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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry





## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Monday, May 15, 2023

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 81 of the 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.

[*English*]

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

I have a bit of housekeeping. While public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require mask wearing indoors or in the precinct, masks and respirators are still excellent tools to protect against the spread of COVID and other respiratory diseases, so they are recommended.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that they are not allowed to take photos of your screen. Everything will be out on the public website, so you'll be able to see it there.

For anyone who is virtual, at the bottom of your screen there is a little icon—it looks like a globe—for interpretation. If you press it, it will give you the option of English, French or floor audio. When you speak, speak through the chair. Keep your mike muted when you're not speaking and to ensure that you do not speak unless you are asked to speak, or unless your name is called.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, the committee is meeting to continue the study on safe sport in Canada.

I want to welcome witnesses this morning.

From the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, we have Jeremy Luke, president and chief executive officer; and Karri Dawson, executive director, values-based sport.

From Own the Podium, we have Anne Merklinger, chief executive officer; and from Sport'Aide we have Sylvain Croteau, executive director.

To the witnesses, you each have five minutes to give your statement, and then we will move to a question and answer period.

We will begin with opening remarks by Jeremy Luke for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Jeremy Luke (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport):** Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak to the committee.

My colleague Karri Dawson and I are pleased to be with you today to share perspectives from the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport on the critically important topic of safe sport in Canada. Today we will provide you with an overview of the CCES and speak to you about the importance of an independent national inquiry into the state of sport in Canada, along with the importance of education, prevention and culture change as part of the approach to create and maintain a positive sport culture.

The CCES is a national non-profit organization with a vision of fair, safe, accessible and inclusive sport. We have four main pillars of focus. The first is advancing values-based sport through True Sport. The second is fulfilling Canada's commitment to the World Anti-Doping Code as the country's national anti-doping agency. The third is addressing the emerging threat of competition manipulation associated with gambling in sport. The fourth is offering ethical sport leadership through the development of tools and resources.

The CCES has worked collaboratively with athletes and sport leaders, as well as experts in sexualized violence, in an effort to address issues related to safe sport. An example of this is the work the CCES did in collaboration with sport leaders, athletes and independent academic experts to develop the first version of the UCCMS.

We recognize the substantial efforts being undertaken to address safe sport issues, including the implementation of the UCCMS and the establishment of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner. We also recognize the positive steps towards a safe and accountable sport system, including governance, accountability, education and the sanctions registry announced by the minister last Thursday. We also recognize the enormous courage and effort of a multitude of former and current athletes to shine a bright light on abuse and maltreatment in sport.

However, more needs to be done. On July 25 of last year, the CCES board of directors wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, calling for an independent national inquiry into the state of sport in Canada. We continue to believe an independent national inquiry is needed to examine the culture of sport and to produce recommendations on how to eliminate maltreatment in sport at all levels.

The commission of inquiry into the use of performance-enhancing drugs in Canadian sport, known as the Dubin inquiry, led to the creation of the CCES in the early 1990s. This was a time when countries around the world, along with sport organizations, were grappling with drug use in sport and how to manage this public health issue. The Dubin inquiry enabled Canada to emerge from this era with clear recommendations that led to culture change in sport and established Canada as a global leader in protecting athletes' health from performance-enhancing drug use. The same approach should be taken for safe sport.

We also believe there needs to be the same focus on education and prevention to drive positive culture change as there is on compliance, regulation and reporting. Our experience with anti-doping has demonstrated the importance of both detection and deterrence, as well as the impact of values-based education—which we call “True Sport”—to change culture and behaviour.

For safe sport, we need to prioritize a centralized and standardized approach to education, underpinned by a common set of values and principles, in order to ensure we eliminate the behaviours we don't want and model the behaviours we do want. Often, this area of work is overlooked and under-resourced. For real change to occur, it must be prioritized.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide an overview of the CCES and to share with you the importance of both an independent national inquiry and a prioritized focus on education, prevention and culture change. The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport stands ready to assist in any way possible.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Now, we go to Own the Podium and Anne Merklinger, chief executive officer.

Ms. Merklinger, you have five minutes. I will give you a 30-second heads-up if you get close to five minutes.

**Ms. Anne Merklinger (Chief Executive Officer, Own the Podium):** Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to elaborate on what we at Own the Podium do, how we do it and why we do it. It is an honour to be here.

It goes without saying that one safe sport issue in our system is one too many. We must all protect the physical and psychological safety of athletes and of everyone involved in high-performance sport in Canada. This may not be obvious to everyone, but it is an absolute non-negotiable.

OTP is a non-profit organization whose mission is to lead and to accelerate the development of Canadian sports, fundamentally, to achieve sustainable and improved performances at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. We have two mandates. The first is to provide

leading-edge technical support to national sport organizations. The second is to prioritize investment recommendations by making expert-driven, collaborative funding recommendations based on evidence. Values are, and always will be, the cornerstone for all decision-making.

