

2010 AND BEYOND PANEL

Honourable Gary Lunn, Minister of State for Sport
Mr. David Zussman, Chair
Submission by Ian Moss
September 17, 2009

Dear Mr. Zussman,

I write this submission to your “*2010 AND BEYOND PANEL*” as an interested Canadian citizen with over twenty years of National Sport administrative experience in the Canadian sport system. Most recently I served as Executive Director for Rowing Canada Aviron during the “Beijing Quadrennial” but have also served in a high performance capacity as Executive Director for Badminton Canada (7 years) and High Performance Manager for Diving/Plongeon Canada (5 years). I have now chosen to pursue my career path in the UK as Performance Director for GB Badminton and prepare GB athletes for medal performances at their home Olympic Games in London 2012.

My attached submission is a summary of my perspective in respect to your Panel’s review mandate. While your mandate is broad and submissions proposing solutions will be quite varied, there is solace in knowing that there is no exact answer to all the questions posed; the answer lies in the Panel’s ability to best describe the mood of the country in respect to high performance sport and the priorities that Canadians identify with toward excellence goals. As well, we must be cognizant of the Canadian sport system’s ability to drive performance objectives, as the goals are equal to that of many other countries with higher financial investments and cultural support mechanisms for sport.

I anticipate that my submission will differ somewhat from other administrative personnel submissions in that my focus is on the enigma that is National Sport Organisation leadership. In my years in Canadian sport, I do not recall ever an effort on the part of NSO’s, funding partners or others with influence to address the dilemma of sport leadership from a functional perspective. I truly believe that this is a critical aspect to creating future strength in performance areas for Canadian sport – those in influential positions on volunteer Boards need to be educated and influenced on the intricacies of high performance sport such that they can lead from within rather than that leadership being driven from the outside. Being in the UK, I now see how this sport system has addressed this matter and, I believe, have moved forward toward performance goals in a stronger manner than that currently in effect in Canada.

I appreciate the opportunity to present my perspective to your Panel and I certainly look forward to outcomes of your research and deliberations.

Sincerely,



1. What strategies need to be implemented to improve the international performances of Canadian athletes, including ensuring the development of a stream of talented and well trained Paralympic athletes at the international level?

In order to create a level of sustainability and continuation of performance development within the Canadian system, funding partners have to firstly recognize the importance of investment in the “health” of National Sport Organisations (NSO’s) – there has to be a recognition that strong NSO governance and leadership is tantamount to creating an environment of success and belief within the sport. Funding that invests in the NSO as a whole (understanding that there needs to be distinctions within funding models for performance funding needs) and that recognizes that NSO “health” translates into strong leadership in all aspects of performance sport is germane to the development of a sustainable performance “culture” within the sport. While OTP has had some positive impact in terms of focusing NSO priorities within budgets, it has also created internal strife within the sport by separating one component of NSO governance away from the rest – OTP has made operating decisions regarding high performance programming and taken that responsibility away from the NSO Board of Directors. Instead of solely focusing on programme investments, the strategy also needs to include an investment in NSO governance and leadership that ensures an appropriate quality of volunteer and CEO leadership to compliment the desired NSO high performance infrastructure.

Sustainability of world leading performance is only achievable through a long term commitment to performance goals, both within the NSO and from funding bodies. While there has been some progress in respect to Sport Canada funding commitments to NSO and OTP, there needs to be a strategy that looks at an 8-12 year plan for high performance funding that shows a commitment to the NSO high performance environment. It must be noted by the leaders in Canadian sport that medal targets for future Olympic Games will not be achieved without a larger number of NSO’s contributing to the total; as such, there needs to be a commitment to “streams” of funding support to NSO’s that are within the high performance production continuum (along the lines of Podium, Performance, Emerging NSO categories that would reflect the existing level of NSO performance and their respective “stretch target” objectives toward medal production). We must always understand that athlete production is somewhat cyclical and that other NSO’s must be ready to step up when an existing NSO medal producer falters slightly.

Investment in world leading technical personnel is critical to performance success. This investment is not only financial (as this can sometimes result in short term but not long term gains) but rather is an investment in sustainable technical systems that can be passed on in new Olympic cycles. As well, there needs to be as much investment in NSO leadership (both volunteer and professional staff) to support and understand the roles of technical leadership within the sport. Likewise, the Canadian sport system has to expand its ability to “hot house” technical and NSO leaders so that they can share strategies and work across sport platforms.

There is no question that a stronger partnership with Provincial governments and Provincial Sport Organisations is critical to achieving a functional and fiscal efficiency with the national sport system – this will be well detailed in other submissions.

2. *Would changes to the design, structure, accountability, governance and/or leadership of high performance sport in Canada help deliver on these strategies and build on the positive momentum in high performance sport that has been created over the past several years?*

While Winter Olympic Sport has seen some advancement in performance, any perceived advancement in performance over the past quadrennial by Summer Olympic Sport is not as tangible. At the 2008 Beijing Games, the medal count would have been almost identical to Athens 2004 had not Rowing and Equestrian “over-achieved” compared to their OTP performance targets. While OTP funds were helpful in Rowing achieving its success, the success itself had more to do with internal dynamics within Rowing than it did with any OTP or external intervention.

