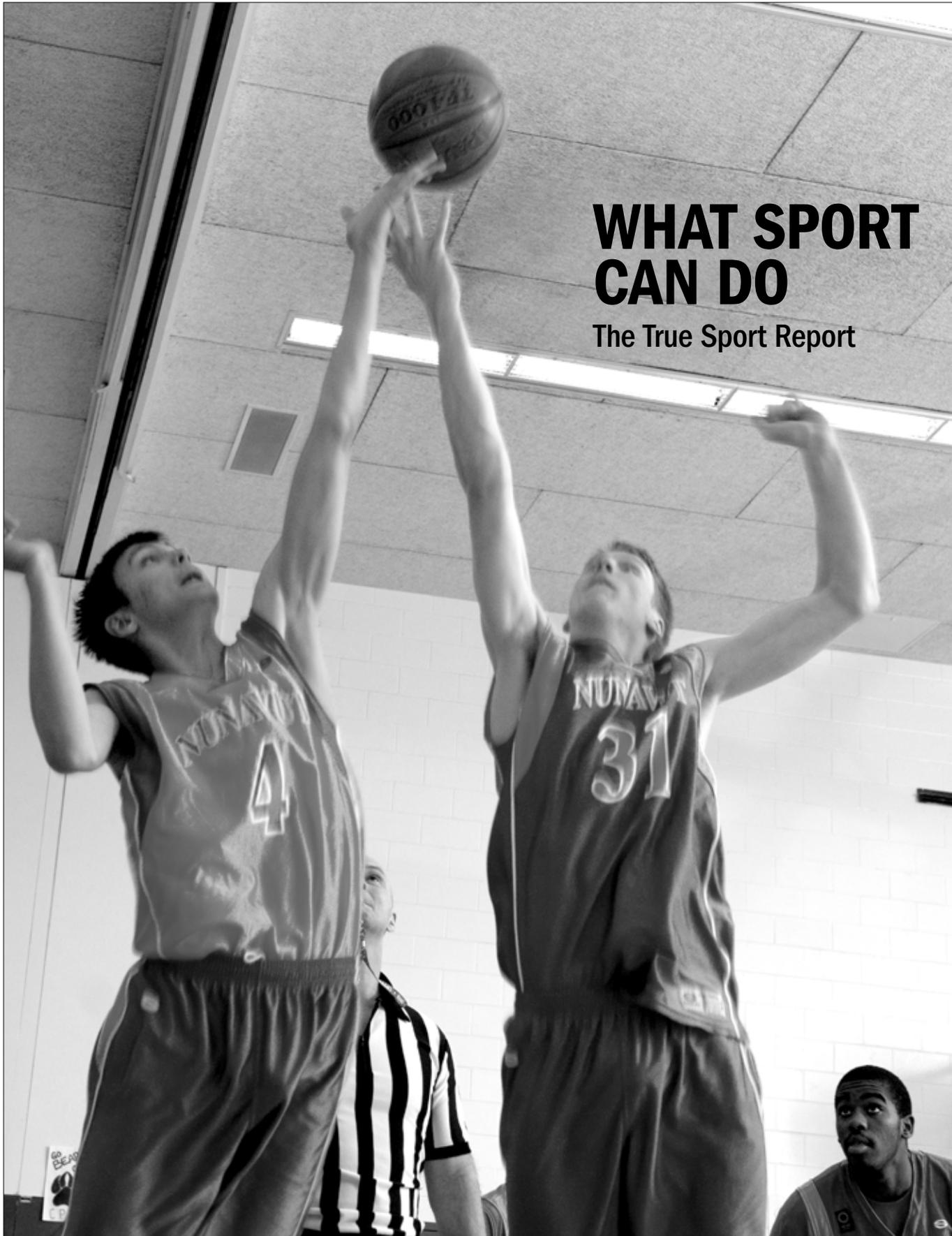


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WHAT SPORT CAN DO

THE TRUE SPORT REPORT





WHAT SPORT CAN DO

The True Sport Report

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Publisher

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.

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Foreword

There is a simple idea at the heart of this report, the same idea that lies at the heart of the True Sport movement – good sport can make a great difference.

Sport is woven into the very fabric of every community in Canada. One out of every 4 adults and one out of two children actively participate in sport, while over 5.3 million Canadians volunteer as coaches, officials, and organizers. We have only to look at the sheer numbers of Canadians who participate in sport, the depth of engagement of the volunteers and donors who make sport possible, and the fundamental goodwill that animates the majority of those who act from a desire to help others and their community – to know that the reach of community sport into Canadian life, in so many ways that matter, is extraordinary.

At the same time, the wide array of benefits that community sport can and often does deliver is also unparalleled. Sport can make us healthier; help put our children on a positive life course and equip them to meet future challenges; strengthen our communities by bringing people together and building trust and inclusion; foster economic development by building skills, attracting tourism, and making communities more attractive to workers and companies that want to employ them; and provide a platform and leadership in the promotion of environmental sustainability.

To realize these benefits though, as this report so clearly illustrates, the sport we do must be good sport.

The vast majority of Canadians (nine out of ten) recognize that community sport can be an enormous force for good – and they want it to be. But they are also very concerned that sport is falling far short of its potential. They are worried about too much aggression, cheating and unfair behaviour. They are worried about win-at-any-cost attitudes and that too many young people are leaving sport for the wrong reasons. They are worried about the negative behaviour of a fraction of parents who make it difficult for everyone else and they are worried about the influence of commercial sport values on the values of community sport.

Canadians know the good that community sport can do and they want the good that community sport can do, but they are worried that it is being pulled in the wrong direction. Community sport is not broken, but if we want sport to live up

to its true potential, we need to be intentional about ensuring that it reflects our best values and that everyone has a chance to participate. We need to work together, across all sectors of society, to make this happen.

True Sport is the opportunity to exercise this intention – to transform our desire for good sport into action.

We know that there is a profound latent desire in Canadians to see community sport live up to its potential. Our experience with True Sport is that all kinds of people – parents, coaches, athletes, and civic leaders – are ready to rally around the idea of the sport we want. Over 1,400 communities, sport leagues, teams, clubs, schools, and other organizations from across the country have joined the True Sport Movement. They reflect and reinforce the True Sport values of excellence, fairness, fun and inclusion, helping to make the sport we have the sport we want.

This is not about trading off excellence for fair play. Canada's high performance athletes and many professional athletes are living examples that excellence and fair play are mutually reinforcing values and that, together, these are the hallmark of great athletes and great sport. The road to excellence, and the path to every podium, begins at a community playing field, pool, rink or track, however, and so should fair play.

This report provides a wide and compelling array of evidence that good sport is good for people and good for places – in short, that it can make a great difference. Community sport is, in fact, one of our most valuable public assets.

We invite you to reflect on what you, your team, your organization, your business or your community can do to help sport live up to this potential, and encourage you to visit True Sport for help in transforming your ideas into action.



Dr. Louise Walker
Chair
Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport



Paul Melia
President and CEO
Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	vii
Introduction	vii
Community sport in Canada	viii
Improving health and well-being	x
Putting children and youth on a positive life course	xi
Building stronger and more inclusive communities	xiv
Contributing to Canada's economy	xvi
Promoting environmental sustainability	xvii
Conclusion	xviii
1. Introduction	1
Purpose of this report	1
Who should read this report?	3
Research methodology	5
2. Community Sport in Canada	7
Defining community sport	7
Community sport participation in Canada	8
The sport we want	10
3. Improving Health and Well-Being	13
Increasing the number of active Canadians	13
Stemming the tide of child obesity	14
Reducing the burden of chronic disease	15
Enhancing mental health	16
Promoting healthy aging	16
Reducing health care costs	17

4. Putting Children and Youth on a Positive Life Course	19
Helping children learn and develop through play	20
Building physical capacity and motor skills	21
Keeping children and youth active and healthy	22
Using sport to reduce youth health risk behaviours	23
Understanding the particular benefits of sport for girls	25
Fostering positive youth development	27
Enhancing academic achievement	29
Teaching positive values and life skills	30
Preventing youth crime and gang involvement	33
Providing positive adult role models	35
5. Building Stronger and More Inclusive Communities	39
Building social capital	40
Helping newcomers to integrate more quickly into Canadian society	42
Fostering greater inclusion of people with disabilities	44
Renewing Aboriginal culture	45
6. Contributing to Canada's Economy	49
Enhancing tourism through sport travel and events	50
Contributing to local economic development and renewal	53
Enhancing workplace skills and productivity	54
7. Promoting Environmental Sustainability	57
Fostering environmental awareness and stewardship	57
Providing a platform for social mobilization	58
Making sport facilities more sustainable	59
8. Conclusion	61
Notes	65



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.

Community sport is sport led, organized, supported or enabled by community volunteers and institutions.

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.

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 orga-

nization. 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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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 sup-

ported 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.

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

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 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% of all household spending or \$1,963 per household. Canada's sport sector accounts for 1.2% of GDP and provides 2% of all jobs, employing 262,324 Canadians.

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

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.

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.



1. Introduction

True Sport is a national movement for sport and community. Founded on the core values of fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun, 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.

True Sport is guided by the recognition that, to realize this goal, the sport we do must be good sport – sport that is values-driven. Research indicates that the vast majority of Canadians intuitively understand the great and diverse benefits this kind of sport can deliver and that this is the kind of sport – good sport – they want. True Sport undertook this research initiative to provide concrete evidence of these benefits, and to put data and examples around this intuition and aspiration.

Purpose of this report

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.

