

Section 2

Community Sport in Canada

Defining Community Sport

“Sport” refers to an organized activity involving two or more participants engaged for the purpose of competition. It involves formal rules, requires specialized skills and strategies, and includes training or coaching. Community sport, or organized sport, is led and supported by community volunteers and institutions, and is found across the country in communities of all kinds.



Power of Sport

Community sport is not a private individual pursuit, nor is it undertaken for profit. Participation — playing, coaching, organizing, or advocating — is a highly social process and involves a high degree of volunteerism. Broadly inclusive participation and this elevated level of civic engagement are the distinguishing features which, together, enable community sport to deliver community benefits that individual physical activity and for-profit sport cannot. More particularly, these are the primary attributes that make community sport such an effective generator of social capital and platform for social inclusion.

Competition lies at the heart of all sport, and community sport is no different in this respect. High-performance athletes (amateur and professional) are an integral part of the community sport continuum because communities develop, support, identify with, and cherish their champions. In turn, they inspire us with their achievements, unite us, and often embody our highest ideals. Communities support high-performance sport because of what these champions do for communities.

Community sport is present in virtually every community in Canada and is largely supported by communities themselves.

While few athletes enter the realm of high-performance sport, good community sport embraces excellence on the basis that excellence, fairness, fun and inclusion are all mutually reinforcing values that help ensure accessible, enjoyable and challenging sport opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and skill levels.

Sport Participation in Canada

In 2016, over 8 million Canadians aged 15 years or older participated in sport (26.7% of Canadian adults). This number is an increase from 2010, marking a major turning point in sport participation; the rate of participation had previously declined from 1992 to 2010. While more men participated in sport than did women in 2016, the overall increase

in participation was largely driven by an increase in women's participation in sport: 16.4% of women participated in sport in 2010 while 19.7% participated in 2016.¹ Rates of participation for males decreased by 1.4 percentage points between 2010 and 2016, from 35.3 to 33.9%.² This change was driven by a significant decrease in sport participation in men aged 15–24 (a decrease of 11.3% between 2010 and 2016).³

In addition to participating in community sport as athletes, over 5.7 million Canadian adults were spectators at amateur sporting events (38.5%), 7.4% served as administrators, 4.9% coached amateur athletes, and 2.1% acted as referees.⁴ For spectators, coaches and administrators, this represented an increase from the 2005 figures (spectators decreased slightly [1% decline] from 2010 to 2016; the others stayed the same). While the number of women coaches has increased, as of 2016 there was still a significant gender disparity in amateur sport coaching, with twice as many men than women participating in coaching activities (6.5% and 3.3% respectively). Interestingly, this disparity seems to be driven by older age categories: more women coaches than men coaches were 15- to 24-years of age, while the numbers reversed for the 25 to 54 age group.⁵

For both sport participation and coaching, participation rates are higher for those from higher family income brackets and those with higher levels of education.⁶ Both women and men with a university degree were 1.6 times more likely to regularly participate in sport than those with some secondary education or less. In 2016, 1 in 4 people with a postsecondary diploma or some university participated in amateur sport as a coach; however, this breaks down to 44% of men and only 14.6% of women.⁷ Canadians from families that make over \$125,000 annually were more than 1.6 times more likely to attend amateur sport as spectators than those who made less than \$25,000 annually in 2016. Similarly 44% of men and 26.6% of women



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from households that reported annual earnings of \$125,000 or more participated in sport, versus only 23.6% of men and 12.6% of women from households that reported earning \$25–49,000 annually in 2016.⁸

There are differences in community sport participation across racial and cultural groups. In 2016, the rates of participation for Indigenous adults were comparable to the national rate. Interestingly, Indigenous women were slightly *more* likely to participate in sport than non-Indigenous women (23.6% and 21.6%, respectively). By contrast, Indigenous men participated in sport at a lower rate than non-Indigenous men (28.4% and 35.7% respectively).⁹ Adults who identified as visible minorities participated in sport at a slightly lower rate (25.2%) than the national average (26.7%) in 2016. Unlike Indigenous populations, women who identified as visible minorities had a significantly lower participation rate than the national rate for women (12.7% and 19.7% respectively), while men who identified as visible minorities participated in sport more than the national average for men (36.8% and 33.9% respectively).¹⁰ Interestingly, established immigrants had lower participation rates in sport than newly immigrated adults did. However, between 2010 and 2016, the rate of sport participation for recent and very recent adult immigrants decreased by 4.3 percentage points, to 24.7%.¹¹

