



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 080

Thursday, May 11, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 80 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of Thursday, June 23, 2022.

[*English*]

Now, while public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer ask you to wear masks indoors on the precinct, masks and respirators are still excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases. I encourage their use.

Now, I would like to do some housekeeping. I want to let everyone know.... Well, Ms. Crooks is the only witness. At the bottom of your screen, you will see a little globe. If you press that, it gives you interpretation in the language of your choice: English, French or the original language.

I also want to remind everyone that they must speak through the chair. Also, please keep your mikes on mute when you are not speaking. Click them off as soon as you finish speaking; otherwise, we get all kinds of sounds from the room.

Please do not take photographs of the screen. It's not permitted. You can view this on the House of Commons website later on.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, March 20, 2023, the committee is meeting to continue its study on safe sport.

We have one witness today, the president of Canada Soccer, Ms. Charmaine Crooks. I just want to welcome Ms. Crooks today.

Ms. Crooks, there are a couple of things that you should know. You will be given 10 minutes to present. I will give you a literal shout-out at 30 seconds before the end, so that you can wind up. Then we will go through a question and answer period after that.

Please begin, Ms. Crooks, for 10 minutes. Thank you.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks (President, Canada Soccer): Hello, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I'm Charmaine Crooks. I'm the newly elected volunteer president of Canada Soccer, and I'm honoured to be the first woman and first person of colour to serve in that role in its 111-year history. As someone who has worked for decades to improve inclusion, ethics and well-being in sport, I do not underestimate the importance of this mandate, and I look forward to serving all of the constituents of Canada Soccer.

I'd like to begin today by telling you about my background as an athlete and volunteer. I hope to use my experience to further the conversation about good governance and safe sport in Canada.

I was born in Jamaica into a family of nine children. I came to Canada when I was six. Canada is where I developed and grew as a person and athlete, where I became a Canadian track and field national team member and an Olympic medallist.

I was the first female athlete in Canadian history to be named to five Olympic Games. As a former international competitor during an era when track and field faced systemic sports ethics challenges, I am deeply conscious of the importance of good governance and ethical leadership to ensure a safe and fair sporting environment.

At the 1996 Olympic Games, I was Canada's flag-bearer for the opening ceremony—partly in recognition of my work off the track with sport organizations and athletes. That honour cemented my commitment to being an advocate for making sport better.

In 2012 I was awarded the Order of Canada for my athletics and volunteer work with the international Olympic Movement, including for my efforts to develop the IOC code of ethics.

As a woman of colour who has been part of the elite global sport system, I've experienced both the wonderful and the unfortunate realities that coexist in sport. Whether abuse comes straight at you or is in the form of microaggressions, the pain and damage are real. As leaders, we have a duty to stamp that out.

I believe I've earned the opportunity and have been elected to take on the leadership of Canada Soccer and to use my experiences to help improve and heal it.

Some of my credentials, which I hope can assist this committee in its work, include my work with the first group of active athletes elected by our peers to the International Olympic Committee as voting members. As an IOC Athletes' Commission member, I have focused on building athlete representation and decision-making in the Olympic Movement and supporting athletes during and after their careers. I also served on the IOC culture and education commissions, the IOC 2000 commission, which was a reform commission, the IOC Ethics Commission, and the World Anti-Doping Agency. I believe these experiences are particularly relevant to the discussion we are going to have today about safe sport.

In addition to my role at the IOC, I was a founding member of Right to Play, which seeks to protect, educate and empower children using the power of sport. I also continued my role as a volunteer board member with the Canadian Olympic Committee and as a member of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Organizing Committee. With that background, I am keenly aware of the power and importance of leadership and sport as vehicles for achieving personal realization, uniting people and driving societal change. I'm proud of my record of advocating for athletes and championing fair, equitable and safe sport.

I have provided that background so that the committee here will understand my purpose: To stand by and advocate for athletes, who deserve our utmost respect and who are the reason we all do what we do.

In my new role as volunteer president, I have a duty to uphold Canada Soccer's mission to provide leadership in the pursuit of excellence in soccer at the grassroots, national and international levels. We strive to lead Canada to victory, but we also encourage all Canadians to have a lifelong passion for soccer and work to ensure that it's the safest sport in our country. We are committed to ensuring that the association delivers on every aspect of that mandate every day. Over the last few years, substantial progress has been made to ensure more board engagement, and certainly, in the last few months, there has been a desire to increase transparency.

The modernization of our board has resulted in the election of a woman of colour as president and of Paul-Claude Bérubé, a Quebec lawyer and person with disabilities, as our vice-president. In recent months, Canada Soccer's leadership has brought an improved approach to how we listen and collaborate. We began work with all of our members and partners to build a better, more inclusive environment for players, coaches, referees, administrators and volunteers.

● (1635)

That work strengthens our record over the last decade plus of building robust safe-sport protocols like the Canada Safe Sport Roster. It's also supportive of our commitments to deliver on equal pay and to ensure that the environments for both senior national teams are set up for long-term success. Those priorities will continue to be a focus during my presidency, and we will achieve further improvements in those areas.

On the topic of inclusion, I want to recognize a key step towards a landmark for women's soccer in Canada: the creation of the domestic women's professional league. At the recent Canada Soccer annual meeting, our membership unanimously voted into membership Project 8, the new women's professional soccer league here in

Canada. We are rapidly approaching the day when women's professional teams in Canada will help develop the next generation of women's national team players. I am thrilled for the Project 8 team, and we look forward to the successful future of the league and its players.

