

Episode 4: Bringing True Sport to Life: What It Takes

00:00:01:08 - 00:00:07:06

[Intro Music]

00:00:07:06 - 00:00:27:03

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

Welcome to the *True Sport Podcast Series*, brought to you by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, known as the CCES. The CCES is excited to bring you a four-part podcast series where we'll explore how activating True Sport can foster a positive sport culture and provide sport with the best chance to reach its full potential.

00:00:27:03 - 00:01:48:08

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

In the spirit of sport, we acknowledge that we gather on the traditional and unceded territories of Indigenous Peoples across the expansive nation of Canada. From coast to coast to coast, these lands have hosted countless sporting events, competitions, and moments of athleticism. We recognize that many of these activities, from traditional games to modern sports, have deep-rooted histories among Indigenous communities.

We respectfully acknowledge that the head office of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People. We honour this land as well as other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit lands and territories on which we work. The CCES recognizes the outstanding contribution the First Peoples make to sport and acknowledges the power of sport to promote reconciliation and address inequality.

Just as in sport, where teamwork and respect for one another are fundamental, we understand that acknowledging the traditional territories is a collective effort towards reconciliation. It's our shared responsibility to learn from, listen to, and support Indigenous athletes and communities to foster a more inclusive, equitable, and safe sporting world.

00:01:48:14 - 00:02:04:06

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

The CCES's vision is that sport is fair, safe, accessible and inclusive.

We believe the fundamental purpose of sport can and should be to make a positive contribution to Canadian society and, we believe that ethical sport is the best way to achieve that.

00:02:04:06 - 00:02:09:13

[music]

00:02:09:13 - 00:03:24:09

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

But first, here's our *Did You Know?* segment where we share an interesting fact connected to True Sport! Today, we're sharing the meaning of the red 'O' in the True Sport logo which represents four things:

First, the heart of sport

The red circle is an "o" – the middle letter in the word sport. Symbolically, it means that True Sport, and the principles that drive it, are at the very heart of sport. It means "True Sport lives here."

Second is Integrity

The circle is one of the strongest and simplest of graphic shapes – a pure geometric form. Because of this, it has been used as a symbol throughout history and across many cultures to represent unity, integrity, and wholeness.

The third piece is Commitment

The circle – seen as a ring – represents a true and lasting commitment. Displaying it makes a public declaration of that commitment.

And finally, Connection

The circle reflects the spirit of True Sport. The circle has no sides, and it is open to all who aspire to bring the True Sport Principles to life. We're in it together and that makes us stronger.

00:03:24:11 - 00:03:56:02

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

In this episode, we're going to focus on the practical steps and efforts required to bring the True Sport Principles to life in everyday situations. We'll provide strategies for implementing and activating True Sport across all levels of sport. This episode will feature success stories, expert advice, and offer guidance for overcoming common obstacles. Whether you're looking to inspire change in your sport community or enhance your personal practice, this episode provides a comprehensive guide to making True Sport a reality.

00:03:56:10 - 00:04:07:12

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

For this episode, we want to spend our time hearing from our guests. We have a wonderful group with us today who will help us to understand the journey they are taking to activate True Sport.

00:04:07:12 - 00:04:13:00

[music]

00:04:13:00 - 00:04:56:09

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

All right. So, I'm just going to take a minute here to quickly introduce, each of our guests. So, we have Shauna Bookal (she/her, President and CEO of Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network). We have John Cawley (he/him, retired educator and vice-president of the McConnell Foundation, and active curling coach, official and board member). We have Elana Liberman (she/her, Safe Sport Lead at Sport Nova Scotia). And we have Bryan Merrett (he/him, Executive Director, Badminton Canada, and community-level soccer and hockey

coach). So welcome, we're so excited to have you all here today to join us!! And Thank you again for taking the time to share your True Sport story!

00:04:56:09 - 00:05:09:03

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Okay, Shauna, we're going to start with you. We're curious to learn more about what motivated and inspired you to integrate the True Sport Principles into your work.

00:05:09:03 - 00:06:11:05

SPEAKER (Shuana Bookal)

We were already doing it within our work, but now it was like we were doing it in an official way with a great logo that brought it together, and it was bringing all the pieces. And, what came to me was the principles and the one principle that always sticks to my mind and one that we do on a regular basis is include everybody. And it was like when I saw that principle, and especially at the time when this was back in 2020, 2021, and it just resonated even more that it's like, here we are looking to be inclusive in the work that we do, and here is this great principles, that are out there that are basically resonating what we're trying to do. So why work in silos when we can work together and, be able to support each other in the work that we do? So, I have been on board for the past five years with this initiative and what they've been doing, because it is, I think one of the biggest things that is the heart and soul of sport in the time that we needed it back then.

