



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 086

Thursday, June 8, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



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• (1550)

[*Translation*]

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

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to the 86th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Therefore, for those who are online, if you look at the bottom of your screen, you'll see something that looks like a globe. It's your interpretation prompt. If you press it you can get interpretation in English or French, as you require.

Also, please remember that while public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require mask wearing indoors or in the precinct, it is prudent to think about wearing a mask to protect against respiratory disease and, if I may say, as you walk out, wearing one protects you against the pollution outside.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all participants that you cannot take pictures of your screen. The committee's proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

You should not speak. Your mike should be on mute during the procession. When I call your name, you may unmute and speak—only if your name is called and you are recognized by the chair. Questions and comments should come through the chair.

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

Today we have three sets of witnesses. As individuals we have Kim Taylor, player and family ice hockey advocate; Lukas Walter; and Thomas Gobeil, health coach. They will be sharing a five-minute opening statement. I thought you should know that. From Boxing Canada, we have Christopher Lindsay, executive director. From Québec contre les violences sexuelles, we have Mélanie Lemay, co-founder.

We will begin with Ms. Taylor.

You may now proceed with your five-minute opening—

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Chair, it's Martin.

We have a couple of witnesses who had to be organized to be here. I just wondered if you had organized anything for those two specific witnesses from the government to appear.

The Chair: The clerk is actually organizing witnesses. She calls them and finds out when they can come.

I don't know if Geneviève has anything or she wants to comment on that.

The Clerk of the Committee (Geneviève Desjardins): My apologies. I was just checking on people in the back.

Did you have questions about witnesses?

Mr. Martin Shields: It's official government witnesses. Kirsty Duncan is an MP and a former cabinet minister.

The Clerk: Yes. Ms. Duncan is scheduled to appear on Thursday. I've been following up with the minister's office, but I have yet to hear back on her availability.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Taylor, you may now begin with your five-minute opening statement.

I give everyone a shout-out, and I mean it. It's a shout-out, not a piece of paper. When they have 30 seconds left, I'll say, "You have 30 seconds left." You can stop and put your thoughts together.

I'm sorry if my speaking is hampered. I have asthma and the pollution is causing some breathing problems for me. I'm sorry about that.

Ms. Taylor, you may begin, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Kim Taylor (Player and Family Ice Hockey Advocate, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable committee, for asking me to speak with you all today in regard to abuse in sport.

My name is Kim Taylor. I'm an American citizen and the mother of a former WHL player. My son's hockey had advanced to a level where he was being given many opportunities and choices about where he would play the following season. Ultimately he decided he really wanted to play in Canada, where hockey means everything to Canadians. He felt that would be a good home for him. He felt this would give him the best opportunity for his development and a fast track to the opportunity to play in the NHL. Few make that final jump to the NHL, and that dream didn't come true for my son. We hoped, but we were realistic and had always talked about a backup plan.

What we didn't anticipate was that the dream would be replaced with a nightmare. We didn't expect him to come home with mental health issues. As a parent, I trusted the WHL to live up to its promises and to take our teenage son under its wing and develop him not only as a hockey player but as an upstanding young man and citizen, as they promised. However, we quickly learned that once our teenager signed his player contract, the league owned him and indoctrinated him into their hockey culture. The clear message sent to players is "all for one, one for all." What happens in the locker room stays in the locker room. The culture of silence is real and it exists, not only with the players but also for their families. You don't complain and you don't tell what goes on behind closed doors. If you do, they will publicly make an example out of you. They do so as a means of intimidating other players for speaking out. Even years after leaving the CHL, players still find it difficult to go on record about their abuse. My son's abuse happened a decade ago. We still suffer pain and live with that. It took us a long time to come out and speak about it because of fear of retribution. It's hard.