Now, our national team players—and all our athletes, referees, members and fans—deserve the very best sports environment. We will continue to work over the next year and beyond to ensure that is the case. On that note, during the past few weeks, as interim and now elected president, I heard from our players, members, partners and fans alike that trust, greater transparency and better communication are crucial to ensuring that we are a stable and strong organization that every Canadian can be proud of. I've heard and I wholeheartedly agree with that input.

In this time of evolution, my mandate, along with the board's, is to continue that work and improve conditions in all areas of our sport. I think we all know that the sports system is imperfect. I'm sure the elected officials who make up this committee know that the best way to make change is to get involved and to usher change from within. That is what I have always striven to do and what I intend to do in my new role.

My key priorities are to ensure that pay equity is realized and that the national teams' budgets are managed effectively to ensure success for our women's and men's programs; to engage in discussions with Canadian Soccer Business to ensure that both parties benefit equally from this partnership and that discussions around the women's game in Canada are continued; to get more people from the business world and more players engaged in governance to ensure that they have a voice in the association's direction, thereby providing more voting power for members and ensuring that the grassroots level has a voice throughout the association; to ensure that full administrative and financial transparency is ensured and eliminate the uncertainty and misunderstandings that led to some of the hardships within the association and with our players; and finally, to build an environment in which people feel safe to participate in our sport and to voice their opinions, and in which diversity is valued and included.

As interim president, I contacted and met with many stakeholders, including territorial and provincial members, players' representatives, alumni, the Project 8 team, CSB and others. As president, I intend to continue that outreach, and have already started that in my first week.

I've lived my life advocating for athletes' rights. I know that to build trust you need to be transparent and actually follow through on what you say you will do. I know what it's like for athletes to make personal and financial sacrifices, to train for long hours, to spend time away from family and to put their minds and bodies on the line to realize their dreams for Canada.

As president, I'm excited for and committed to realizing the current opportunity to heal and move Canada Soccer forward so we continue to grow the grassroots, build on the success of our national teams and truly maximize the potential of the professional game in both the women's and men's games. That commitment includes appearing before you today to address your questions directly and with respect.

In turn, during your questioning I expect members of this committee to display the proper respect and decorum that this important vital topic deserves and to further the principles of safe sport, which include creating safe spaces for solution-seeking and discussion. I, along with my partners and along with all the members, will execute this presidency in the same spirit.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Crooks. I was just about to give you a 30-second shout-out, so there you go.

Now we're going to the question and answer component. The first round is a six-minute round. The six minutes includes the question and answer. We have shortened this meeting because of the votes, and I know it's Thursday and all kinds of people have to get flights to get home, etc., so I'm hoping we can get a lot of questions in during the time we have allocated.

I shall go to the Conservatives. First up will be Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have six minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Chair, before I start, I would like to clarify the time at which this meeting will end.

The Chair: Given that with past meetings on Thursdays people have rushed to get trains and planes, I would suggest that we could go to six o'clock, but I think that most people might find 5:45 better.

Again, I will bow to the will of the committee, whatever it wants to do. If 5:45 is fine, that's okay, but if you want to go to six o'clock, we will do that.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm hearing 5:45 around the table.

The Chair: All right. We will finish at 5:45 exactly.

Thank you.

Mr. Waugh, you have six minutes.

• (1645)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

Welcome, Ms. Crooks.

I don't have to tell you that the national teams are absolutely pissed off with you and your organization. Before the AGM in New Brunswick, they sent letters out to everybody. They are absolutely disappointed in the leadership of Canada Soccer, which you have been a part of for the last 10 years.

I did hear your 10-minute speech. You have a problem with both national teams. Not only one now, but both of them are demanding massive change.

What are you going to do for them?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: First of all, what happened in the past was not perfect. I acknowledge that. That's why I stepped up to be president, and that's why I ran for election. I just want to make sport better.

Of course, I acknowledge a lot of the historic hurts that have happened in the past with our athletes, but we are working to make it a better place. All of us want to make Canada Soccer a better place. We've had challenges, and we will continue to work through those.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Have you spoken to any of the team members since Saturday's vote?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Yes, I have seen many of the players, and I have spoken to some of the alumni, and we will move forward in the direction that will make us better. I've heard their concerns, and we are acting on many of them immediately.

One of the pillars will be athletes' engagement in the governance process, and we have already started looking at how that will be done.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Canada Soccer has been heavily criticized for conflicts of interest among its management ranks. According to The Globe and Mail, its policies to manage conflicts of interest received a failing grade—in fact, two of them, they said—suggesting that signs of a problem were apparent a few years ago. It also received a dismal grade for board development—one out of five.

You were on this board. I'd like your thoughts on what the information accessed by The Globe and Mail says about Canada Soccer. You are the second-most powerful sport agency in the country, yet you have a two and a one out of five, which are both failing grades.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I did see some of that report this morning. I believe those reports are necessary as measures to see where organizations are, particularly when it comes to governance. What I can say is that our governance policies are aligned with some of the new initiatives that were announced today.

We have a very diverse board. We have a board with 40% independent members, so we have changed a lot of structures even in light of some of the new governance matters I heard about today. We hope that we will be better. We are working on being better and on making sure that all the voices throughout our organization are heard.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Your organization has not revealed the names of coaches who have been suspended. Athletics Canada and Gymnastics Canada have done so.