This evidence has begun to change how policy makers, community organizations, the private sector, and sport organizations themselves view the role and importance of community sport. On the basis of these insights, a new picture of Canada's community sport system is emerging – that of a critical, yet largely untapped, reservoir of public benefit that, with intentional effort, can be made to deliver even more for Canadians.

The evidence presented in this report validates what Canadians have long intuitively known – that Canada's community sport system possesses a unique potential that we have only just begun to explore. The evidence also bears out Canadians' fundamental belief that realizing this potential is profoundly linked, not just to the availability of community sport, but to the quality of the sport experience itself. Ninety-two percent of Canadians believe that community sport can have a positive influence. However, fewer than one in five believe this potential is being fully realized.

Study after study has shown that the full value of community sport is only realized when sport is conducted in a certain way – when it is inclusive, fair, fun and fosters genuine excellence. What Canadians understand to be good sport – the sport that they seek – is, in fact, the sport that delivers the greatest benefits to their families and communities.

The purpose of this report is 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.

A new picture of Canada's community sport system is emerging – that of a critical, yet largely untapped, reservoir of public benefit that, with intentional effort, can be made to deliver even more for Canadians.

The sections that follow describe what we mean by community sport, sketch a brief picture of our community sport system, and summarize Canadian and international evidence concerning the impact and value of community sport in relation to a broad range of societal goals that are important to the social and economic prospects of Canadians, the quality of life in our communities, and the ability of Canada, as a nation, to meet future challenges.

Who should read this report?

This report is primarily aimed at public, private and not-for-profit decision-makers at the community, provincial, territorial and national level who are working to improve social, economic and environmental sustainability in diverse spheres of Canadian life, but who may not currently see sport as a potential means of advancing these efforts. These include:

- School boards, school administrators, educators and parents concerned with: improving the quality of education, making our schools healthier, reducing drop-out rates, promoting academic achievement, and fostering healthy child and youth development.
- Municipal and regional government representatives and officials concerned with: developing recreation opportunities; protecting public health; strengthening community development and neighbourhood renewal efforts; accelerating economic development and investment attraction; improving the social inclusion and integration of newcomers; encouraging healthy child and youth development; prevent-

ing youth crime and gang involvement; and building environmental sustainability.

- Provincial and territorial government representatives and officials concerned with: promoting health, preventing and managing disease, tackling obesity, and reducing health care costs; strengthening education, reducing school drop-out rates and increasing academic achievement levels; eliminating barriers to the full social and economic inclusion of women, Aboriginal people, newcomers, and people with disabilities; fostering healthy youth development; building youth employment skills; preventing youth crime and gang involvement; and promoting environmental sustainability.

The purpose of this report is 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 to work for Canadians.

- Federal government representatives and officials concerned with: public health, tackling obesity, and helping provinces to reduce health care costs; fostering civic engagement, building social capital and fostering national unity; supporting community efforts to prevent crime and reduce youth involvement in gangs; strengthening Aboriginal community development and reducing teen suicide rates in Aboriginal communities; and promoting regional economic development and investment attraction.
- Business leaders seeking effective ways to: improve the productivity of their workplaces, achieve philanthropic impact, involve their employees

in the community, and make a positive corporate contribution to the communities they work in and to Canada.

- Community organizations, staff and volunteers working to: make their communities healthier; provide children and youth with a good start in life and positive development opportunities; promote greater social and economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups; strengthen neighbourhoods and local economies; and improve environmental sustainability and quality of life in their communities.
- Community sport athletes, volunteers, professionals and advocates seeking to: build community and public support for community sport infrastructure, programs and participation.

Research methodology

This report is based on an international literature search encompassing primary research published in peer-reviewed journals, Canadian public opinion research commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, Statistics Canada data on community sport in Canada, and secondary research in the form of literature reviews and other research syntheses undertaken by governments, inter-governmental working groups, and research, non-governmental and sport organizations.



2. Community Sport in Canada

Defining community sport

Community sport¹ is sport that is 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 largely supported by volunteers, to high performance competition, which involves a broad range of professionals but relies on community support for athletes and influences the sport that takes place in communities.

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 voluntarism. 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 attri-

butes that make community sport such an effective generator of social capital and platform for social inclusion.

Competition and the pursuit of excellence lie at the heart of all sport and community sport is no different in this respect. High performance elite athletes (amateur and professional) are an integral part of the community sport continuum because communities develop, support, identify with, and cherish their champions. These, in turn, inspire us with their achievements, unite us, and often embody our highest ideals. Communities support elite 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 with minimal support from governments.

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.

Community sport participation in Canada

Community sport is present in virtually every community in Canada and is largely supported by communities themselves, relying heavily on volunteers and only minimally on government support.

In 2005, more than half (55 percent) of boys 15 years of age or younger were active in sport and 44 percent of girls. In the same year, 7.3 million Canadians over the age of 15 (28 percent) were also active in

sport.² In 2005, 18 percent of Canadians belonged to a local club, community league or other local amateur sport organization, while 39 percent of active Canadians took part in sport competitions or tournaments.³ Overall, however, adult sport participation has been declining, dropping sharply from 45 percent to 28 percent in the period 1992-2005⁴ while participation as sport spectators at amateur events has increased from 24 percent to 35 percent (or 9.2 million Canadians) over the same period.⁵

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in motivating children to actively participate in sports. In 2005, the participation rate among children aged 5 to 14 with neither parent involved in sport was only 35 percent, compared to 57 percent when at least one parent was an active sport participant. When at least one parent helped as a sport administrator, children's participation rate jumped to 80 percent (however, it is possible that parents get involved as administrators because their kids are involved).⁶ In 2005, 72 percent of Canadian parents contributed financially to purchase sport equipment, memberships, coaching and instruction, 55 percent transported their children to sport activities, 36 percent participated in sports and physical games directly with their children, 21 percent supervised or helped out with their children's recess and sport activities at school, and 37 percent actively volunteered with sport activities and organizations outside of school.⁷

As these figures show, in addition to participating directly in sport, Canadians also participate indirectly as coaches, referees, umpires, administrators, volunteers, and spectators. In 2005, the number of amateur coaches reached 1.8 million (7 percent of Canadians), more than double the 840,000 observed in 1992, with female coaches (882,000) outnumbering male coaches (874,000) by a slight margin.⁸ In the same year, 3 percent (800,000) of adult Canadians were involved in sports as referees, officials or umpires, down from a peak of 937,000 in 1998, but still significantly more than the 550,000 reported in 1992 and with steadily increasing participation by women.⁹ A further 2 million Canadians volunteered their time as administrators or helpers in amateur sport, up 18 percent from 1998, with rates of volunteering ranging from 12 percent of adults in Saskatchewan and Alberta to 5

percent in Quebec.¹⁰ Roughly equal numbers of men and women were involved as administrators or helpers in 2005, a significant shift from 1992 when men outnumbered women 2 to 1.¹¹

According to broader definitions of sport, which include non-competitive recreational sport, 5.3 million Canadians, or 28 percent of all Canadian volunteers, volunteer with sport and recreation organizations.¹² Sport volunteers surveyed indicated that helping their community is their primary motivation, followed by helping others and the social interaction that volunteering for sport organizations offers.¹³ On average, community sport volunteers each contribute 143 hours a year to sport.¹⁴ The most common volunteer activities are organizing and supervising activities and events, and teaching or coaching.¹⁵

Community sport participation is coordinated through 33,650 sport and recreation organizations which make up 21 percent of the country's nonprofit sector and engage more volunteers nationally than any other sector.¹⁶ Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of sport and recreation organizations have no paid employees at all.¹⁷ Most of these organizations are local (71 percent)¹⁸ and many are a longstanding part of their community, with 63 percent established over 20 years ago and 25 percent over 40 years ago.¹⁹ These organizations tend to be smaller than other types of nonprofit and voluntary organizations, with over half (55 percent) reporting annual revenues of less than \$30,000. On average, they rely largely on earned income and receive only 12 percent of their funding from governments – far less than the 49 percent characteristic of voluntary organizations overall.²⁰

The sport we want

The exceptional level of voluntarism and community support for sport is a testament to the high value that Canadians place on sport.

Canadians understand the fundamental power of sport in their lives. In particular, they value the benefits sport offers their children – 92 percent of Canadians believe that community-based sport can have a positive influence in the lives of youth.²¹ In fact, sport is ranked second

only to families themselves as a highly positive influence in shaping the values development of young Canadians.²² Many Canadians also understand the health benefits of being physically active through sport. And all Canadians, watching our athletes mount the Olympic podium, have felt the surge of collective national pride in their achievements and the positive values that they represent.

92% percent of Canadians believe that community sport can have a positive influence. However, fewer than one in five believe this potential is being fully realized.

All sport holds within it, however, a tension between the need for fair play, to keep the game alive, 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 commercial sport, characterized by high costs, extraordinary financial rewards for a few star athletes, and an emphasis on winning at the expense of inclusion, fun and fair play.

The confusion of sport as commercial entertainment (the professional sport we watch on television) and community sport (the sport we do) can at times undermine the fundamental principles of good sportsmanship and, with them, the benefits that sport produces in communities. This is because the full value of community sport is only realized when sport is conducted in a certain way – when everyone gets the chance to play, when every player has the opportunity to acquire new skills and improve their game, when winning is not possible without sportsmanship, and when the inherent joy of the game remains integral to the experience of the players.

Good sport reinforces the importance of commitment, honest effort, and hard work in the pursuit of excellence. Winning achieved through

other means is not a measure of sporting excellence. Through sport, we experience exhilaration and joy, the profound satisfaction that accompanies hard won achievements, and a shared spirit of pride in our athletes and sport 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 physical excellence and love of sport.