00:06:11:07 - 00:06:19:07

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Amazing. John, do you have anything to add on to what Shauna just shared?

00:06:19:07 - 00:08:20:07

SPEAKER (John Cawley)

Couple of things. Long before True Sport was a formal movement. I mean, it's not new. The notion that sport can be a really powerful tool for community and individual development.

When I was teaching in West Africa in the late 70s, I was quite frankly, it was discouraged about what was going on in the classroom.

But the students were so motivated and skilled and engaged on the sports field, where I was very much involved, and I was able to use that type of engagement to say, well, you know, remember on the sports field, we practiced hard, and it paid off on the competition we went to, we kind of have to do the same thing in the classroom where if you study, you're likely to do better later on in your studies.

Fast forward a bit, I was working at a foundation, the McConnell Foundation, and we were supporting True Sport. And the reason why it's not because it was sport, but because it has a powerful impact on two things individual outcomes around health, education, but even more importantly, community resilience. So, things like the ability to integrate newcomers to Canada into society.

One of my favorite stories is, there's, you know, Muhammad was playing soccer. There was language issues and everything. Integrating the small boy was one thing, but his grandfather found work by interacting with the other parents in the crowd. It's when you start to get those ripple effects of sport, of how it impacts communities, making them stronger and more inclusive that is very interesting. And that's why when I was working with the McConnell Foundation, we supported True Sport less about, you know, because we cared about sport, although we do and more about what it could do to make, you know, Canada more inclusive and sustainable country.

00:08:21:00 - 00:09:38:02

SPEAKER (Elana Liberman)

I love, what you just said about the impacts in communities. And I think that is sort of the genesis, I guess, of my involvement and which goes back about five years ago when I started, as Safe Sport Lead.

And sort of really just taking a survey of landscape of what was safe sport back then, which we know is a little bit different than it is now and came across True Sport. We were looking for ways to amplify athlete voices, in our province and in our communities. And so we sort of played with, the idea of using the True Sport Principles as a way of amplifying athlete voices. And, it just seemed like such a natural progression, and avenue for us to do that and really, showcase these athletes who are living the True Sport Principles on and off the field of play and showcasing them and the impacts on their communities as John said earlier, in

terms of, the power that these mostly young people, but athletes of obviously of any age can bring to their communities, when they live the True Sport Principles.

And so, I'll probably talk a little bit more about that, but really showcasing the sport we want to see, the sport that we know exists. So that was how we started. And we've grown from there.

00:09:38:02 - 00:09:45:11

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Amazing. Can't wait to hear more about it. Bryan, over to you. Do you have anything to add?

00:09:45:11 - 00:11:27:03

SPEAKER (Bryan Merrett)

I would say that I got involved in True Sport through a coaching lens. When I started coaching, I just knew that sport could do so much more than just encourage a person to kick a ball around a field or pass a puck around a sheet of ice.

I started coaching soccer and I just tried to deliver a program that was more than, what the experience was on the field. Help the kids feel connected and make sure they were having fun. Make sure that they were, they understood, they needed their teammates and respect the officials, in the sport that they were playing.

Making sure that, players and parents knew that the sport experience had to be more than just the actual sport on the field and the connections working towards a goal, growing as humans, around something they like.

And to John's point earlier, sport is just the vehicle, the experience, and the life skills that they get out of it are the purposeful actions that we take to help them grow and develop as human beings. And if it's left unchecked, sport can be chaotic and misdirected and used in ways that we don't want to see people, use sport. But in a purposeful way and encouraging kids to understand.

00:11:27:13 - 00:11:47:08

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

Thank you everyone. we're going to jump into the next question. I think we'll start, with Elana for you for this one. So, can you share any success stories or notable outcomes that demonstrate the benefits of adopting the True Sport Principles? I think you alluded to it a little bit in your first question. So, we'll circle back here and see what you have to add.

00:11:48:15 - 00:12:35:03

SPEAKER (Elana Liberman)

I did it was set up as a teaser. And so based on that first question and based on some of the initial discussions we had. This vision that we had was to create an ambassador program and, so we've created the Nova Scotia True Sport Athlete Ambassador Program, which is now entering its fourth year. And it's really an opportunity to showcase, athletes and coaches, who live the True Sport Principles on and off the field of play.

