutions to nine. This surged the total number of participants to 1229 who competed still in eight disciplines; judo, football, handball, volleyball, basketball, lawn tennis, and table tennis. The fourth edition of the University games hosted in Ngaoundéré from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2001 marked the end of hosting rights in the Pre-FENASU coordination era. Eleven institutions took part in this game with new entries of the school of Public Works (ENSTP) and *Institute Africain D’Informatique* (IAI). The number of participants went up to 1588 and they competed in eight disciplines.<sup>44</sup>

The Pre-FENASU administration of university games in Cameroon rested more in the hands of the Ministry of Higher Education. These era which began from

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<sup>41</sup>MINESUP, *Compte-rendu des 2eme jeux universitaires, edition Yaoundé 1999*, 2. Data collected and collated.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> MINESUP, *Compte-rendu des 2eme jeux universitaires, edition Yaoundé 2001*, 4. Data collected and collated.

1998, passively gave way in 2002 when FENASU was in its gestation face. However, 2012 marked the end of its mandate administratively speaking. To this end, an appraisal of FENASU organized games hereafter is important.

### **Transition from MINESUP Management to FENASU Organization**

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001, decision number 3861/MJS, MINESUP put in place a provisional executive bureau of FENASU which had as general mission to: organize sports at the higher level through university sports competitions and to organize University Games once every year. In 2002 this provisional executive bureau organized the University Games for the first time.<sup>45</sup> FENASU went official in 2012 after the presidential decree No 2012/2506 which set the modalities under which it had to function. It was placed under the co-tutelage of the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Higher Education.<sup>46</sup> For proper management, FENASU was administered by two organs; the Federal Council which is a supervisory and deliberation organ, and, the National Executive Bureau which assumed the role of the administrative organ of the structure. These different facets formed the next part of the discussion.

In an attempt to function properly, the Federal Council was composed of the president, the Minister of Higher Education, the Vice President, the Minister of Sports and other members notably, the Minister of Secondary Education, Basic Education, Public health, Social Affairs, Finance, the Rectors of all State Universities, Head of Higher Institutions in the private sectors that had affiliations with FENASU and two students delegated from each private and public higher institutions. The Federal Council was to meet at least twice in ordinary sessions a year. It had one session to vote its budget and another to audit its budget and examine how far the Federation had evolved.<sup>47</sup>

The functions of the Federal Council were as follows; defined the operational strategies put in place by the government, defined, orientate, control and evaluate the actions and functioning of the executive Bureau. The Federal Council also adopted budget and controlled the execution of budget by the executive bureau. It equally defined the road map and determined the remunerations given to personnel.<sup>48</sup> It controlled the other organs at all levels, adopted a national competition calendar, validated competitive results, sanctioned faults committed by members in the execution of their duties and organized extra-ordinary sessions.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Alain Ndio Bakagzia.

<sup>46</sup> MINESUP, Decree No.2012/2506, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Noah Euloge Marcelin.

On the other hand, the National Executive Bureau, the administrative organ of FENASU assured the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Federal Council and elaborated projects from the minutes of the Federal Council. It was headed by a President who was a Rector from any state university, a vice president designated by the Minister of Sports and Physical Education, the Secretary General and a vice, a national technical coordinator, the head of financial department and two account commissioners designated by the Minister of Higher Education. According to Article 2 of decree No 2012/2506 of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012 FENASU had the following missions;<sup>49</sup>

- To consolidate the associative life of students who were members of sports association in institutions of higher education.
- To fight against drug use in the University milieu as far as sports was concerned and other sports malpractices.<sup>50</sup>
- Furthermore they had to vulgarize the practice of sports in partnership with civil sports federations in all disciplines which were recognized in Cameroon in state universities, public, private and international institutions of higher education who were affiliated to FENASU.
- They were to see into the rehabilitation and perpetuation of the existing sport infrastructures, to develop physical activities and sports in university and other higher institutions so that it should be dynamic and to prepare them for national and international university sporting competition.<sup>51</sup>
- Furthermore, FENASU had as obligation to reinforce solidarity among the student from the different universities in Cameroon thereby promoting unity between them.