This is the sport Canadians want. A majority of Canadians (57 percent) believe that community sport currently reinforces these positive values to a great extent, while an additional 33 percent believe this is true to some extent.²³ Canadians are concerned, however, that community sport is becoming overly focused on winning at all costs, without appropriate attention to how the winning is achieved, which in turn leads to an erosion of positive societal values. Canadians believe that action is needed to better align sport with these values.²⁴

Canadians are also concerned that some people are excluded by Canada's community sport system. This is due, in part, to the uneven distribution of sport resources and facilities within and among communities and, in part, to the way sport has grown into a highly formalized and structured system with high participation costs for individuals and their families. Almost three quarters (71 percent) of Canadians believe that the high cost of sport is a barrier to participation for many people,²⁵ underscoring the importance of ensuring broadly based access to sport programs for all Canadians, as well as safe and accessible facilities, green spaces, streets, trails and play areas that make low-cost, informal sport an option for everyone.

These views point to a growing 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.



3. Improving Health and Well-Being

Good health is fundamental to the ability of individuals to enjoy well-being and to realize their full human potential. It is also a crucially important economic asset. Poor health impedes people's ability to work and earn a living for themselves and their families. It also drives up public health care costs and reduces economic productivity – both challenges for Canada in the context of its aging population and labour force.

Increasing the number of active Canadians

Physical activity is critical to many aspects of health including maintaining healthy weight levels, preventing chronic disease, fostering mental health and well-being, and promoting healthy aging. Conversely, physical inactivity is the most widespread risk factor for cardiovascular disease and, after tobacco use, the single greatest contributor to death

and disability.²⁶ Despite the importance of physical activity, 51 percent of Canadians are physically inactive.²⁷

Sport offers a fun and rewarding means of engaging more of these Canadians in moderate to vigorous physical activity on a regular basis. 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 levels²⁸ which have been proven to reduce mortality rates by as much as 30 percent.²⁹

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

This fact is not lost on Canadians active in sport, who see improved physical fitness and health as the most important benefit of their sport participation.³⁰ In 2004, about 80 percent of sports people surveyed rated sport as very important in improving their physical fitness and health.³¹ In the same survey, more than 70 percent described their overall state of health as either excellent or very good, compared with less than 50 percent among those not active in sport.³²

Stemming the tide of child obesity

The importance of increasing physical activity rates is underscored by Canada's growing obesity rate. One-fourth of adult Canadians and almost 10 percent of children aged 7-13³³ are currently at risk of disability, disease and premature death because they are obese. Between 2003 and 2006, the number of obese children and youth in Canada increased a further 35.7 percent.³⁴ Aboriginal children are particularly

affected, with 55 percent of children and youth on reserves overweight or obese, and 41 percent of those living off reserve overweight or obese.³⁵

Physical inactivity is one cause of this obesity.³⁶ Ninety-one percent of Canadian children and youth are not meeting Canada's physical activity guidelines³⁷ for their age group.³⁸ Children who participate in organized physical activity and sport are more likely to meet these guidelines than those who do not. However, even among children active in sport, too few are achieving target activity levels (11 percent versus 5 percent of those not involved in sport). Greater efforts are needed to help children and youth become more active, with sport providing one important avenue.

Reducing the burden of chronic disease

Physical activity also plays a critical role in the prevention and management of many chronic and non-communicable diseases³⁹ that rank among the leading causes of death and disability in Canada and account for a large portion of our health care spending.

- Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in Canada.⁴⁰ People who participate in regular physical activity are at much less risk of suffering a major coronary event such as a heart attack⁴¹ and those who already have cardiovascular disease can reduce their risk of negative outcomes by over 60 percent by being physically active.⁴²
- Cancer is the second most common cause of death in Canada.⁴³ Physical activity has been proven to reduce the risk of cancer by 30 to 40 percent, relative to people who are less active,⁴⁴ with particular benefits in helping to prevent breast and colon cancer.⁴⁵
- Diabetes is the eighth leading cause of death in Canada.⁴⁶ Both cardiovascular and resistance exercise can help lower the risk of type 2 diabetes,⁴⁷ the most common form in Canada, particularly among people who are overweight and, therefore, at greatest risk.⁴⁸ Exercise

can also help people manage their diabetes by stabilizing their blood sugar levels.⁴⁹

- Osteoporosis is one of the primary causes of bone fractures among the elderly and affects 25 percent of post-menopausal women in North America.⁵⁰ Physical activity (particularly resistance exercise), in combination with calcium and vitamin D, plays an important role in building bone mass,⁵¹ slowing the rate of bone loss in early post-menopausal women, and improving bone density in older women (75-85 years).⁵²

Enhancing mental health

Physical activity, achieved through sport as well as other means, offers important mental health benefits as well: enhancing self-esteem, helping to manage stress and anxiety, and alleviating depression.⁵³ In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression.⁵⁴

Sport, as distinct from individual physical activity, also offers important opportunities for social relationships, friendship, and support that contribute in a significant and positive way to emotional health.

This is important because mental illness affects one in five Canadians, and is closely linked with social isolation, poor quality of life, and increased mortality, as well as enormous economic and social costs.⁵⁵ Depression alone accounts for over \$5 billion annually in direct and indirect costs to Canadians.⁵⁶ The total cost of all mental illness is estimated at \$1,056 per capita.⁵⁷

Promoting healthy aging

While sport participation rates tend to decline with age, 17 percent of all Canadians over 55 still actively participate in sport,⁵⁸ highlighting the power of sport to foster healthy active living on a lifelong basis among those who develop a passion for it earlier in life.

In addition to helping prevent the onset of chronic disease, physical activity helps to improve strength, balance and coordination as people age, reducing the risk of falls and injuries, improving overall functioning and quality of life, and enabling individuals to remain independent longer.⁵⁹ Recent breakthrough research has also shown that exercise improves brain functions such as memory and learning, and reduces the risk of cognitive loss through Alzheimer's and small strokes.⁶⁰ Sport participation also provides an important source of social connection for older Canadians who are at greater risk of social isolation once they retire from the labour force.

Physical inactivity is one cause of childhood obesity. 91% of Canadian children and youth are not meeting Canada's physical activity guidelines for their age group. Children who participate in organized physical activity and sport are more likely to meet these guidelines than those who do not.

At the population level, longer healthier lives translate into greater aggregate productivity for Canada's labour force. This has important economic implications as our population continues to age and more Canadians reach the traditional retirement age.⁶¹

Reducing health care costs

Sport's ability to engage more people in a physically active lifestyle has other important economic benefits. The direct and indirect costs of physical inactivity in Canada are estimated at \$1.6 billion and \$3.7 billion annually.⁶² Increasing physical activity levels by just 10 percent

would save Canadians over \$150 million annually in direct health costs alone.⁶³

As the cost to government of supporting sport is small in comparison with health spending related to inactivity, increasing sport participation as a strategy for improving Canadians' health could significantly reduce national health-care costs.⁶⁴



4. Putting Children and Youth on a Positive Life Course

While the health benefits of sport are significant and broadly understood, Canadians place the greatest value on what sport can do for their children. Almost two-thirds of adult Canadians report that their children are, or have been, involved in sport.⁶⁵ There is strong agreement across the country that community sport is among the most positive forces in the lives of young people today, even more than school, friends and peers, religion and the music/entertainment industry.⁶⁶ In addition to crediting community sport with being a constructive force in the lives of children and youth, more than 80 percent of Canadians believe that promoting positive values in youth should be a priority for sport in Canada,⁶⁷ underlining the importance of getting sport right.

Canadians are not wrong on this score. International research shows that sport can contribute to giving children a healthy start in life, helping those who have not received a good start to get back on track, and

equipping youth with the information, skills, personal resources and social support they need to make key life transitions successfully.⁶⁸

Helping children learn and develop through play

Sport can begin making a contribution early in the lives of children. Play is one of the primary ways that young children explore and experience the world and develop their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional capacities.

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 early years – zero to six – are particularly critical in the brain development of children, with specific windows of opportunity for developing key capacities that enable them to learn and function later in life.⁶⁹ Inadequate stimulation and development opportunities during this period, however, can foreclose on these opportunities with lasting consequences for a child's future.⁷⁰ Children living in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to lack appropriate stimulation and play opportunities that enable them to benefit from these developmental windows, although children in all socio-economic circumstances may experience this absence.

Both unstructured and structured play help children to make the most of these opportunities.⁷¹ Young children particularly need and benefit from opportunities for unstructured, self-directed play, which assists

in their physical, motor, creative and social development and sense of independence.⁷²

In terms of structured play and activities, research based on Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth⁷³ showed that, in 1998-99, an estimated 87 percent of Canadian children aged 4 to 15 participated in organized activities outside of school. Among children aged 4 to 9, those who participated in activities, particularly sports, tended to have fewer difficulties in reading or math than those who rarely or never participated.

While competitive sport is far too complex for very young children, age-appropriate games and physical activity designed to help young children acquire mobility, coordination, knowledge about the world and themselves, self-confidence and initial social skills, can support their positive development and complement the stimulation provided by parents or caregivers.⁷⁴ Involving parents or caregivers in the activity can also help them to learn new ways to stimulate the child and strengthen the bond between them.