The prime example of the culture of silence is that after the league was informed of my son's abuse, following my testimony in the Oregon State Senate hearings, the CHL commissioned their own independent investigation. Even after admitting fault with the way they handled my son, they never called to apologize. They never let us see the private investigation report or let us know what actions were taken by the CHL to ensure that this type of treatment wouldn't happen to other players.

I have many issues with the CHL business model but I know this is not your mandate. However, it is your mandate to provide protections for workers and athletes, not only for Canadians but for import players like my son. Canada is a global leader in hockey development. That is one of the reasons I entrusted my son into the Canadian hockey system, yet under the current policies of OSIC, CHL players have no additional protection. To make matters worse, following the Portland hearings and just before the Quebec National Assembly hearings on employment standards law changes, the CHL attempted to silence players from speaking and threatened to sue them for libel.

Clearly, through these hearings, the committee has recognized that systemic problems exist within the Canadian Hockey League. It's obvious that the Canadian Hockey League cannot police themselves. It's also clear that the CHL falls into a category that doesn't require them to be accountable to anyone—not Hockey Canada or federal or provincial governments, yet they seek amateur status un-

der the Canadian government system for financial gain. They are not affiliated with a union or a players association.

Canadians are looking for leadership with respect to how this committee is going to handle these incidents. You also have the eyes of the world looking at the outcome.

I often wonder whether, if there had been provincial or federal regulations in place or a true third party association for players, that would have prevented the maltreatment of my son. We still need to have a federal inquiry about abuse in sports. Parents once again need reassurance that, if they send their children to play in the CHL, they will be protected.

Thank you for your time.

• (1555)

The Chair: Now, I'll go to Mr. Lukas Walter and Thomas Gobeil. I hope you will be splitting your time as you promised you would. I'll still give you a shout-out at 30 seconds if you go over time.

Thank you very much.

Lukas, you may begin.

Mr. Lukas Walter (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am Lukas Walter from Langley, B.C., a former WHL and QMJHL player. I played three years in the CHL in both Canada and the U.S.A.

I come here today from B.C. to address the committee on the very important issue of Canadian hockey players' rights. I wish to share my story with this body to provide you with information that will help make hockey fairer and safer for players in the future.

During my experience in the CHL, I witnessed numerous issues that might not have occurred if there had been a third party resource that players could have had access to in times of trouble or a mental health crisis. If you would like examples, I can give you some. You can inquire.

During my time in the CHL, I was exploited financially by teams. I provided my service, which I was paid for. Since then, I have become a players' advocate for wage and hour. I am a plaintiff in the class action for wage and hour. I've stood up for players during my career on the ice and have been rewarded with praise and benefits in the form of monetary awards.

I played three years within the CHL and was entitled to three years of scholarship. When I attempted to obtain my education scholarship, I was informed by the league that it had expired because I did not use it within the first year of leaving the league. I was not aware of this. This is a prime example of why there needs to be a third party to protect players' rights and to hold the league accountable for better communication.

I now want to make the league a safer place with better working conditions, a place that is more enjoyable for the players, with a new culture that will allow players to speak out with no repercussions. I feel that a third party is needed to oversee the league and the business model, while making sure players' rights, education and safety are protected. We ask this body and the Minister of Sport to declare CHL players employees.

We are also here today to break the trend of players not speaking out.

Thank you for your time.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Walker.

We now go to Thomas Gobeil.

Thomas, you have three minutes.

Mr. Thomas Gobeil (Health Coach, As an Individual): Madam Chair and honourable committee, my name is Thomas Gobeil. I want to thank you for allowing me to attend today's hearing and to share with you all some of the issues I witnessed and experienced first-hand during my time in the Canadian Hockey League.

I played QMJHL for three years, and I'd like to share with you a little bit about my last season. I had just come from my first NHL experience with the Anaheim Ducks. I had a good beginning of the season individually, but as a team we were struggling.

