



WHAT SPORT CAN DO

THE
TRUE SPORT
REPORT

Executive Summary

Introduction

True Sport is a national movement for sport and community. Its core mission is to be a catalyst to help sport live up to its full potential as a public asset for Canada and Canadian society – making a significant contribution to the development of youth, the well-being of individuals, and quality of life in our communities.

There is now evidence that sport's benefits go far beyond the positive health effects of physical activity that have long been understood. A growing body of research points to community sport's fundamental role as a primary generator of social capital and related benefits across a broad spectrum of societal goals including education, child and youth development, social inclusion, crime prevention, economic development and environmental sustainability. Perhaps most significantly, no other domain of community life has demonstrated sport's capacity to connect so many young people to positive adult role models and mentors, opportunities for positive development, and help in acquiring critical life skills. Evidence documenting these benefits is causing a new picture of Canada's community sport system to emerge – that of a critical, yet largely untapped, reservoir of public benefit that, with intentional effort, can be made to deliver even more for Canadians. To realize these benefits, though, the sport we do must be good sport, driven by positive values – when good sport is used intentionally, it can have even greater benefits.

Research indicates that this is exactly the kind of sport that the vast majority of Canadians want, understanding intuitively that this is the sport that generates the greatest benefits. True Sport undertook this research initiative in order to provide concrete evidence of these benefits – to put

data and examples around this intuition and aspiration. This report is intended to enable communities, policy makers, and business leaders to see the tremendous potential that lies within our community sport system and to catalyze new approaches that will put this potential to work for Canadians.

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Community sport in Canada

Community sport is sport led, organized, supported or enabled by community volunteers and institutions. It runs from the playground to the podium, ranging from simple pick-up games, to community and school-based sport leagues, to elite high performance competition.

It is also present in virtually every community in Canada. There are 33,650 sport and recreation organizations in Canada – 71 percent of them local. Twenty-eight percent of adult Canadians and approximately 50 percent of children and youth participate directly in sport, while 18 percent of Canadians belong to a local sport club, league or organization. More than 1.8 million Canadians coach amateur sport while 800,000 participate as amateur sport referees or officials.

Community sport is supported primarily by communities themselves, relying heavily on volunteers and only minimally on government support. Sport and recreation organizations make up 21 percent of Canada's nonprofit sector but engage 28 percent (5.3 million) of all volunteers – more than any other sector. Seventy-three percent of sport organizations have no paid employees at all and, on average, they receive only 12 percent of their funding from governments, compared with 49 percent for voluntary organizations overall.

Ninety-two percent of Canadians believe that community-based sport can have a positive influence in the lives of youth, and rank it second only to families as a highly positive influence in the lives of young Canadians. However, community sport is increasingly being pulled toward the values of commercial sport, undermining its benefits which can only be fully realized when sport is conducted in a positive and

intentional way – when it is inclusive, fair, fun, and fosters genuine excellence.

5.3 million Canadians, or 28 percent of all Canadian volunteers, volunteer with sport and recreation organizations – more than for any other sector.

This is the sport Canadians want. Fifty-seven percent of Canadians believe that community sport currently reinforces these positive

values to a great extent. They are concerned, however, that community sport is becoming overly focused on competition and believe that corrective action is required. They are also concerned that too many people are excluded from community sport, with 71 percent citing cost as a major barrier. These views point to a growing gap between the positive benefits Canadians believe sport can provide 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 – true sport.

Improving health and well-being

Good health is fundamental to an individual's well-being and their ability to realize their full human potential. It is also a crucially important economic asset. Sport helps make Canadians healthier by:

Increasing physical activity levels – Adult Canadians active in sport average almost three hours of mostly moderate or vigorous physical activity per week and are, therefore, likely reaching recommended activity levels that have been proven to reduce mortality rates by as much as 30 percent.