As it happens, we are in the midst today of an internal review to include an organizational purpose and revised vision, mission and mandate statements that better describe our current approach and priorities. While it is early days in this process, the message is clear that our purpose must reflect the important role Own the Podium plays in supporting our country's sport system and its athletes as they inspire Canadians, not just in winning but in winning well.

OTP provides technical advice to all Olympic and Paralympic sport organizations. The funding recommendations made on behalf of the Government of Canada, the Canadian Olympic Committee and the Canadian Paralympic Committee focus on helping athletes, coaches and sport organizations that show clear evidence of athletes or teams being on the podium pathway over an eight-year horizon. OTP does not financially reward sports for a medal performance.

We believe that high-performance athletes should be afforded the resources and the opportunities to pursue their athletic objectives safely and without regret. Our goal is to help all athletes get to the start line and to know that they have done everything possible to achieve their goals in an environment that promotes and protects their psychological and physical health and safety.

OTP knows that participant wellness—both physical and psychological—is a key prerequisite to everyone achieving their goals. We recently introduced a requirement that all NSOs must have a wellness plan for all participants in the high-performance program. We've also initiated culture assessments and have provided resources to support building positive cultures in the high-performance space. These are just two examples of changes we have made in our approach to protect the psychological and physical health and safety of participants in high-performance sport. I want to stress that the health, safety and well-being of all people in Canada's sport system—from the playground to the podium—are most important. This is not a “win at all costs” approach.

OTP believes it is important for Canada to do well on sport's global stage. Every Olympic and Paralympic Games inspires Canadians to be better versions of themselves, be it at school, at business, at home or in the community. Sport is about developing great people. Every Olympic and Paralympic Games introduces us to a whole new generation of role models for Canada. Every athlete achieving their personal goals through a healthy and an enjoyable journey is a champion for developing a healthier population, more active communities, and a prouder, stronger and united Canada. Sport has an important role in nation-building in our country.

While we must always pursue higher goals, our sport system has to be better at identifying its gaps, continuing to work together, supporting one another, and talking about what it does well and where we can be better. The system needs to demonstrate to Canadians the benefits of sport. Sport, when done right, is an incredible force for good.

It can make our communities better. It builds new generations of leaders. It's good for the physical and mental health of everyone involved, and so much more.

Significant work remains ahead of us, but change is happening. Creating a healthier, safer and more inclusive place for all is, and must always be, our top priority. This is not a choice. We must never settle for "good enough" in this area. We must always put people first, hold ourselves accountable regularly and drive further down this path every day to ensure all Canadians can enjoy the benefits of sport.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Merklinger.

I will go to Sport'Aide with Sylvain Croteau, please.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau (Executive Director, Sport'Aide):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

On behalf of Sport'Aide, thank you for inviting us here today to share our vision, which is informed by our comprehensive, positive, accountable and sustainable approach.

Sport'Aide has been active in Quebec since 2018. As a leader, Sport'Aide offers initiatives that promote safe, healthy environments for Quebec athletes and other sport community stakeholders at both elite and recreational levels. We provide counselling, support and referral services to everyone who has witnessed or been a victim of physical, sexual or psychological violence. We also advise organizations in the sports, education, municipal and athletic recreation sectors. We do this by developing, perfecting and implementing education and awareness tools and activities.

Two weeks ago, as we were preparing to testify before this committee, we felt it was important to share the main conclusion we've drawn in the five years we've been promoting safe, healthy sport: our athletes' well-being has been sacrificed because of a blinding, money-driven obsession with results. Consequently, stakeholders have failed to take action and have sometimes even protected per-

petrators. In short, as such incidents become more common and normalized, we see them as increasingly alarming and, frankly, discouraging.

Nevertheless, we decided to change the focus of our remarks following the recent public statement by Minister St-Onge, which made it clear we weren't alone in being aware of and concerned about this twofold problem. The minister's desire to drive a culture change by reforming our sport system, establishing a governance code and a registry of sanctions and investing in prevention is consistent with Sport'Aide's approach.

So today we're going to focus on a few recommendations to bring about real change in Canadian sport. The magnitude of this change calls for pragmatism and collective action. We are heartened by this collective awakening and by the fact that some nations have already achieved this goal in both sport and education.

Topping the list is Norway, proof positive that well-being, enjoyment and success can indeed coexist. Launched in 1988, the Norwegian reform prioritized development and the joy of sport. It changed Norway's sport culture and turned it into the most successful nation in history at the Winter Olympic Games.

With respect to preventing violence, the issue we are discussing today, Finland has mobilized 90% of its schools to reduce violence by more than 50%.

Inspired by these successes, Sport'Aide is here today to talk about its comprehensive, positive, sustainable and accountable approach.

Our approach is comprehensive, because this societal change requires commitment on the part of all stakeholders. To achieve results, we have to set up a structure that will bring about change at all levels, from young to old and, as we say back home, from Timbit to elite. Although some measures implemented at the national level are very valid, it is difficult to align them with provincial and local bodies without getting private sport involved.