After a few losses, our coach decided he wasn't happy, and he decided to put us through a discipline bag skate. Towards the end of the skate, he came up with a rather weird drill in which the forwards and the defencemen would compete. The forwards were to pass the puck at the blue line to the defencemen, and the forwards were to go up and try to block the shots the defencemen were attempting to bring to the net.

I ended up with a puck to the face. When it happened, I also drove myself to the hospital. I got evaluated and I was told that I had a double jaw fracture. I drove to the pharmacy to get medicine, and I had to head home for recovery.

When I came back from my injury, I learned that the team, which was supposed to have warned my teachers about my incapacity to attend my classes.... Actually, I learned that I had failed all my exams, so I ended up quitting school. The emotional turmoil and the anger I felt coming back had me quit the team I was playing for. I ended up playing for the BCHL, but it was really hard to get a release because the team owned my rights as a player, and they were trying to sell me.

I have a question from my time in the BCHL. Why is it that I lost my eligibility to go play college hockey if the CHL players aren't considered professional athletes or employees?

As I have shared with you, CHL players are required to be devoted and to sacrifice their bodies to help their team win. These are the conditions CHL players work under. This is why the players in the CHL need a third party to represent the players to make sure these issues don't happen again.

I recommend that this committee evaluate the CHL and recognize the players as federal employees so that they can have additional protection. This would then entitle CHL players to be federal employees under the federal labour code.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gobeil.

Now we go to Boxing Canada. We have Christopher Lindsay, executive director.

Mr. Lindsay, you have five minutes.

Mr. Christopher Lindsay (Executive Director, Boxing Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to appear before the committee and contribute to the important mission of providing a safe and abuse-free sport system to Canadians.

Boxing Canada is the national governing body for the sport of Olympic-style boxing. Our goal is to promote, organize and coordinate the advancement of its members of all levels and ages. Our mission is for Canada to become a world-leading boxing nation. We promote, encourage and develop lifelong participation and the highest proficiency in the pursuit of excellence amongst our members.

The protection of physical and psychological safety of all of Boxing Canada's participants is critical and foundational. Our programming ranges from physical literacy programs for children to national teams proudly winning medals on the world stage to active-for-life participants who coach, officiate and still work the bag for fitness.

The culture of boxing is inherently inclusive. From our esteemed Olympians to our fitness-only programs, everyone is welcome. Boxing gyms across our country cater to every possible demographic group, and Boxing Canada proudly runs programs regardless of gender, income or cultural background. Providing safe spaces for young people to develop confidence, learn self-discipline and meet their individual fitness goals is inherent to our success.

To be completely clear, boxing involves hitting our opponents and, as our athletes remind me, taking a few punches from time to time. Needless to say, boxing has a robust and rigorous series of concussion screening and medical checks. We are proud of the protocols put in place by our officials and coaches to protect the long-term health of our participants.

In recent years, however, those protocols and policies have been expanded to meet a holistic understanding of health. Boxing Canada has adopted, reviewed and reinforced policies and practices to best protect all of our participants.

This has led Boxing Canada to adopt and enact policies that provide structure and accountability for our participants and to our funding partners. These include the adoption of third party reporting; compliance with the abuse-free sport program; a screening policy for our participants; a whistle-blower policy to encourage participants to speak up about potential issues; a diversity, equity, and inclusion policy to check that we are aware of possible barriers to participation; and a gender equity policy to ensure that representation is present at all levels of our organization.

To help us gauge blind spots in our self-evaluation, we have strengthened our athlete representation and engaged ITP in an independent cultural review. Boxing Canada was in the first cohort of sports to go through the cultural assessment and audit tool available through Own The Podium. Our experience with self-reflection has been difficult, profound, but ultimately positive.

No organization, including Boxing Canada, is perfect. Some participants have had negative experiences in our programs. All sport leaders bear responsibility for the situations that have surfaced in our sport. We are committed to preventing these situations in the future.