Stemming the tide of child obesity – Physical inactivity is one cause of obesity and 91 percent of Canadian children and youth are not meeting recommended physical activity levels. Children who participate in sport are more likely to reach these levels than those who do not, but even among this group only 11 percent are succeeding. More effort is needed to increase activity rates, but even modest increases can help overweight children and youth to improve their heart health and lower their blood pressure, thereby reducing some of obesity's most damaging health effects.

Preventing chronic disease – People who are active on a regular basis significantly reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer (in particular breast and colon cancer), type 2 (adult onset) diabetes, and bone loss and pain in later life due to osteoporosis.

Enhancing mental health – Physical activity through sport helps to enhance self-esteem, reduce stress and anxiety, and alleviate depression. In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression. Sport also offers opportunities for positive relationships, friendship and support that foster emotional health.

Promoting healthy aging – Physical activity through sport can help prevent chronic disease, improve balance and coordination as people age (significantly reducing their risk of falls and hospitalization), improve memory and learning, and reduce the risk of cognitive loss through Alzheimer's and small strokes. Sport also provides opportunities for social connection for older Canadians at risk of social isolation.

Reducing health care costs – Physical inactivity costs Canadians \$1.6 billion and \$3.7 billion annually in direct and indirect costs. Increasing sport participation is a cost-effective strategy for improving Canadians' health and significantly reducing national health costs. Increasing physical activity levels by just 10 percent would save Canadians over \$150 million annually in direct health care costs alone.

There is a growing gap between the positive benefits Canadians believe sport can provide for their children and their communities and what they are actually experiencing.

Putting children and youth on a positive life course

Sport can contribute to giving children a healthy start in life, help those with a poor start get back on track, and equip youth with the information, skills, personal resources and social support they need to make key life transitions successfully. However, sport can also expose children and youth to negative experiences, discourage their participation, and even impede their positive development.

In organized youth sports, the primary determinants of whether youth will have a positive or negative experience are the adults involved – parents, coaches, officials, and administrators – and the quality of coaching and mentoring. The values and practices employed by parents, coaches and volunteers can be powerfully enabling and enriching for young people, or they can drive them out of sport for a lifetime.

Canadians have identified a number of serious issues in community sport: too much focus on winning and competition, violence, under- and over-involvement of parents, poor coaching and leadership, harassment, intolerance/racism, lack of fair play, and injuries. These pressures are believed to be contributing to decreasing sport participation rates as children grow older. U.S. research has shown that the leading reasons youth drop out of sport are that they are no longer having fun, they do not have the

time, and they do not believe they are good enough to play. These findings point to the need for a comparable investigation of the sport experiences of youth in Canada, in order to encourage their continued participation and ensure they benefit from and enjoy their experience.

In Canada, most parents' (70 percent) expectations of what sport should provide their children have been met or exceeded, however, more can be done to ensure sport is delivering the greatest benefits possible. These benefits include:

Helping children learn and develop through play – Play is one of the primary ways that young children explore the world and develop their physical, cognitive and social-emotional capacities. Age-appropriate games and physical activity can help young children acquire mobility, coordination, knowledge about the world and themselves, self-confidence and initial social skills.

Building physical capacity and motor skills – Early to mid-childhood is when children acquire the strength, coordination and motor-skills necessary to move with efficiency and confidence in physically challenging circumstances. Sport and physical activity can help children to build this general base of motor abilities and a basic understanding of how their body moves.

Keeping children and youth active and healthy – Regular participation in physical activity during childhood and adolescence can help: 1) build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints; 2) control weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat; 3) prevent or delay development of high blood pressure and reduce blood pressure in adolescents with hypertension; 4) lower risk of cardiovascular disease; and 5) reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.

Using sport to reduce youth health risk behaviours – Young athletes are more likely than non-athletes to eat healthily and weigh less, and less likely to smoke cigarettes, use drugs, engage in sexual activity, or be bored or hopeless. Organized sports are generally associated with less antisocial behaviour, such as carrying a weapon or contemplating or attempting suicide, while adolescent girls who participate in sport are less likely than non-athletic peers to participate in sexual activity and/or report a pregnancy.