By virtue of its carefully crafted mission, it was clear that FENASU through its executive national bureau had the task to bring probity in to university games in Cameroon and to create possibilities for enlivening the spirit of the games by making sure of all desired arrangements. Having seen its mission, an examination of the pre-FENASU organization is important.

### **FENASU Organized Phase of the Games**

It is germane to indicate that, before its official recognition in 2012 as per Decree No 2012/2506 of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012 fixing modalities for the organization and functioning of the National Federation of University Sports, FENASU had

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<sup>49</sup> Decree No 2012/2506 of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012

<sup>50</sup> This was part of the reason why BAT was removed from sponsoring the games.

<sup>51</sup> Luc Angoula Nanga, In *Cameroon Tribune*, March 26 1999, 15.

already organized its first games during the fifth edition of the university games of 2002 at the University of Douala. As the host institution to the fifth edition after the era of direct control from the Ministry of Higher Education, the University Games in Douala which lasted from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of March saw the participation of 14 institutions and a total number of 2241 participants with three new institutions participating for the first time that is, *L'Ecole Supérieur de Gestion* (ESG), National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) and *Institute Siantou*.<sup>52</sup>

In 2003, the University of Yaoundé I once more hosted the Games, but this time under the coordination of FENASU. The sixth edition of the Games counting from the time of it was re-launched, took place from the 25<sup>th</sup> of April to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2003. National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) and *Institute Africain D'informatique* were excluded from this edition of the games because of malpractices. Thus Twelve institutions took part with a total number of 2538 participants. There was an innovation in this year's Games given the enlistment and participation of students from neighboring Nigeria. This gave the event an international dimension for the first time which was also geared towards improving diplomatic ties. The sum of 70 million FCFA was made available by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in preparation for the Games and the host university received the sum of 30 million FCFA to renovate its sports infrastructures and to accommodate athletes during the manifestations.<sup>53</sup>

Thereafter, the seventh edition of the Games was convened for the University of Yaoundé II from the 25<sup>th</sup> of April to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2004. Thirteen institutions featured with 2987 participants. The 2004 university Games was organized in a context somehow challenging than the preceding cases given that the University of Yaoundé II at Soa was a new university environment with little or no take off sporting facilities. In this regard a lot had to be done to construct pitches to accommodate the different sports disciplines. In spite of all the efforts invested, the university environment could not meet up with the exceeding social facility demands of the Games. Some participants had to leave from Yaoundé to Soa every day to participate at the event.<sup>54</sup>

From the University of Yaoundé II, the University Games returned to the cradle of the re-launch, in Dschang, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2005. This year's game took place later than planned due to delays by the host university to meet up with the required sports facilities. Eleven institutions, down from thirteen, took part in this

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<sup>52</sup> Ack Wendeu in *Cameroon Tribune*, March 19 2002, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Bertrand Roger in *Cameroon Tribune*, May 2 2003, 26.

<sup>54</sup> MINESUP, *compte-rendu des 6eme jeux universitaires, edition Yaoundé II 2004*.

game with 2173 participants who competed in 11 disciplines. Some institutions were sanctioned for game malpractices. In wrestling, seven institutions were supposed to compete but only five finally took part. Two private institutions; Institute Siantou and ESG participants were expelled for violating the age limit eligibility for athletes. Others were expelled for violating the rule that restricted participation to duly registered university students.<sup>55</sup>

In 2006 the University of Buea was once more honored to host the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Games that ran from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2006. This edition received 3113 participants from twelve higher institutions who competed in nine disciplines. Picture one depicts University of Buea athletes with the Olympic flame.

**Picture 1: UB Athletes with the Olympic Flame**



**Source:** Dieudonne Gaibai, “University Games: Buea 2006 in the Rear-view Mirror”, Up Station Mountain Club Magazine, 2006, 7.