Why have you refused to name these coaches over the years?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm not sure what the essence of that question is, but I can say that we have a very strong safe sport roster. That policy was put into place and approved by the board in 2019. With that roster now, a coach cannot move around the country without our knowing who they are. This is what we are doing within the safe sport roster to ensure that a coach who has breached will never be able to coach anywhere in the system across Canada.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Will you show coaches who have been suspended? Will other people in this country have access to that, or is it just a national registry? What are you going to do to show provinces and teams in this country that there are issues with coaches in this country?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As you know, we are now going through the ITP recommendations following the McLaren report, and we will put all those in place. We are looking to strengthen that so that anybody who wants to go beyond the system and the rules will not be able to do that.

Our goal is to make this sport the safest in Canada, and we are strengthening that every day to be able to do that, especially with the coaches.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

I'm going to switch it now to Mr. Martel.

Mr. Martel, you have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you to my colleague.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's actually less than two minutes, Richard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: All right.

Ms. Crooks, I would like to know what your relationship is with the Canadian Soccer Business agency.

I know it's a very successful agency, and I would like to know if you are can make certain decisions yourself or if Canada Soccer is completely dependent on Canadian Soccer Business.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As you may have heard in previous testimony, Canadian Soccer Business is an agency relationship we have that benefits soccer all across the country. In the past, to grow

our game, we would have had to spend millions on broadcasting. What this has provided for us is the opportunity to grow our game through broadcasting and streaming rights. In the first 24 hours of my interim presidency, I had conversations with Canadian Soccer Business, and we are currently looking at ways to modernize this agreement. That includes looking at the unilateral terms, as well as at opportunities for sponsorship growth throughout.

Right now it may not be the most perfect deal, but this is an opportunity for us to grow our game.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: You are admitting that right now there is a problem between Canada Soccer and Canadian Soccer Business.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

The Chair: We are over six minutes, but I will allow Ms. Crooks to provide a quick answer to that.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I did not mention that. What I did say is that it is not a perfect deal. A lot of deals are not perfect deals, but we believe that in this time we will modernize it. We have already started that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will go to the second questioner, and that's for the Liberals.

Anthony Housefather, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Crooks, I want to start by thanking you for your enormous contribution to Canadian sports and to the Olympic movement for so long. I just want to ask a few questions, if that's okay, to clean up some things from last week's election.

First, can you commit that you will not terminate or sanction John Herdman or Bev Priestman in their roles, given that the men's team and women's team came out as being opposed to your presidency? Will you commit to not taking any vindictive action against people who were against you for the presidency?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I work for every single constituent across the country, no matter how they voted. As you know, the elections involved a wide membership, including the provinces and territories, the MLS teams, the CPL teams, the coaches, the referees and the players. Perhaps there might have been different views, but this is no reflection on anyone in particular. I'm looking at this as an opportunity to give back, and I'll work for every corner of the organization, from the grassroots all the way up to our national teams.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Basically, you're assuring me that there will not be any retribution against anybody who didn't support you. Is that correct?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: There will absolutely not be. It's about building bridges.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I know there was a bit of a controversy last weekend, when Stephanie Labbé asked you if you had been at that meeting that we've talked about at this committee. At that meeting, Mr. Bontis said, "What was Christine bitching about?" in reference to Ms. Sinclair. You said you weren't there. Are you confident that you weren't there, given that now Ms. Sinclair, Quinn and Ms. Schmidt have all said you were there?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I checked my schedule, and I did not see a meeting matching the date when that call may or may not have taken place. For me it is really about respect. It's about respect for our players. It's about respect for everybody who touches our organization. That kind of language and that kind of tone when speaking with our players or anybody is something that I would never, ever condone.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I believe, of course, Ms. Crooks, that you wouldn't. The question is that Sean Bawden, who was the lawyer representing Canada Soccer, confirmed by email for this video conference on Friday, January 28, that you would be one of the attendees. He did so only a day before the call. I think the feeling is that if you were there, why didn't you say something to Mr. Bontis? You're confident, even though the lawyer for Canada Soccer said you were going to be there and the players all remember you being there, that you weren't there?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As I said, I checked my schedule and did not see that I had accepted an invitation to be on that call, but I stand by the point that the tone and rhetoric and language that were displayed to all of those players was totally unacceptable.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Also, Dino Rossi was elected to the board this weekend. Mr. Rossi is the commissioner of a CSB-owned league. Can you confirm to this committee that Mr. Rossi will be recused and will not be part of any discussions related to Canadian Soccer Business that Canada Soccer undertakes? Have you taken steps as president to make sure that happens?

• (1655)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Governance, rules, following bylaws and following procedures are of the utmost value to this organization. Conflicts of interest are also a part of that.

As you know, Mr. Rossi, through the nominations process, did address this. My understanding, through our bylaws, is that anyone who has a perceived conflict would have up to 90 days to be able to remove themselves from that conflict, and if they have any other conflicts that may come up throughout the period of their term, every year they have to declare them.

Also, before every meeting, we have to declare our conflicts. I'm confident that any conflict anyone would have would be declared and that the person would recuse themselves from any matters pertaining to that issue.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

My belief is that he should recuse himself. I just wanted to make sure that you as president were cognizant of that—

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Yes, I'm very cognizant of that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: —because I think that Canadian Soccer Business is what I will be asking about in my next round, throughout the round. It's a very important issue.