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.⁷⁵ When these motor abilities are not achieved, children are more likely to experience reduced cardio-respiratory fitness, be less motivated to participate in organized physical activity, and participate less in healthy leisure activities.⁷⁶

Sport and physical activity can help children to build this general base of motor abilities and an understanding of basic concepts about how their body moves.⁷⁷ Age-appropriate sport and games involving physical activity, and focusing on skills and expression rather than competition and team strategies, are ideal in this respect for children under 12 years of age.⁷⁸ Effective pre-school and elementary school activities include helping children to develop basic skills such as running, jump-

ing, kicking, and throwing,⁷⁹ while giving particular attention to accommodating the emerging ability of children to see things from others' perspectives, developing their basic cooperation skills,⁸⁰ exploring skills and talents, and building a sense of success.⁸¹

At this stage, effective teaching and coaching includes encouraging and praising effort, rather than winning, and promoting learning by providing encouragement and direction about specific skills.⁸² As children get older, team strategies and competition can be introduced and sport used to enhance the development of specialized motor skills and patterns and to improve creativity, attention, balance, coordination, agility, strength, endurance, and knowledge.⁸³

Keeping children and youth active and healthy

Sport also offers broader health benefits for children and youth. While the links between physical activity and prevention of chronic disease are not as strong as they are for adults (likely because children are generally more fit and active than adults and, therefore, at lower risk of many chronic diseases), children and youth who are insufficiently physically active tend to be at higher risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, disability, and motor skill deficiencies.⁸⁴ Regular participation in physical activity during childhood and adolescence, however, can:

- Help build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints;⁸⁵
- Help control weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat;⁸⁶
- Prevent or delay the development of high blood pressure and help reduce blood pressure in adolescents with hypertension;⁸⁷
- Lower risk of cardiovascular disease;⁸⁸ and
- Reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.⁸⁹

Using sport to reduce youth health risk behaviours

Positive developmental sport experiences that enhance adolescent self-perception and self-esteem appear to also have a positive impact on health risk behaviours among youth.

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.

In general, there is clear evidence that, while athletes are more likely to put themselves at risk for accidental injuries than non-athletes,⁹⁰ youth participating in competitive sports programs are more likely to eat healthily and weigh less, and less likely to smoke cigarettes, engage in sexual activity, or be bored or hopeless.^{91,92} Male and female teenaged athletes are less likely than non-athletes to use drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin and hallucinogens. Both male and female sport participants report a slightly higher incidence of binge drinking than non-participants, but lower overall alcohol use.⁹³

Organized sports are also associated with less antisocial behaviour, such as carrying a weapon, or contemplating or attempting suicide.⁹⁴ Sport participation generally is associated with less engagement in violence,⁹⁵ but participation in highly competitive contact sports (e.g. ice hockey, football, and rugby) can, in some cases, give rise to excessive anxiety, aggression, and violent behaviour.

It is important to note, however, that these outcomes appear to be largely driven by adults, particularly parents and coaches, who over-emphasize winning and directly or indirectly signal that aggressive behaviour is an acceptable means to achieve victory.⁹⁶ This fact under-

scores, yet again, the importance of ensuring that sport, and those involved with youth sport, reinforce positive rather than negative values on the rink and playing field. This responsibility lies with adults, as their attitudes and actions will ultimately determine the values and behaviour expressed on the playing field.

Sport can also be used as a tool to build confidence and, thereby, potentially reduce high risk sexual behaviour.⁹⁷ Young people's confidence levels are closely linked to their tendency to behave in more sexually responsible ways. Adolescent girls who participate in sport are less likely than their non-athletic peers to participate in sexual activity and/or report a pregnancy.⁹⁸ More research is needed, however, to determine whether this link is actually causal.

Sport programs can also serve as a platform for educating young people about HIV/AIDS and other health risks, equipping them with information, skills and effective role models that can help them to protect themselves by adopting healthy lifestyle behaviours. Prominent athletes and local coaches who embody positive values and behaviours can play an important role in this respect, exerting a strong influence on the children and youth they reach. Research has consistently shown that regular interaction with a caring, non-related adult can help protect youth against risk factors that might otherwise negatively influence their health or future.⁹⁹

More than 80% of Canadians believe that promoting positive values in youth should be a priority for sport in Canada, underlining the importance of getting sport right.

Effective sport for health programs empower and support youth by developing their skills, engaging them in dialogue about health issues, involving them in decision-making about the programs they participate

in, offering them leadership roles and responsibilities, and encouraging them to contribute to their communities in other ways. Together, these approaches can help youth to become more resilient and to better manage the risks and stresses in their lives.¹⁰⁰

Understanding the particular benefits of sport for girls

The traditional association of sport with masculinity and the ongoing dominance of some aspects of sport by men, to the exclusion of women, reinforce the view that sport not only reflects, but contributes to, gender-based inequity in society as a whole. While there is evidence that this is true in some instances, there is also evidence that positive sport experiences can contribute to the full inclusion of girls and women by:¹⁰¹

- Enhancing their health and well-being;
- Fostering their self-esteem and empowerment;
- Facilitating their social inclusion and integration;
- Changing gender norms; and
- Providing opportunities for female leadership and achievement.

Research on the impacts of positive sport experiences on youth has shown that the effects on adolescent boys and girls are not identical and that girls obtain particular benefits from sport participation, in addition to those they share with boys. In the case of physical health benefits, gains in bone mass as a result of sport participation are particularly important to girls, as they are far more vulnerable than boys to osteoporosis later in life, and bone mass they acquire in adolescence plays a significant protective role against this disease.¹⁰²

With respect to mental health, adolescent girls are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depressive disorders than boys. By age 15, girls

are twice as likely to have experienced a major depressive episode.¹⁰³ Girls are also significantly more likely to have seriously considered suicide.¹⁰⁴ Research suggests that regular activity can help reduce anxiety and depression, have a positive effect upon girls' psychological well-being, and that girls may respond even more strongly than boys in terms of short-term benefits.^{105,106}

With regard to educational attainment, girls who participate in sport are more likely to demonstrate pro-education values, although it is not yet clear whether this relationship is causal. Studies from the United States report that:¹⁰⁷

- Girls who participate in sports are more likely to achieve academic success than those who do not play sports;
- Female high school athletes express a greater interest in graduating from both high school and college; and
- Female athletes from ethnic minority groups report better school grades and greater involvement in extra-curricular activities than non-athletes and, in some cases, are considerably less likely to drop out of school.

Sport participation can also help to undermine traditional gender stereotypes concerning academic aptitude, as studies have shown that girls' engagement in sport is linked to improved performance in science and mathematics.¹⁰⁸

There is also evidence suggesting that sport participation can contribute to more generalized feelings of empowerment among girls and women.¹⁰⁹ In many settings, adolescent girls may be encouraged to view their bodies as sexual and reproductive resources for men, rather than sources of strength for themselves.¹¹⁰ Positive sport experiences can help to offset these influences, enabling girls to develop a greater sense of ownership of their bodies¹¹¹ and a stronger sense of identity and self-direction.¹¹² U.S. studies show that adolescent girls who participate in sports tend to become sexually active later in life, have fewer partners, and, when sexually active, make greater use of contraception

than non-sporting girls.¹¹³ This may be because participation augments girls' self-esteem¹¹⁴ or because being an athlete carries with it a strong public identity.¹¹⁵ Whatever the reasons, increasing the number of girls participating in sport and physical activity appears to open up routes through which they can acquire new community affiliations and participate more equally in community life.¹¹⁶

Fostering positive youth development

Sport can also contribute positively to the process of adolescent identity formation, a critical step in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Identity formation is achieved when youth arrive at a stable concept of who they are.¹¹⁷ Leisure activities that involve challenge, effort and concentration are beneficial to this process, promoting self-exploration, self-esteem, self-concept and a sense of being in control.¹¹⁸

Youth who participate in sport are less likely than non-participants to engage in delinquent behaviour, and have lower rates of criminal arrest and anti-social behaviour. This relationship tends to be strongest among disadvantaged youth and athletes in minor sport.

Young people who participate in sport score significantly higher on self-concept than those who do not participate in physical activity in sport clubs, with girls benefiting even more than boys in this respect.¹¹⁹ Age-specific analysis shows that self-concept is remarkably stable among youth who are physically active throughout adolescence and that their physical self-concept is a highly significant part of their overall self-concept, especially in early adolescence.¹²⁰ Friendship also plays an

important role in youth identity formation. Sport facilitates this process when it offers young people opportunities to build positive social relationships with peers.

Adolescent girls who participate in sport are less likely than non-athletic peers to participate in sexual activity and/or report a pregnancy.

Research tracking youth aged 12 to 15 over a four-year period, using data from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth, has shown an association between regular participation in sport activities and higher self-esteem and better health.¹²¹ Youth who rarely or never participated in organized sports were more likely to report having lower self-esteem and difficulties with friends. They were also more likely to smoke. Low levels of self-esteem were four times higher among this group than among those who had always participated in sport. In addition, youth who had participated in sport, but had stopped by 1998/99, were three times more likely to report lower levels of self-esteem than youth who had always participated. Finally, youth who participated in organized sports regularly over the years were more likely to report that expressing their opinion was important and, looking ahead five years, had a more positive outlook on their personal futures. These findings were echoed in a 2003 Ipsos-Reid survey of Canadians aged 12 to 21, in which respondents indicated that playing sports:¹²²

- Improved their health (99 percent);
- Helped them make friends (87 percent);
- Improved their feelings about themselves (85 percent);
- Helped them succeed at school (58 percent); and
- Helped them become more active with their family (54 percent).

These benefits are not automatic, however. Negative sport and physical activity experiences can also damage self-esteem. In some cases, particularly for girls, sport participation can also be linked to distorted body image, unrealistic efforts to lose weight, and an unhealthy lifestyle.¹²³ Good sport programs, however, are attentive to and minimize these risks.