After the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the university games in Buea, the University of Ngaoundéré was earmarked to host the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the University games from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2007. This game played host to some 3054 participants from sixteen institutions who competed in nine disciplines. This was the first time an institution from the North West Region, National Polytechnic Bambui joined the competition. Unfortunately, 89 cases of food poisoning related malaise were reported by the medical task force of the Games.<sup>56</sup>

The hosting rights for the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the University games in Cameroon scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2008 was the preserve of the University of Douala, with fifteen institutions registered present. In spite of the increase in the

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<sup>55</sup> Mounyol Mboussi in *Cameroon Tribune*, 13 July 2005, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Armand Essogo in *Cameroon Tribune*, 26 April 2007, 30.

number of official delegation, the total number of participants dropped from 3054 in the previous edition in Ngaoundéré to 2633.<sup>57</sup> These athletes competed again in nine disciplines. As usual, the Games was launched on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> of April, by the Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Jacques Fame Ndongo, in the presence of, the Minister of Sports and Physical Education, Augustine Edjoa Minister of Youth, Adoum Garoua, and other dignitaries.

At this edition in the economic capital, business people, corporate companies notably, brewery and telecommunication companies made brisk business. Even the informal commercial motor cycle transporters ('bend-skin' riders) registered unprecedented profits. Noel Donfack, a seasoned commercial bike rider testified that during the Games, movements to and fro the Games setting were so intense that, his daily net gains quadrupled from 12000FCFA to 48000FCFA.<sup>58</sup> MTN Cameroon was the main sponsor of the event. Athletes, officials, fans were all clad in the company's outfits. MTN billboards, posters, caps, T-shirts, were conspicuously displayed as ceremonial décor in the Games precincts. The various university fan clubs were competing for the best fan club award, besides keeping the games vicinity visibly alive. They could be seen gyrating like rattle snakes to the delight of spectators.<sup>59</sup>

In 2009 the University of Yaoundé I hosted the University Games for the third time after it was re-launched. This game unfolded from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of May and a recorded the participation of seventeen institutions. One of the new entrants to the Games was the delegation from the newly created University of Maroua. There were a total number of 2812 participants who competed in nine disciplines. This edition was special in that it had at its launching ceremony international visitors from the Economic and Monetary Union of Central Africa (CEMAC) Regional Bloc like the Rectors of the Universities of Bangui, Libreville, Ndjamen, Malabo and Brazzaville were all present during the opening ceremony of this game.<sup>60</sup> Elated by the unfolding of the events, they proposed to organize similar events among higher institutions in Central Africa in order to promote and foster inter-university solidarity between students in the sub regional setting.<sup>61</sup>

In 2010 the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the University Games simply shifted from the University of Yaoundé I to its splinter offshoot at Soa, University of Yaoundé II. This

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<sup>57</sup> The number of participating institutions dropped because *Institute Africain D'Informatique* was expelled for malpractices.

<sup>58</sup> Innocent Mbunwe, <https://www.postnewsline.com/2008/04/2008-douala-uni.html>, accessed May 20, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



time around the pressure of organization had reduced given that it was building on the infrastructure put in place during the first hosting. Attention was mostly tilted towards renovating the existing sporting facilities.

From the University of Yaoundé II, the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the University Games went to the University of Dschang in the West Region of Cameroon. The Games in Dschang began from the 7<sup>th</sup> of May and ended on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2011. It was officially launched by the Minister of Higher Education Prof. Jacques Fame Ndongo at the University of Dschang Sport Complex under the theme “Catapult towards Emergence”. The 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the University Games was very special due to the presence of a delegation of member countries from the CEMAC Regional bloc. The visitors once gain expressed the willingness of countries in the sub region to put in place University Games as another social lever of integration.<sup>62</sup> Dignitaries such as Jean Kuete, Vice Prime Minister in charge of Agriculture and Rural Development and H.E Albert Roger Milla the Roving Ambassador were among the cream of dignitaries who featured prominently at the event .<sup>63</sup> A unique activity that distinguished this opening ceremony was the formal singing of the University Games hymn “*Les corps sont dans la place*” composed and written by some students from “*l’insitut des beaux Arts de Foumban*” a newly created academic department of the University of Dschang.<sup>64</sup>

The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the University Games took place in Buea and ran from Saturday the 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2012. The Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Jacques Fame Ndongo in his opening address on ‘Together Let’s Build the Cameroon of Excellence’, implored the public to take the Games as an avenue to produce veritable sports men and women who are not just only interested in wining but who will build and exhibit a spirit of camaraderie towards all opponents.<sup>65</sup> What was peculiar about this Games was the official mascot, a gigantic elephant which represents the Bakweri culture artistically mounted at the entrance of the Administrative block of the University.