As a new leader in our NSO, I am personally committed to having an environment that protects the physical and psychological health and safety of every one of our participants. However, efforts to protect our members will never be complete. Measuring outcomes, incorporating feedback from our participants and evolving the standards of practice are a responsibility that boxing humbly and gratefully accepts.

The foundation upon which boxing will fulfill our mission, vision and goals is safe sport.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now go to Mélanie Lemay.

Ms. Lemay, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay (Co-founder, Québec contre les violences sexuelles): Good morning.

My name is Mélanie Lemay. I'm a Ph.D. student in sociology and co-founder of Québec contre les violences sexuelles.

When it comes to hockey and football, for much of my youth and professional life, I have witnessed the consequences of toxic culture in sport. Over the years, a number of men have confided to me that they were traumatized by what was done to them when they were young during hazing activities, and by what they had to do to others for fear of what would happen to them if they refused.

I'm going to describe indoctrination that starts very early on. Young people age 10 to 12 had hardcore pornography and group

masturbation sessions organized for them. In the classroom, certain players were challenged to snap little girls' bra straps, rub up against them or slap their behinds, in addition to masturbating under their desks or on the bus. I heard about acts of bestiality involving a 14-year-old boy at the time. Then there's the "toast ritual" of eating grapes or olives that have been inside another player's anus. I've also heard of a case where someone had to choose between penetrating a sexually diverse individual who had been invited for the occasion or being sodomized by a broomstick.

After off-season tournament victories, the excesses were commonplace and conducive to all kinds of violence: fights, alcohol and drug abuse, assault and gang rape, all in the name of the "boys will be boys" principle or because excellence in sport justified it. I also learned that some teams kept Excel files recording young people's sexual prowess with their conquests, shared videos their conquests didn't know about, or exchanged intimate photos they received, just like they were hockey cards.

I don't need to say how much psychological distress the girls they targeted experienced, especially since their peers considered them responsible for the violence they faced, particularly because of the systemic sexism environment in which we were all immersed. Plus, because of the inequities that still remain between men's and women's sports, student athletes have been convinced not to file a complaint so as not to reflect badly on star players or the sport programs that put the institution on the map. Funding, reach and a sense of belonging were at stake for administrators, far ahead of young people's safety and integrity.

A number of young people have also told me how hard it was for them to assume their own sexual identity or to confront their teammates who were causing problems, due to the strict pecking order in the locker room and the bro code. That brotherhood is impenetrable because, at the end of the day, it's bros before hos. Even coaches have little control over this, and some of them encourage this kind of code because they are convinced it builds team spirit.

While it's a hard truth to hear, this violence occurs daily on sports teams, in our schools, in our extracurricular activities, in leagues and, ultimately, wherever sports are played. Before they become athletes, these young people go to school, and the absence of limits and frameworks fosters an environment where impunity prevails.

Based on the information gathered for the investigation report on École Saint-Laurent, we have no official mechanisms for sharing information among sports federations, educational institutions, the government and complaint handling mechanisms. As a result, complaints can be filed with any of those bodies, including the I File a Complaint platform on the Sport'Aide website, without informing the other parties involved. Therefore, multiple reports of unacceptable behaviour by a coach or athlete can be made without them ever having to undergo a thorough or special investigation.

Fortunately, we do have solutions. Now more than ever, child grooming must be officially recognized as a criminal act, and the same is true for psychological and online violence. Athlete status must be formally recognized as a form of moral authority, and coaches must be held accountable for their actions. They must be in a registry, both domestically and internationally. We urgently need to redefine the very meaning of athletic excellence, its values and, above all, how we keep athletes safe.

Furthermore, the law is not designed to prevent injustice. It's only there once we've failed as a society to protect our most marginalized individuals and the crime has already been committed. That's why it's on all of us to stop the violence from happening. A new branch of law focused on gender-based violence must emerge and integrate clear protocols, along with resources adapted to the daily lives of young people to hear what they reveal and to support them, as well as complaint mechanisms that meet victims' needs.