Enhancing academic achievement

Sport and physical education also play an important role in school life, helping to improve young people's academic achievement levels, behaviour, attendance, health, and social skills.¹²⁴

Contrary to the idea that time spent in physical activity hinders academic performance, research has shown that, under certain conditions, it in fact improves it, although the reasons for this link are still not entirely clear.^{125,126} We do know that physical exercise causes children and youth to experience a short-term state of relaxation marked by improved concentration, enhanced creativity and memory, better problem solving and task performance, and improved mood.¹²⁷ In a school environment, this leads to a better learning environment and greater readiness of individual children to learn.¹²⁸

In the longer term, regular physical activity is also associated with increased self-confidence and self-image, relief of frustration, reduced aggression, and decreased anxiety and depression.¹²⁹ This is consistent with research showing that participation in school-based physical activities can result in considerably healthier social and academic self-concepts, positive moods and pleasurable experiences.¹³⁰ In the United Kingdom, schools that introduced more structured and purposefully active playtimes and opportunities to practice skills linked to the physical education curriculum, experienced lower levels of truancy and improved behaviour as a direct result of these changes.¹³¹ Additional longitudinal research from the United Kingdom confirms that sport can contribute to identification with, and commitment to, school and school values, with a positive influence on academic performance.¹³²

Teaching positive values and life skills

Sport is also widely believed to be a powerful means of teaching children and youth social and life skills and instilling positive attitudes and values. According to the Conference Board of Canada, sport offers young people a means to gain and enhance a range of skills that are transferable to important parts of adult life.¹³³ The knowledge, life skills, health, and physical abilities generally developed through positive sport experiences benefit youth by improving their chances of finding employment, raising their income level, and making them more optimistic and willing to volunteer in the community.¹³⁴

While there is some debate as to the conclusiveness of existing research,¹³⁵ the evidence suggests that, as children mature and acquire the capacity to empathize with others and take responsibility for their own actions, sport has the potential to promote a broad spectrum of life skills and values that build on these capacities,^{136,137} including:

- Team-building;¹³⁸
- Communication;¹³⁹
- Decision-making;¹⁴⁰
- Problem solving;¹⁴¹
- Self-esteem;¹⁴²
- Sense of community;¹⁴³
- Personal responsibility;¹⁴⁴
- Empathy;¹⁴⁵
- Resilience;^{146,147} and
- Socio-moral development.^{148,149}

While these skills and attributes are generally beneficial, they are particularly helpful to youth entering the labour market. Examining the overlap between life skills developed through sport and skills important to employers in diverse countries, the International Labour Organization found that well-designed sport programs helped youth to acquire many generic employment skills, as well as ethically based skills that employers particularly value such as volunteering, commitment to teamwork and team building, tolerance, and acceptance of rules.¹⁵⁰ The review also found that young workers entering the labour force with sport-specific skills were likely to be well-equipped with creativity, team building, and peaceful and tolerant behaviour in the face of cultural diversity – qualities increasingly valued in today’s diverse workplaces.¹⁵¹

Sport and physical education can help improve young people’s school attendance, behaviour, and academic achievement.

According to Statistics Canada’s National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (1997, 2000), sport also predisposes youth to greater civic involvement. Adults who reported participating in organized sports as children were much more likely to have also performed volunteer work and to have participated in student government, compared to those who had not participated in organized sports.¹⁵²

While the extent to which sport can specifically advance moral or character development is still the subject of research debate,¹⁵³ most researchers agree that sport offers potential benefits to youth when they participate.¹⁵⁴ Most also agree that, while performing sport skills does not inherently confer any moral benefit, and sport experiences vary widely, the social interactions associated with sport participation do offer the potential to influence moral development.¹⁵⁵

Achieving this effect is contingent, however, on providing youth with sport that fosters positive experiences, minimizes negative experi-

Research on youth participation in criminal gangs has shown that absence of a positive adult role model is the single best predictor of gang membership.

ences,¹⁵⁶ and systematically and consistently teaches fair play and sportsmanship.¹⁵⁷ Sport that builds character – positive social and moral attitudes, judgments and behaviours – has less to do with the playing of sport than with the philosophy of the sport organization, the quality of the coaching, the nature of parental involvement, and participants' individual experiences and resources.¹⁵⁸

Research suggests that the following conditions make sport more conducive to positive character development:

- The behaviour, attitudes and decisions of adults in charge, particularly coaches, inform young people when issues and their resolution have a moral dimension;¹⁵⁹
- Participating youth feel personally empowered¹⁶⁰ and are involved in decision-making;^{161,162}
- The primary objective of the program is helping children and youth to develop life and social skills – not winning;^{163,164}
- Relationships between individuals create a positive social environment;¹⁶⁵
- Activities are tailored to the needs of individual participants;¹⁶⁶ and
- The program takes into consideration other aspects of the lives of participating children and youth.¹⁶⁷

Preventing youth crime and gang involvement

Research on youth participation in criminal gangs has shown that absence of a positive adult role model is the single best predictor of gang membership¹⁶⁸ and a key differentiating factor between gang and non-gang members,¹⁶⁹ underscoring the critical importance of positive adult role models in the lives of youth and the potential value of sport programs that can provide them.

Young people in all communities can experience circumstances that increase their chances of getting involved in delinquency, gangs and crime. The following factors have all been shown to play a role: ¹⁷⁰

- Low self-esteem and self-worth;
- Lack of companionship, support and social interaction with family and peers;
- Poor school performance or non-attendance; and
- The absence of caring adult guidance.

As an integral part of youth culture, sport can help to address these issues using a variety of different approaches:¹⁷¹

- Targeting local ‘hotspots’ with attractive and positive activities for young people;
- Building resilience in young people so that they can better resist pressures to take part in harmful or anti-social behaviour;
- Providing opportunities for involvement and social bonding;
- Increasing young people’s self-esteem and organizational and social skills;

- Providing positive role models through coaches and program leaders who lead by example and have clearly stated expectations about young people's behaviour; and
- Decreasing the perception and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour in the community.

Research has shown that youth who participate in sport are less likely than non-participants to engage in delinquent behaviour,¹⁷² and have lower rates of criminal arrest and anti-social behaviour.¹⁷³ This relationship tends to be strongest among disadvantaged youth¹⁷⁴ and athletes in minor sport.¹⁷⁵

To work, however, sport programs must be holistic, values-based, and empowering.¹⁷⁶ Programs that are purely recreational or just focus on sport skills are unlikely to be very effective. Sport programs to prevent youth crime work best when they are delivered as part of a wider series of activities, in partnership with renewal agencies and local groups, with an overall ethos that emphasizes positive values.¹⁷⁷

International research has shown that after-school activities, including sport, combined with graduation incentives, can encourage disadvantaged teens to complete high school, reduce youth arrests by as much as 71 percent, and increase attendance at post-secondary education by up to 26 percent.¹⁷⁸ London England's Youth Inclusion Program, which provides targeted at-risk youth in high-crime neighbourhoods with sport and recreational opportunities and skills training (literacy, anger management, dealing with gangs and drugs), was found to reduce school expulsions by 27 percent, youth arrests by 65 percent, and overall neighbourhood crime by 16 to 27 percent.¹⁷⁹

Sport programs can also offer youth a positive alternative to membership in criminal gangs. Gangs are attractive because they fill a void created in young people's lives by the issues noted earlier. Membership provides affiliation, self-worth, companionship, excitement and a valued role reinforced by the group.^{180,181} By involving youth in sport at a young age, this void can be addressed before they become involved in delinquent or criminal activity, helping to move them onto a positive

life trajectory and lowering the risk of future delinquency which, if not prevented, can often continue over a lifetime.¹⁸²

Providing positive adult role models

Adult role models are one of the key benefits sport offers young people and play an essential part in determining whether sport programs exert a positive or negative moral influence.

What adults do matters even more than what they say when it comes to affecting the attitudes, habits and behaviour of the children and youth they encounter on a daily basis. Character, notions of fair play, and morals are learned by youth when the goals, attitudes and behaviour of the coach or teacher, and therefore, the program, are moral.¹⁸³

A consistent, positive, emotional relationship with a caring adult is also a significant protective factor more generally, helping to build resilience

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.

in children and youth and enabling them to better manage the challenges in their lives.¹⁸⁴ 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.¹⁸⁵ Most successful sport programs can point to the influential role of skilled, enthusiastic sport teachers, coaches and athlete role models who, through their actions

as well as words, inspire and guide the children and youth with whom they work.

Poor sport, however – sport that fails to place the health, development and well-being of young people at the heart of the experience – can expose children and youth to negative experiences, discourage their participation, and even impede their positive development. 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, depriving them of enriching opportunities, experiences, and benefits that they might otherwise have enjoyed.

In Canada, sport participation rates peak at age 10 to 13 and then decline steadily with age.¹⁸⁶ According to a Government of Canada youth survey conducted in 2003, the leading reasons for youth not participating in sport were lack of time (34 percent) and lack of interest (30 percent).¹⁸⁷

While lack of interest may be due to a wide range of factors, a 2002 Decima survey of Canadians highlighted a range of issues that may be partly to blame. Respondents identified the following as the most serious issues facing community sport today: focus on winning/competition (16 percent), violence (10 percent), parental over-involvement (10 percent), parental under-involvement (7 percent), and poor coaching/leadership (6 percent).¹⁸⁸ Harassment (38 percent), intolerance/racism (29 percent), lack of fair play (21 percent), and injuries (18 percent) were also identified as very serious issues.¹⁸⁹ Parents who felt their expectations for their child's sport experience had not been met, cited the following reasons: lack of interest/participation (25 percent), poor coaching/supervision (14 percent), too much emphasis on winning (12 percent), and parental influence/pressure (8 percent).¹⁹⁰

In 2004, in response to similar sport drop-out rates among American adolescents, research firm Harris Interactive surveyed 1,228 8- to 18-year-olds about their participation in organized sports. The survey found that most youth had participated in organized sports outside of

school (68 percent) but almost 39 percent were not participating at the current time. While feeling positive overall about the role of organized sport in their lives, respondents also noted negative experiences:

- Saw parents yelling at or arguing with officials (31 percent);
- Did not get to play as much as they wanted (30 percent);
- Saw parents yelling at or arguing with coaches (28 percent);
- Heard coaches or parents using bad language (27 percent);
- Had coaches who were too focused on winning (23 percent);
- Had teammates who insulted them (21 percent);
- Had too many practices (18 percent);
- Felt pressure to play when they were hurt (14 percent);
- Had coaches who insulted them (11 percent);
- Had to travel too much to games (9 percent); and
- Had been physically hit by an adult (2 percent).