Our approach is positive, because proven approaches focus on changing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Approaches based solely on repression and control, like those suggested last Thursday, have major limitations. That's why Sport'Aide already promotes an approach that prioritizes developing life skills, together with partners such as the Académie de baseball du Canada in Trois-Rivières, the Institut national du sport du Québec in Montreal, and the Montreal Canadiens.

Our approach is sustainable, because our actions must be part of everyday life if they are to last. This means investing in resources whose sole responsibility is to effect this change in federations and clubs. Let's be realistic: at this point, our organizations don't have the means to facilitate this kind of process. Investing in facilities is all well and good, but the time has come to invest in the people who bring these facilities to life. Let's remember that every dollar invested in an approach that promotes life skills yields a return to society of \$11.

Our approach is accountable, because results-obsessed blindness is extremely problematic when it alone guides our actions and behaviours. Although last week's announcement on governance is a step in the right direction, we need to make sure accountability is central to the values system that dictates the course of action for Canada's sport system as a whole, thereby ensuring that at least as much attention is paid to athletes' well-being as to their performance. Unfortunately, because existing measures aren't properly evaluated, too many organizations think it's fine to just check the boxes.

• (1115)

Fortunately, things can change. We know that getting this societal undertaking off the ground requires collective effort, genuine will, and concrete, lasting action. I'll conclude with the following six recommendations: create a committee that represents stakeholders across Canadian sport; establish a structure that ensures effective interorganizational communication; base prevention efforts on developing life skills; increase and optimize funding for sport and make it more equitable for all; scientifically assess the impact of this culture change; and conduct an independent national inquiry.

Ladies and gentlemen, the game has begun, but it is far from over. That's why I'll end with this question: What legacy do we want to leave?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we're going to the question and answer component. The first round is six minutes. The six minutes includes a question and the answer.

We will begin with the Conservatives, for six minutes, with Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, everyone. It's nice to see everyone in person for a change.

Mr. Luke, thank you for your comments. In terms of reliance on government funding, OTP, as you know, got \$7 million from the federal government in 2022. When you are being funded by the Government of Canada, how can you be that independent?

• (1120)

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** There are ways to maintain independence, I would suggest, that go beyond looking only at funding. There are other measures, such as the governance of an organization, and the

Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport was established as an independent organization. It was a recommendation of the Dubin inquiry. Its board is made up of 12 individuals who are independent from both sport and government, and it's expert-based and non-representative.

We are also subject to audits by a global regulator, the World Anti-Doping Agency, to ensure that the work we are doing is independent from government.

Last, operational independence from an anti-doping perspective is a requirement within the World Anti-Doping Code.

I would offer those as some suggestions on how to maintain independence while at the same time receiving government funds.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** The Dubin inquiry certainly was timely for the drug abuse and PEDs issues that we've seen athletes in that era come through, not only in this country but others.

I'm just going to pose a question to you because of my private member's bill on single-event sports betting. This has had a major influence, not only in this country, but in the world. In the last week we've seen the baseball coach of Alabama fired. We've seen suspicions of gambling for the Iowa football team.

Have you received any additional funds to make sure that we are so-called "safe sport" in gambling in this country? Have you received any since Bill C-218 was passed in the House of Commons?

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** Not in any significant way. There have not been additional resources in a significant way to address the issue of competition manipulation in Canada, and I would stress to you, as a committee, that competition manipulation, which is an intentional effort to manipulate either the part of or the outcome of a competition, is a safe sport issue. It is often linked to organized crime and can cause harm to athletes. It's something that should be seriously considered as part of this discussion, and hopefully in years to come we'll be able to indicate that there is funding available to deal with that issue.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Would you advocate through the federal government for more funding? This is a new "want", if you want to say, in the world, where not only Canada but several other countries are doing this now. With this, you do see some red flags. I've just pointed out two in the United States in the last week, and I'm sure there are some in Canada that we don't know about.

How are you, as an organization, going to look at this in the near future?

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** There are absolutely red flags. What we've learned internationally is that with gambling in sport comes the risk of competition manipulation as a safety issue. In Canada we've been trying to advance these issues through a national symposium that was held in 2019. There will be a second version of that in two weeks' time in Toronto, and we've advocated for the federal government to ratify the Macolin Convention, which is a Council of Europe convention. It's the only international law that deals specifically with competition manipulation, and it sets out a framework for governments, provincial regulators and betting operators to co-operate to investigate these issues and to protect the safety of athletes who are subject to this type of activity.

Those, again, are some efforts that we've undertaken and tried to move forward.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you, Mr. Luke.

I'll go to Ms. Merklinger.

Welcome. I'm a big fan of Own the Podium. In saying that, I was a little disturbed that there was funding to Canada Soccer, and to Gymnastics Canada and Hockey Canada, when we know there have been abuses in the past.

Can you speak to that?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Certainly, the three examples you've provided have all come to our attention. In all three instances, we have put funding conditions in place to make sure the sport organizations address the shortfalls that have come to light.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** So, playground to podium.... You know, a lot of people have taken shots at Own the Podium. What are your thoughts on that? For safe sport...many groups have sat in the same chair you're sitting in today and do not believe in Own the Podium.

