

Canadian Team Sport Coalition Submission – ‘2010 and Beyond’

September 17, 2009

The Canadian Team Sports Coalition (the ‘Coalition’) is a group of national team sport organizations organized for the purposes of: carrying out research in relation to contribution of team sports to the Canadian sport system; enhancing the capacity and sustainability of team sports by leveraging resources and sharing best practices; increasing awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing team sports; implementing advocacy strategies with key partners, funders and decision-makers.

In its invitation for submissions, the 2010 and Beyond Panel poses a series of questions. The Coalition is pleased to make the following submissions in relation to three of those questions.

Question 1. “... what approaches to governance and leadership should be considered in order to improve the high-performance system? In responding to this question, please consider what sort of relationship should exist between the major funding partners of high performance sport in Canada.”

From the perspective of the Coalition, there are three areas of leadership and governance that need to be addressed to improve the high performance system. They can be organized under these three headings:

- Service Provider Autonomy
- Service Delivery (a one-window approach)
- Extended Partners

Service Provider Autonomy:

The Coalition believes that the Canadian sport system needs a strong and independent agency to execute on the priorities of funding partners at the national level. Our experience has shown that, as a direct government department, Sport Canada’s primary mandate is to support government, and not to support sport. As a result, political pressures have rendered Sport Canada more of a financial watchdog than a partner in implementing sport policy or developing a robust sport system. Most senior administrators within sport organizations will report that they spend inordinate time and energy dealing with financial issues, funding applications and quarterly statements, rather than spending time planning and implementing sport programs. As well, due its placement within the Ministry of Heritage, the Coalition has observed that Sport Canada is often required to follow funding frameworks and procedures that are better suited to the needs of Heritage (i.e, arts and cultural organizations) but do not meet the reality of delivering good sport programs and serving Canadians. The Coalition encourages the Panel to consider carefully the recommendations that have been made many times in the past, that Sport Canada be positioned as an independent agency, having an arms-length relationship with government, so that it can be a true partner in the development of the Canadian sport system. This would not be unlike agencies in other sectors, such as research funding bodies (NSERC, SSHRC) or the arts funding body, the Canada Council. The advantage of an independent agency is its ability to focus squarely, without political interference, on the mission that Canadians care about, and to support

the mandates of the sport organizations and communities through which sport actually takes place.

Service Delivery:

Recently there has been a push by several sport organizations in Ottawa to explore coming together under one physical roof, so that organizations may collaborate more, share administrative services, eliminate duplication and realize not only economies of scale, but also valuable synergies. This is a good idea and signals, in concrete terms, the merit and priority of bringing together the functions delivered by Sport Canada, Games organizations, coaching organizations, Own the Podium and other national service providers.

The concept for such consolidation is simple. At the present time, a national sport organization liaises on a regular basis with a representative from each of these organizations on matters relating to funding, policy development, high performance, coaching, LTAD, disabled sport, athlete assistance, and more. As a result, the sport organization is required to deal with separate individuals using separate procedures, timelines, funding applications and reporting requirements. Sport organizations are caught in an endless cycle of doing and redoing funding applications all throughout the year, and meeting shifting requirements as the needs of these entities change, leaving little time to perform the actual work that is contemplated in their plans and budgets.

There are enviable best practices from the private sector that demonstrate better ways to streamline such disjointed relationships and reporting. For example, in the high tech sector, when a company like IBM takes on a new client/project, it creates a multi-disciplinary service team to manage the relationship. Within this team, roles are well-defined – there is a single project manager, joined by representatives from marketing, hardware, software, sales, testing, and technical writing. The project manager serves as the intermediary between the team and the client. This multi-disciplinary team approach, all predicated on the ‘one window’ principle for the client, is also gaining ground in other fields such as health care.

We believe such a model can work for sport. A sport administrator should be able to liaise with a single manager to communicate with all of its funding partners. In effect, this creates a ‘one-window’ approach that would not only reduce the administrative burden on sport organizations (thus freeing up resources to pursue the sport organization’s mission), but would also enhance the seamless integration of the services being provided through COC, coaching, LTAD, Podium, etc. One point that should be made quite strongly is the need to have specialists in disabled/paralympic sports, there is a gap right now in the system of experts who can represent this group effectively – especially in a High Performance setting where the pathway for is less developed and clear for disabled athletes. As well, the one window approach flows logically from creating an independent, arms-length agency to represent the interests of sport’s major funder, the federal government.

Extended Partners:

High performance sport will not thrive in this country without the involvement of many partners. The Coalition believes that two partners, in particular, require special mention: Canadian Sport Centres, and collegiate sport bodies (CCAA and CIS).