To also clarify one other thing, we've had a whole succession of former Canada Soccer presidents—Mr. Montagliani, number one, and then Mr. Bontis now—who have occupied roles at Concacaf and FIFA. Do you occupy any roles at Concacaf or FIFA, Ms. Crooks?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I have no role at Concacaf. For many years, I have been a member of the FIFA competitions commission, which looks at all the different FIFA-related competitions around the world. That's the only committee I'm on, and that is—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's not a paying role, is it?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: That is an unpaid role.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Exactly, okay. Thank you.

There's a last thing I want to ask, because it has come up, and I want to clarify all of this before I get to my substantive round about Canadian Soccer Business. There have been allegations that Mr. Montagliani played quite a big role in this election—that he was making calls on your behalf to different provincial organizations. People have come forward saying that he was threatening that Concacaf and FIFA would leave Canada or would not support tournaments in Canada and other stuff. Did Mr. Montagliani campaign on your behalf at all? Are you aware of this?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: To suggest that I am in this role because somebody did something or said something, I think, is a real disservice, not just to me, as somebody who has been in this sport for a long time—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That is not what I said, Ms. Crooks. I did not say that. I want to correct that. I did not say that you were in this role because of it.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you. I'm sorry.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm saying that there was an allegation that this gentleman was campaigning for you and making threats. I want to understand. Did this gentleman do any campaigning for you?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I do not understand that to be the case. Our members are the ones who vote for us in the elections.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's correct, but people make calls to the voters—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

The Chair: You can come back to that line of questioning later on if you wish.

We need to go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

I'm sorry. I think it's Mr. Lemire.

Sébastien, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to begin by mentioning an announcement made by Minister St-Onge and which affects our work.

There are many things which show that this committee listens. I want to repeat that we expect an independent public inquiry to be called as soon as possible.

Ms. Crooks, thank you for being here.

I would like to add my voice to that of Ms. Ciara McCormack, who asked committee members via social media to ask you the following question.

During the years you were on the Canada Soccer board of directors, what did you do to remove Mr. Bob Birarda, a coach who was abusing female athletes and was constantly around young athletes? When was he permanently suspended?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Excuse me. May I please ask for a repetition of the last part of your question? I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: What did you do to remove coach Bob Birarda? We know that the board of directors had been made aware of the allegations against Mr. Birarda.

When was he permanently suspended so that he could not join other federations?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you.

Regarding your question, first of all I want to say how deeply saddened we all were when the board was made aware in 2019 of these allegations. One thing that was done immediately was to ask a board member with appropriate experience to reach out to the former members. As you know, a staff member also did that, and it was also an opportunity to have some additional input.

At that time, when that incident occurred.... I was not on the board in 2008 when the matters related to Mr. Birarda happened, but in 2019 I can assure you that there was immediate action to close those gaps in the certification system. The mechanisms were not in place when that happened in 2008. They are now, and the safe sport roster and all the matters we are doing to do that would ensure that this would never happen again.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: If I may, I'd like to stay on this topic.

In July 2019, you were on the board when safe sports were discussed and you requested that the meeting be rescheduled to October 2019.

Why did you not take this opportunity to discuss Mr. Bob Birarda's case at that time?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I was not on the board in 2008. My term at Canada Soccer started in 2013.

We all became aware of the information about Mr. Birarda in 2019. You've had several former presidents who have been to this committee who have also shared their insights on this matter.

Our actions are what we did after 2019. I'm very confident that our safe sport roster, which continues to be improved through the McLaren report and through the work of Allison Forsyth, would ensure that it would never, ever happen again.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Why is your most recent financial report, as of today, not in the Corporations Canada registry or on your website, despite what good transparency practices and regulations require?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: This is something I have certainly advocated for, for a very long time. In our AMM just recently, we approved that all of our minutes and all of our financial records will be posted online, which is a governance best practice. We finally have an opportunity...and this will be shared in the interests of further transparency for the organization.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Can you tell us when that will happen?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm sorry, but I didn't hear you.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: When will that happen?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: We hope to have this up very shortly. We're working on it now.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Can you be more specific and tell us what you mean by «very shortly»?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: The AMM just completed a few days ago, so our team is working on making sure all of our financial records and minutes are posted publicly.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Will it happen in June?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm happy to get you the exact date. We'll make sure to inform this committee as soon as that information is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: We will obviously have to hold another meeting.

We've talked a lot about Canada Soccer's financial management over the past two years. According to the most recent reports, Canada Soccer is in the red, a red even deeper than the Nike jerseys worn by national teams. Many current and former players have stated that Canada Soccer handcuffed itself by entering into an agreement that did not financially consider the progress of national teams or the well-being of athletes. Both male and female players were neglected.

How do you explain that the organization's precarious health persists despite the positive outlook for progress?

Why do you think this is, since you helped to make those decisions?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: The current deficit has been attributed to the board's decision to retroactively pay our women's national team on the basis, of course, of equal pay. Also, the costs from some recent men's national team matches have allowed us to be where we are now, not to mention the COVID-19 recovery and also the very extensive travel that had to be taken over the past year for our respective teams to travel to World Cup and training competitions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

I go now to the New Democrats and Peter Julian.

Peter, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's Ms. Zarrillo sitting in for Peter Julian today.

The Chair: Welcome.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I wanted to start by recognizing your outstanding achievements in Olympic sports. Thank you so much for that.

You mentioned at the top of the hour that it's a volunteer position. Has this presidency role always been a volunteer position?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: My understanding is yes, it has been. It's an honour to serve, absolutely.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Ms. Crooks.

I'm wondering, in the past 10 years that you have been on the board, whether there were pecuniary advantages to this presidency. With past presidents, in your term, were you aware of any pecuniary advantages that they might have benefited from?

