

## House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance – Pre-budget Consultations 2014

**This brief is submitted by:**

**Pierre Lafontaine, CEO of Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS)** an organization which represents and works in collaboration with 56 member universities from Coast to Coast to Coast.

**Organization name:** Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS)

**Executive summary and recommendation:** This is a request for the Government of Canada to support a partnership with the broader sports community to build a healthier nation through investment in Canadian University student-athletes and the CIS. Our objective is to create a healthier Canada by supporting our 56 CIS member universities and their 11,000 student-athletes to become catalysts for change for a healthier Canada.

CIS is seeking \$500,000 from the Government of Canada annually and has a plan to secure a commitment from private corporations and other partner organizations to match this initiative that will help address the on-going talent drain of student-athletes from Canada. (The CIS has already approved a pilot project for Women's Hockey with some scholarships).

Canada is estimated to be spending almost \$7 billion annually on preventable health care costs and this innovative project has the potential to build a team of ambassadors (student-athletes) of health and fitness to help us turn the corner on the fight against obesity, costly increases in the treatment of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, and other health related issues. In addition to the athletes' inspirational performances, they will be engaged in community leadership initiatives, school visits, be involved in local sports community events in coaching and developing regional clinics for local kids.

Currently, Canada is losing over 20% of our home-grown student-athletes to foreign sports organizations, primarily the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States. Any student-athlete leaving Canada to train in the US exacts a high cost to our nation. By losing a Canadian student-athlete to the US, we lose a future leader, a game changer for our nation and a potential catalyst for excellence within the sports and health communities of Canada. We also often lose their Alumni dollars, as well as their intellectual and economic contributions to Canada. This potentially includes the future generations of our lost student-athletes.

Our country invests in developing high performance athletes long before they get to University and all of this investment is lost when they leave Canada. Existing Canadian investments and contributors include, the Long Term Athlete Development program (LTAD), the athletes carding system, events such as the Canada Games, Regional Games

such as Ontario Games and organizations such as Own the Podium (OTP), the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC), and the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC).

Many of these athletes who go to the American university sport system (NCAA) often fall out of the Canadian High Performance pathway and are lost to our nation's sport system forever.

By keeping a majority of these athletes in Canada, we can turn the tide and help to create a culture of Health and Fitness in Canada. These 11,000 athletes are creative role models for the future, both academically and athletically. Over 2,500 of them are also recognized as Academic All-Canadians. By investing in our student-athletes, we are developing and supporting our future community leaders. Many will get involved within their own communities, later in life as adults and parents playing such roles as coaches, officials, club board members, fund- raisers and team builders.

The responsibilities of each selected student-athlete will be clearly identified. In addition to his or her academic and athletic performances, the scholarship holder will be explicitly tied to a defined role in promoting health and physical literacy in his or her local community through inspiring talks, regional clinics and youth programs. The identification of qualifying student-athletes for this aid will be accomplished in partnership with the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) as well as OTP, the NSOs and other partners in high performance sport in Canada

Sen. Larry Smith (Football – Bishop's University), Justice minister Peter Mackay (Rugby – Acadia University), George Cope President of Bell (Basketball – Western U.) are shining examples of world class athletes and now play an active role in the success of our nation and were products of the Canadian university sport system (and stayed home!).

#### **Expected investment and savings:**

This \$500,000 annual investment will be allocated to Canadian student-athlete scholarships in order to retain Canada's best and brightest and slow the current drain of Canadian talent. Results are expected and will be measurable. This data will be reported annually after this project is funded. An increase in the relative proportion of national team athletes coming through the CIS system over the next 5 years is expected in coordination with the NSOs. The key performance indicators (KPI) are crucial to the National Sport Organization (NSO) and Own The Podium (OTP) to ensure to all stakeholders that these athletes are following the best performance pathway for exceptional Canadian international performances.

**Federal Funding:**

CIS is seeking a 5 year initial program commitment. Student-athletes in Canada are eligible to compete for a maximum of five years. A full evaluation of the program would be completed upon graduation of the initial cohort of student-athletes awarded scholarships. We also believe that in collaboration with other public and private sector partners in sport and health, we can help reduce the health care cost by 1% by the work and inspiration of these student-athletes, the saving could be close to \$70M.

With this work, in collaboration with other public and private sector partners in sport and health, this program can help provide some of the change that our country needs to inspire active living in Canada. Ideally, this initiative would tie into other existing programs whose purpose is to enhance the development of post secondary leaders within the university environment and empower Canada's future role models.

