

## SUBMISSION TO THE “2010 AND BEYOND” PANEL

### CROSS COUNTRY CANADA

#### Preamble

Three factors dominate the present environment of the Canadian amateur sport system:

- **The 2010 OWGs/PWGs** – The hosting in Canada of the 2010 Games has created an exceptional, but finite, window of opportunity for sport development. This window is manifest in a heightened interest in winter sport and therefore a higher priority for sport in government agendas – with the latter leading to an increased availability of resources for amateur sport.
- **The OTP program and related funding stream for improving results in HP programs** – This program has emerged through a convergence of interest and effort in the sport system, in response to the 2010 window of opportunity.
- **Sport Canada’s Long Term Athlete Development model and its application** – This model is a major progressive influence in amateur sport, with the influence growing as application of the model continues and expands. Although there has been some impact at the HP level, the more important changes to date have taken place at lower levels of athlete development systems, and the benefits will not be seen at the HP level for several years, particularly in the case of late development sports. In general, the LTAD model is improving the quality and relevance of program content and facilitating programs alignment within individual sport systems. But sports are learning that it also has potential to facilitate organizational alignment within their sports systems – since the common understanding of the athlete pathway that it represents can be a catalyst to mission and role definition among the entities that govern and manage the system. Thinking more strategically yet, the LTAD model can also facilitate a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the amateur sport system writ large – which may form the basis of agreement on an effective definition of missions and roles among the various players.

#### Question #1

To date, the strategies of Own the Podium have proven to be successful in achieving the aim of improving HP results in winter sports. These strategies are well known: increasing the resources dedicated to “excellence”; targeting investment based on podium potential; enforcing rigorous accountability; providing technical leadership and advice; promoting innovation; etc. The lessons are clear; resources make a difference; but resources can have a greater impact if applied with this kind of mission-focused, needs-based and professionally-guided methodology.

The easy answer to Question #1 is to continue to operate in this mode, further improving productivity through a process of continuous improvement: seeking better qualified program leadership; hiring more and better coaches; enhancing the delivery of sport science support; emphasizing ongoing professional development; etc. These strategies would need to be supported by a dependable funding stream that can expand to meet new demands.

As regards funding, the 50% decrease in OTP funding for winter sports anticipated beyond the 2010 Games would be extremely damaging. As a principle, funding is more effective if stable, and it should be capable of expanding in accordance with needs in order to capitalize on success. Even annual fluctuations in resource levels create program uncertainty and discontinuity that jeopardize forward progress. This can result from linking funding levels too rigidly to the achievement of annual benchmarks. Though the latter practice is sound at a tactical level – it certainly gets one’s attention and focuses effort – it can also be counter-productive in a strategic (i.e. long-term) context.

The more meaningful answer to Question #1 demands recognition that current results are based primarily on “hot-housing” of the elite athletes produced by the existing athlete development systems of their respective sports. Effectively, the potential of all HP strategies is limited by the quality and quantity of athletes delivered to the HP level. In terms of quality, LTAD principles tell us that the HP potential of athletes is determined by the totality of their experiences throughout the development continuum. If athletes’ experiences at any stage of development are sub-optimal, their long-term potential is diminished. As regards quantity, the number of athletes reaching the HP level is dependent on numerous factors that define the capacity of a sport’s athlete development system: coach and athlete development programs; recruitment and retention mechanisms; club development; competition programs; international event hosting; etc. Therefore, to maintain and build on the level of HP results now being achieved, strategies need to be directed also at improving and expanding the athlete development pipelines on which they ultimately depend.

In short, achieving further improvement in HP results demands recognition that athletes who reach international podiums are produced by sport systems, not by HP programs. The reality is that the medal-winning potential of Canada’s winter sports for the 2010 Games is limited to a relative handful of athletes, many of whom will retire after the Games. The size of the elite athlete pool was a limiting factor in OTP’s efforts leading to 2010; and it will limit the programs leading to 2014 and 2018 as well, if truly strategic investments and strategies appropriate to the lower levels of athlete development systems – from “Active Start” to “Training to Compete” – are not taken. Athlete production must become more systematic and less hap-hazard. Ultimately, more athletes at the “Training to Win” stage will provide more grist for the OTP mill.