Any amendments to the Canada Health Act, the Physical Activity and Sport Act or any other federal legislation must create safe, integrated, specialized and culturally aware spaces. They must also pull together the various assistance services, while bringing together the various perspectives and therapeutic approaches that victims need to truly be at the centre of the process. We need to create a service corridor.

In addition, the provinces absolutely must pass legislation to protect young people in schools, as recommended by *La voix des jeunes compte*, a group of young people who have been fighting sexual violence for over four years now.

In short, with support from documentary filmmakers at Les Studios Seaborn, who helped me make the documentary *Pour une culture du consentement dans le hockey et dans le sport en général*, the strategy is to learn from our mistakes and improve our game for the next match. All we need to do is apply that to our laws and to life in general. It's time for our sports to become a reflection of our national pride again.

• (1610)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Everyone is on time today, and actually even quicker than they need to be. I appreciate that.

We're going to go to the question-and-answer segment right now. The first segment is a six-minute segment. You will have six minutes for questions and answers, so I urge you all to be as concise as you possibly can to get as many questions and answers into the timeline as possible.

I'll begin with Rachael Thomas for the Conservatives.

You have six minutes. Go ahead, please, Rachael.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for you, Mr. Lindsay, through the chair.

It's come to our attention, looking at past articles in the news, that there was quite the scandal that took place that came to light. In spring of 2022, there were over a hundred letters that were written to Sport Canada from athletes within Boxing Canada. Those letters outlined situations of abuse or of misconduct within the organization, specifically regarding Daniel Trépanier.

I'm curious as to how Boxing Canada dealt with that when you had hundreds of letters coming out.

• (1615)

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Thank you for the question.

The situation any time we have so many athletes coming forward with allegations is serious, and we need to listen and to investigate. To the best of my understanding, as I was not part of the organization at that point, Boxing Canada engaged with an investigation after putting that employee on suspension. At the end of that investigation, a decision was made to try to move the program in a different direction, which has led to a replacement of that high-performance director position.

During the time of that investigation, Boxing Canada had also turned over one of its coaches and had engaged with the third party company, ITP, which is our designated third party investigative agency, in order to start a long-term study of the culture of boxing writ large within the program.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Has that study wrapped up?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: It has not wrapped up. They actually called me within the first week of my job saying, "Here's where we're at. Sorry that it's taken so long". My response was, whatever you need in order to get this done, let's get it done.

During that time was when we actually engaged with the CAAT, a culture assessment and audit tool, which is a little more focused on the high-performance program as opposed to boxing writ large. We have received the report back from them, which through that process goes to staff, and the staff is using that as a basis not only to look back on policy changes that had been enacted in the past couple of years but also to chart out a course for future changes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Lindsay, I can appreciate that you came after this incident took place, but I would imagine that you looked at historical documents and that you have a fair understanding of the context you stepped into.

I'm curious. Did Sport Canada reach out to the organization after receiving hundreds of letters?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I have not seen any evidence one way or another that they did or did not.

I could certainly ask more questions about that change.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I would love that, yes. If you could report back to the committee, that would be wonderful. Thank you.

Again, I would imagine you have looked at financials. It seems part of your responsibility. Yes...? Perfect.

I'm curious if Sport Canada...if there were any repercussions with regard to funding based on those letters that were submitted.

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: My understanding is that Boxing Canada was reminded of its obligations under the funding framework and that changes were required in the types of policies and procedures we have in place. I think one reason we see so many policy changes in the 2022 calendar year is a response to making sure we actually had all of the necessary measures in place in order to adequately protect our participants.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Was there any accountability taken with regard to Sport Canada and the funding that it is providing to Boxing Canada?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: To the best of my knowledge, our funding has not been interrupted.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay.