The particular benefits of sport for girls – Girls benefit particularly from sport's potential protective effects against osteoporosis, anxiety, depression, suicide, and adolescent pregnancy. As well, girls' participation is strongly linked to pro-education values, a greater sense of control over their own bodies, and more generalized feelings of empowerment, identity and self-direction that can help them to overcome restrictive gender norms and participate more fully in society.

Fostering positive youth development – Sport can also contribute positively to adolescent identity formation, a critical step in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Young people who participate in sport score significantly higher on self-concept than those who do not, with girls benefiting even more than boys. Sport also facilitates friendships and positive social relations, which also play an important role in youth identity formation.

Enhancing academic achievement – Sport and physical education can help improve young people's school attendance, behaviour, and academic achievement. Participation in school-based sport and physical activity has been shown to result in considerably healthier social and academic self-concepts, while longitudinal research from the United Kingdom confirms that sport can contribute to identification with, and commitment to, school and school values.

Teaching positive values and life skills – Sport offers young people a means to gain and enhance a range of life skills that can improve their chances of finding employment, raise their level of income, and make

them more optimistic and willing to volunteer in the community. Sport can potentially have a positive moral influence when it fosters positive experiences, minimizes negative experiences, empowers youth, treats them as individuals, and systematically and consistently teaches fair play and sportsmanship.

Preventing youth crime and gang involvement – Youth who participate in sport are less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour and have lower rates of criminal arrest. Sport programs can also offer youth a positive alternative to membership in criminal gangs. Sport programs to prevent youth crime and gang involvement work best when they are holistic, values-based, empowering, and delivered as part of a wider series of activities, in partnership with local renewal agencies and other groups. Purely recreational programs are unlikely to be very effective.

Providing positive adult role models – Adult role models play a key part in determining whether sport programs exert a positive or negative influence. Character, fair play, and morals are learned by youth when the goals, attitudes and behaviour of their coach or teacher are moral. A consistent positive relationship with a caring adult is also a significant protective factor, helping to build resilience in children and youth and enabling them to better manage the challenges in their lives.

Building stronger and more inclusive communities

Sport's benefits are not limited to individuals. Sport can also help to strengthen communities by building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of marginalized or excluded groups. This view is widely supported by Canadians, 72 percent of whom believe that sport is a key contributor to quality of life in their communities.

Building social capital – A nation's level of sport participation is closely linked to its level of social trust and well-being. People who participate in sport are more likely to

vote, contact a politician and sign a petition than the average citizen. They also show higher levels of social trust, trust in institutions, and life satisfaction. Sport also helps to keep small rural communities together and, in declining rural towns, may even provide the last remaining social infrastructure.

Helping newcomers to integrate more quickly into Canadian society – United Kingdom research on sport and the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers shows that it can help to break down barriers between newcomers and local host populations, improve relationships among asylum seekers of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and build their self-esteem and self-confidence. Sport is also being used successfully to link newcomers to key community services and supports.

Fostering greater inclusion of people with disabilities – Sport helps people with disabilities to improve their health and mobility by making them stronger, more flexible, and more coordinated. At the same time, it provides opportunities for them to build their self-confidence and self-esteem, enhance their social skills and networks, and become more motivated and independent. Sport also helps change negative community perceptions by focusing attention on athletes' abilities, rather than their disability.

Renewing Aboriginal culture – Research from Australia confirms that sport offers particular benefits with regard to Aboriginal communities in terms of building cultural pride, social cohesion, self-esteem, and transferable skills among participants and volunteers. Sport carnivals can also help reduce drug and

Sport is a powerful means of promoting health, but an even more powerful means of building social capital.

alcohol use on a short-term basis, with related reductions in family violence. Sport and recreation programs offered with other supports have also helped to increase school attendance and achievement levels, and reduce the incidence of youth crime and suicide.