Therefore, a two-track approach is needed. A better OTP mill (similar strategies to the present, but with enhanced application) can improve the conversion rate of medal-potential athletes to medal-winning athletes. But more dramatic improvement in HP results will come from producing more medal-potential athletes. Without the latter change, strategic planning with the OTP program will have limited scope for creating improvement. “Hoping” that high quality athletes emerge from the athlete development pipeline to replace retiring athletes or augment the numbers of active athletes is not a method; a more pro-active and structured approach, with similar rigour to that exercised by OTP, is essential. Which begs the question of who will do this and how.

## **Question #2**

There are two key lessons for HP sport from the OTP experience to date: resources can deliver success, but only when sufficient to the defined requirement (i.e. token funding is wasteful and ineffective); and the Own the Podium approach to resource investment works. Therefore, the OTP program must be placed on a permanent footing and must be resourced at a level that will permit its operations to be sustained and effective. But more can be done. It is imperative to: analyze the OTP program (and comparable foreign models); identify all of the lessons learned; and extrapolate them to identify the additional measures that should be taken to further improve performance.

## **Question #3**

One of the keys to enhancing the productivity of the amateur sport system – long recognized but yet to be achieved – is to improve its coherence. The first step towards addressing this problem is to have roles clearly defined, explicitly accepted by the many players, broadly recognized within the system and carefully enforced. Referring back to the preamble to this submission, the LTAD model should function as a catalyst for the definition and acceptance of roles.

In HP sport, the way ahead for role definition is relatively obvious. HP is by definition the small tip of the performance continuum, and thus a “sandbox” that can be easily defined and delineated. Its

orientation is international results; its management must therefore be a national responsibility. Given these realities, the business of enhancing HP results lends itself to management by a single entity. Other approaches would be illogical, indulgent and inefficient. OTP has an admirable track record in this area because it has been narrowly focussed on a clearly defined mission and role, unencumbered by agendas (e.g. political, regional, topical, etc.) other than results.

Accordingly, it is proposed that OTP be mandated as the single entity to perform the role of funding and overseeing development of HP sport in Canada. Other parameters that should define how OTP performs this role are evident from the track record of OTP in the past five years and the example of similar entities in Australia and Germany:

- OTP must be independent, operating at arms length from the sources of funding.
- Funding of targeted sports must be sufficient to fill the gaps between good programs and those that will put athletes on international podiums. Funding on a “share” basis based on ranking – which is the modus operandi for Sport Canada allocations – will generate enhancements in programming, but may not deliver podium results. In other words, half measures should not be employed in the business of HP funding.
- OTP must have the mandate to intervene in sport management or to otherwise require compliance with OTP leadership/guidance as the quid pro quo of allocating funding.

Other parameters require further consideration;

- What should be the exact corporate status and governance model of OTP? In particular, what oversight and accountability arrangements will be necessary?
- What should be OTP’s scope of operations? In other words, while producing HP results will be the mission, how far down the LTAD continuum does OTP need to assert influence in order to be effective? Note the difference between “interest” and “influence”. OTP will have an interest in all levels of the sport system; but it must be able to influence the higher levels – not simply the medal-potential athletes - in order to optimize its effectiveness.
- What will be the funding sources? Will OTP’s functions related to funding be limited to lobbying, decision-making and investment oversight, or will OTP be involved in raising funds through marketing/sponsorship? It is possible that the latter function would cause a diffusion of leadership focus and corporate energy that would undermine the mission.

What then of roles for the other major players in the business of HP amateur sport? Briefly, it is suggested that the Canadian Olympic Committee should perform the role of Games preparation and team selection, leadership, management and support. The COC may also have a role in raising funds for HP sport – to be channelled for implementation through OTP. However, past experience has demonstrated that, because of the unique and formidable nature of the Olympic brand and the narrow and time-limited scope of the Olympic team property, Olympic sponsorship programs are frequently in friction with NSO programs.

Sport Canada’s role is today and must remain central, in that the Federal Government will remain the single largest source of funding for sport. Even with clear role definition within the overall sport system, coordination between players will be of over-riding importance. This role should belong to Sport Canada. In addition, Sport Canada should be responsible for delivering required funding for HP sport to OTP and for funding, managing funding delivery and overseeing sport development through NSOs – i.e. continuation of the existing Sport Support and Hosting programs. To create a unified system for HP funding, the present AAP and Excellence (i.e. HP sport) programs, with the scope of the latter being clearly defined, should be transferred to OTP.