In terms of finance, the University of Buea spent about five hundred million francs CFA to prepare for the Games. Existing sports facilities were refurbished and additional infrastructures constructed.<sup>66</sup> This Game was not without hurdles given

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<sup>62</sup> Christian, Manga. [http://www.uy1.uninet.cm/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=175%3Aapport-des-jeux-universitaires&Itemid=58](http://www.uy1.uninet.cm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=175%3Aapport-des-jeux-universitaires&Itemid=58), accessed November 21, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Raynald Bounde, <http://www.news.mboa.info/superieur/fr/societe/actualite/62530,jeux-universitaire-also-dschang-2011-les-des-sont-jetes.html>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Nelson Walter, “varsity games”, [http://www.postnewslines.com/2006/05/varsity\\_gamesa\\_html](http://www.postnewslines.com/2006/05/varsity_gamesa_html), accessed July 15, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Walter Nelson, “varsity games”, [http://www.postnewslines.com/2006/05/varsity\\_gamesa\\_html](http://www.postnewslines.com/2006/05/varsity_gamesa_html).

that, a group of students of the University of Buea, identified as University of Buea Students Union (UBSU)” interrupted the games with rattling chants for the university authorities to “pay the dues owed athletes prior to the competition.” This esoteric situation brought a moment of confusion during the inaugural football encounter between the University of Buea and the University of Dschang. The protesters claimed athletes’ game participation dues had not been paid for the past two years. It was an opportunity for the students to drum this frustration to the attention of the Minister of Higher Education. On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> of May, this group of protesters resurfaced and once more attempted to disrupt the game. They did this by invading the field and creating pandemonium. Additionally, vehicles heading toward the stadium were vandalized.<sup>67</sup> The situation was only brought under control by the presence and intervention of the forces of law and order and the payment of the students’ participation allowance. After the hosting’s and turmoil in Buea, the university of Ngaoundéré was the next to host.

The 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the University Games started on Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> of April in Ngaoundéré and rounded off on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013. It was the second time the University of Ngaoundéré was hosting the competition, having hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> edition in 2007. The 16th edition of the Games drew together 3000 students and officials from eighteen Institutions of Higher Learning in Cameroon.<sup>68</sup> The 2013 University Games in Ngaoundéré registered some tethering organizational challenges. On the eve of the manifestations most of the sports facilities were still under construction. Besides, most visiting delegations had not been reserved accommodation because of lack of infrastructures. Some had to gain makeshift lodgings before they were later moved to improve lodging facilities.<sup>69</sup>

In 2014, the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of the Games was slated for Douala and it ran from 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2014 to 11<sup>th</sup> of May that same year. During the one week sports and cultural jamboree, 3143 athletes from over twenty public and private higher institutions of learning had to exhibit their talents. The 17<sup>th</sup> Edition of the University Games, was marked by the presence of over 3000 athletes. It was animated by the Fans clubs of the different participating delegations.<sup>70</sup>

Thereafter, the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the University Games in Cameroon took place in the University of Yaoundé I on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2015. The Olympic torch was lit at the Yaoundé 1 University complex on the same day. The 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the University

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<sup>67</sup> Frederic Bounboua in *Cameroon Tribune*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012, 29.

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/SportsArchive/2013-Varsity-Games-Around-the-Corner-306912>, accessed October 16, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

games, which brought together state, private Universities and higher institutions of learning was graced by the presence of the Minister of Higher Education, the Roving Ambassador, Minister of Youth and Physical Education, Minister of Communication, the Governor of the Center Region, Government Delegate to the Yaoundé City Council and other dignitaries. The occasion witnessed the presence of over 3000 athletes coming from nineteen official delegations.