• (1705)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I am not familiar with any of those advantages. I know that I will continue to serve in this role as a volunteer.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Ms. Crooks, you've been with this organization for a long time, and I'm sure you've faced many of the challenges we heard about—I was here—in the testimony on March 9 around equity and around gender discrimination. I wonder if you wouldn't mind sharing what challenges, in your 10-year tenure, you ran into on equity and transparency, and whether you feel that some of those challenges have been removed with the loss of some of the leadership.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I believe we have an opportunity to reset the organization. I also strongly believe that through our safe sport roster and the new progressive gold standard that we want to lead to, we will be in a better place.

My leadership is one that is very open and working very closely with the team. For example, when I was on the board for many years, it was very different, but I also know that it takes time to understand an organization and to be in a position to make that positive difference. I want to be the type of president for the organization who gives back, who listens and who truly engages all the partners. I have had the opportunity to do that over the past few weeks. As I mentioned, trust, transparency and open communication are the things that I believe in, and those are the things that I believe this role provides an opportunity for the organization to do.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Ms. Crooks. I see that you have a clear vision of what needs to be done.

I'm really trying to understand the cultural barriers within the sport organization that didn't allow some of that leadership and some of your vision to break through over the past 10 years. What were some of the barriers and the challenges you faced that didn't allow this to happen in the last 10 years? I think you were the vice-president before, for many of those years.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I was vice-president for a year.

I believe that decisions are made collectively. There have been a lot of times and a lot of opportunities when individual voices had a chance to share and a chance to contribute. I feel that I've had that in many ways, and I'm giving that even more to my board. That is a style. I strongly believe that this is the start of the work, not the end, and this new direction should yield more of that trust.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: In that vein—

The Chair: Excuse me. I'm sorry. Whoever on the floor has an open mike, can you please mute it?

Thank you.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: It could be me.

In that vein of change, it seems that it was common practice within Canada Soccer to conclude with oral agreements rather than written ones. I'm wondering if you have any plans for governance changes that are needed in regard to more than just a gentlemen's handshake, and more of some actual written governance and expectations there.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I agree that we will continue to build on all of our governance policies, as mentioned earlier—posting our minutes and having better structure, better involvement and better engagement from all the members. I've already started to work very quickly on how to engage more athletes, with a players' council and an alumni association built in. I came through that, and as an athlete I know how important that voice is.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you. This is my last question.

When I was here last, I was asking about who had seen and who signed the documents with the business agreement that was made. As a board member, did you ever see those documents before signatures were put on them?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I saw most of those documents before the signatures were there, but from what I understand, there was an administrative oversight when it came to the finalization of signatures on those documents.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ms. Crooks.

The Chair: You know that you have a little less than a minute left.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm going to ask, then, about the equity and the funding. I just want to talk a bit about gender equality and discrimination. It shows that 39% of Canada Soccer funds were invested in the men's national team and 18% in the women's national team. Was that ever raised before you became the president?

• (1710)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: It wasn't.

In terms of some of the inequities that are happening, as you know, we are now fully committed to pay equity. For any member of our national team looking at program equity as well as pay equity, we are deeply committed to that.

With that, we will have a women's team that is the second-highest-paid team in the world. As Canadians, we can all be proud of that opportunity to show gender diversity throughout the organization. Whether it's for player pay, whether it's board members or whether it's looking throughout our membership, equity and diversity—DEI especially—will be an even stronger part of that moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to the second round. The second round begins with the Conservatives for five minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the witness for being here. I have some questions and will probably go quickly.

You referred to talking about decision-making with “we”. Does that mean in the past as a board and in the future as a board?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: In the future we will.... The board.... Of course, I am president, but I have a style that works very collaboratively and depending on what.... The decisions, again, always rest ultimately with us, but—

Mr. Martin Shields: Then it's a “we”. Are you saying that the board in the past didn't operate as a “we”, but you used that as “we” made decisions in the past?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: When it comes to decision-making with any board, it is “we”. We work together through collaboration.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

You said you'd used your voice in the past on this board. You talked about respect in the organization. When we talk about the CSB agreement, you seconded the motion for that agreement.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I don't recall seconding that motion. I'll have to look at that, sir.

Mr. Martin Shields: We have it here. If you seconded that motion, did you read that agreement?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I read agreements, and I read all the documents that are put before us, which is good governance. Anybody who serves on a board, volunteer.... We have to read documents.

Mr. Martin Shields: Did you read that document that you seconded on the CSB agreement?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I read all documents that come in front of me.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

You referred to reaching out to people. We have a quote from Christine Sinclair. Of course, that's a name I know and recognize in soccer. She said, in fact, “Since she has been elected...she has not reached out [to me].”

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: When that comment was made, when they were in front of this Parliament, it was four days into my interim presidency, so you can imagine the scale.

I was actually told that I would have to work through the coaches in order to connect with the athletes. As is normal protocol with us, we reach out through the coaches, through the athletes and through the players. There's a busy time for them through their competitive schedule. I would not ever make demands on their time, but we did have a meeting two weeks after that, when it was possible for all of us to be together. We had quite a cordial meeting and talked about some of their challenges and some of the opportunities to grow and work together.

Mr. Martin Shields: Was Ms. Sinclair part of that meeting? Was Ms. Sinclair part of that?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: That meeting was with my vice-president at the time, who is also a woman, Kelly Brown. We had a meeting—

Mr. Martin Shields: Was Sinclair involved in that meeting?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: —with all four of the senior member teams.