• (1125)

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Like everyone involved in the sport system, I'm horrified by the stories that we've heard over the last many months.

OTP was founded at the request of athletes who complained that the sport system was underfunded and they weren't receiving the necessary support that other nations were providing to their athletes. These were barriers for them in achieving their goals.

OTP was given a mandate from Sport Canada, the Canadian Olympic Committee and the Canadian Paralympic Committee to help Canadian athletes have everything they need in order to achieve their goals. It was never intended to put medals over anyone's well-being. The person has to come first in all instances.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I have only a few seconds left...or maybe I have no seconds.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** You've run out of time, Kevin. Thank you.

I'm going to go to the Liberals and Tim Louis.

You have six minutes, please.

**Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses. We appreciate your being there.

To continue Mr. Waugh's line of questioning, I will address Ms. Merklinger from Own the Podium.

You mentioned two things. They were leading edge technical support and then investments.

Can you explain what the threshold is and how you get involved with a sports organization? What criteria are met?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** We are essentially a technical agency. We have a team of what we would call sport technical experts, who provide guidance to all Olympic and Paralympic sports on a number of different elements, including the quality of their coaching, their daily training environment, the competition environment, sport medicine, sport science support, and safe sport and wellness. On a number of very specific technical factors, our team works with the sport organization to identify the gaps and identify areas where they can improve.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** Okay.

Mr. Luke said in his opening statement that we need to support the behaviours we want. That can be a bit subjective. How do you handle subjective criteria like supporting behaviours we want?

Is it just technical, or is there [*Inaudible—Editor*] behaviour?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** There are a number of different approaches we've introduced over the last few years. We are doing culture assessments and providing sport organizations with areas in which they can improve their high-performance culture. We are requiring every sport now to have a fulsome wellness plan to make sure the health, wellness and psychological safety of every athlete in the program is protected. We also work with them to share best practices from one sport to another.

We're really in the trenches with the sport organizations, being able to witness first-hand where there are opportunities for improvement.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** Ms. Merklinger, I'm not sure how recent this is, but are you starting to see data? Are you starting to see any positive outcomes? If not, when are you expecting to see that?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** We've already seen that the introduction of a mandatory wellness framework has been a game-changer. We are now able to ensure that there are adequate financial supports to the national sport organizations to focus on this area. We assess the sports in a very fulsome manner at least twice annually, in addition to being in the daily training environment on a very regular basis.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** That's perfect.

We hear time and again that we want to nurture and protect our children. We want to give them that opportunity to grow and succeed, like you mentioned in your opening statement.

At the same time, there's a culture of creating athletes and pushing them to be elite. It starts at a young age.

Can this model be done in a balanced way? How can we strike that balance? You mentioned in your words not just winning, but "winning well".

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Certainly, we're redefining excellence as we speak.

What does excellence mean to Canadians in the high-performance sport context? Behaviours that were acceptable 15, 10 or five years ago are no longer acceptable.

We've also introduced a new initiative focused on professional development and leadership development of national coaches, so they are able to coach more effectively in today's high-performance sport landscape.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** Thank you.

Maybe I'll turn to Ms. Dawson or Mr. Luke from the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport.

Knowing that sports are multi-jurisdictional, what's the best way we can set up a pan-Canadian approach that can also work with provinces and territories to handle abuse in a coordinated manner?

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** One of the approaches we've been working on in Canada relates to values-based sport. It relates to trying to instill values within sport at all levels and in all jurisdictions.

Maybe I can turn it over to my colleague Karri Dawson to walk you through that.

• (1130)

**Ms. Karri Dawson (Executive Director, Values-Based Sport, Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport):** At CCES we use an approach called "true sport". I believe the committee has heard of it before. It's our approach to values-based sport. It's an approach that is underpinned by a set of common values and principles that were chosen by Canadians. This dates back to the early 2000s. We did some public community research and found out that 80% of Canadians thought that sport was this wonderful, valuable public asset that could do all kinds of great things for our kids in communities, but fewer than 20% of Canadians thought that sport was living up to that potential.

We set out and talked to Canadians across the country. They chose the values of fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun as the four values to underpin. We developed a program called True Sport, with a variety of tools and resources that we take out to everything from communities to provinces and territories to national sport organizations. It's applicable to all sports at all levels.

In 2018 we had the opportunity to do another tour in partnership with the Public Policy Forum, called the "values proposition" symposium. We canvassed Canadians around the shared set of values and principles and whether they were still relevant. We found that they were.

We're seeing that it is a good way to have system alignment to have a shared set of values and principles that underpin the sport experience, so that you can model the behaviours and expectations of everyone who has a part in the sport system.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** Thank you. That was fantastic. You gave such a thorough answer, you answered the next three questions I had.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, Tim.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** Maybe I could go to you, Mr. Croteau. You mentioned the role that money plays. How important is financial transparency with sports organizations?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** Regarding the importance of financial transparency, I think the decisions announced last week about greater accountability are essential. We applaud those decisions.