Notwithstanding the need for brevity and the limited mandate of this Panel, an observation must be made on the importance to HP sport of coordinated investment at local and provincial levels of the sport system. Recalling that Olympic medallists are produced by sport systems, not by HP programs alone, the stages of LTAD that deal with recruitment, skill development and capacity

building are critical if full athletic potential is to be realized. In most if not all sports, these stages are the responsibility of PSOs and clubs. Regrettably, the lack of resources for these elements of the sport system remains chronic. For Canada to produce more - and more successful - international-level HP athletes, provincial governments, all of whom are parties to the *Canadian Sport Policy*, need to be seriously committed and to effectively integrate their efforts. Currently, the level of that commitment (in terms of the amounts of resources committed) is highly variable among the provinces, but generally quite low. Further, there is little consistency across the jurisdictions with respect to the types of programming provided.

The sport system will continue to underperform if provincial sport bodies are not able to invest in a systematic way at the grass roots and PSO levels of the sport system. Sport Canada needs to exercise strategic leadership and coordination, both by its own example and by playing the role of federal partner with its provincial counterparts. The long term health of Canadians and national aspirations for international podiums merit this joint effort.

The roles proposed above for the HP sphere can be better understood by highlighting the planning focus for each. Military doctrine defines three levels of operation: strategic, operational and tactical. The three levels of operation are fully integrated and are undertaken concurrently. This approach can be applied to HP sport as follows:

- Strategic (Long-Term) – leads to long-term goals; involves a planning horizon of two quadrennials or more, sufficient to effect changes in a sport system that will be manifest in overall system productivity (i.e. the quality and quantity of athletes entering the HP program). Even longer planning horizons will be required in order for significant change to be manifest in late development sports in which athlete development can take 20 years from “Active Start” to “Training to Win” stages of LTAD.
- Operational (Mid-Term) – leads to mid-term objectives; involves a planning horizon of four years, within which strategies, single and multi-year initiatives and intermediate objectives (e.g. World Championships) are selected to lead to the quadrennial objective – the next Olympics/Paralympics.
- Tactical (Short-Term) – leads to annual objectives/benchmarks; involves a 12 month planning horizon, within which initiatives, tasks and investments are designed to achieve specified results for the season. Tactical results are only important within the context of operational objectives.

The proposed roles and inter-relationships for the principal players in HP sport can be explained in terms of their respective goals/objectives and the orientation of their plans. Figure 1 on page 5 of this submission depicts this dynamic.

With key roles identified, the determination of which sports should be supported is next in importance. There will never be sufficient resources to treat all sports equally and still produce something meaningful at the highest level, where disproportionate investment is a must. Therefore it is suggested that HP funding should be prioritized towards sports that:

- are assessed as having the potential to achieve competitive results in future Olympic/Paralympic Games; and/or
- are sustainable in the long-term, based on accessibility, affordability and relevance to the Canadian population at large.

The selection of sports for funding for the enhancement of HP results is a strategic decision. As such, it should involve a long-term commitment by the funding agency; and it must be matched by a strong corporate commitment to “excellence” by the NSO. The accountability framework for these reciprocal commitments must impose upon the NSO a strict regime of compliance, within specified program areas, with recommendations from the funding agency.

**Figure 1 - Planning Contexts Related to Roles in HP Sport**

Planning Context	Applicable To			Additional Notes
	Sport Canada	OTP	COC	
<b>Strategic (Long-Term)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinates overall strategic effort</li> <li>Invests in sport system leadership, structures and programs for national application below level of OTP influence</li> <li>Hosting program complements OTP's sport-specific long-term goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invests in depth in targeted sports to create HP structures and programs that will pay off in a larger/better athlete pool in long-term</li> <li>Programs identify and enrich programs for top-performing athletes in L2C stage and above</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated assessment process essential to identify sports receiving both "Sport Support" funding and OTP support</li> <li>Assessments updated every four years, prior to new quadrennial</li> </ul>
<b>Operational (Mid-Term)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinates overall operational effort</li> <li>Invests in sport system leadership and in structures and programs for national application below level of OTP influence</li> <li>Hosting program complements OTP's sport-specific mid-term objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invests in leadership, structures and programs for a finite group of selected athletes – with either proven ability to reach international podiums or very high potential (in effect, "hot-housing")</li> <li>Involves athletes primarily at the T2W stage, with some athletes producing world-class results at the T2C stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invests in planning and preparation for the next Games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barring exceptional circumstances, support to targeted sports is stable throughout the quadrennial</li> </ul>
<b>Tactical (Short-Term)</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invests in programs for selected T2W athletes to prepare and compete in current year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selects and leads teams to Games</li> </ul>	