

Canadian Sport for Life Expert Group: Submission to 2010 and Beyond Panel

Competitive success in the 21st century will only be achieved by athletes who have mastered their sport through high quality sport and physical activity experience from a very early age. Tomorrow's athletes will not step on the podium without having first acquired and perfected fundamental movement and sport skills. Building an inclusive Canadian system which facilitates physical and sport development from Active Start to Active for Life is the *sine qua non* of high performance for future Canadian athletes.

The Canadian Sport for Life/Long-Term Athlete Development (CS4L-LTAD) model has emerged as the paradigm for that integrated Canadian system. However, CS4L-LTAD is both a paradigm change and a paradigm for change. What started as a process of working with NSOs to create specific athlete development pathways has broadened into a far more comprehensive process of engaging Provincial/Territorial organizations and governments, community-level organizations, as well as new sectors and partners. Over the past five years approximately 1000 experts from across Canada have participated in building and implementing CS4L-LTAD. This process of engagement is needed because athlete development is a holistic process that depends on a complex web of delivery agents, funding bodies, and policy-makers. CS4L-LTAD has been seeking to align the system with two primary goals: increasing participation of Canadians in sport and physical activity, and improving sport performance. We believe our experience with system change can be valuable to the 2010 and Beyond Panel.

In this submission to the Panel we will propose a series of "design principles" based on the CS4L-LTAD experience to inform decision-making about the shape of the system and the role of organizations within it. From our perspective there are four key principles: first, it takes from 8-12 years to develop an athlete to high performance; second, the development of physical literacy is a prerequisite for later performance; third, athletes will be best supported through an integration of existing sectors - sport, recreation, school based sport and physical education, and health; and fourth, this will be facilitated by alignment of multiple institutions and organizations such as governments, MSOs and NSOs toward a set of common goals.

Changing the Paradigm

CS4L-LTAD is based on sport science research combined with the practical experience of working with thousands of athletes and coaches to develop a comprehensive set of principles for effective athlete development. These principles are based on developmentally-appropriate training and competition and the premise that participants will not only be more successful in sport but healthier throughout life if they develop "physical literacy" at a young age, and the attitude that being active is "just what we do" as Canadians. Essentially CS4L-LTAD is a system of life-long periodization which suggests that for every athlete, at every moment, there is a right coach and the right kind of training, competition, and rest and recovery. Thus, CS4L-LTAD is athlete-centred, coach-driven, and administration-supported.

To support holistic athlete development, the sport system must also be integrated and follow a consistent set of values and directions. This is the greatest challenge confronting Canadian sport. The varied priorities of municipal, provincial/territorial and federal government funding partners, not to mention NSOs, P/TSOs, recreation, education, coaches, and parents creates a tug-of-war in which athletes are the rope. In response, CS4L-LTAD reaches out to an expanding pool of partners and stakeholders to promote a holistic, athlete-centered approach. To succeed, we need to move...

- From an exclusion-based model of athlete selection, to **inclusion**;
- From an age-based system to a **CS4L-LTAD stage-based system**;
- From a quantity-based model of training and competition, to **quality**;
- From "adult-only" periodization, to **unique periodization for all stages**;
- From independent organizations and coaches, to **integration**;
- From pursuit of immediate goals, to pursuit of **long-term goals**;
- From a model where success is random, to one where **success is planned**;
- From a self-centered sport system, to one with **goals for society as a whole**.

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We believe, to create a better high-performance sport system:

1. High performance can only be discussed in context of the system as a whole;
2. We must avoid focusing only on today's top performers and losing sight of the existing gaps in entry- to mid-level development (Fundamental to Train to Train stages) of athletes, coaches and other sport leaders;
3. We must integrate the roles, planning and accountability of initiatives and organizations such as Games, Own The Podium, CS4L-LTAD, NCCP, and others so they are truly working together toward a shared vision and common goals.

