

High Performance Sport in Canada – 2010 and Beyond
Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) submission to Federal Panel
September 17, 2009

Preamble

Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC), the Canadian franchise holder for the Commonwealth Games, is grateful to the Minister for the opportunity to help define a future vision and strategies for high performance sport in Canada in 2010 and beyond. Hosting the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver has enabled Canada to use both existing systems and new innovative sport structures in pursuit of performance success, with impressive results in winter and summer sport in recent years. While the importance of appropriate high performance resources, currently at an all time high, cannot be understated in recent success, it is also clear that clear performance goals for Olympic and Paralympic sport have helped drive the system to perform, and an unprecedented level of collaboration exists amongst key players in the delivery system.

At the same time, there are obvious inefficiencies in the Canadian sport system and a growing fragmentation of structures and delivery methods which hold our athletes and coaches back from reaching their full potential. It is therefore timely and far sighted for this type of future-oriented process to take place. It is the mark of an ambitious and determined country that even in times of performance success, we seek a better way forward for sport, including alternate systems of delivery (ASD).

Commonwealth Games Canada is a leader and innovator in Canadian sport, and an integral player in the development of Canada's summer sport athletes. The next Commonwealth Games (Delhi, India in October 2010) are a critical stepping stone in Canadian high performance excellence en route to London 2012, and constitute the first big test of a 'better way' for Canadian sport post-2010. We are committed to building our contribution to and role in Canadian sport excellence, and look forward to working with government and leading sport partners in this important panel process.

A Vision for Sport

CGC believes that discussion of a 'better way' for Canadian sport performance begins with agreement around a vision for Canadian sport and the role it plays in our nation. We believe that sport is an essential element of Canadian daily life and can contribute to building the type of society, community and country we want. Sport at the highest levels is a reflection of the Canadian spirit, of our ability to compete and to win, and of the pride we have in the athletes who represent us. A vision for sport will enable us to place discussion of a system in the proper context, to set appropriate goals and to assemble the associated plans and strategies.

While defining a vision for sport is a collective task and will therefore take some time, we can certainly begin by proposing a set of principles and values upon which discussion and analysis of a new and "better way" can take place.

It is helpful to first define what we mean by 'high performance sport' in Canada. For the purposes of this paper, high performance sport is not simply defined as the national teams level; it is extended to include those elements of the high performance system (e.g. provincial, university, college, club) which directly feed the elite level and if ineffective or neglected, can greatly affect the prospects for success at succeeding levels.

Principles and Values

- We believe in the essential benefit and importance of sport in Canadian life
- We believe that success in international sport is a strong reflection of the Canadian spirit and values, and inspires pride in accomplishment, healthful activity, and a desire to excel
- Central and stable leadership is an essential component of a successful sport system
- Setting of clear goals drives performance

- Performance results are an important measure of success
- A strong and healthy sport system embraces the full range of sport involvement, from early engagement through talent development to competition at the high performance and international levels
- An effective sport system consists of structures, pathways and support mechanisms working in harmony at all levels
- Effective governance and leadership are the cornerstones of effective sport organizations
- Opportunities to compete at major multisport Games are essential to the progressive development of Canadian athletes and coaches, and ultimately, to Canadian performance success
- Sustained funding is the basis for long-term planning and improved performance
- Building a 'better way' for sport post-2010 will be a combination of current best practices and innovative new approaches
- The Canadian sport community can and must chart the path to a 'better way' for sport

What is working in our current system

We strongly believe that there are many components of the current system which are world class and effective, and should continue to form the foundation for building a better way for sport.

Canada has invested in developing the theoretical principles for the development of athletes and become a global leader through the *Canadian Sport for Life* program (LTAD), which helps identify and develop children through progressive levels of sport involvement. The LTAD framework provides effective pathways for the direction of appropriate support, coaching, training and competition to Canadian athletes at the 'right time', and has been increasingly and effectively applied by Canadian sport organizations (NSOs).

NSOs continue to be the backbone of the Canadian sport system, serving as the coordinating body for all aspects of their sport and the technical experts in the development of athletes and participants at all levels (including high performance) of their respective sports. Their expertise and experience is highly respected and places them as a key contributor to the sport system, though the challenge remains in connecting effectively to the educational and provincial/territorial sport systems. Commonwealth Games Canada has built strong relations with NSOs and taken unprecedented steps to ensure alignment and full collaboration in advance of the upcoming 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India.