As far as governance is concerned, our understanding is that there was already a governance code in the works, so that is not necessarily something new. Obviously, we are very pleased to see that people understand how important it is, because it's essential. Those currently in office must be aware that the decisions they make or don't make impact people in the sports community.

**Mr. Tim Louis:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Croteau, and thank you, Tim.

I will now go to the Bloc Québécois.

Monsieur Lemire, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to say how amazed I am to see how far we've come in the year since I moved the motion to invite representatives of Hockey Canada to appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I want to take a moment to thank all my colleagues and the witnesses.

I feel that people are hopeful and want to make change happen. I see evidence the will is there. Having said that, one of the ways to make these changes a reality is to have an independent public inquiry. Representatives of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport have said as much.



I'd like you to explain to us how this inquiry should be set up and what it can change, at this stage, so we can act on the recommendations and make the changes we would like to make in sport.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** A national independent public inquiry could lead to real system-wide change within the sport community. Our hope for that inquiry would be to identify the root causes that are leading at a system-wide level to the maltreatment we're seeing in sport; to produce a series of recommendations, as we saw in the Dubin inquiry, that are system-wide and that deal with alignment issues, jurisdictional issues and expertise in treatment; and to address the need for resources to be able to implement those recommendations in a meaningful way.

That would be the hope.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** At this point, what are we risking if we don't hold an independent public inquiry? Why is it urgent?

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** I think the danger of not holding an independent public inquiry is that the initiatives we're implementing today, even the ones that were addressed by the minister last Thursday, are not informed by a thorough investigation that identifies system-wide issues. They're ad hoc in measure. That ultimately might lead to us being back here in three, four or five years, continuing to deal with this issue, whereas an independent public inquiry can really identify the root cause situation that's leading to these issues and set us up for success in the long term.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** You're right.

I'd like to point out that many athletes and groups of athletes have repeatedly and urgently called for just such an inquiry on social media.

Now I have a question for Mr. Croteau from Sport'Aide.

First of all, thank you for your leadership, foresight and long-standing commitment to safe and healthy engagement in sport.

I'd like to know your thoughts on the independent public inquiry, given that you're in Quebec. I'd like to know how the federal government and the provinces can find common ground through an independent public inquiry. Obviously, that can create tension. How do we make sure we set up a solid foundation for the inquiry to cover all sports organizations, from Timbits to the podium, as you put it?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** The first thing we need is an openness and true willingness to collaborate. The colour of the jersey should not be a factor. We are all here to promote a positive experience for our young athletes. No political or territorial issue justifies us not working together for this. Thousands of young people are here today, but many leave, which could turn into a big problem later. We need the young people who are here today to continue to invest in themselves and get involved in our sports communities for many years.

I am appealing for openness and true collaboration. That is the most important thing.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** In the context of this study, what sources of irritation or what friction between the federal government and the provinces might we see? What recommendations would you make for us to be able to move forward?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** The first thing that comes to mind is part of the announcements made last week by our minister: the arrival of a registry. At Sport'Aide we commend this initiative. From day one we have been shouting from the rooftops about the need for a registry of people whose behaviour is unacceptable, but back home in Quebec we were told that is impossible. We were very pleased with last week's announcement. It is a clear example of the main challenge: back home we are told it is impossible, but I do not think it is impossible.

Three or four weeks ago, I found out that France has this kind of registry. The French worked together. They decided to do this and it did not take decades, it took a few years. They were willing to collaborate. That is what I am appealing for.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** The Sport'Aide model is innovative and changes things in Quebec. We do not see this model in the other provinces. What advice would you give to the other provinces? Can the Sport'Aide model be exported? Could you provide a helping hand on that?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** Our message from day one at Sport'Aide at various times and whether to Sport Canada or the different provincial bodies or national federations that appeal to us is that we would be happy to be used as a carbon copy to speed up the process in other places. Everyone tells us that in five years, we have done tremendous work. I am not saying that to blow my own horn. I am just making a comparison to what is being done on the outside. We would be happy to help other partners speed up their process. For example, Sport New Brunswick reached out to us recently. We are absolutely prepared to work with other partners.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I have one last question about the importance of protecting victims who report abuse to you. What is the process? How can we help and support them?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** There are two things. Just as we do back home we need to assure them of full confidentiality. In the different interactions we have with these people, we need to constantly remind them that there is no shame in asking for help. We regularly need to remind them that there are services to help them and that they should use those services.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

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

I'm going to the New Democrat Party with Peter Julian for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. We appreciate their presence here today and their testimonies.

The fact is that our national sports organizations have been in crisis for a year now. As my colleague Mr. Lemire said, we are seeing a growing number of revelations that are causing tremendous harm to public trust in the national sport system. In addition to the cases of sexual abuse and sexual violence there is also the whole issue of financial transparency.

You all mentioned being in favour of a public inquiry. It is important. I think that is a recommendation that some people around the table will promote when the time comes to produce our report. It is essential.