Have there been metrics set out or expectations set out, aside from signing off on OSIC, in order to receive funding?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: To the best of my knowledge, no. Signing on to OSIC, as with all of our national sport organizations, was the primary thing that was asked.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Those hundreds of letters were written to Sport Canada, and they came to light in May 2022. Your organization didn't sign OSIC until May 2023, which means that an entire 12 months passed with zero accountability from Sport Canada toward your organization. Meanwhile, hundreds of letters were submitted that outlined atrocious things that took place under the care of your organization.

I take issue with Boxing Canada, and I take issue with Sport Canada for its lack of accountability. That's shameful. It's really sad that those athletes had to go through that.

I'm curious why Daniel was allowed to simply resign without any disciplinary measures?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Unfortunately, I don't have any information to add that could bring any clarity to your question.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Under your leadership, would that happen again?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: No.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Why not? What are you going to do to protect against it?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I am a very strong believer that, in order to have performance at the highest end of our national team program, we must have a strong foundation of trust, accountability and free communication among our athletes, our coaches and our leadership.

Without that, I don't feel that athletes are put in a position to perform. We may end up having top-level athletes being able to overcome obstacles, but our goal at Boxing Canada isn't to support only top-level athletes. Our goal is to improve the ability of our national

team to compete at whatever level they are able to obtain until such time as they are unable to compete with the national team anymore, at the end of their career or should they choose to move on.

• (1620)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Lindsay, I hope you are never put in a situation where you have to consider letting someone within your organization go, but should you be put in that situation, I hope you do the right thing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas.

Next I go to Tim Louis for the Liberals.

You have six minutes. Go ahead, please, Tim.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll ask all the questions through the chair.

I want to start by thanking everyone for being here, including those who are telling their personal stories. I would just say—I'm sure I speak on behalf of the whole committee—that it takes courage to be here and it is important that your voices are being heard. We do appreciate your time.

I will start by addressing Ms. Taylor.

Ms. Taylor, you embody and represent so many parents of children playing hockey or other sports, and as parents we all want to nurture and protect our children. We want to give them those opportunities to grow and to succeed. Part of those opportunities—and you mentioned this—includes competition.

At the same time—and we've heard this from so many people—you spoke about this culture of creating athletes and pushing them to be elite, and it starts at such a young age.

In your opinion, what is a model, a scenario in which that can be done in a balanced way? How can we strike a balance between being competitive and winning at all costs and learning the right life skills?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Thank you for the question.

I don't know if I have a great answer for that, but competition is always going to be there, and life isn't fair. I think you do need to learn how to win and how to lose to be successful.

With that being said, it's becoming a year-round sport for kids. They're not able to do multi-sports or do other things. The Canadian Hockey League is big business. Big money and scholarships are involved. The money is so enticing that kids are in sport year-round, and I think that's part of the problem too.

Mr. Tim Louis: I do appreciate that.

You are at this committee. I imagine there are other parents watching who have younger children. What kind of message do you have? From your unfortunate experiences, is there something you can share with both the committee and other parents—let's say, of younger children?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Looking back, being an American and sending my high school-aged son to a different country was a bit naive of me. We're a first-generation hockey family. We live in California and, yes, there is hockey in California. I didn't even know what the CHL was at that point. I didn't know what the USHL was.

My son was identified at a young age, at 14, through the U.S.A. Hockey national team development program. That's when it all started. These opportunities all hit that bantam year. The phone started ringing, and we had all these choices to make. We made the best decision with the information we had at the time. Looking back, we believed what we were told.

When you have a big name fly out to a practice to watch your son skate, and they tell you, "It's about timing and being at the right place at the right time, and we're offering him this great opportunity", you buy into everything they're telling you.

I am here to say, always remember that it's big business. They're there to make money, and they're not always there for the best interests of the player.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you for that.

Mr. Walter, we have heard much testimony, but I do not believe we have yet heard the term "exploited financially", so I want to shed some more light on that. You mentioned scholarships and how you weren't aware of the terms. You talked about the players' rights and safety and making sure those are protected.