Contributing to Canada's economy

Sport plays a significant role in the economic life, as well as the social life of communities, providing jobs, boosting tourism, contributing to neighbourhood economic renewal, and enhancing skills and productivity in the workplace. In 2004, Canadians spent \$15.8 billion on sport – 2.18 percent of all household spending or \$1,963 per household. Canada's sport sector accounts for 1.2 percent of GDP and provides 2 percent of all jobs, employing 262,324 Canadians.

Enhancing tourism through sport travel and events – Almost one third of tourist trips to Canada in 2006 included participation in sport or outdoor activities. Canada hosts over 250,000 sport events annually ranging from professional events, to multi-sport amateur games to local tournaments. All of these provide economic benefits in the form of visitor spending on accommodation, food and drink, entertainment, and gifts/souvenirs, while larger events also often leave a legacy of high quality sport infrastructure and international awareness leading to increased sport tourism.

Contributing to local economic development and renewal – Community sport amenities help cities to attract and retain highly valued knowledge-workers and the companies that seek to employ them. Sport can also boost the fortunes of disadvantaged neighbourhoods by providing employment and, through

local sport and employment plans, helping local residents to acquire the sport volunteer opportunities, training and accreditation they need to access these jobs.

Canadians rank sport second only to families as a highly positive influence in the lives of young people.

Enhancing workplace skills and productivity – Employers are increasingly turning to sport and physical activity to improve productivity in their

workplaces. Workplace sport and fitness programs can reduce annual absenteeism by 1.6 days per employee, leading to payroll savings of 1.1 percent per year. Employers also place a high value on the transferable skills acquired by sport participants and volunteers because these skills improve workplace performance.

Promoting environmental sustainability

Sport can instill appreciation of, and a desire to protect, the environment and provide a platform for social mobilization on behalf of environmental sustainability, including ensuring that sport at all levels is a net contributor, rather than detractor. It does this by:

Fostering environmental awareness and stewardship – Many investments in community sport are investments in green space, with users often becoming advocates for their protection, proper maintenance and expansion, just as those who pursue wilderness sports are often advocates for the protection and sustainable use of remote environments.

Providing a platform for social mobilization – Elite international sport events provide powerful platforms for promoting environmental protection because of their large audiences and global reach. High profile athletes possess this same potential. Many international sport and environment bodies are using this

capacity to raise environmental awareness and to advocate for greater sustainability at the local, as well as global, level.

Making sport facilities more sustainable – New greener standards for sport and recreation facilities, combined with efforts to improve the sustainability of existing facilities, ensure that community sport is doing its part to make our communities more sustainable and to leave a positive environmental legacy for the future.

Conclusion

The benefits of community sport invite communities and decision makers to recognize its value as a substantial public asset, and to devote attention and intentional effort to ensuring these benefits are fully realized for all of our communities.

Sport is a powerful means of promoting health, but an even more powerful means of building social capital, and perhaps the most effective system we have, outside of the family, for providing young people with positive adult role models and mentors and opportunities for positive development. Delivering on these benefits, however, requires that we build an inclusive community sport system that delivers the sport Canadians want – sport that is fun, fair, inclusive and promotes excellence.

This is not the job of sport alone. Local communities have a leading role to play, together with federal, provincial and territorial governments who can help ensure all communities have the sport infrastructure they need.

The quality and ultimate impact of community sport finally comes down to individuals through – the athletes, parents, coaches, administrators and volunteers whose ideas, attitudes and behaviour determine whether we will close the gap between the sport we have and the sport we want – or widen it.

By intentionally making the right choices, together we can all help ensure the sport we have is the sport we want – true sport – and make sport count for Canada.

Download WHAT SPORT CAN DO: The True Sport Report at www.truesport.ca/truesportreport

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