On the topic of financial transparency, it is also a matter of protecting the victims and not requiring them to sign agreements that muzzle them. That is also something we need to discuss.

• (1140)

[*English*]

I want to ask each witness these questions around financial transparency that we have seen, notably with Hockey Canada and Canada Soccer. They have stunned Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Many sports organizations continue to use non-disclosure agreements to muzzle victims from speaking out if they so choose. An NDA should not be constructed in such a way that victims are unable to speak out if they so choose. We benefit, in this climate of crisis we have with national sports organizations, from victims telling us their stories if they so choose.

My question to all three organizations is, what should the federal government be doing to ensure financial transparency? We cannot have, as we've seen from testimony here at the committee, secret funds—funds that are hidden and not available either to members of the organization or to the public—or agreements that are signed, where it is not clear there's been transparency, even though, ultimately, it has cost the organization a lot.

Secondly, should the federal government be insisting that victims should be free to speak out if they so choose? Should the government ensure that any national sports organization does not impose an NDA on victims that does not allow them to speak out if they so choose?

I'll ask all three organizations those two questions.

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** From our perspective at the CCES, it really leads to the need for an independent public inquiry that is expert driven on the issues of maltreatment and abuse in the sport system as a whole, and how it functions. It should be able to identify the types of issues you're speaking to and produce a series of recommendations. We can then hold the sport system accountable to implement them, so that we don't see the issues you're speaking to.

In the short term, the announcement by the minister last week was positive around the mandatory requirement to follow the sport governance code. Her announcement on NDAs and the Athletes-CAN agreement was positive as well.

I would offer those two thoughts in response to your question.

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** We as leaders all bear a responsibility for what has happened. We all bear responsibility to make sure it doesn't happen again.

We would certainly support an inquiry, but I suggest it be an inquiry into the entire sport system, not one limited to safe sport. I believe the issues related to safe sport are symptoms of a much bigger problem for the sport system in Canada. It's under-resourced. It lacks leadership, and it is very fragmented. We would certainly support an inquiry that looks at the entire sport system.

I also—

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I'm sorry. Could you clarify that a bit more, Ms. Merklinger?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Don't have an inquiry that is limited to just the safe sport conversation, but one that looks at the entire sport system. Where are the opportunities for improved alignment, improved resourcing and stronger leadership?

I would also suggest that.... Maybe I'll stop there, Madam Chair.

Thank you.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** No, please, continue. What would you also suggest?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** I would also suggest that the measures that were announced last week by Minister St-Onge will definitely effect some positive change. We have a long way to go. We are just starting the journey. Certainly, the measures that were announced were very positive and will assist the sport system in improving.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** For my part, I tend to question the entire Canadian sport system, not just the financial aspect.

Why not create a panel of stakeholders from various backgrounds and different layers of the sport system? We have to get out of the mode of dealing with the elite and national federations. Our support trickles down. Our local organizations and our athletes need to be heard. We need to be supported in this and there needs to be no stone left unturned.

As far as funding is concerned, there may be solutions we have not thought of yet. Earlier, someone alluded to sports betting, which seems to quite popular these days. Why would sports betting not serve the Canadian sport system instead of foreign interests? Why would there not be a national lottery to partially fund the Canadian sport system?

As for the non-disclosure agreements our young people have been forced to sign to date, Sport'Aide was outraged to find out about that. Whether we are young or not so young, when we are a victim of anything whatsoever it is hard enough to ask for help. If we are asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement to boot it is even harder. There is no need to spend two minutes in a victim's shoes to know what this means to them. I have not been a victim, but based on the testimony we are receiving, I can imagine the pressure of all this. We will put a stop to it.

• (1145)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're now going to go to our second round. I don't think we're going to be able to complete the second round, but I'm going to make sure every party has an opportunity to ask questions according to the time.

We're going to go to Richard Martel for the Conservatives.

Richard, you have five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I find this interesting.

I have some questions for Mr. Croteau, naturally.

In her recommendations, the minister talked about a registry of sanctioned individuals. How do you picture this registry being implemented? There is talk of unacceptable behaviour, but where do we draw the line between unacceptable behaviour and acceptable behaviour? How many offences will a person need to commit before being registered? If complaints against a coach are admissible, will he automatically be added to the registry?

Is creating this registry a complex process? It is a rather sensitive exercise.

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** The ideal solution would be to have a registry where the Mr. Croteaus and Mr. Martels of this world who commit these unacceptable acts in sports are added, in such a way that we know where they are. In fact, such a registry would establish the traceability of these individuals and help us know their pathway in the sport system.

In Quebec, we were told that this is a difficult measure to implement from a legal standpoint. Then why not be creative and, conversely, establish a registry of individuals who have positive practices, as a way of following their pathway? Every year, people could make a voluntary statement of their progress. For example, an individual could declare that over the past year, he was a coach at such-and-such location and indicate what training he took. He could provide the contact information of a resource person who could confirm the information about him. This registry could be mandatory for every stakeholder in sports. That way, if an organization receives Mr. Croteau's application and he is not on the registry of positive coaches, the organization could ask questions.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** That is good, Mr. Croteau.