Canada's participation at major international multi sport Games (World University Games, Commonwealth Games, Pan American Games, Olympic and Paralympic Games) is an essential element of sport development and performance success. The relevant Canadian franchise holders successfully manage all Games logistics, planning, relationships, preparations and mission support in order to create the conditions for world class performance by Canadian athletes. The recent emphasis on Games-time performance and conversion has resulted in the increased use of best practices in team preparation, sport science and technology, as well as heightened collaboration amongst the franchise holders.

The hosting of major international Games has been the principal method of developing much-needed facilities for sport in Canada, with Montreal (1976 Summer Olympic Games), Edmonton (1978 Commonwealth Games), Calgary (1988 Winter Olympic Games), Victoria (1994 Commonwealth Games), and Vancouver/Whistler (2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games) serving as shining examples. There are important economic and public policy benefits of Games hosting and Canada has a well-earned reputation as a first-class event organizer. An important element of Canada's high performance strategy therefore is a coordinated approach to bidding for Games and an emphasis on major Games hosting.

The establishment of the "Own the Podium" program (OTP) has provided much needed leadership to Canadian high performance sport through the coordination of services, expert-based decision making and the timely and streamlined delivery of resources. Its independence and emphasis on technical expertise has built the required credibility and autonomy for OTP to assert a strong leadership role and have a truly positive impact. The pooling of

resources from multiple funding sources has been highly successful. Commonwealth Games Canada has built strong working relations with OTP in the planning and preparation of our Canadian team to the 2010 Games in Delhi.

Sport Canada plays an important role in the Canadian sport system by building and managing intergovernmental connections and ensuring there is stable and sustained funding for sport - and sport policy that reflects government priorities. As a government body, however, Sport Canada is somewhat restricted in its ability to lead in a direct and timely way and to make independent, technical decisions on behalf of the sport community as a whole.

The Canadian Sport Policy, with its four pillars of excellence, participation, interaction and capacity, set out a broad vision for sport supported by all Canadian provinces, and provided the framework for Canada's approach to high performance. Sport Canada, the federal department responsible for sport in this country, undertook the necessary processes, approvals and interdepartmental cooperation within government to secure the current level of funding for sport, some of which will sunset following the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Financial support to eligible Canadian athletes through the federal Athlete Assistance Program is at an all time high, and varying suites of athlete services are provided through the Canadian Sport Centres and their NSOs. The degree to which this delivery model is effectively coordinated and funded is, however, an ongoing question. At major multisport Games, including the Commonwealth Games, Canadian athletes, coaches and teams are provided leading-edge mission support and world-class competitive conditions to perform.

Recognition of the essential role of coaches in high performance success has resulted in greater emphasis on the training and retention of coaches in Canada. The network of Canadian Sport Centres has become an increasingly effective agent in the harmonized delivery of support services to identified athletes across the country.

Towards a better way

While the current sport system consists of many effective elements, it suffers from fragmentation of structures and lack of coordination amongst an array of disparate organizations. It also lacks consistent and autonomous leadership. A new approach and a new way to connect the pieces are required.

Leadership

In our view, one of the missing elements to the continued improvement of our multifaceted high performance system is stable, independent leadership. OTP has played a vital leadership role to date by virtue of its autonomy, pooled funding, technical expertise, authority to make change and results-based decision making. However, OTP is focused solely on the achievement of results at Paralympic and Olympic Games and therefore limited in its scope and ability to influence performance at successive levels, or to set performance goals.

Leadership of high performance sport is a shared responsibility, with each organization playing its part. We believe, however, that an overall plan for high performance sport is essential, along with the establishment of a single authority responsible for the implementation of the plan, delivery and assessment of results. In our view, the setting of performance goals for sport should be done by those most competent and knowledgeable to do so, namely the sport technical experts and the NSOs.

Under the current model, the preparations and performance plans for the 2010 Commonwealth Games for example have no formal avenue for appropriate vetting, validation and coordination with Canadian high performance strategies.

Alternative Service Delivery

There are numerous examples in Canada of a body independent from government successfully able to provide strong leadership and program delivery to its sector. The Canadian Council for the Arts is one such body, able to meet the needs of its members through successful advocacy, coordinated planning, clear accountability and

autonomous decision making. For sport, the best practice examples of Australia, France, and Germany stand out. In Canada, the establishment of the OTP program has addressed sport's need for technical leadership, timely decisions, streamlined resource delivery, partnership, improved governance and clear accountability. We believe that an independent authority for sport in Canada should be modeled on the best practices drawn from similar bodies in Canada and around the world, and create a Canadian solution to our own unique circumstances.