Overall, children's participation in organized sport in Canada has increased from 2005 to 2016.¹² In the 2014–2016 CANPLAY study, 77% of Canadian children aged 5–19 participated in organized physical activity and sport. Rates of participation in sport were the same for girls and boys, but participation decreased with age: 70% of teens aged 13–19 reported participating in sport, compared with 83% of youth aged 5–12. Children of parents with higher education levels and higher household incomes were significantly more likely to participate in sport than their peers from lower-income households.¹³ Another factor that impacted children's participation in sport included whether or not their parents themselves were involved in sport. Children (aged

5 to 14) with at least one parent involved in sport as a participant or administrator were much more likely to participate in sport (57.2%) than those with no parental involvement (39.4%); these numbers are similar to those reported in 2005. Children from two-parent households are more likely to participate in sport than those from single-parent households, particularly if their parent(s) are active in sport themselves.¹⁴

The Sport We Want

The exceptional level of volunteerism and community support for sport is a testament to the high value that Canadians place on sport. Canadians also place a high financial value on sport: In 2018, 84% of Canadians believed that it was somewhat or very important that the federal government continue funding community-level sport.¹⁵ And Canadians understand the fundamental power of sport in their own lives: in a 2018 survey of over 2,000 Canadians, 84% agreed that participation in community-level sport can instill character in youth, 91% think that it can contribute to good health, and 82% believe it can strengthen our communities.¹⁶

All sports are characterized by a tension between the need for fairness — to be equitable and inclusive — and the desire to win. With the rise of professional sport as global mass entertainment, community sport is increasingly being pulled toward the values of professional sport, characterized by high costs and an emphasis on winning at all costs. Over 40% of parents worry that professional sport does not reflect the True Sport Principles, and over 80% are at least moderately concerned about the negative influence of professional sport on community-level sport.¹⁷ The confusion around sport as commercial entertainment (the professional sport we watch on television) and community sport (the sport we play) can at times undermine the fundamental principles of inclusion and good sportspersonship and, with them, the benefits that sport produces in communities. This

Power of Sport

is because the full value of community sport is only realized when sport is conducted in a certain way — when there is a place for everyone to play, when every participant has the opportunity to acquire new skills and improve their game, when winning is not possible without equitable and inclusive participation, and when the inherent joy of the game remains integral to the experience of the participants.

Good sport reinforces the importance of commitment, honest effort, ethical play and hard work in the pursuit of excellence. Winning achieved through other means is not a measure of sporting excellence. Canadians know the value of honest effort: 82% of Canadians believe that it's not okay to cheat, even if you know your opponent is cheating.¹⁸ Through sport, we experience exhilaration and joy, the profound satisfaction that accompanies achievement, and a shared spirit of pride in our athletes and sports teams. These emotions are felt every day in communities as individuals and teams of all ages test themselves and their competitors, and strive to realize their — and our — aspirations in the shared pursuit of the promise and potential of sport.

This is the sport Canadians want. Of those surveyed, 82% of Canadians believe that community-level sport can contribute to strengthening our communities, and when asked about the importance of the True Sport Principles in community sport, “Respect Others” has consistently been rated the most important principle since 2016 (67% in 2018).¹⁹ However, Canadians are concerned that community sport is not always reflecting these principles.

Fewer than 1 in 5 Canadians think that community sport very effectively enacts the True Sport Principles, and only 14% of Canadians think that community-level sport in their community is doing an excellent job at delivering a positive sport experience.²⁰ Two of the top-ranked concerns about community-level sport are poor parental behaviour and harassment, bullying



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or other abuse. Furthermore, Canadians are concerned that not all community members have the same access to sport: half of respondents in a 2018 survey indicated concern about lack of access for some people, and the top-mentioned concern with respect to community-level sport was the cost of participation.²¹

These views point to a continued gap between the positive benefits Canadians believe sport can provide for their children and their communities and what they are actually experiencing. The sections that follow set out the broad spectrum of public benefits that are available to Canadians if we apply ourselves deliberately to the task of closing this gap by building a comprehensive, accessible and inclusive community sport system that delivers the sport we truly want.