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When pan lost out to football

Only a meagre 1,500 to cheer on superlative Schools Steelband Festival

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THE 1989 SCHOOLS Steelband Festival has come and gone without any fanfare, and a discouraging silence from the news media. I believe that this is the most important pan event as it ensures the very survival of the art form in this country while instilling proper values and discipline into our young pan musicians.

The 1989 festival "Reaping The Harvest" was one of the most efficiently run cultural events of the year, and it gave me the greatest satisfaction to witness the high standard that the school bands have achieved in just under ten years.

The crowd attendance on final night was the only major disappointment. From an almost capacity audience in 1987 we could only muster a meagre 1,500 patrons to cheer on the superlative performances. Surely the youth deserve more.

School Event

Why the lack of interest? Many blamed the football and in a way they were correct. People had approached us with the suggestion that we postpone the festival because of the match with the US. We refused; after all we had booked our dates two years ago, and saw no reason why the football should affect the Schools Steelband Festival.

We were proven wrong; not that we would have changed the dates if we



FESTIVAL CHAMPIONS: ST AUGUSTINE Senior Comprehensive, 1989 National Schools Steelband Festival champions. The popular East band topscored in both tune of choice and test piece.

had this knowledge beforehand. It just proves how fickle a people we are. The whole population went with the football over-kill at the expense of everything else. The media could find no space for us, after all there was nothing sensational about a school festival.

The only television station in this country must re-examine its priorities. We held three press conferences and a media launch, to all of which TTT were invited. They attended none, claiming lack of crews. Our advertisement scheduled for the Friday before the festival

could not be found in the log the Tuesday before. The excuse, football.

The other area of concern lies with the lack of commitment by the Ministry of Education to the festival. We have been trying since the inception of the festival to get the Ministry's blessing in making it an official school event. They have dragged their feet on it up to this time.

National Effort

We were shocked to know that while the Ministry was reluctant to allow the students time off to support their bands, they gave permission for chil-

dren to attend a frivolous rally at the stadium on the same day as one of our semi-finals at the whims of the football association.

We discreetly channeled our protests to the Ministry of Education and to Culture, informing them that this rally would disrupt our programme, and that we did not see any educational value in it. In fact it may be because of this rally and other distractions that our footballers were drained of all energy when it was needed most.

The football people as we expected would not budge, although we had

moved around our dates to accommodate them both for the big match and for an inter-col semi-final.

To make matters worse a double header was scheduled the same night of our finals, and try as we could we were unable to get it changed. Fortunately few people attended and it did not disturb the performances.

Such disrespect by one national organisation to another cannot be tolerated. Had we made it an issue we would have been accused of sabotaging the national effort.

I wonder if many people consider the staging of the Schools Festival as a national effort. Next festival we would demand that no conflicting activities compete with us, after all we pay for the use of the courts.

Young People

There are too many positive things coming out of the festival to dwell on the negative. The fantastic performances of the bands and the soloist, the response of the Corporate sector in giving small, but valuable donations, especially the commercial banking sector and Citrus Growers.

Ras Shorty I and Tambu inspired the young people on final night with renditions straight from the heart. The schools steelband festival is here to stay.

Proof of this is the number of foreigners who were here as observers. People from the University of Northern Illinois, St Vincent, Guyana and the Virgin Islands.