I'm sorry, I didn't...

Mr. Martin Shields: Was Sinclair involved in that meeting? Have you met with her since?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: It was Sinclair, it was Quinn, it was Janine Beckie and it was Ms. Schmidt. All four who were in front of you—

Mr. Martin Shields: I appreciate that.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: We worked, again, through the coaches to meet them.

Mr. Martin Shields: The person who you were running against for president has quoted that Rob came right out and said the CSB agreement “has to be ripped up and renegotiated”.

Will you rip it up and renegotiate that agreement?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As I mentioned earlier, that agreement is in the process of being modernized.

We have an opportunity to look at all our agreements. We are looking to modernize that to be more in line with sponsorship opportunities and to be more in line with time frames as well.

Looking at opportunities to grow our game is what we do. Every partnership that we have should always be looked at in the vein that it helps to grow our game.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, I appreciate that. I'm not sure what “modernization” means.

On the voting structure, there are 85 votes, with 15 potentially coming from one source—Canada Soccer.... Are you going to change the voting structure for president?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As a matter of fact, we already decided in November that we will look at the entire structure of our governance when it comes to voting. We will have [*Inaudible—Editor*] meetings—

• (1715)

Mr. Martin Shields: That's not what I asked. Are you in favour of changing the voting structure?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm in favour of a structure that is fair and equitable to all the groups across, but it's up to the membership to have that dialogue, to have that conversation and to be compliant and in line—

Mr. Martin Shields: I understand that, but my question is about you. What is your opinion on that voting structure?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: My opinion is that we will work to put in a structure that is for the benefit of all constituents across the country.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's a non-answer. Are you going to run for president another term?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As you know, my presidency now is a one-year term to serve out the term of Nick Bontis. At the end of the day, it will be those members who will vote if I choose to move forward in the next year.

Mr. Martin Shields: Are you going to run?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: It will be up to the members and how my work is, and that decision will be made at that time.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: You're welcome.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I now go to the Liberals and Lisa Hepfner.

Lisa, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to echo some of my colleagues and thank Ms. Crooks very much for appearing here today and also for her amazing contributions to our country and our culture. We really appreciate that.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you, Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I would like to ask you about something that I've been curious about since we had the women's team appear before us at committee. Shortly before they appeared before us, a press release came out from Canada Soccer that detailed a bit about the proposed collective agreement. I thought the timing was a little strange and was hoping that you could explain for us how that all happened.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As you may recall, there was a press release that outlined where we were in the labour negotiations. For that release, perhaps the timing may not have been the best timing, but the general secretary just wanted to make sure that information was out there. It was going to be out there, but the timing was just what it was.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Okay. Thank you.

You did talk in your opening statement about ethical leadership and how it's necessary for good governance. You are also—I looked at your biography—a founding member of the IOC Ethics Committee. Would you tell us about what it means to have ethics in governance and how you envision and implement that?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: As a member of that committee, we certainly dealt with a lot of the fallout that happened as a result of the Salt Lake City scandal, when many IOC members were removed. Also what we did was to set up the IOC code of ethics, which is now in place. These are the guiding principles about ethics in sport. They touch on governance. They touch on breaches. They touch on everything, as you would be well aware, that would be aligned with leadership and ethical principles in sport.

I was very proud of that work, but I also believe that this work and ethics in sport should permeate within all organizations, particularly here in Canada. We cannot be complacent when it comes to ethics in sport. I think we should always be evolving, and we should always have opportunities for dialogue. The work your committee is doing is part of that. It's setting that foundation. It really is setting that foundational work that gives us an opportunity not just to be better as an organization but to be better as Canadians.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

I think you've expressed to us at this committee today some of the processes you've implemented to try to make Canada Soccer more transparent and accountable. I don't know if there's anything you want to add to that, but I'd also like to ask you, because this has been a big story and a lot of people have been talking about Soccer Canada lately, is there anything out there that you feel has been misrepresented? Is there anything you would like to clarify for the public while you have a couple of minutes left?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm honoured to be part of an organization that goes from the grassroots all the way up to the national team level. That does present some of the complexities, of course, but I always look at sport as being sport for all, and soccer is for all. It's in every corridor of our country.

We want to make sure we have a framework and we have the opportunities, so that everyone is engaged: men, women and various diverse groups, from indigenous communities to the very multi-ethnic groups across our country. This is the kind of organization we want to build. Yes, it's one that is transparent and that's built on trust, and again, that's built on further transparency, but we also have our athletes. We have to make sure we do right by them, because they are the ones...their platforms are so powerful and so important, and they are the inspiration for our nation.

That's what drives me every day. We just want to put our arms around so many of the various groups that aren't a part of Canada Soccer and bring them in and let them feel that this is a safe environment that they can be a part of.

• (1720)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Ms. Crooks.

I'm not sure you have enough time to answer my next question fulsomely. We've spoken about this already today a bit, but I still don't fully understand why there has been such a disparity in the incomes of the men players and the women players. Perhaps you could give us some sort of brief afterwards or address it later in the committee and help us break this down and show us more clearly how you're going to achieve pay equity in soccer.

The Chair: Thank you, Lisa. Maybe Ms. Crooks can address that in a later question.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'd be happy to. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Crooks, are you the president of NGU Consultants?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Excuse me? I'm sorry?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Ms. Crooks, are you the president of NGU Consultants?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: That is my consulting company, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: How many contracts have you, your spouse or a member of your family received as compensation from FIFA until now?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I have never received any compensation and have never had any work directed by FIFA to any of my companies, no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: What about members of your family?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: No, nobody from my family has.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Have you ever received money from Canada Soccer when you were sat on the board?