It was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April that the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of the university games began and ran till the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2016 at the campus of the University of Yaoundé II SOA. SOA was hosting for its third time. As usual, the opening ceremony was chaired by the Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Jaques Fame Ndong, accompanied by the Minister of Sports and Physical Education. The ceremony combined 3812 participants, including 2670 athletes and members of the fan's clubs. Athletes from at least eighteen institutions were contesting for trophies in eleven disciplines including the best fan club. The Minister of Higher Education, gave the kick off to the long week sporting jamboree during a solemn ceremony at the football pitch of the University of Yaoundé II, Soa.

For its first time, the University of Bamenda played host to the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the University games in Cameroon within the germination of the Anglophone crisis with safety and security partially threatened. Since it was its first time, the institution embarked on a vast and diversified construction site. A few pitches were rehabilitated while about 90% of the overall sports infrastructures were constructed anew, and a few others rehabilitated.<sup>71</sup> Newly constructed pitches included; two tennis courts, two basketball pitches, two handball pitches, one football pitch and a gymnasium.<sup>72</sup> Besides the infrastructures directly linked to the Games, other amenities like water, road network, toilets, on campus hostels and restoration were improved upon. The opening of the university restaurant on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 was a precursor to the commencement of the Games. In fact, the activities around infrastructural development dictated the pace for other surrounding businesses. The expected logistics was not perfect but at least it was relatively adequate to host a sports jamboree of that magnitude.

As seen already, from 2002 FENASU began supervising university games in Cameroon, ahead of its official recognition in 2012 as per Decree No 2012/2506 of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012, fixing modalities for the organization and its functioning. The era of FENASU, witnessed an increase in the number of participants, increase in

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<sup>71</sup> The University of Bamenda News Magazine, No. 005/2017, April 2017, 4.

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/SportsArchive/All-university-games-opens-in-Douala-303231> accessed October 16, 2020.

sports disciplines and sometimes increase in budgetary allocations. The trend and progress accounted for this wholesome growth.

### **Conclusion**

From the inception, the University Games developed as part of the national sporting games and systematically evolved to take its autonomy with the expansion of the public and private higher education institutions of learning. From the nascent development in the 1960s and transformation especially from 1985 to 2017, the games has wavered in mode and nature of coordination and hosting. Inspired by the State's desire to promote national unity and integration through sports, the investigation revealed that from the budding phase, with just few institutions of higher learning, the state of Cameroon created a social communion of sporting interaction among primary, secondary and university institutions by instituting the OSSUC structure to organize and animate competitive sports among school athletes. This initial phase was modified due to the growing population and number of higher education establishments, which necessitated universities and other higher education institutions to demarcate from the OSSUC formula and compete at top level. The Cameroon Government through the Ministry of Higher Education took charge of the affairs related to the nature and organization of the competitions up to 1990 when the activities were perturbed by socio-political crisis in most part of the decade. After about seven years of hibernation, a law on the organization of sporting activities in August 1996 coupled with the nostalgia of re-living the pre-interruption phase(1990-1997) of the Games led the Ministry of Higher Education again to re-launch the University Games in 1998 at the university of Dschang. Within the interruptive phase from 1990-1997, an important State reform, the 1993 university reforms engendered the creation of the new State Universities. It also provided administrative guidelines for the creation and functioning of Private and Confessional higher institutions of learning thereby increasing the number of participating institutions in the Games. Consequently, the increase in the number of participating delegations. It is perhaps for this consideration that the law organizing national sports was enacted in 1996 to create FENASU. This law remained inactive up to 2012 when it received its text of application. Therefore, from 2012 onward, the management structure for the University Games in Cameroon became the preserve of FENASU. The impact of the games were far reaching as it served as nurseries for potential talents to attain their dreams of becoming national and international professionals in their different sporting domains. Francoise Mbango, fresh from the university Games, for instance, was able to win the most coveted gold medal in triple jump at the 2002 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. The Games also greatly contributed in the development

of sports facilities especially in the State universities. It was above all, a platform for social leveraging of students from the different cultural backgrounds in Cameroon as well as an opportunity for international university cooperation.

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