As John said, going back to that, impacts in communities, who are, impactful in their communities, who are leaders, who are inspirations to others. We have coaches who are involved in this program as well who believe in values-based sport as a way of achieving safe sport.

00:12:35:09 - 00:12:52:15

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

Thank you. Elana, it's such a wonderful program and one that is never ceases to be inspiring. And watching it grow has just been a major highlight!

Bryan, do you have anything to add to this, around successes or notable outcomes around the benefits of adopting the True Sport Principles?

00:12:52:15 - 00:16:29:13

SPEAKER (Bryan Merrett)

For me, I was a board member as a part of a soccer association, and we were going through a strategic planning process, and we just simply overlaid the True Sport Principles as the

values of the organization. And it seems pretty simple. I mean, it was the discussion was much longer, but the simplicity of believing in those principles as values that the organization would like to, espouse or work towards was, was it just seemed a match for the organization.

On a more even micro level, as part of my coaching a couple seasons ago, we really talked about, being brave and going for it and, really putting yourself out there to try new things in practice, in training, and in games. We encourage this all season by giving them a challenge. And the challenge was that they had to. If one player out of 20 girls pulled off a soccer rainbow in a game, there would be a prize for all 20 girls.

And, if anybody knows what a rainbow is, it's where you trap the ball between your heels and you flip it over your head into space and run on to the ball. So, it's a pretty hard skill to learn. But the fact that they would try it was more important than actually executing on it. So they practice every single practice they tried. Every one of those girls tried to do rainbows.

And then finally, the last game of the year. This was their last chance to try and get the prize from the coach. And one girl went out there and tried to do it right away and failed. And 30s later tried again and did it over her head, over the other player into the 18 yard box, gets a shot on net. The entire bench goes bananas cheering her name. They were chanting. They were clapping. The parents didn't even know what was going on. But it meant something to them. In executing that skill, they were given her high fives. They were this kind of small community of girls who were trying to work towards something. And they got as a prize rainbow nerds, because that just made sense, in providing to them.

But now they practice that rainbow all the time. We're a year and a half out from when that happened. And they practice it, whenever they have a chance, you can see them trying. And you can see in the games now that they're okay to try something and fail, but they're just trying to put themselves out there. So that connection, through a goal of going for it to the team and each other was, a great example of the True Sport Principles in action.

On a larger scale, Badminton Canada had agreed to the True Sport Principles as a board, and they put out the ad boards around every field of play through, and we run 20 events a year, across the country with players from age 13 to age 25.

00:16:30:03 - 00:16:44:07

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

So good. Thanks so much for sharing, so to follow up, I'll start with you, Elana. Wondering if you can share some best practices that you would recommend for other individuals who want to integrate the True Sport Principles into their work.

00:16:44:07 - 00:18:34:02

SPEAKER (Elana Liberman)

Yeah, absolutely. I think making connections if it resonates with you, if someone is listening to this and doesn't or they're not familiar with, you know, the True Sport Principles and what can be done. Again, going back to John, I love that impacts and communities or reach out to me, be imaginative, you know, if you're an athlete who's listening to this and you're saying, well, what does this mean? And how can I be involved? We have again, through our ambassador program, we have a number of athletes. And we'll make those connections and the opportunities, for coaches and administrators of the same, and so making those connections, reaching out, being imaginative. And certainly, in our ambassador program, are chosen because they're leaders, they're inspiring, and they probably want to share those principles as well with other communities.

And so best practices would be, continue to live and showcase and embody the True Sport Principles on and off the field of play. If any of the ambassadors or coaches are listening or administrators, please continue to share because again, there is the belief and I believe a belief, for everybody on this podcast and everyone who's listening, that if we live by these True Sport Principles again, on and off, we're going to have a great communities, great sporting experiences.

And I think, what we've seen through the ambassador program is, people taking opportunities that we might not have even thought of, whether it being an event, whether it's taking an oath, whether it's having a booth, whether it's showing up in a classroom and sharing with your classmates, whether it's coaches, you know, as Bryan was talking about, sort of weaving in those True Sport Principles, maybe at the beginning of a season. And so I think there's the opportunities to be imaginative, to be creative, and know that there's support and there's people across the country who also want to see this floor.

00:18:34:06 - 00:18:39:15

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

John, I'm curious to know if you have any best practices that you'd like to add.