You said that your current activities were carried out on a volunteer basis, but in the past is it possible that you received financial compensation for those activities?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I have never received any payment for any service. I've never provided any service for Canada Soccer except in my volunteer capacity as a member of the board.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

Your name appeared in Vancouver newspapers and it came up in the minutes of proceedings of the City of Vancouver. At the time, it had to do with the Olympic Games.

Can you tell us why? Was there some kind of controversy?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm sorry. I didn't.... With the Olympics...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I'm referring to the Winter Olympics which were held in Vancouver in 2010.

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I was a board member of the Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, from the bid all the way up and through to the successful games that left a lot of legacies for Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Does Canada Soccer have a partnership with Nike?

Do you currently have a contract with CSB?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: No. I have never received any contract from CSB. That would be a complete conflict of interest.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Were female athletes in touch with Nike representatives under its partnership with Canada Soccer?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I'm not exactly sure what that question pertains to, but I do not work as an agent for any of our players. That might be a question best posed to them directly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Crooks.

Thank you, Sébastien.

I'm now going to go to the NDP for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm from B.C. It was quite shocking for the soccer community, certainly in B.C. and around the Vancouver region, where I was, when the news came out about Mr. Birarda.

My question is about some of the conversations that are happening now in the community on all sports, not just soccer, and the abuse and that imbalance of power that exists.

I see here that Richard McLaren and McLaren Global Sport Solutions called Canada Soccer's governance "dysfunctional and inefficient". This was back in 2008.

I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on that. I asked you some questions earlier about governance. I'm wondering what your thoughts are about those words, "dysfunctional and inefficient" governance. Is that what you experienced in your term?

• (1725)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I can't speak to how it was back then, but I can speak to it now.

We have a board with some highly experienced individuals from the corporate world who have joined. We've just had a few new independent board members join today. I'm proud to say that almost half of them are women, and most are from the corporate sector. We can be proud of that. Many of them speak both official languages, which we are improving on, including our vice-president.

I believe that governance training is very important, particularly for sports boards. We are volunteers primarily, but a lot of us per-

haps do other things outside of the sport world. Some of the potential governance changes we're looking at today for organizations are to make sure we have a higher level of expertise. We're constantly looking at how we can build our matrix of experts.

However, we have some voices that are missing. I believe the athlete voice is one of them. I went through as an athlete in many organizations, which gave me a chance to have a voice. We want our athletes to also have an opportunity to have a voice.

With regard to players' counsel, we have on our board a former national team player. She is there more as an independent member, but she is there, and she is an incredible board member. She gives such incredible context, because she lived that game.

The more we do that, I believe the better we will be able to serve the organization.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I want to get one more question in.

It seems that Canada Soccer was being run as a business. It started to be really about a business. It started to be about where the money was coming and going. I believe they lost sight of the athletes. We heard that even from the team.

Around youth and young people, you mentioned in your comments that you want to invest in them.

I want to understand whether you feel there has been a change in that mindset, from a handshake, gentlemen's agreement-driven business organization, to an organization that is going to be able to get itself on the path of caring about young athletes all the way through their lives.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: You said that exactly how I was going to start my response. We are an organization that is complex because we have a variety of stakeholders, from the grassroots all the way up to the national team. We also have our professional teams as well that are part of that. It is complex, but we want to make sure we are serving all of the constituents.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will go to Richard Martel for the Conservatives.

You have five minutes, Richard.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Crooks, I know there have been many budget cuts and that it has affected your funding.

What impact did it have on the development of young players and on the structure of amateur sport? How does that play out in your plan?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I see that we are continuing to look at ways to make sure we do not compromise what the players and our youth of today have to do on the pitch.

We work very closely with the technical team, but we also have to open up other partnerships throughout the region to share some resources. We are not the only member association that has been under a lot of financial strain.

I can assure you that we will always do it with a gender-equity lens in mind, to make sure we are doing for the young men and young women the same as we're doing for all of them across the organization.

I hope that answers part of your question. I didn't hear the second part. I'm sorry.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Ms. Crooks, what is your plan with regard to the training of coaches? Will they get more training? Will there be a follow-up?

Will reports have to be presented?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: We will continue to have more training, especially when it comes to safe sport, for all coaches, officials, administrators, volunteers and even the board. Nobody will not be part of the safe sport training that will be available, to make sure we have that throughout the organization.

That is a part of building a safe sport culture.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Who will train the coaches working with young players?

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: We currently have a system in place internally in which this is already happening, and we are going to strengthen that. We have on our staff those who are working on development, and they work directly with the provincial and territorial member associations on much of that coaching training certification that we're all aware of.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Ms. Crooks, I'm curious about something. I'll offer an observation. Quite a few questions have been asked of you today with regard to.... There were questions about being on the call when Mr. Nick Bontis called Sinclair a bitch. You denied being there, even though we have evidence to the contrary.

Further to that, you were asked questions with regard to the Canadian Soccer Business deal. You denied that, even though we have the minutes in front of us that say you seconded that motion at committee.

I noted that when you were asked those two questions, your posture was tight and you had a very formulated answer ready to go, but I've noticed that when we asked you other questions, you've been more free. You kind of chuckled. I wonder if you're lying. Are you being totally truthful with us today, or are you skirting our questions?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I vehemently reject that notion. I came to you today to speak openly, with respect and in the spirit of safe sport. That's why I'm here, and that's what I will continue to do.