Canadian Sport Centres (CSCs) are direct providers of services and facilities to coaches, athletes and teams. As such, they are strongly connected to the high performance mandates of NSOs. However, the current environment that exists in terms of CSC's is one of varying degrees of satisfaction with the service levels provided by the individual CSC offices. The Canadian team Sport Coalition feels several things need to be addressed to increase the effectiveness of these service providers:

1. Consistency – the level and types of services provided to HP athletes changes from one centre to another. Mandates seem different and what they are willing (able) to provide shifts dramatically from one region to another.
2. Linked to consistency is a need for better responsive to the specific needs of NSO's. From a team sport perspective we already have difficulties centralizing training, especially for sports that have professionals playing abroad and the costs of maintaining a centralized training environment (facilities, accommodations, etc). It is important that NSO's (High Performance directors/Coaches) have greater ability to have a say in the types of service provided in order to meet the needs of this type of group.
3. We believe CSCs should have a broader mandate – i.e. service a wider number of and types of athletes (non-targeted, disabled, etc) to support the sport system.
4. Finally, the Coalition is of the view that the present intrusion of Own the Podium into areas that are the purview of CSCs, is inappropriate. OTP is a funding agency and we would respectfully recommend that it be amalgamated with parts of Sport Canada into the independent agency described above.

On the collegiate sport issue, the Coalition feels strongly that the CCAA and CIS could play a much more vital role as infrastructure points for high performance athletes and teams. These bodies should be better integrated with NSOs and should fulfill their rightful place in the athlete development pathway towards high performance. The Coalition is supportive of efforts to merge CCAA and CIS (or minimally, to see CCAA and CIS more strategically aligned) and is also supportive of more government funding towards these entities, provided it leads to improved integration of collegiate sport within the Canadian high performance system.

Question 2: “How should performance targets be set for the 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games and the 2016 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, and beyond?”

First and foremost, the Coalition believes that, as a country, our aspirations should never waver from the ultimate goal of medalling at the Olympics, Paralympics and/or at World Championships. It is paramount that we create and sustain an organizational culture in our high performance programs that focuses on excellence. The mindset that we convey is that we strive continually to be the best, and that NSOs and their partners are accountable for ensuring that our resources are wisely used in pursuit of this objective.

Team sports in Canada have not shied away from the performance challenge. However, the barriers to international performance success are considerable, and are unique to team sports. Firstly, the international qualification process that team sports must pass through is exceedingly difficult and much more restrictive than for individual sports. Secondly, Sport Canada's focus on

medal production undervalues the significance of team sport success at the international level.

To better explain this difference between individual sports and team sports, and the resulting disparity that occurs in terms of the funding that rewards performance, consider the following scenario. Presume, for a moment, that the qualification process for swimming was altered to more closely resemble the qualification process for a team sport. This would mean that: 1. Only one swimmer from each gender could qualify to compete at the Olympics, 2. Only 12 swimmers from around the world could qualify and spots would also be preserved for the continental zone and host country, and 3. Qualification would not be based on times but rather on head-to-head competition against the best swimmers in your continental zone (i.e. Michael Phelps). Furthermore, there would be very few competitions available to you to seek qualification, and participation in those competitions would be exceedingly expensive due to costly logistics. This is the situation for most team sports in Canada.

Secondly, a strict focus on medals tips the balance to individual sports, without taking into consideration the impact team sports have on the sport system overall, from grass roots to high performance. This excerpt from the December 23rd *Summer Team Sport Strategy* document provides a good overview of our point:

A singular focus on medal production at the Olympic and Paralympic Games favors individual sports where numerous medals are available. Such an imbalance in medal-winning opportunities brings into question the appropriateness of such an approach given the significant numbers of Canadians who participate in summer team sports. For example, at the recent 2008 Olympic Games there were 302 medal events and 958 medals awarded. Team sports made up 14 of these events, approximately 5% of the total, and accounted for 42 medals or approximately 4% of the total medals awarded. The situation is more dramatic at the Paralympic Games; at the 2008 Paralympic Games 1,431 medals were awarded, of which 21 were to team sports, representing approximately 1.5% of the total medals awarded.

Team sports are the most popular sports in Canada. In terms of people engagement (through participating, volunteering and attending), team sports outperform individual sports by a significant margin. Team sports also contribute disproportionately to the many physical, psychological, community, societal and economic benefits of sport that are so well described in the literature.

We ask that team sports be viewed through their own lens, as opposed to the lens used to assess individual sport, and the Coalition specifically recommends that funders consider funding criteria for team sports that would focus on a team's capacity to consistently achieve Top 8 results at an Olympic Games, Paralympic Games or World Championships. Our rationale in support of this concept is that the Top 3 standard that applies to individual sports should equate, in team sports, to a consistent ability to secure Top 8 results, inasmuch as a Top 8 result puts a team in the hunt for a medal in that a single elimination victory can advance a team to the final four of a tournament.

