

September 11, 2009

SUBMISSION
TO THE
***2010 AND BEYOND* PANEL**

The Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto is delighted that the *2010 and Beyond* Panel has been appointed to seek ways of improving Canada's high performance sport system.

We do so from a long tradition of excellence in sport. The University of Toronto has contributed to high performance sport for more than a century, through its facilities, coaching, research, undergraduate and graduate degree programs, sport medicine, administrative leadership, and athletic performances. The first Canadian to win an Olympic gold medal, George Orton, in Paris in 1900, was a U of T graduate, and the university has been represented on virtually every Canadian Summer and Winter Olympic and Paralympic Team ever since. The first Canadian to serve on the International Olympic Committee, James Merrick, and Canada's first female IOC member, Carol Anne Letheren, learned sports administration as U of T students. More than 20 of U of T's current faculty and staff have served as coaches and administrators of Canada's national teams, and several have played a prominent role in Toronto's two recent Olympic bids and the current Pan American bid.

The University has recently invested significantly in the renewal of its facilities for high performance sport, with a new Varsity Centre, and soon, the Goldring Centre for High Performance Sport. As a result, Athletics Canada, Swimming Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion have created national and provincial training centres at the Faculty. This year, Canadian championships in swimming, track and field, and intercollegiate field hockey were held, with intercollegiate soccer scheduled for 2009 and 2010.

The Faculty of Physical Education and Health supports the priority given to high performance sport in the *Canadian Sport Policy* (2002) and the *Physical Activity and Sport Act* (2003), and trust that the Panel will frame its recommendations within the overall goals, objectives and values of those important policy initiatives.

This submission deals primarily with Questions 1, 2 and 5 as outlined in the *2010 and Beyond Panel: Consultation Paper* (August 14, 2009), from our perspective as members of a research-intensive university with a strong commitment to high performance sport as part of a continuum of opportunities from 'playground to podium.' We are concerned with **strategies** "to improve the international performances of Canadian athletes" (including Paralympians); with "changes to the design, structure, accountability, governance and/or leadership of high performance sport in Canada help to

deliver on these **strategies;**” and with the setting of future “performance targets.” To address these questions, the submission deals with five concerns: (1) defining and measuring excellence; (2) healthy high performance sport; (3) infrastructure; (4) research and knowledge translation (KT); and (5) creative connections with grassroots participation.

1. Defining and Measuring Excellence

In defining excellence and setting targets for Canadian high performance, we urge the Panel to follow the approach set by the *Canadian Sport Policy* and focus on the number, quality and accessibility of opportunities the system provides; the learning, cultural, scientific and economic outcomes the system produces; and the improvements made annually in these metrics, not just medals. Neither the *Policy* nor the *Act* focuses on ‘podiums’ or ‘medals’. To focus on, even to fetishize podiums and medals to the exclusion of all other measures of achievement and excellence is a serious mistake, for several reasons:

- focusing on medals collapses the entire experience of high performance training and competition into the scoreboard results, with the effect that the significant intrinsic learning that participants undergo in the day-to-day of training, travel, inter-personal and inter-cultural exchange and of course competition, the rich social narratives that sport weaves into the fabrics of Canadian culture, and the scientific and economic benefits that sport produces are all marginalized, if not overlooked altogether. We would argue that such important outcomes are as important to Canadian public policy and popular support as medals; they need to be recognized in the planning, program delivery and monitoring and evaluation of the high performance enterprise.
- focusing on medals places Canada in a ‘sporting arms race’ with countries who, for various political reasons, are prepared to outspend Canada, and to go beyond “fair and ethical means” in order to achieve medals.
- focusing on medals means that, if performance targets based on medals are not achieved then it gives the impression that the policy was a failure and vast amounts of money have been wasted (in a country and at a time when such waste is not easily dismissed). Few of the athletes, coaches or communities involved in high performance sport that we know would ever say that their experience was ‘wasted’, even when they came home without the medals they wanted.
- focusing on medals leads to a boom-and-bust cycle of sport funding, which undermines the sustainability necessary for outstanding programs.

We therefore recommend that the Panel define the goals of the Canadian high performance system comprehensively and holistically, with a focus on the number, quality, and accessibility of opportunities, and the learning, scientific and economic outcomes, and develop and recommend an appropriate set of metrics to measure and

evaluate annual improvement. The Faculty's Centre for Sport Policy Study would be pleased to assist with that process.