These pressures are believed to be contributing to decreasing sport participation rates, as children grow older. The survey found that youth stop participating in organized sport at age 13 or 14. On average, those aged 8 to 12 said they would stop participating at age 13, and those aged 13 to 18 said they stopped participating at 14. The leading reasons given for ending their participation in organized sports were: they stopped having fun (43 percent), not having enough time (31 percent), not believing they were good enough to play (27 percent).¹⁹¹ These findings point to the need for comparable investigation of the sport experiences of youth in Canada, if we want to encourage their continued involvement in sport and to ensure they derive the maximum benefit and enjoyment from their experience.

It is instructive to note that 63 percent of the children and youth surveyed by Harris Interactive said they would rather be on an organized sport team that loses most of its games, but allows them to play most of the time, than on a championship team where they do not get to play often. This finding underscores the importance of maximizing participation and fun, rather than winning, as an essential strategy for sustaining youth participation in sport.

The good news is that a majority of parents surveyed in Canada (70 percent) feel that their expectations of what sport should provide their children have been met (56 percent) or exceeded (14 percent).¹⁹² However, more can clearly be done to ensure both that sport is delivering the greatest possible benefits to our children and youth, and that we are truly succeeding in fostering lifelong participation and enjoyment.



5. Building Stronger and More Inclusive Communities

While we experience sport's benefits most immediately as individuals, sport can also play a major role in strengthening communities by bringing people together, 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.¹⁹³

When asked to indicate specific ways in which sport contributes to their quality of life, over 85 percent of Canadians surveyed by the Conference Board of Canada pointed to sport's ability to:¹⁹⁴

- Provide a place for people to meet and interact;
- Encourage people from different backgrounds to work and play together;

- Provide community volunteer opportunities;
- Teach people responsibility and respect for other people and property;
- Get people of all ages actively involved in their communities;
- Give people a sense of purpose;
- Provide families with opportunities to know each other better; and
- Help prevent youth crime.

Sport can also help to strengthen communities by building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of marginalized or excluded groups.

Building social capital

These examples speak to sport's potential to help bring individuals and communities together, create a sense of community, encourage active citizenship, and foster trust, reciprocity, and a sense of security among community members. Together, these elements are the social capital of every community. Social capital is important because places with more social capital are generally safer, better governed and more prosperous than those with less, and people with more social capital are more likely to be happier, healthier, safer and employed than those with less.¹⁹⁵ Research also suggests that social capital may even explain differences in death and sickness rates, within and between groups, that cannot be attributed to other known causes.¹⁹⁶

Community organizations are one of the key means by which social capital is established and maintained.¹⁹⁷ Canada's 33,650 sport and

recreation organizations play a central role in this respect by fostering three kinds of social capital: ¹⁹⁸

- **Bonding social capital** – Bringing people together and strengthening the social ties within families and neighbourhoods that we all rely on for ongoing informal support and assistance;
- **Bridging social capital** – Connecting people across geographic, economic, ethnocultural or other boundaries, leading to greater trust, solidarity and social cohesion among disparate groups of citizens; and
- **Linking social capital** – Using sport to attract and connect with hard-to-reach individuals and disadvantaged populations, linking them to community organizations, services and institutions that can assist them directly or effect policies that improve their situation.

Research from the United Kingdom and the European Union examining the relationship between sport participation and social capital shows that they are strongly linked:¹⁹⁹

- Nations with higher levels of sport membership also have higher levels of social trust and well-being, although the correlation with trust in institutions is somewhat weaker;
- Individuals who are involved in sport organizations, both as members and as participants, are more likely to vote, contact a politician and sign a petition than both non-members and the average citizen;
- Individuals who participate in sport and sport clubs generally demonstrate higher levels of social trust, trust in institutions, and life satisfaction; and
- Sport organization members are more likely to express the view that immigration enriches the cultural life of the nation.

Sport's capacity to help build social capital makes it an important tool for civic renewal efforts but also for sustaining community life in places

undergoing profound and rapid change. Research in Australia, examining the role of sport in maintaining health, well-being and community life in small rural communities, found that community members considered sport and recreation vital to the social and economic viability and sustainability of their towns.²⁰⁰ Respondents saw sporting activities as a way to keep their community together – providing a sense of unity, acting as a social leveler, fostering trust, and contributing to social cohesion. Sport was also seen as a means of increasing community pride and loyalty.²⁰¹ The study also found that, in some declining rural towns, sport clubs provided the last remaining social infrastructure, although even these organizations were being challenged by population aging and decline.²⁰²

Social capital is also an important aspect of building more inclusive communities. People who are marginalized or excluded often suffer from multiple problems. These arise from a lack of human capital (e.g., confidence, self-esteem, education, employment skills) and the social capital that enables individuals to access the people, resources and institutional help they need to tackle challenges and realize opportunities in their lives.²⁰³ Because sport can help individuals to both enhance their capacities and participate in broader social networks, it offers an important means of helping to redress these gaps at the individual and societal level. This has important implications for many groups in Canadian society who are currently not full participants in Canada's social, economic and cultural life.

Helping newcomers to integrate more quickly into Canadian society

There is strong evidence that newcomers to Canada are experiencing greater difficulty integrating into their new communities and the Canadian job market than their predecessors of 20 years ago.²⁰⁴

While there is little Canadian research on the use of sport to enhance the integration of newcomers, a systematic review of the role of sport in the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom

Sport is being used successfully to link newcomers to key community services and supports.

used case studies to determine the positive impacts on participants. These included:²⁰⁵

- Breaking down barriers between asylum seekers/refugees and the pre-existing local population;
- Improving relationships between asylum seekers and refugees from different ethnic backgrounds; and
- Providing opportunities to build the self-esteem and self-confidence of asylum seekers and refugees.

These benefits were largely attributed by participants to sport's capacity to bring people together from different cultural backgrounds.²⁰⁶

The United Kingdom also provides examples of sport's use to link newcomers to important services and supports. The Sport Link project in Charnwood, United Kingdom uses sport and exercise programs to link women newcomers with general practitioners, health centres, and local recreation centres that deliver sport/exercise programs. It also enables access to local university sport facilities, with a view to fostering educational aspirations in youth participants.²⁰⁷ Similarly, the Kingsway Court Health and Well-being Centre links the provision of sport and physical recreation opportunities to other services for refugees and asylum seekers, including information and advice on men's and women's health, community development, English as a Second Language classes, and child care.²⁰⁸

On the basis of international research evidence, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants has identified sport and recreation as an important tool for the integration of immigrant youth and developed an inclusive recreational model for immigrant and

refugee youth to serve as the basis for partnerships between sport and recreation organizations and immigrant serving agencies.²⁰⁹

Fostering greater inclusion of people with disabilities

People with disabilities also face many forms of social, economic and political exclusion. These may be intentional or unintentional. Even in the absence of negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, people without disabilities may underestimate the capacities of people with disabilities and feel unsure about how to accommodate and include them in day-to-day activities.

Sport provides opportunities for people with disabilities to build their self-confidence and self-esteem, enhance their social skills and networks, and become more motivated and independent.

Sport helps to remove these barriers by changing community perceptions of people with disabilities, focusing attention on their abilities and moving their disability from the perceptual foreground into the background.²¹⁰ Able-bodied people encounter people with disabilities in a positive context that challenges their fundamental assumptions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do, leaving them with a more balanced view.²¹¹

Sport changes the player with a disability in an equally profound way. As a result of their exclusion, people with disabilities may have fewer opportunities to acquire important social skills and to fully develop their physical and mental potential. Through sport, they can:

- Access opportunities for positive social interaction with peers with and without disabilities, make friends, and build social networks vital to their health and well-being;^{212,213}
- Learn vital social interaction skills such as teamwork, cooperation, the importance of rules, goal setting, self-discipline, and communication;^{214, 215}
- Become physically stronger with improved stamina, coordination, flexibility, posture, muscle tone, balance, strength, and movement;^{216,217,218}
- Enhance their social-emotional development and capacity for self-help,²¹⁹ acquiring greater emotional control, social awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, motivation and independence;²²⁰ and
- Become empowered to advocate for themselves and others.²²¹

Many of these skills can be transferred to the employment realm, further helping to build self-sufficiency.