This brings me to training for coaches.

Today, given everything we know, coaches need to know how far they can go, where they need to stop and how they need to manage different situations. What is more, often the entire community is accountable because the coach, quite often, is pushed by certain people.

To me, training and follow-up are very important. How do you imagine proceeding on that?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** As far as training is concerned, you touched on something super interesting: we need to consider every component of a sports ecosystem. It is not just the coaches that we need to target for training, but also our young people themselves, so that they are able to recognize what is acceptable or not. We need to talk to them, educate them. We also need to talk to the administrators of our sports organizations so that they realize that they are responsible for the decisions they make. We also need to talk to the spectators, the parents of the athletes, and the support staff at the organizations.

At Sport'Aide, we raise awareness among all the stakeholders in an ecosystem. The best way to reduce risk is to address every component of an ecosystem.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Mr. Croteau, you've been in your role since 2018, so you've probably received many complaints. I would like to know why those complaints have only come to light since late 2022 or early 2023. There have been complaints in the past—why have they not been mentioned? We talk about a culture of silence, but what led this silence to be broken now?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** I think current events have helped people realize that there is more openness and they can now talk about situations and speak out against them.

There has been a law of silence. We are still grappling with it. There are still people who fear reprisals or are scared to lose playing time or their spot on a team. For example, some people call us for the first time and then it might take 5, 6 or even 12 months before they call us again, because they are afraid of what might happen to them. This is still very common and all too present in sports.

• (1150)

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Okay, thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Merklinger.

We know that the goal is to win medals, to perform well, and to reach the podium.

What happens, in terms of perceptions, if athletes cannot get a medal?

[English]

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** I believe athletes get involved in high-performance work because they want to win and they believe they can win. Our job in the system is to provide every opportunity for athletes to have the resources to achieve their goals in an environment that respects the psychological health and safety of every athlete.

We invest in the future. We don't reward past performance. It's an investment in future opportunities for each and every athlete.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** You recently submitted financial statements, but I have not seen any minutes. Perhaps it's because they weren't yet ready at the time.

Were your financial statements made available because of the minister's recent request, or were they always available?

[English]

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** We have posted our full, audited financial statements on our website for many years, and we will now be posting our board minutes. In fact, we are in the process of doing that now.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now I'm going to go to the Liberals for five minutes with Michael Coteau.

You have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate your being here.

For folks who may be watching and for the committee, how much does each organization receive? What's your funding per year? What do you spend per year?

Could all three of you tell us, briefly?

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** Sure. I'm happy to. Total expenses at the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport are approximately \$10 million, of which about \$7 million is from—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Is it public?

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:**—Sport Canada. Yes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you.

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** For Own the Podium, our annual budget is about \$6.5 million.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Okay.

During a major sporting event, it must increase drastically. For example, when an Olympic Games comes up...

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** There are no incremental funds that flow through Own the Podium. Own the Podium's responsibility is to provide investment recommendations to the partners. Those are the Government of Canada and the Canadian Olympic Committee—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** You distribute on behalf—

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:**—and the funds are distributed by those partners directly to the sport organizations. The funds don't flow through us.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Okay.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** To answer your question, I'll use a sports metaphor: hearing those numbers, I know we are not in the same league. We receive about \$800,000 a year. This funding comes mainly from the Quebec government, in particular through the ministry of education and the ministry of family, seniors and the status of women, and also from private partners. We do not receive anything from the Canadian government, for the time being.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Okay.

I noticed, Mr. Croteau, there was a new directive by the Quebec government to build in a complaints system.

Can you talk a bit about that and how it works? Is this something that's being replicated in other provinces?

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** To my knowledge, that does not exist in other provinces. The Canadian system has been put in place there.

In Quebec, the complaints officer system was set up in March 2021. So far, it has proven effective. It isn't perfect, and we knew that when we launched it in the fall of 2020. When I say "we," I mean the Quebec government, the Regroupement loisir et sport du Québec, Sport'Aide and the Quebec sport community. Back when we announced the system, we were saying already that it could be improved upon.

After two years in operation, we are now realizing that some improvements need to be made. A committee has been struck and we are working together to determine what improvements we can make to the system. Although it is not perfect, the system has proven effective so far.

● (1155)

[English]

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I'm assuming it's a wide range of different complaints. Any athlete or organization can...someone within an organization can complain.

Tell us how many complaints come in a year. What is the flow of those complaints? Do they go directly to your organization? How are they dealt with?

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** First, to be admissible, complaints absolutely must be cases of physical or sexual abuse or of neglect. As for complaints related to—let's call it sport governance—those are returned to the federations themselves. For example, those would be complaints by parents who are unhappy with the amount of playing time given to their child, or upset because their child was not picked for the Quebec or Canadian team.