2. Healthy High Performance Sport

One of the defining characteristics of the Canadian sport system is its commitment to 'athlete centred sport'. A holistic approach would establish performance targets that include the health, education, intercultural facility, and employability of athletes and coaches, as well as their athletic progress. Strengthening the health and well-being of Canadian athletes should be an important first step, in keeping with recent developments in the Olympic Movement. The IOC Medical Commission has shifted its focus on determining "the best medical practices in the domain of sport and the safeguarding of the rights and health of the athletes." Recent work of the Commission (e.g., the new Consensus Statement on Periodic Health Evaluation of Elite Athletes [16/7/09]; the recent Statement on Fasting and Sport [4/5/09]) provides a clear indication of this important new direction. 'Healthy high performance' was long thought to be a contradiction, but increasing knowledge about training derived from the health monitoring, education and treatment of athletes have changed it into an aspiration – one that now drives sports programs at the University of Toronto. With its highly respected system of public health care, Canada has an opportunity to become one of the world leaders in this regard, to the benefit of its athletes, and we would argue, their performances. The Panel should make ensure that 'healthy high performance' is a characteristic of the Canadian sport system after 2010.

3. Infrastructure

High performance training and competition are extremely difficult without adequate facilities, properly maintained, with appropriate access for athletes and coaches. Unfortunately, there is only a patchwork of such facilities across Canada, with some regions moderately well served and others in deficit. The best facilities have been legacies of major games, so that the construction of new facilities has become an artifact of successful bids. The practice has led to a preoccupation with bidding as a strategy of infrastructural development. The creation of a network of Canadian sports centres and the recent dedication of Build Canada funds for sport and recreation are welcome steps towards broadening the access to high performance facilities, but what is really needed is a comprehensive, pan-Canadian, multi-year plan, involving federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, to develop, construct and maintain appropriate facilities for both high performance and sport for all. In 2005, the provincial and territorial sports ministers suggested that such a plan be developed as a lasting legacy of the 2017 sesqui-centennial. Given the jurisdictional, political and regional differences, this will be no easy task, but it will be essential to moving ahead. We so recommend.

4. Research and Knowledge Translation (KT)

Canada's high performance system needs comprehensive strategies for sport leadership, sport science, and sport medicine to advance significantly. To realize significant improvements in each of these areas, the universities and colleges must be more centrally involved. To cite just one aspect of the challenge, many scientists in Canadian

universities would be interested in contributing to sport science, but the current funding models do not support their involvement in such research. Few grants are available from the established research councils, where peer-review is a condition of awards, and as a result, faculty cannot obtain either the funds or the recognition for sport research. In this environment, deans discourage junior faculty from engaging in such research. While some applied sport science is being done in the Canadian sport centres, it is often conducted in isolation from the communities of scientists and students doing leading-edge basic research. Such research has the potential to assist in high performance training and competition but health practices and the conduct of sport at many levels. If that research is publicly funded, then it is appropriate and responsible to make that knowledge widely available in timely manner (KT).

One model that could increase the amount of sport science research is five year old agreement between Sport Canada and two of the major research funding councils (CIHR and SSHRC), known as the Sport Participation Research Initiative. The SPRI has been a major stimulus to research on grassroots participation in Canada, and the results of the first studies are now becoming available through the knowledge translation requirements of funded research. The SPRI provides an ideal model to stimulate funding and we recommend the Panel to consider establishing a High Performance Research Initiative based on the SPRI model.

The same points could be made with respect to the universities and colleges with leadership development and sports medicine. We recognize that these are not new challenges, and some colleagues have worked very hard to bring about improvements. But they must be addressed in a comprehensive analysis of the future of high performance sport in Canada after 2010.

5. Creative Connections with Grassroots Participation

The *Policy* (2002) and the legislation (2003) that govern Canadian sport at this time give balanced priority to *participation* and *excellence*, sometimes referred to as the ‘pillars’ of the Canadian sport system. The full text of the citation from *The Physical Activity and Sport Act* (2003) in the first paragraph of this submission reads: “to increase *participation in the practice of sport* and support *the pursuit of excellence* in sport.” The intent of the policy and legislation is clear -- the two objectives are to be pursued in an integrated way, to create a seamless Canadian sport system.

Unfortunately, the relationship between the two pillars has been less than ideal. At at worst, it is antagonistic; at best one-way with high performance sport often recruiting from participation sport, but providing little in return. Widespread evidence indicates that there is little substance to the frequently claimed inspirational effects of medals and podiums on increasing grassroots participation. These effects are mostly mythical, but a recent position paper from the Centre for Sport Policy Studies at the University of Toronto (2008) indicates that there are possibilities for realizing such inspirational effects.

The resource needs of high performance sport have left little for the development of grassroots participation. Assumed benefits for the whole sport system of the influx of huge amounts of funding were not realized in the case of Australia, where there were no measurable increases in participation following the Sydney (2000) Olympics. Rather than an unhealthy and divisive struggle for limited resources, it is necessary for high performance and grassroots sports to begin to work together to realize the intent of Canada's sport policy and legislation. We recommend that high performance sport establish clear, organic links to the community sport system, and work towards the inclusion of the major regions of the country and the demographic diversity of Canada. Forming strategic alliances with grassroots sport, municipalities, and educational institutions, and the sharing of facilities, equipment and expertise, will create a stronger sport system. A system that speaks with one voice will be stronger, and will certainly command more attention, than the currently divided system.

Respectfully submitted,

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