Question 3. “What strategies should be undertaken to develop future HP resources, including the replacement of the \$11M/year from VANOC and \$5M from Sport Canada that are sunset after the 2010 Winter Games?”

The Coalition offers the following points for the Panel’s consideration.

1. More funding is required. However, the burden should not be placed on the shoulders of our current funding partners. Strong leadership, sound sport policy and effective relationship-building among national, provincial, municipal and educational partners could create a sustainable source of funding for sports in Canada.
2. The national funding partners need to sort out their roles and relationships. The layers of duplication and complexity that exist among Sport Canada, COC, OTP and Coaching Association need to be resolved. The bureaucracy that a sport administrator must negotiate at the national level is burdensome and counterproductive to Canadian sport reaching its high performance objectives. This shortcoming can best be addressed by creating an independent agency to represent the needs of national funders, as noted above.
3. The current focus on results is counter productive to efficient and effective athlete development. The message from OTP is Olympic/Paralympic results are crucial, but just as important is the need to demonstrate on an on-going basis that teams/athletes are reaching the podium at all significant events. This works counter to the way some team sports develop on several levels – specifically there is a natural ebb and flow of results that occurs with team sports (and sports in general) where senior athletes play through the system and are replaced by younger athletes. This transition historically sees fluctuations in rankings mostly due to getting new athletes acclimatized to the higher level and developing a “team dynamic”. Coaches create plans based on these peaks and valleys in terms of results leading up to a “peak” period for the more important qualifying events. A singular focus on results affects this type of planning. We are seeing many team sports holding onto senior athletes longer than usual in fear of results getting worse under younger athletes.
4. Greater partnering at the provincial and municipal level is crucial. Some good work is being done between provincial governments and CSCs that have benefited NSOs and the communities that their National Teams call home. For example, Volleyball Canada recently lost half of the funding for its Beach National Team in OTP cuts. It now has a budget of approximately \$185,000 to run a National Team program. Through some innovative partnerships it has been able to hire a full-time international renowned coach and an assistant coach, and locate its first indoor full-time training centre in Toronto – through a partnership of CSC Ontario, Ontario Volleyball Association and the City of Toronto. This National Training Centre was not created by filling out more funding applications, developing new budgets and writing another High Performance plan to file away somewhere, but rather came about through discussion and negotiation about sport development principles and objectives among like-minded organizations. The Memorandum of Understanding creating this opportunity is but three pages long.

Similarly and crucial in a broader sport system/paradigm approach for sport will be to align

provincial funding priorities with those of the national funding bodies. Many NSO's and PSO's have difficulty working towards common goals/objectives because the funding provided to PSO's is not always related to the national interests.

5. We need to support PSOs and NSOs to be financially self-sufficient. The sports that are financially successful in this country (for example, ice hockey, soccer, figure skating) are those whose governance structures create a direct link from the national body to the individual member. In these sports you cannot participate at all without having a membership in a local club that filters directly up to the national association. The sport system in Canada is complex and much of it is disjointed. In a perfect world, the following levers and incentives would be in place to create this cohesive, national membership structure for a given sport:

- Municipalities would require users of municipal sport facilities to be members of a provincial governing body;
- Provincial funding to schools, school boards, colleges and universities would be tied to the athlete participants in these settings being members of a provincial governing body.
- Sport officials would only provide their services to leagues and events that are sanctioned, by means of membership, through provincial governing bodies.

These ideas do not require more money from taxpayers. They require open and transparent discussion, a willingness to consider new ways to do old things, skilled negotiation and follow-through from all players in the sport system. The shared leadership required to have this discussion and to reach successful outcomes is special indeed. The Coalition would like to think that the Panel's findings and recommendations could provide strong impetus for the exploration of ideas, such as these, that would contribute to sport's long-term sustainability and financial independence.

In closing, the Coalition is thankful for this opportunity to present its views to the Beyond 2010 Panel. If the Panel members are not yet aware, we would also like to bring to its attention that in the last six months we have undertaken a formal research project to assess the unique value and contributions of team sports in Canada. This research involved a review of literature, interviews with numerous key stakeholders and sport leaders, and a survey of 572 athletes. We have not yet published the results of our research, but intend to do so shortly and will ensure that you are provided with these findings as soon as they are available.

Sincerely,

Graham Brown (Rugby Canada), John Paul Cody-Co (Volleyball Canada) and Wayne Parrish (Canada Basketball), on behalf of the Canadian Team Sport Coalition.