Renewing Aboriginal culture

In Canada, significant disparities exist between the social, economic and cultural opportunities available to Aboriginal peoples and to Canadians on the whole. This is reflected in higher rates of illness, premature mortality, school leaving, unemployment, poverty, and incarceration among Canada's Aboriginal population.²²²

Sport has been identified by Aboriginal people themselves and by Canada's provincial, territorial and federal governments as an important means of helping to reduce these disparities, particularly as they affect Aboriginal youth, the fastest growing segment of Canada's population.²²³

Sport and games centred on traditional skills and culturally-based principles have always played an important role in North American Aboriginal culture.²²⁴ This is reflected today in the popularity and success of sport and cultural events such as the Arctic Winter Games, the North American Indigenous Games, and the World Indigenous Nations Games. These events, which involve thousands of Canada's Aboriginal youth, aim to improve the quality of life of indigenous people through self-determined sport and cultural activities that encourage equal participation in the social and cultural life of communities, while respecting the distinctiveness of Aboriginal culture.²²⁵

There is growing evidence that cultural continuity is critical to restoring the social, economic and spiritual health of Aboriginal communities.²²⁶ As an important cultural feature, sport has a role to play in this process. A review of the research evidence undertaken by the *Australian Sports Commission* confirms that sport offers particular benefits with regard to Aboriginal communities.²²⁷ Sport carnivals organized by local indigenous communities have been described as fulcrums for social and traditional cohesion, largely because they are organized and managed by Indigenous communities themselves.²²⁸ Volunteer involvement in sport events and activities contributes to social cohesion as individuals get involved in coaching, umpiring, administration, management, and equipment and facilities maintenance. Volunteers acquire employment skills and a sense of purpose, while participants and volunteers alike benefit from enhanced self-esteem as a result of their involvement.²²⁹

Sport can also help to address the issue of substance abuse. Sport carnivals help to stop gasoline-sniffing and the use of alcohol and cannabis on a short-term basis by making this a condition of participation,²³⁰ while sport and recreation programs more generally have been found effective in preventing gasoline sniffing, particularly among occasional users.²³¹ The AFL Kickstart Program in Western Australia found football participants less likely to engage in substance abuse than non-players during the football season.²³² Reduced alcohol consumption by players, in turn, led to reduced consumption among families and lower rates of family violence. Community members also felt football and related activities helped to build community spirit.²³³

Sport is also being used successfully to address elevated rates of adolescent suicide in some Aboriginal communities. In Yarrabah, an Australian Indigenous community, after-school sport and recreation programs offered in conjunction with a suite of other supports succeeded in reducing the suicide rate to zero, property crime by 16 percent, and crimes against people by 72 percent in the period 1993-1996.²³⁴

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 has also proven an effective means to improve school attendance and retention, through initiatives such as “No school, no pool” policies and the addition of popular programs like horseback riding lessons to the school day.²³⁵

Effective Aboriginal sport programs have been found to demonstrate the following characteristics:²³⁶

- **Quality** – Good leadership, qualified and experienced coaches and program leaders, needs-based programming, ongoing interaction with participants upon program completion, and non-threatening environments which are flexible, varied, not necessarily competitive, and include non-traditional delivery models.
- **Resources** – Adequate and sustained human (paid and volunteer) and financial resources to run programs, pay staff and obtain and maintain facilities and equipment.
- **Community** – Community support, ownership and control; local involvement in planning and delivery; and a holistic approach with links to, and/or partnerships with, other programs and agencies.

- **Opportunities** – Creation of local employment and volunteer opportunities in the areas of sport participation, development, training, and leadership.
- **Access** – Ready access to programs through appropriate use of facilities, ensuring facilities are open at appropriate times, and minimizing financial, transportation, cultural and information barriers.



Canada Games/F. Scott Grant

6. Contributing to Canada's Economy

Sport plays a significant role in the economic, as well as the social life, of communities, by providing jobs, boosting tourism in large and small communities alike, contributing to neighbourhood economic renewal, and enhancing skills and productivity in the workplace.

The Conference Board of Canada reports that:²³⁷

- Canadian households spent \$15.8 billion on sport in 2004, or 2.18 percent of total household spending;
- This translates into \$1,963 in sport spending per Canadian household;
- Canada's sport sector employs 262,324 Canadians, accounting for 2 percent of all jobs in Canada; and

- Sport contributes 1.2 percent of our national GDP, a significant increase from 1996 when sport spending accounted for just 0.9 percent of GDP.

Enhancing tourism through sport travel and events

One of the ways that sport contributes to economic growth is through sport-related tourism. Special events, including sport events, have become one of the fastest growing types of tourism and are increasingly viewed by tourism marketing professionals as an integral part of tourism development.²³⁸ Local communities see special events as a way of leveraging local infrastructure to generate revenue, as well as enjoyable recreation opportunities for their residents.

Research on the economic impact of special events shows that they benefit communities by:²³⁹

- Increasing tourism visits;
- Injecting new spending from outside the community;
- Increasing employment;
- Improving their image;
- Enhancing tourism development;
- Acting as a catalyst for local development;
- Extending the tourism season and reducing seasonal fluctuations;
- Enhancing community pride; and
- Creating incremental social and cultural benefits.

In any given year, Canada hosts over 250,000 sport events.²⁴⁰ While a significant portion of sport tourism is related to professional spectator

sport events, major multi-sport amateur games such as the Olympic, Paralympic, Commonwealth, Pan-American, and Francophonie Games, also attract thousands of international athletes, delegation members, officials, media and spectators who spend locally on accommodation, food, event attendance, transport, gifts and souvenirs.

Canada hosts over 250,000 sport events annually ranging from professional events, to multi-sport amateur games to local tournaments, and all of these provide economic benefits in the form of visitor spending.

These events provide immediate economic benefits but also leave a continuing legacy in the form of high quality sport infrastructure and international awareness which lead to higher levels of ongoing sport tourism. The 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games attracted over 150,000 people to Calgary. Forty percent of these were visiting Calgary for the first time, 27 percent having never heard of Calgary before. In addition to the immediate economic benefit generated by these visits, international tourist volumes in Calgary have grown significantly since the Games.

According to the House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Study of Sport in Canada, sport accounted for an estimated \$4 billion in tourism expenditures in 1997, attracting tourists to all regions of Canada and increasing our visibility and reputation in the world.²⁴¹ In 2006, travel surveys showed that 4.17 million or 30.1 percent of all overnight person-trips from the United States to Canada included participation in sports or outdoor activity.²⁴² These ranked among the top activities for this tourism segment, along with shopping and sightseeing. That same year, 1.15 million or 27 percent of all international trips to

Canada (excluding those from the U.S.) included participation in sport or outdoor activity.²⁴³

Analysis by the Province of Saskatchewan indicates that approximately 80,000 visiting participants and spectators (international and domestic) attended regional, national, and international sport events held in that province during the period 2000-2006. Spending by these visitors is estimated to have been over \$55.9 million dollars.²⁴⁴

Trips by Canadians within Canada account for approximately two thirds of all tourism in Canada.²⁴⁵ Sport plays a large role in this portion of the tourism market as well. The 1996 Canadian Travel Survey showed that sport activity represented 26 percent of all person-trips taken by Canadians that year. Nearly 8.6 million person trips included attendance at a spectator sporting event, while 35.8 million trips included participation in sport or an outdoor activity.²⁴⁶

Community sport amenities help cities to attract and retain highly valued knowledge-workers and the companies that seek to employ them.

Large domestic sporting events like the Canada Games, which is held every two years, or national sport championships, are also an important feature in Canadian sport tourism and provide important economic benefits to host communities. The 2005 Canada Summer Games in Regina, Saskatchewan, for example, is estimated to have attracted \$9,285,000 in visitor spending which, together with event operations and capital expenditures, generated \$101 million in economic activity, an estimated 955 jobs, and \$42 million in new GDP, \$32.3 million of this in Regina.²⁴⁷

The vast majority of sport events in Canada are regional or local. While research on the economic impacts of these kinds of events is only just beginning to emerge, studies that exist show that they do generate measurable economic benefits through visitor spending on commercial

accommodation, food and drink, and shopping and souvenirs, although on a more modest scale than larger events.^{248,249}

Contributing to local economic development and renewal

Community sport infrastructure and activities are influential in attracting residents, as well as tourists, to communities. In his groundbreaking book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*,²⁵⁰ urban economist, Richard Florida, documents the important role that “just-in-time” community sport and recreation amenities (such as parks, playgrounds, walking and bike paths, and public playing fields) play in making communities attractive to highly mobile knowledge workers. Florida’s work shows that global competition is intensifying among urban regions to attract and retain these highly skilled workers, who are the key to building local knowledge-based economies that generate high quality jobs and economic growth.

Companies seeking new investment locations are also increasingly sensitive to quality of life as an important factor in attracting and retaining the highly-skilled employees they need. By investing in sport and recreation green space, facilities and services that appeal to these workers, communities can only increase their attractiveness as a location for the companies seeking to employ them.

Sport can also play a different, yet complementary, role in boosting the fortunes of less advantaged communities experiencing high levels of unemployment and poverty. An examination of the use of sport in neighbourhood renewal in the United Kingdom has found that sport can directly provide business and employment opportunities at the local level and, through local sport and employment plans, serve as a route to acquiring the motivation and skills necessary to access these and other employment opportunities.²⁵¹ These skills include confidence, self-esteem, transferable skills, and basic qualifications. However, as people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are less likely to be active in sport or to have access to sport-related training, they are often only

qualified for unskilled and low-paying sport positions. To truly harness sport's potential as a neighbourhood renewal tool, those involved in sport and employment-related renewal efforts should:²⁵²

- Develop a local sport and employment plan;
- Support creation of new local employment opportunities in the sport sector;
- Adopt a policy of local recruitment to fill positions and provide opportunities for local residents to obtain the necessary sport skills training and qualifications;
- Provide opportunities for local residents to increase their employability and transferable skills through sport participation and volunteering;
- Evaluate the impact of sport and employment projects.