A Paradigm for Change

Clearly, this transition in Canadian sport has not and will not come easily. We know that it is a long road. Our experience shows that organizational change is difficult to fast-track without risking destabilization of the system. However, we believe that compared with many previous efforts, the "CS4L-LTAD initiative" has grown to become the "CS4L-LTAD movement" due to some specific choices made in design and implementation which have facilitated the change process. These include:

- CS4L-LTAD's leadership consists of people with acknowledged expertise.
- CS4L is not incorporated. CS4L is not an organization. CS4L is what Paul Jurbala has called "a community of purpose" and an "un-organization", a group united only by a desire to implement the CS4L-LTAD vision. We believe this lack of organizational "turf" generates trust and support in the sport community, and beyond.
- CS4L acts as consultants to sport organizations. CS4L is there to serve them, and to serve Canadian sport.
- Sport Canada funding was pivotal to CS4L-LTAD's "taking off" in Canada. The decision to fund an initiative not led by government or by a typical, incorporated organization, was courageous and lent credibility to the initiative.
- CS4L has showcased emerging good practices in the sport community through the annual Workshop, where sport leaders can learn, but more importantly, participate. Our goal is to empower by sharing information.
- CS4L is "open source". CS4L continues to add members to the extended Expert Group and adopt ideas from across Canada and around the world.

We believe, to create a better sport system:

4. We must more effectively integrate the FPTSC, ISRC, and government agencies with the leadership of sport organizations themselves, to create a tighter, common "pan-Canadian" government/NGO vision for all jurisdictions;
5. The trend toward devolution of sport funding and leadership from government to multi-sport organizations (MSOs) such as sport federations, coaching associations, and Games associations, has in some jurisdictions resulted in multiple layers and/or "silos" for sport organizations to deal with. We must better integrate or merge some of these agencies, and implement single application and reporting processes, which will ease the administrative load on sport organizations and coordinate system-wide goal setting;
6. We should explore the possibility of vesting leadership in an "un-organization" or coalition which has the direct participation and support of the sport community, while maintaining the required accountability standards. In addition, we should better recognize the value of and invest in "communities of purpose" (e.g. CS4L-LTAD, Sport Matters) which have the ability to provide leadership in specific areas of expertise.

Our experience shows that when we take a risk and approach change in a new way, we can break through old mind-sets. New ways of thinking must also be applied to the challenges of high performance sport. The following are our comments and suggestions in response to the Panel's specific questions.

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Question 1: Improving the international performance of athletes Paralympic athletes, and Special Olympics athletes.

The pathway to the podium depends on a coherent, integrated, national system that begins at the earliest stage of athlete development. Canada's high performance *Train to Win* athletes are better provided-for than those in any other stage and have access to top-level coaches, facilities, equipment, training and competitions. However there are significant gaps at the *Train to Compete* stage and athlete development becomes more haphazard with each earlier stage. Our national system must ensure that every Canadian child is physically literate, must recognize that development of a high performance athlete requires 8 to 12 years, and it must be well-supported throughout all the stages of long term athlete development.

- We have observed there is often not enough funding to support the 'next generation' of athlete which leaves them unprepared to move to the Train to Win stage. This is especially true in team sport where our emerging athletes do not get the international experience required to progress to professional teams which will result in successful results for Canada.

We believe, to create a better sport system:

7. Funding or revenue generation opportunities need to be put in place to allow for more emerging Canadian talent to gain international experience.
8. A high standard of support for Train to Win athlete must be maintained and evolved to maintain current levels of performance.
9. National organizations, with their expertise, need to lead and be given the opportunity to lead throughout their sport's development pathway.

Questions 2 & 3: Design, structure, accountability, governance and leadership of high performance sport.

In working with nearly 60 NSOs and meeting across Canada with hundreds of P/TSOs, P/T governments, recreation, school sport, and many other groups we have encountered thousands of talented, dedicated, passionate individuals. Canadian sport has much to be proud of. Our conviction is that Canadian sport can do much more, and can be much more.