Can you expand a bit on ways in which these young athletes can be exploited financially as well?

• (1625)

Mr. Lukas Walter: Yes, for sure.

I was down in the States, and my paycheque was about \$75 a week. I had a car, and everyone knows that gas is expensive. At the end of the day I had to take a loan out from my parents, and then that summer, when I was supposed to be training and all that, I had to pay off the loan and then pay for my training. Hockey is an expensive sport. It's really expensive.

I will say about the league that I don't think anything has really changed in it. You were saying that you were first generation. I talked to my dad and my uncle—I'm from a long line of WHL players—and nothing has really changed, including the pay, since the 1980s. Look at inflation and how that goes. I don't know what else to say about that.

Mr. Tim Louis: What would you have liked to see to be better equipped to negotiate the contracts? What systems would have helped you to make sure you were protected?

Mr. Lukas Walter: Making sure I have enough money to fill up my car and buy a couple of snacks here and there would help, but at the end of the day, the financial situation hasn't changed since the 1980s, let alone anything else in the league, including the hazing. All of that still goes on.

Mr. Tim Louis: I'll simply say thank you. My time is short, but I want to thank you and all the witnesses for being here today.

The Chair: Thank you, Tim.

I'm going to go to the next speaker, Sébastien Lemire of the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their testimony.

Mrs. Lemay, how do you feel about what you've heard today?

How could we prevent the types of abuse suffered by Mr. Gobeil, Mr. Walter or Ms. Taylor?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: A member of my family played for the Montreal Canadiens in the 1940s and 1950s. It's fascinating to see that things haven't changed much. It's the loved ones who fund sport, and the family has to make a lot of sacrifices. In my opinion, it's a major financial challenge.

You can see that college and professional sports teams are businesses. In my opinion, as long as we don't take a closer look at the precarious environment young athletes live in or the fact that we're creating a competition for opportunities, I believe we'll continue to fail miserably at protecting our young people.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You're taking action and you're looking for solutions. In particular, you worked with the Canadiens hockey club and met with players to talk about a form of education on sexual mores.

Can you tell us more about your experience and the solutions that are needed in locker rooms?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: Obviously, any player who has gone through the entire process of becoming a professional is essentially an expert in their sport. As such, they have a lot to say and they have a voice. They should play a more central role in the emerging decision-making process. They're heroes and role models for generations of young people who want to follow in their footsteps as they grow up.

The data are obviously confidential, but the fact remains that, because they have been in this environment, men have a lot of information about things they weren't even aware they were witnessing, whether in interrelationships with women or with fans.

We need to make sure we carry out a concerted campaign with various players. That's what my friend Mia Lynn Cossette and I are advocating for. Together, we founded the Consensus campaign, which aims to engage the entire ecosystem to ensure that we recover this leadership model and that we bring about a transition to new values and a new way to be an athlete.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Among other things, your expertise leads you to observe what's going on in the educational environment, particularly in student sports.

The committee wants things to change, and we obviously need to submit a report. Do you have any specific recommendations for the educational community? At that age, athletes develop their connection to sexuality and experience a sense of glory on their teams or in their schools.

• (1630)

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: It's essential that the Department of Canadian Heritage no longer be responsible for managing sport. It has to be the Department of Health, simply because we need to set up integrated support mechanisms within teams and a service corridor that facilitates and enables young people to get help as soon as they need it. We have to stop seeing them as athletes. These are young people, people who need support. Implementing integrated measures can benefit society as a whole.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: In a way, you're denouncing this high-performance culture that puts athletes above all else, a bit like the culture of gold medals at all costs in the Olympic movement and the Own the Podium organization. The people from that organization told us they wanted to see a change, and said they are in favour of an independent public inquiry, but they are also reviewing their mission.

How do you see this culture of performance at all costs? How is follow-up done with victims? Do they receive guidance? Is there sufficient compassion for them and do victims get the services they need?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: Right now, people are only keeping silent about these issues of violence because we have no mechanism that captures the complex situation of the instigators and victims of this form of violence.