**Intended beneficiaries:**

Multi-talented university student-athletes who are pursuing sport training and competition while also pursuing their post-secondary education would be the direct beneficiaries. This program is intended to provide adequate support allowing the student-athlete to focus on their studies, their athletic endeavours and their ability to help in their regions.

In the academic year 2012-2013 alone, over 3,900 of our most talented young Canadians pursued their athletic training and competition in American universities. Retaining such high achievers in Canada by providing adequate support would help keep the mentors, coaches, leaders and heroes for all Canadians in their communities, where they can provide more direct inspiration and guidance for the youth. Often, the university athletes are the highest performers in their region and are often the best role models for the next generation.

This initiative is likely to create a "ripple effect"; the retention of more of our top student-athletes (who are the direct beneficiaries of this initiative) will result in an increase in the overall depth of competition and training for their teammates and competitors. In turn, They will serve to enhance and further improve the coaching and provide more incentive for coaches to get involved at this level since the calibre of athlete will continue to get higher as we retain more of them.

Current research speaks to the fact that a large percentage of those who go to the US for their university education do not return to Canada upon graduation, thus resulting in the permanent loss of a potentially valuable and contributing Canadian citizen, similar to the "brain drain" issue that was identified and addressed recently.

**General impacts:**

Sporting events can be a valuable engine of local economic activity, and Canadians feel proud, united and connected to their communities through participation in, and hosting of, sport activities and events. The highest level of sport competition in many sports in Canada for the 18-23 year age group occurs in university sport.

Some of Canada's very best young athletes are often unavailable to Canada's national teams to compete for the country in international competitions due to their commitments to US university programs.

This age group (18-23) is the most vulnerable group for retention problems in the development of national Team athletes. Others are not trained as well as they could be in a coordinated Canadian university system (CIS) integrated with partners such as our National Sports Organizations. More broadly, in consultations for the National Sport Policy, Canadians have identified population health, community building, social development, nation building, and civic engagement as areas in which sport can make the greatest contributions to Canadian society. Many of these goals are also identified pillars in the new CIS strategic plan. Canadians improve their standard of living and economic well being through sport. Communities benefit from healthier citizens, increase productivity and the reduction of health care costs; and the sport and tourism sectors benefit from legacies of hosting of local, regional, national and international sport events including infrastructure development.

Canadian Sport Policy (2012) recognizes the value to Canadians of sport at all levels, including High Performance Sport. In consultations for that policy, "Canadians from diverse backgrounds, sectors and communities sent a clear message that sport is an essential part of life in Canada... The accomplishments of our athletes give Canadians a source of pride ... and sport provides a means for personal and social development...." In addition to the broader societal benefits of a healthier society promoted by sport, the Policy declares that excellence like Canada's record-setting accomplishments in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics is an **"aspiration worthy of focussed and continued pursuit,"** and that the development of athletes as leaders and role models in sport and society is crucial. Yet there is a gap in the high performance sport system in Canada as a high proportion of the most talented of Canadian athletes at the university age level leave Canada to pursue their training and competition in the U.S., and thus they are lost to our communities. In women's hockey alone, 469 of our most talented Canadians were pursuing their training at U.S. universities rather than our own in 2012-13.

\$500,000 annually would provide adequate support to multiple talented young university athletes who cannot be expected to work while pursuing the commitments to high performance sport training and competition while pursuing their continued education. The Government of Canada previously has addressed the "brain-drain" from Canadian universities with the Canada Research Chairs program which has been very successful; the Ten Year Evaluation Report concludes that "recruitment and retention of talent" has been "one of the main successes of the program." This provides excellent precedent that a program to address the ongoing talent drain of Canadian athletes would be successful in contributing to a world-class Canadian sport and health system.

This proposal is part of a broader initiative of CIS working in collaboration and partnership with NSOs, Canadian Sport Centers and OTP for a more integrated approach and effort to address this issue and they will be able to serve and contribute to our communities long after their high performance sport days are behind them.

The coordination of the delivery of this initiative with the multi-sport organizations such as the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), Own The Podium (OTP) and the National Training centers (NTC) with the CIS, will help streamline the Canadian sport landscape. ***“One Team, One Vision, One Canada”*** The benefit of this bold vision is that we will have a more successful group of Canadian athletes internationally that will also help to inspire thousands of kids regionally and thus help develop a healthier and educated population on the power of active living.

Thank you very much.

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