00:18:40:01 - 00:19:54:14

SPEAKER (John Cawley)

Yeah, both as a board member of the curling club and someone who teaches, learn to curl. I guess my take on it is, it's very important to be intentional. When the board adopt something, there's a certain level, obviously, you want commitment. There's also a certain level of compliance. This is the direction we're going in, we're doing it, when it's a bunch of volunteers that you're pulling together. So, I guess you want to be intentional but situational.

So, you know, following up on what Bryan and Elana said, I think the most important thing is living the values as opposed to preaching about them, because you want to turn people off. But I focus on the values, the fun, the fairness, the inclusion and the excellence and I don't start off by saying, okay, we're going to focus on have fun today. No, you make it fun.

Right now, I do finish every practice, whether it's with an elite team or with the beginners with two questions. Did you have fun today and what did you learn? And if they just give some blasé answer? Oh yeah, I had fun. I say, why, just as I do in real life, if people say, you know, how are you today? And they say, oh yeah, I'm fine. I often say why? And it causes them to have to actually think about it and give an answer, so you build the fun and the fairness.

00:19:55:08 - 00:20:16:14

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

Amazing. Thank you so much for sharing both of you on that question. So, we're going to jump to Shauna for this one, hoping you can get us started on, this next one. And then I know, John, you had some ideas, so we'll come back to you too. So, Shauna, if you could tell us about the challenges you've encountered with promoting and implementing True Sport values, and how you addressed them.

00:20:16:15 - 00:21:51:08

SPEAKER (Shauna Bookal)

Well, the first thing that right off the bat, when we're promoting it, like everywhere that we go, we always like to promote things that are out there because, again, we don't believe in reinventing the wheel. We want people to jump on board with what is existing. And a lot of them are like, well, I don't have the money for it. And we're like, well, there is no cost to it. It's free! And because we deal with a lot of different diverse groups, they're like, well, what if like, we don't understand because it's not in our language and like, well, guess what? They actually do have it in some popular languages based on their Canadian demographics and what is out there.

So, people think it's actually hard to get involved in stuff, and we like to use examples for them. So, we say so do you give out a sportsmanship award or do you give out a coach's award or some type of award from that aspect? And they're like, yep, we have that in our club. I'm like, well, you can change that to the True Sport Award, or you can just add the name into that, and it's the exact same thing, and then we're giving it out. And you could also download some templates online to help with the certificates and do things from that nature.

So, if you're one thing this year, because it can be overwhelming for people is we're just going to give out the True Sport award. And that's your goal for this year is to give out the True Sport award. And then let's see how do we add on to it for next year. So, it's being able for people to see things that are tangible. And then there's some groups that English is not their first language. And they feel like it's not for them. But in realistically we're like, no, it is for you because it is inclusive. Well, when we have that conversation, you can see people's guard going down a little bit because it's like they just like, oh, I didn't realize that, or I didn't realize it was just all I had to do was this.

00:21:51:08 - 00:22:15:05

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

So good. Thank you for sharing those challenges and ways that you've addressed them. That's incredibly helpful. Okay, so to wrap up our conversation today, we'll connect with each of you again. And we'll start with John. What strategies have you use to encourage participants, parents or other community members to embrace the True Sport Principles?

00:22:15:05 - 00:22:59:12

SPEAKER (John Cawley)

I'd like to tell a story about when I was actually coaching soccer. Before the season starts, I gather everybody together. So that's not only the athletes, but also the parents. What is the kind of behavior that we want to see on the field? What kind of behavior do we want to see from parents?

Well, why this was really effective. Of course, it didn't change the behavior. The parents were abusing the referee. But I'm on the other side of the field trying to coach the team. The other parents start coming around and saying, remember what we all agreed to before the year started? You have to do these things before you can't do it on the spur of the moment, so to speak.

00:22:59:12 - 00:23:06:05

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

That's a beautiful example, John. Elana, do you have any strategies that you want to highlight?

00:23:06:11 - 00:24:18:00

SPEAKER (Elana Liberman)

Well, the strategy, I guess, is the program that we created because I think in the question itself, it talked about, you know, the athletes, and the parents, and other community members, including coaches and administrators. And so, we created this program to do exactly what, the question asked is, how do we involve them? Well, we get them actively involved.

And I think, so much so that any chance, as much as possible, change the narrative and discuss the positive aspects of sport and what sport can be and what's the sport we want to see. Imagine if we could have that throughout the country and the provinces and the territories, where we have athletes and coaches and parents and administrators, showcasing and being examples and leaders for others.