While the specifics of an authority or agency for sport require further study, we believe the following to be essential:

- Central leadership and oversight
- Clearing house for planning and assessment
- Technical (evidence based) leadership
- Autonomous decision making and accountabilities
- Dedicated high performance funding
- Authority to ensure proper system governance and stable organizational leadership
- Single window for funding applications and information
- Integration of partners and support systems (e.g. CSCs, coaching, athlete services, federal AAP...)
- Coordination of bidding and hosting of major multi-sport Games
- Linkage to successive levels of LTAD (Canada Games, post secondary sport..)
- Aligning the contributions of provincial/territorial sport development in the high performance system
- Transfer of knowledge (best practices, data sharing, Zeus)
- Performance targets
- System health and development

Independently governed, the agency would be funded by multiple sources including government and have authority for the health and accountability throughout the system...from talent development through to national teams. It would provide a unified and stable voice for sport at key funding and decision-making tables in Canada.

Roles

We believe that responsibility for high performance at the upper level (international) should be assumed by a non member-based body like OTP under a broadened mandate to affect change at successive levels and the responsibility to coordinate the myriad of support services, competitive opportunities and high performance resources. It would serve as a filter and oversight mechanism for plans, programs, services and activities at the upper end of the high performance continuum and help integrate the contributions of various players in the system

We believe that the Canadian Sport for Life (LTAD) model provides the framework for sport system development, upon which an independent agency can provide system leadership.

Sport Canada would continue to play an important role in ensuring intergovernmental connections, stable and sustained funding for sport, and sport policy to reflect government priorities. It remains an essential piece of the sport system through its unique position within the government bureaucracy on and ongoing partnership with the sector.

We believe that the sport community has an equally important role to play. NSOs must continue to lead all aspects of their sport, and the sport community can greatly improve the integration and efficiency of the sport system through measures such as the sharing of services, co-location of sport organizations, and amalgamation of programs and structures.

The Games Franchise Holders

Beyond the basic preparation and competition of Canadian teams at Games time, ***we believe the Canadian franchise holders of major Games make important contributions toward high performance in Canada.*** Canadian athletes do not learn to perform solely at the Olympic level, but do so rather through a progressive series of competitive and Games events suited to their developmental needs.

The Commonwealth Games, for example, provide the unique opportunity for more Canadian athletes to experience the high performance competitive environment and help Canadian athletes 'learn to win'. The Games provide a testing ground for innovative approaches, new science and pilot projects, and serve as a milestone midway through each quadrennial to measure Canada's readiness to compete at Olympic and Paralympic Games. **We believe that major Games leading to the Olympic and Paralympic level contribute effectively to world-class performances and thus their results should be integrated within the funding formulae and federal measurement programs of NSOs (SFAF).**

We believe that Games hosting is a critical component in Canadian high performance success, creating the much needed sport facilities and training environments. Through more collaborative bid processes and the coordination of hosting plans among the franchise holders, the likelihood of success in hosting major Games in Canada will be greatly enhanced, as will the development of sport and recreational facilities across Canada and the realization of significant economic, public policy and tourism benefits. **Commonwealth Games Canada strongly believes in the value of hosting and has set a goal of hosting the Games again by 2030, the 100th anniversary of the first Commonwealth Games hosted in Hamilton.**

We believe that the Games franchise holders can increase their contribution to Canadian high performance through the formation of a ***Games Body*** whereby each organization would work collaboratively with each other and the central agency, while retaining its autonomy, networks and influence. Consisting of COC, CPC, Commonwealth Games Canada, Canada Games and Canadian University Sport, the benefits of such a body will include:

- Joint mission team preparation
- Sharing of best practices
- Streamlined processes for collection of athlete data and accreditation
- Collaborative funds development (sponsorship of a 'family of Games', as Hbc currently does)
- Coordinated bidding and hosting processes
- Joint communications

Conclusion

Many of the building blocks of a strong national high performance sport system are currently in place and there are numerous examples of new innovation and structures (OTP, CSCs) that have improved the system. We believe, however, that the Canadian sport system is in need of a tune up. The existing system is dated and falling behind the demands of international high performance sport. Our system has an abundance of players, yet is filled with gaps that require a new means of leading, coordinating and connecting the disparate pieces.

There is a clear need for a vision and strong leadership of the system and for a better way to integrate the many activities taking place. Within Canadian sport, there is a strong appetite to do so and the opportunity is now before us. Commonwealth Games Canada is committed to full integration within the Canadian high performance system and is focused on making a stronger contribution toward excellence and improved Canadian performance. We are a willing partner in the strategic development of athletes, coaches and other contributors to community and high performance sport development.

We trust that the recommendations made in this paper, including creation of a central agency for sport and a Games body, will contribute to a new and better way for Canadian sport.