Any “momentum” created within the high performance environment by the existing OTP/Sport Canada funding arrangement will be short term because the intervention strategies to date have not translated down into a functional shift and educative process occurring within the NSO environment; in fact, the current policy of direct intervention into the high performance environment by OTP without the concurrent educative and support elements provided to the NSO leadership will alienate sport personnel and create internal strife. Targeted OTP high performance funds that are “ring fenced” have already created a divide within NSO’s as those governing the sport are not in control of funds that are utilized within their environment.

The principles of high performance sport success needs to be built on integrity, partnership and leadership development within the NSO environment. Both OTP and Sport Canada have a role to play in this development as it significantly helps to create a level of professionalism and sustainability within the NSO environment. Likewise, NSO’s themselves need to embrace this partnership as they are the custodians of the athlete performance environment.

While there are significant calls for an independent agency (OTP) to drive Canada’s high performance strategy, the expansion of such an agency is not the panacea for the issues facing Canadian high performance success. Quite the contrary – it is better to strengthen the relationship and focus of the sport mandate between government and the deliverers of sport (NSO’s) and use OTP as an intermediary to affect positive change toward that mandate. There is no question that the utilization of strong technical leaders within an agency such as OTP can be beneficial, but the real question is the interaction between OTP and the NSO’s in terms of implementing Canada’s high performance mandate that requires the most discussion.

While this point may be brought out in other submissions, Canadian sport (and sport in most Western countries) is experiencing a drought in volunteer leadership, to the point that we have lost a generation of volunteers within the succession planning process. This is very problematic for all levels of Canadian sport and there needs to be a clear understanding of potential impact on NSO vision for the future. To be visionary, to be true world leaders in sport, we need to be building an NSO environment that is cutting edge and looking 10-15 years into the future to predict needs and infrastructure. It is time for an NSO governance review that looks at NSO leadership needs for the next 10-15 years.

4. *How can service delivery of high performance programming to athletes be improved?*

More than anything, Canada needs to be prepared to invest in world's best coaches for the short term. From that, we need to have a logical mentoring programme for Canadian coaches that can transfer that knowledge to Canadians who will be supported for the long term in the high performance system. Too many Canadian coaches seem to have to leave our shores to gain a level of credibility within Canada – they are leaving either because of lack of opportunity, disillusionment in the system or for significant financial gain in another country. Coaches need an appropriate technical support environment within their NSO to create a balanced lifestyle and reduce the burn-out rate – the NSO environment needs to be “high performance friendly” in order for an effective service to be provided to athletes. Investment in the education of NSO leaders is critical to creating this supportive environment for the sport's technical experts.

Athletes do need appropriate direct financial support that is on par with other leading sporting countries (since we have the same performance expectations). AAP increases over the past few years have been positive and will need to continue to keep up with inflation and programme needs. There is no question that athletes should be rewarded in a hierarchical fashion based upon performance – this currently does not exist within AAP and needs to be re-instituted to maintain progressive performance targets. The AAP budget within government should continue to be protected but not at the expense of other sport funding categories.

Canadian Sport Centres need to be re-aligned to better deliver a focused performance mandate based upon their NSO/PSO relationships. CSC's should be seen as an integral component of the Canadian high performance system in respect to their role as support for the technical leadership within the NSO's. As well, consideration needs to be given to stronger linkages with University Sport Science faculties that can also provide housing and meal options for targeted performance athletes.

Finally, there needs to be a further investment in the high performance environment for “cross pollination” of ideas and programming within the technical environment for sport. In Minister Lunn's backyard (Victoria), the linkage between Rowing, Triathlon and Swimming national team athletes and coaches is such that all train within 2km's of each other – the opportunity for combined learning's is critical to nurture as this creates respect, vision and critical analysis that will provide the edge for performance into the future.

5. How should performance targets be set for the 2014 Winter Olympic/Paralympic Games and the 2016 Olympic/Paralympic Games, and beyond?

Targets are only effective if there is buy in to those goals. As such, it would be ideal to support a national forum of technical sport leaders to discuss such targets and pathways to achieve success. One cannot expect linear improvement of performance from the current Canadian sport system because it is only focused on short term results through targeted interventions – the “architecture” of Canadian sport has not evolved to create sustainable performance on a world stage. Canadian sport leaders within the NSO environment need to feel ownership in targets set – NSO’s are tired of being told what targets to achieve without a significant level of input or financial support put to those targets.

It is very difficult to forecast realistic performance targets without a clear understanding of the fiscal and programming infrastructure for Canadian sport in 2014, 2016 and beyond. Minister Lunn has an ideal opportunity now to create a forum for discussion on an updated Canadian sport infrastructure and then to put an appropriate architecture in place to support such a system.

In the end, our collective strategy should be about re-investing in our future, understanding our collective vision for high performance, costing out a sustainable infrastructure and investing in an 8-12 year strategy to achieve our objectives.