In the course of this work we have observed many of the same things as others:

- There are disconnects between different levels (e.g. national vs P/T vs community) within the same sports.
- Sport organizations struggle to find the money and people to do all that is expected of them. The higher the level of organization the more difficult it is. CS4L-LTAD is not being implemented as quickly as we would wish simply because organizations lack the capacity to do so.
- Not all organizations are equally well-managed or well-governed. Many leaders in the sport community have struggled to implement CS4L-LTAD, encountering short-sighted thinking, lack of strong organizational leadership, or frequent turnover in key staff or volunteer positions within their own organizations.
- Funding agencies must insist organizations are accountable for the use of funds. However, many agencies off-load that expectation onto the organizations themselves. Some organizations must apply, then report to, four or five different agencies. This places a further burden on over-stretched capacity; monitoring and reporting displaces doing and improving.
- Despite the millions of dollars spent by governments at all three levels, parents and individual athletes remain by far the main funders of Canadian sport. Consequently, promoting increased awareness and a shared vision of sport by individual Canadians is absolutely essential to reaching our objectives including better high performance results, improved health and fitness, and national pride and unity.

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- Parent education and club capacity development is largely ignored, yet they are the key stakeholders during the Learn to Train and Train to Train stage where we are making or breaking athletes.

We believe, to create a better sport system:

10. We should develop a system-wide audit of “design, structure, accountability, and governance” to develop benchmarks and metrics for these all-important factors, and move away from anecdotes about undefined “capacity issues” toward clear definitions;
11. We should move from having layers of funding agencies down-loading accountability requirements onto sport organizations, resulting in multiple reports to many agencies, to having an integrated approach to performance measurement using system-wide standards;
12. We should promote real, foundational change by creating awareness among the millions of sport volunteers, parents and athletes of what good practice in athlete development and sport delivery really looks like. We should build on the Canadian Sport Policy and CS4L to create a Canadian “bill of rights for sport” defining what we should all expect from sport.

Question 4: Delivery of high performance programming: Coaching, technical, training, competition

Part of our CS4L-LTAD planning process with NSOs has been to encourage them to take a hard look at traditional activities and programs to determine whether these actually promote optimal athlete development. For example, does the competition structure (e.g. number and type of competitive events) provide the right developmental benefits? What Championships should athletes be attending? Would a rational analysis of how National Teams are currently supported, result in the NSO re-allocating resources or even discontinuing support for some projects? Much of the reasoning behind this is captured in our paper, “Competition is a Good Servant, But a Poor Master” available on the www.canadiansportforlife.ca web site.

This has revealed common challenges within many sports:

- Difficulty generating internal support for reduction or re-allocation away from traditional programs and competitions, even when a clear case can be made for improved benefit to athletes;
- A significant shortfall in the number of experienced coaches and technical leaders compared to the need, and inability to recruit and train such leaders fast enough to fill the gap;
- Broken athlete development pathways, especially between Train to Compete and Train to Win stages, with inadequate coaching and/or competition opportunities for “next generation” high-performance athletes;
- An inability to use opportunities such as P/T and Canada Games to best effect for athlete development, due to inconsistent pathways between those levels of Games, and the varied F/P/T expectations (other than athlete development) for those Games.
- Over competing and under training at early stages resulting in a skill and fitness deficit which is difficult to overcome at later stages.

We believe, to create a better sport system:

13. We require better standards for integrated development and competition programming from early to Train to Win stages, which provide a framework for tracking accountability and results. CS4L-LTAD plans should be the basis of this framework for each sport;
14. We must use existing fixtures, such as P/T Games and Canada Games, for optimum athlete and coach development and not dilute their impact by requiring them to serve so many “masters” (e.g. regional economic development, building new facilities);
15. We must provide the support needed for true coach and sport-technical development, including, but far beyond, the contribution of NCCP, so each sport has a “pipeline” and succession plan for these essential leaders.