And so I think that, if we go into this not being prescriptive and, you know, the True Sport Principles, and the values are the foundation and then what we do with them, how we show up, whether it's an ambassador program, whether it's, as Shauna said, you know, making an oath at the beginning of the year or what that looks like it can be, determined, but, really taking those opportunities, and seeing what we can do and what we can create.

00:24:18:11 - 00:24:24:06

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Thank you for sharing that. Okay, Bryan, over to you. Do you have anything to add?

00:24:24:06 - 00:27:33:03

SPEAKER (Bryan Merrett)

I think from a sport perspective, some hard-core sports people and John talked about is that the concepts that True Sport talks about sometimes gets equated with not wanting to win or not wanting to excel. And when you're in competitive sports, the parents have some desire to see success on the field.

So that was air quotes, success on the field. And success for them is equated to wins and losses. But as a coach, success is not in wins and losses. It's in development and growth from individuals and you know. I see True Sport as kind of like the butter on the popcorn. Popcorn's good, we're just making it better with some butter.

Like, it just makes the experience so much more memorable and exceptional for the participants. Last year, during the hockey season, I did this thing called Features of a Great Teammate. So, we got all the players together in the dressing room with the coaches, and we asked them some questions, and I said, okay, well, what do you think a great teammate brings to the team? Respectful, good listener, caring, hard worker, team player, fearless, open minded, no shortcuts. Like these are things that tie right back to the principles of True Sport.

And so True Sport just gives us the framework of which we can integrate day to day activities with our, with some of the tools that are available in the world around coaching or running associations. And this qualities of a great teammate was essential for us as we went through the season. So when something went wrong or somebody did something on the ice that was not reflective of the True Sport Principles or the qualities of a good teammate, we could have a discussion after the game and say, hey, you know, when you

were kind of going after the referee or going after the other team and you were emotional at that moment, did you think you were being a good teammate?

And when you can reflect and reinforce those ideas and concepts, you're actually making an effect on those young people well beyond, scoring a goal or winning a league championship, which we did win a league championship. But it went way beyond that. And the parents afterwards just talked about how that team was a family and how they came together and how and they said many of them said I didn't really care that we won. I cared about the experience that my son was getting over the course of eight months.

I think I think True Sport has a greater potential, and it doesn't have to be complicated to integrate it into your day-to-day activities.

00:27:33:08 - 00:27:42:05

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Thanks for sharing that, Bryan. So, Shauna, over to you for any final thoughts around strategies that you've used.

00:27:42:05 - 00:28:09:02

SPEAKER (Shauna Bookal)

The best ones I just use is providing people examples because they can relate when they can see what other people are doing, whether it's in their communities, whether it's in their sport, whether it's in their cultural groups and showing how people have integrated different cultures into True Sport and things from that nature. And so, then they can visually have an understanding of what True Sport can do for their sport in their community.

00:28:09:02 - 00:29:00:06

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Thank you so much for your incredible insights and for joining us today. Shauna, Elana, Bryan and John, really hearing your story and your True Sport journey is inspiring. The theme of connection and the impact on communities and really using sport as a vehicle, for making those connections and changes to community is truly inspiring. Your stories

have left us with, a sense of purpose, and we're so grateful for the work that you continue to do.

Continuing on, our conversations have highlighted the profound impact sport can have on our lives. It's a powerful reminder of the benefits that result from strengthening our communities, increasing opportunities for excellence, and instilling character through sport.

00:29:00:06 - 00:29:29:04

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

Shauna, Elana, Bryan and John have conveyed that sport is more than just a game—it's a powerful tool for building connections and fostering growth. We invite you to reflect on your own experiences in sport and consider how you can contribute to a more positive sport culture. Whether it's through mentorship, volunteering, or simply sharing your story, every effort counts.

That's it for this episode. Thanks for joining us.

00:29:29:04 - 00:29:33:07

[music]

00:29:33:13 - 00:30:05:08

SPEAKER (Sarah Bennett)

We recognize that changing culture is a long game that takes time and effort. But with a consistent and intentional commitment to True Sport we can create the positive sport culture we all want.

For more information about True Sport, check out our website at truesport.ca. You can subscribe to the monthly newsletter, find tools and resources, and declare your commitment by joining True Sport. You can also find us on social media at [@truesportpur](https://twitter.com/truesportpur). Drop us a line and tell us how you plan to activate True Sport.

00:30:05:13 - 00:30:13:15

SPEAKER (Melissa Sullivan)

Thanks for listening. We hope to have inspired you to play your part to help ensure good sport is happening in communities across Canada.

00:30:13:15 - 00:30:27:08

[outro music]