



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY & PHYSICAL EDUCATION



CENTRE FOR SPORT POLICY STUDIES

**CENTRE FOR SPORT POLICY STUDIES
POSITION PAPER SERIES**

**SUBMISSION TO THE
2010 AND BEYOND PANEL**

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**August, 2009
CSPS Position Paper No. 3
www.sportpolicystudies.ca**

The Centre for Sport Policy Studies (CSPS), in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Toronto, is engaged in empirically-based research in the service of sport policy, monitoring and evaluation studies, and education and advocacy for the two most important ambitions of Canadian sport: 'sport for all' (widespread grassroots participation) and healthy high performance in elite-level sports. The Position Papers represent an important part of the work of CSPS.

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Kidd, B., & Donnelly, P. (2008). *Submission to the 2010 and Beyond Panel*. Centre for Sport Policy Studies Position Paper Series, No. 3. Toronto: Centre for Sport Policy Studies, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto.

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CSPS POSITION PAPER NO. 3: Editor's Introduction

In July, 2008, the Honourable Gary Lunn – then Minister of State for Sport – created a five-person *2010 and Beyond Panel*. “The purpose of the Panel [was] to chart a course for high performance sport in Canada that builds on our current success and sets a bold vision for the future.”

Own the Podium, the funding and planning agency, had been formed in 2005 to prepare Canadian athletes for successful performances at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. By 2008, there were growing concerns that the initiative, which was already showing signs of success in terms of winter sports achievements by Canadian athletes, would fizzle out after the Vancouver Olympics, and that the high performance sport system would become less of a priority. The *2010 and Beyond Panel* was a timely attempt to plan the post-Vancouver future for high performance sport in Canada.

One of the *Panel's* first initiatives was to call for submissions from the Canadian sport community. The Centre for Sport Policy Studies (CSPS) joined with the Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto to develop a submission that would combine our concerns for ‘healthy high performance’ with leveraging high performance sport to plan for increased sport and physical activity participation. That submission is reprinted here as a CSPS position paper. [See other submissions and relevant *2010 and Beyond Panel* documents on the Sport Information Research Centre (SIRC) web site:

http://www.sirc.ca/2010beyond_form.cfm]

The final report of the *Panel* (<http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/sc/pubs/panel/rap-rep-eng.pdf>) was extremely disappointing. In the first place, it reaffirmed a single- minded and narrow definition of success (i.e., winning medals) in the face of the overwhelming preference by Canadians, shown in several surveys, for a broadly

based system of opportunities. Secondly, it completely failed to address the long term health and well-being of Canadian high performance athletes ('healthy high performance'). Thirdly and most seriously, it proposed to distance the administration of high performance sport from public policy while nevertheless retaining some \$125m./year of public funds to sustain the programme.

This proposal, to establish an independent organization (structured in a similar manner to *Own the Podium*) with the exclusive responsibility to run high performance sport in Canada represents a violation of the purpose of the Canadian Sport Policy (2002) in effect at the time, and the Sport and Physical Activity Act (2003), both of which see participation and high performance as the two equal pillars of a seamless Canadian sport system. The *2010 and Beyond Panel's* proposal can also be considered a thinly disguised attempt to circumvent the democratic expectation of accountable and transparent sport, while hiving off high performance from a sport system which currently serves the interests of high performance sport substantially more than participation sport. Although the *Panel* offers the Long Term Athlete Development System / Canadian Sport for Life (LTAD) as a link between grassroots sport and high performance, it is clear that the *Panel* views LTAD as a talent identification and development project for the high performance sport system.

What Sport Can Do -- The True Sport Report is cynically offered as a justification for the value of high performance sport as a public good when it is clear that the *True Sport Report* is primarily concerned with the values of community sport. We take it as a healthy sign that, although the federal government has seen fit to extend and increase *Own the Podium* funding through the 2012 London Olympics, no longer term commitments have been made and no steps have been taken to implement the recommendations of the *2010 and Beyond Panel*.

Peter Donnelly, Director
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Editor's Introduction, May 2012

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 [now the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport] have created national and provincial training centres at the Faculty of Physical Education and Health [now the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education]. 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:

http://www.sirc.ca/2010beyond_form.cfm), 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 to 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 *[Physical Activity and Sport] 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:

- (a) 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 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;

(b) focusing on medals involves 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;

(c) 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;

(d) 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 Studies 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 to 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 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 [Canadian] 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 carried out 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, as well as 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 a timely manner (KT).

One model that could increase the amount of sport science research is the 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 involving universities and colleges in 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 Physical Activity and Sport Act* (2003) enshrines those policy objectives: "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 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 (Donnelly, et al., 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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