Now, regarding the handling of complaints, it is completely confidential. The complaints officer works independently and is outside the sport community. He was hired to put this system in place. He is the one who receives the complaints and, based on the information provided to him, determines if they are admissible. From there, a sanction is recommended to the federation concerned. Our federations in Quebec have adhered to the integrity policy. Next, the federation must apply the recommendations.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I'm going to have to intervene. I don't want to be disrespectful.

I have another question I want to ask, but thank you for sharing. I'd like to get some more information on it.

Racism in sport doesn't come up in these meetings often, with the major organizations. There have been individuals who have come to speak on the issue. If we do a study on safe sport, maybe you can provide us some advice on what the internal experience of the organization has been when it comes to diversity, inclusion, fairness and equity.

Specifically, what is your organization doing to combat systemic racism in sport, which many people say exists?

We can start with you, please.

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Certainly, internally within our organization, we have had a significant focus on equity, diversity and inclusion over the last two to three years. We have a very intentional employment policy now, where we're recruiting with an EDI lens. Certainly, internally within the organization, that's been our approach.

Externally we know that numerous organizations are providing important leadership in this area. Again, change is happening. It's probably not happening as quickly as one would want, but it is definitely top of mind for everyone involved in sport in our country.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Do you have a diverse board?

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Yes, we do. We have a board of 10, with a very diverse group on the board, yes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's the end of your time, Michael.

I'm going now to Sébastien Lemire for two and a half minutes, please.

Go ahead, Sébastien.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Ms. Merklinger from Own the Podium.

I was surprised to hear an athlete who appeared before the committee say that the Own the Podium program has really increased pressure on athletes. He said that the \$5 million in funding allocated to his federation, to coaches and to the whole ecosystem of up-and-coming talent was based on Olympic sport performance. He said the difference between fourth place and third place had a major impact on a sport's future.

Is it necessary to put all that pressure on athletes? You have opened the door to reform and to thinking about your mission. Do you acknowledge that this pressure may have an impact on the athletes' psychological health?

[English]

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Yes, certainly, as I mentioned, we are an organization that works with sport organizations that have over an eight-year horizon of athletes on the pathway, so it is very much a future-oriented assessment from our perspective.

I believe our responsibility is to help all those athletes and teams on the pathway prepare to achieve their own personal performance objectives. They are their goals. They want to excel, and we need to do that in a way that their physical and psychological safety is protected at all times.

We have consulted extensively with athlete groups. They embrace the notion of our redefining excellence and making sure that winning well is part of the conversation.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Are there high-performance advisors on the ground to support athletes? Have those advisors ever reported cases of abuse or problematic situations to you? If so, what did you do with that information?

• (1200)

[English]

**Ms. Anne Merklinger:** Our outreach to different athlete groups over the last two years has been much more robust than it's ever been. We've just reformed our governance model to have two athlete directors who are full and equal voting members on the board. We have created an athlete advisory council so that we can listen and reach out to a more robust athlete voice, so that we are consulting on a much more robust basis going forward.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The time is up, and I'm going to have to move on to Mr. Julian.

Peter, you have two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Luke, you mentioned education and training of coaches. I've been a coach in two sports, and I know there haven't been a lot of resources available. It really depends on the organization. Obviously this is something that could make a difference.

Do you believe that Canada should be ensuring that there are more resources available for coaches at all levels, both in terms of the expertise for the sport but also to ensure that there is zero tolerance for any possibility of sexual abuse or sexual violence?

**Mr. Jeremy Luke:** I absolutely agree with the approach that there needs to be enhanced education for coaches and for all athlete support personnel and education through the lens of information on one hand around the UCCMS and the rules and what those rules mean, but education also through the lens of values that are underpinned by a set of values that we want to see in our sport community. We ensure that all of our educational initiatives support those values, so at the end of the day we see coaches modelling the behaviours we want more than our informing them of the behaviours we don't want.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Croteau, I'm amazed at what you're able to do with such a small budget, as compared to other organizations' budgets. It's impressive.

You mentioned several countries, such as Norway, Finland and France. What model do you think Canada should adopt? There is a crisis, and we need to find a different way of practising sport. Which country seems to be the best model for Canada to follow in the coming years?

**Mr. Sylvain Croteau:** I want to say England, which does a lot of great things. Honestly, though, I would also say that other countries look to Canada. Our system is not perfect and there are still many things that can be done, but the fact remains that some things in

Quebec and Canada are the envy of other places. Few places have done as much to protect young athletes.

That doesn't mean that we should stop there. We must remain the leaders that we are, and stay ahead of the game. To do that, we can spare no effort. We need to think big and be bold. You mentioned how much we manage to do with our funding. We have to be creative and we can't be afraid to boldly go down different paths.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you.

I'd like to ask another question—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The session is up.

I want to thank our witnesses for coming, for being very excellent and on time, and for giving us all the information they were asked for quite openly and clearly.

Now I'm going to suspend the meeting because, as you know, we have an in camera portion. I hope you all have the in camera coordinates. We'll just suspend for a few minutes while we go in camera.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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