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Question 5: Setting targets for 2014, 2016 and beyond

We believe basing sport funding on high-performance results alone is flawed. Sports face retirements of top athletes and coaches and recognize the need to build or re-build elements of their own system at different times. In order to suggest appropriate targets we need to consider sport-specific LTAD plans and the progress of each sport toward those plans. Sport development gaps are perpetuated when high performance is “de-funded” due to lack of results and those resources are not reallocated to needed development within the same sport.

We believe, to create a better sport system:

16. As individual athlete development to high performance takes on average 8 to 12 years, or 2 to 3 quadrennials, NSOs should be supported to sketch 3-quad plans, updated once per quad, indicating how athletes are progressing through the pathway toward the Train to Win stage. This would provide a context for assessing development needs from entry-level on;
17. Funding should be keyed not just to outputs, such as international results, but to required inputs (e.g. athlete and coach selection and development) and allocated with the intention of obtaining maximum “flow rate” through the development pathway. A variety of indicators, including athlete conversion rate from one development stage to the next, tracking of performances in provincial and Canada Games, may be useful in measuring this;
18. Coordinated federal and provincial/territorial funding, as well as coordination of MSO funding (e.g. Coaching Association of Canada), all linked to the sport’s long-term development plan, will be required to effect this.

Question 6: Funding for High Performance Sport

We note that asking about resources for “high performance sport” directs attention away from what we believe is the greater need, the adequate funding of a comprehensive Canadian physical activity and sport system, without which high performance results will be limited. We also suggest that if Canada is to be competitive with other nations, the level of government funding to sport must also be competitive with that of those nations, which in many cases far exceeds funding provided in Canada.

We believe, to create a better sport system:

19. The Government of Canada and the Provincial/Territorial governments must continue to increase support for sport and physical activity. Coordinating this spending will make it more effective, yielding better “results per dollar”;
20. In the current economic climate it appears corporate support for sport has declined, and looming government deficits may make it more difficult to provide enhanced government funding. If governments provide tax incentives to stimulate corporate support, it may be possible to channel that support toward specific areas which would most benefit system development.
21. In some cases NSOs have a large participant base, however they find it difficult due to the layering of governance to get funding support for high performance sport (national teams). Government support at all levels to encourage fees to flow from the local community to NSOs would have significant impact on funding high performance sport.

Conclusion

We thank Minister of State (Sport) Lunn for his decision to create the 2010 and Beyond Panel, and to the Panel members for agreeing to serve on it. This is a critical time in Canadian sport. The major change initiatives of the past few years have surfaced a greater awareness of the needs and challenges currently confronting us. We have started working together in unprecedented ways. It is essential to have this dialogue at this time if we are to continue moving forward.

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We believe in an integrated, holistic approach to athlete development and by extension, to the Canadian sport system as a whole. At every level, in every organization, we need to understand it takes 8-12 years (10,000 high quality hours) to develop an athlete to high performance, that physical literacy is a prerequisite, that athletes will be best supported through integration of sport, recreation, school based sport/physical education and health, and that this can be facilitated by alignment of multiple governments, departments, NSOs and MSOs around a set of common goals. Canada's Olympic, Paralympic and Special Olympic results are only a reflection of the entire system. Our efforts, and our suggestions in this submission, can be summarized as: "Let's work together to create one country, one vision, one system!"

The solution to our challenges cannot be found in an examination of high-performance sport alone. We believe that sport, recreation, education, high-performance, entry-level, Federal, community, able-bodied, Paralympic, and Special Olympics are all parts of that "one system". Leadership and principle-based decision-making is needed to promote this unified vision and to ensure that each of us can contribute meaningfully to attaining it. We hope the 21 points we have outlined will be useful the Panel in guiding their decision making. We look forward to making a continuing contribution.

Respectfully submitted,

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