Enhancing workplace skills and productivity

Sport participation – and physical activity levels more broadly – have important implications for economic productivity as well. Employers are increasingly turning to sport and physical activity as a means to improve productivity in their workplaces. A 1981 study examining the impact of a workplace fitness program on absenteeism in a Toronto insurance firm revealed that the program reduced hiring and training costs by \$273,000 and sick day costs by \$80,000, for a total savings of \$267 per employee. The study concluded that the company could save as much as 1 percent of total payroll costs annually, on the basis of a 20 percent participation rate in the program.²⁵³

A 1992 review of workplace absenteeism studies confirmed these findings, revealing that, in 35 of the 39 studies, significant improvements were linked to participation in sport and fitness programs. On average, the studies showed a 1.6 day decrease in absenteeism per employee, leading to a savings of 1.1 percent of payroll costs per year.²⁵⁴ Canada's

National Workplace Survey, in the same year, confirmed that employers offering active living programs rated improved productivity among the top 4 benefits, due to reduced employee absenteeism, accidents and turnover.²⁵⁵

Employers place a high value on the transferable skills acquired by sport participants and volunteers because these skills improve workplace performance.

Company policies to support employee physical activity include flexible work hours and incentive plans for employees to join athletic/recreational clubs or workout individually, company sponsored recreational sport teams, and workplace facilities to accommodate active employees such as showers and bike racks.

Employers also place a high value on the transferable skills acquired by sport participants and volunteers. According to the Conference Board of Canada survey, the vast majority of active participants, volunteers and attendees rate sport as an important way to gain skills that they can apply away from sport, in their personal lives and also across a broad range of jobs and workplaces.²⁵⁶ Sport volunteers identified even stronger skills gained than did active participants among the eight categories of skills they were asked to rate. They particularly valued coaching and mentoring skills, personal integrity, responsibility to others, fair dealing, and leadership and teamwork skills.²⁵⁷ Employers prize these skills because they improve workplace performance.



7. Promoting Environmental Sustainability

As interest in the economic benefits of sport has grown, so too has awareness of sport's potential to benefit the environment and promote greater sustainability – within sport and on a broader basis. Sport can instill appreciation for – and a desire to protect – the environment and provide a platform for social mobilization on behalf of the environment, including ensuring that sport at all levels is a net contributor to, rather than detractor from, environmental sustainability.

Fostering environmental awareness and stewardship

Because so much sport takes place out-of-doors, it has traditionally been closely associated with an appreciation of nature's beauty, as well as its challenges. Arising from this association is the knowledge that healthy sport requires a healthy ecosystem – clean air, clean water and clean earth. The significant efforts to improve air quality in Beijing,

China in the lead up to the 2008 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games is just one example of this necessary and close relationship between sport and environmental stewardship.

Many investments in community sport are, in fact, investments in additional green space that improve the environment and quality of life in Canadian communities. Parks, playgrounds, playing fields, trails, beaches, and other outdoor facilities provide Canadians with access to nature, improved air quality, and the space to pursue outdoor physical activity in clean and enjoyable surroundings. Sport club members and other recreational users of these spaces, in turn, often become advocates for their protection, proper maintenance and even expansion, even as those who pursue wilderness sports often become advocates for the protection and sustainable use of more remote environments.

Providing a platform for social mobilization

This relationship between sport and the environment has been formally recognized, and is being actively promoted by, a wide range of international sport and environment bodies such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Global Forum for Sports and Environment, Federation International de Football Association (FIFA), and the Global Sport Alliance.

In 1994, UNEP and the IOC signed a landmark agreement declaring environmental protection and sustainable development to be the third pillar of the Olympic Movement, together with sport and culture. This has translated into growing encouragement for cities hoping to be future Olympic venues to prove the sustainability of their Olympic plans and proposals, unleashing bold innovations in the areas of sustainable sport facility development and operation, event management, and transportation. VANOC, the organization responsible for preparing for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Games has embraced this ethos, aiming for the first carbon neutral (zero net carbon dioxide emissions) Olympic and Paralympic Games and laying plans for

an ambitious public awareness and education campaign to promote environmental protection and sustainability.²⁵⁸

Many investments in community sport are investments in green space, with users often becoming advocates for their protection, proper maintenance and expansion.

The high profile of international sport events, like the Olympic and Paralympic Games or the FIFA World Cup, provides a powerful platform for promoting environmental protection because of the extraordinary audiences these events command and their global reach. High profile athletes, in turn, possess the same potential to reach large audiences with environmental sustainability messages. More importantly, their influence as role models is likely to ensure that their messages have an impact on behaviour – particularly that of young people.

Initiatives like the international Ecoflag project that enlists sport participants to promote environmental sustainability in their communities (in this case by displaying the international Ecoflag at their events), build on the natural tendency of sportspeople to care for the places and habitats that afford them and their families so much pleasure. This desire is reflected in the involvement of sport groups in local green space planning, as well as the establishment and protection of ‘green belts’ around cities, in order to ensure that future generations of urban and suburban residents can enjoy the recreational, aesthetic, and health benefits that these natural, open spaces offer.

Making sport facilities more sustainable

Sport role models – local coaches, athletes and sport leaders – have the same power to communicate the importance of environmental sus-

tainability and to practice environmentally responsible sport on a more local level. This extends to those who plan, build and maintain sport facilities in communities.

Built in 1990, Selkirk Manitoba's hockey arena is a professional size sports complex that uses a geothermal heat pump system for heating and cooling. This system significantly reduces the high energy costs normally associated with maintaining a rink complex of this size and eliminates the need for hazardous chemical coolants. Selkirk's arena has been a model for other local facilities and has led to further design improvements now being pioneered in other communities.²⁵⁹

A national survey of arenas undertaken in 2005 revealed that, within the next decade, most of Canada's arena infrastructure will need major renovation or replacement.²⁶⁰ At the same time, new integrated technologies for heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and refrigeration offer opportunities for energy savings as great as 60 percent.²⁶¹ These two facts combined underscore the potential for significant progress in making Canada's sport infrastructure 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.



8. Conclusion

The broad and compelling evidence of sport's benefits invites communities and decision makers to recognize sport's value as a substantial public asset, one that merits our attention and intentional effort to amplify sport's positive effects across the full spectrum of opportunities outlined in this report.

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, is not the job of sport alone. Local communities, where community sport takes place and where the benefits are most tangible, have a leading role to play in both building a comprehensive and inclusive community sport system, and ensuring that the sport Canadians get is, indeed, the sport that they want. This is critical to realizing the full range of benefits that sport can generate. Evenly distributed opportunities to participate in sport can help to nar-

row the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged groups, while high quality sport experiences both encourage participation and foster the positive development of participants and communities.

Through intentional and strategic development of accessible, high quality community sport, municipalities – together with their many community partners and stakeholders – can harness the power of sport to advance a broad cross-section of their social and economic goals, and

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.

make a measurable contribution to improving quality of life in their communities. School boards, service clubs, business groups, community service organizations, foundations, law enforcement agencies, health practitioners, band councils, and, of course, sport organizations themselves, all have a role to play in this process.

All orders of government have a role to play in helping to ensure the infrastructure necessary to enable communities to benefit from sport is available to all communities, in particular those with limited resources of their own. While community sport offers benefits to everyone, it offers the greatest benefits to individuals, groups and communities coping with isolation or exclusion, social and economic challenges, and, in some cases, decline. Many government policies and programs aimed at helping Canadians and communities to tackle these challenges can also benefit from the strategic integration of sport as a low-cost and potentially highly effective tool for advancing their goals.

Community sport's cross-cutting effects and diverse beneficiaries invite governments to move beyond traditional approaches that involve sport ministries and departments alone, to adopt more horizontal, cross-governmental approaches that engage the full range of ministries and departments interested in harnessing sport's potential.

Despite the crucial importance of all these contributions, the quality and ultimate impact of community sport finally comes down to individuals – the athletes, parents, coaches, administrators and volunteers whose ideas, attitudes and behaviour determine whether the sport we have is, in fact, the sport Canadians want.

When elite athletes compete, they capture our attention and carry our hearts and hopes with them. They are our champions, but also beneficiaries of our support and resources, de facto ambassadors for our communities and country, and highly visible and influential role models for our young people. As such, they have a particularly important choice to make in terms of their behaviour and the messages they send publicly about sport. By reinforcing the positive power of true sport in their words and actions, on and off the playing field, they can inspire, champion and give back, closing the gap between the sport we want and the sport we have, and further increasing the power of sport to improve our lives, strengthen our communities, and make Canada better.

All Canadians and communities participate in one form or another in making this same choice. Every game we play, every match we organize, every race we run, large or small, can help to build a stronger Canada for the future. By intentionally making the right choices, together we can all ensure the sport we have is the sport we want – true sport – and make sport count for Canada.

Notes

1 For the purposes of this report, sport is any rule-based physical activity with two or more people engaged in competition to determine a victor, where the outcome is unknown ahead of time. As physical activity is an essential component of all sport included in this definition, the benefits of physical activity are addressed in this report, in addition to those of sport per se.

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COMMUNITY SPORT IN CANADA

Canada has 33,650 sport and recreation organizations and hosts over 250,000 sport events annually.



Sport and recreation organizations engage 28% (5.3 million) of all volunteers in Canada – more than any other sector.



55% of boys and 44% of girls 15 years of age or younger, and 28% of Canadians over the age of 15, are active in sport.



1.8 million Canadians coach amateur sport, 800,000 participate as amateur referees or officials, and 2 million volunteer their time as administrators or helpers in amateur sport.



72% of Canadians believe that sport is a key contributor to quality of life in their communities.



Canadians rank sport as the 2nd most positive influence in the lives of youth, after family.



Over 80% of Canadians believe that promoting positive values in youth should be a priority for sport in Canada.



92% of Canadians believe that community sport can have a positive influence in the lives of youth.



Only 20% of Canadians surveyed believe sport is living up to its full potential as a positive force in the lives of young people.