To say that I missed something or what have you, or that I do not recall.... I've put a lot of motions on the table over these years that I do not recall, and I vehemently reject that notion.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: None of our questions have been skirted by you today, then. You have been as truthful as you possibly could be. You have told the truth, the full truth and nothing but the truth. You have not reserved anything from us today.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I took an oath before I presented before you today. Everything that I am telling you is the truth, based on everything that I knew at the time, and I am sharing with you openly.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: In the few seconds you have left, give me two solid steps you're going to take to "modernize" the CSB.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I've talked about it already, and we've already started that process. One of them is to look at the term limits, and the other one is to look at how we can increase sponsorship throughout the organization.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Thomas.

We will now go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather for five minutes.

You have five minutes, Anthony.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ms. Crooks.

I want to go back to something. My colleague from the NDP, Ms. Zarrillo, mentioned the McLaren report, which, of course, wasn't in 2008. It was much more recent. It also involved a review in 2019, when 14 U-20 players came forward to share their accounts of abuse and bullying at the hands of Birarda, which was reported on extensively by the press.

What I think was surprising at the time was that Canada Soccer didn't go talk to those people who alleged that they had been victimized. You just came forward with a very bland statement that Canada Soccer didn't have any further details about the ongoing matter. I think that was the concern on that. You're not responsible in any way for what happened in 2008, but there was a feeling that there was a lack of sensitivity by the board in 2019.

Let me ask about CSB. I can understand that lots of motions come before the Canada Soccer board at every meeting, but of course this is the most important deal that Canada Soccer has signed in the last 10 years. You would think that motion would be much more memorable and relevant than other motions.

I know there was a negotiating team. I know there was outside counsel, but you, as a very smart businesswoman, would have asked some questions. Did you ask the negotiators why they agreed to a 20-year agreement in which the CSB had a unilateral option to extend after 10 years and Canada Soccer did not?

• (1735)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: There was a team internally, as you know, in our structure. The secretary general works very closely on these deals. On what we knew at the time and what was presented to us, we made a decision. It was based on the information that was presented to us at the time. A 20-year—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm very sorry, Ms. Crooks. I have only a limited amount of time. I understand, but I was asking a very specific question.

As a smart businesswoman, yes, there are people whom the board puts out to negotiate, but then it comes back to the board. Everyone on the board has the ability to ask questions and poke holes. Did you ask why they agreed to a unilateral extension after 10 years for CSB and to not giving Canada Soccer the option to exit the contract after 10 years if it was not working out?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Again, this was an opportunity to grow the deal. After IMG, the CSB opportunity was what was presented to us. Based on the information we had, and looking at the upside of \$3 million a year when we had a lot of challenges within the organization, it was a deal that at the time was good. Times have now changed. We have to look at it—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Can I ask a question? I'm so sorry. I know you're not here—

The Chair: Excuse me. I will just pause this for a second.

There is a mike open on the floor. Someone is coughing. We can hear the echo. Could you all look at your red light and make sure it's off, please?

I paused, Anthony, so I didn't take any of your time. Go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Crooks, I understand that, but again, you keep saying that you were presented with this and you were presented with that. You were an independent board member. There are questions around why you unilaterally went to CSB and didn't allow the deal to be bid, including by those who were doing the contracts in the United States and Mexico. Why would you agree to a 20-year term? Yes, it may have looked like there was an upside of \$3 million at the outset, but everybody knew there was not a great upside going forward. The deal has figures where the amounts never go over \$4.5 million after 20 years.

For example, if you had negotiated that if we make the Olympics the deal goes up to \$8 million, or that if we make the World Cup the deal goes up to \$10 million, or that if we host a World Cup it goes up to \$15 million, those would be upsides. None of those are there. I think as a smart businesswoman you would have seen that.

My question is this: Did you ask those questions at the time, or did you just rely on this negotiating team and the outside counsel to come forward with a deal that in the end pretty much the universality of people who have looked at it thinks doesn't make any sense?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: This deal will be modernized. These same challenges that we're talking about today...we also feel a lot of that. We want to make sure that whatever comes out of this, it's in

the best interests of Canada Soccer moving forward. There have been some precedents with other associations that also have had long-term deals, but where we are now is looking at how we can make it better. There is an opening, and we are taking that and working that together.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm going to wind up with a last question, Madam Chair. I know I have only 24 seconds.

Again, Ms. Crooks, you talked about the leverage, but where is the leverage? You signed a deal for 20 years, for which you have no exit terms. They defaulted during the pandemic in paying, but Canada Soccer didn't take any action to declare them in default. Why did you sign a deal that created no women's professional league, yet you let the women's team assets be part of this deal to create the CPL? None of this makes any sense.

● (1740)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: We are looking at every single angle to be able to fix some of these, to correct some of the areas of this partnership.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have five minutes left to go on this, everyone. We could go with a round of three, three, 1.5 and 1.5, but that's really pushing it. Do you feel you've asked all the burning questions? We committed to 5:45 p.m.

Can I get a sense of whether people would like to end the questions now?

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): I think we agreed to end at 5:45, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes. We're almost there.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I think there are heads nodding that perhaps it's time to adjourn, so I will move said motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank Ms. Crooks for being here, and I want to thank everyone on the committee for getting along so nicely and keeping to time.

Thank you very much, Ms. Crooks. We appreciate your presence.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you.

The Chair: We want to thank you for being here today.

I declare the meeting adjourned.

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