Allow me to explain. National tournaments are held in various provinces, and there are international tournaments too. They come under various authorities, and the players sign contracts or agreements that are sometimes at odds with our own laws. Clearly, we need to broaden our vision to facilitate access to justice and redress.

In addition, athletes sign confidentiality agreements. There are lawyers and legal experts behind these practices. All provincial bar associations must therefore commit to better regulating the profession and creating a new branch of law that considers all the implications and ramifications of gender-based violence.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: That's very interesting.

I'd like to talk about the people who mentor athletes. Even if they are held accountable, a number of coaches who have committed abuses find themselves in situations where they can reoffend elsewhere.

How can we explain this phenomenon where victims are left to fend for themselves, when abusers have the right to start over elsewhere and, sadly, begin committing reprehensible acts again in many cases?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: Often, what people tend to say, with no real legal basis, is that the right to privacy trumps young victims' right to safety or freedom of speech.

In my opinion, this is a fundamental human rights issue, because at the end of the day, adults in positions of authority are being al-

lowed to act with impunity, and that's unacceptable. This underscores the need to broaden the dialogue and to call for a new branch of law.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

This week, we heard from representatives of My Voice, My Choice, who came to talk about this issue.

What legislative changes would you suggest to ensure that people are no longer abused by having them sign non-disclosure agreements?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: First, we have to redefine the very meaning of what we want to protect. Personally, I think it should no longer be an organization's image or reputation, but rather young people's integrity. That's why the group La voix des jeunes compte is calling for legislation on this issue.

Let's also not forget that before they are athletes, these are human beings who grow in our school environments. We need to foster a dialogue with the provinces that would make it possible to pass legislation on this issue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Then everyone will have to assume their responsibilities.

Thank you very much, Mrs. Lemay.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

Now we go to the New Democratic Party and Peter Julian for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony, which has often been troubling. We're very grateful to them for showing courage in coming to give us this information. It's extremely important, given that we must draft a report on the subject. It will help us tell the government what action it needs to take.

Mrs. Lemay, one of your recommendations was that grooming should be considered a criminal offence. When we talk about abuse, whether in sports or in schools, it always starts with that form of psychological manipulation, that type of wrongdoing.

Do you have any more details to give us on that? How could we frame that in the Criminal Code?

• (1635)

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: Here's the main problem. When a young person or their family files a complaint, there will often have been no overt physical violence. In fact, it's very rare. Emotional blackmail often involves a bond of trust or love. There are also the bonds forged when parents have blind faith in the coach.

We really need to better understand, through science, what leads to the act being committed. The climate that develops over several years gives certain aggressors the opportunity to progress to actions, whether it's during a tournament or a trip abroad. In my opinion, it's essential to call a spade a spade. Current laws don't always allow charges to be laid, since the person in the position of authority will sometimes wait until the young person has reached the age of majority before acting. There's a perversion in all this that hasn't yet been considered. It's a huge blind spot.

Mr. Peter Julian: Are you aware of grooming practices in other countries?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: In a way, Canada is a forerunner in that respect. Given all the legislative challenges that exist between provincial, national and international jurisdictions, it's really necessary to go much further than what the Criminal Code currently offers. Otherwise, we won't be able to take into account the full social context in which sexual violence occurs. We're only going to focus on the facts of the case, without considering the systemic context in which they occur.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Lindsay, I'd like to come to you.

In response to questions asked by Mrs. Thomas, you talked about the fact that, essentially, for about a year there wasn't an investigation process in place in response to the letter, which talked about the "toxic culture of fear and silence" with Boxing Canada. They write this in their letter:

Many athletes feel they have suffered physical abuse, psychological abuse, and neglect by the organization because of their failure to address these issues. Repeated attempts have been made to bring these issues to light, and they have been ignored or dismissed.

I understand from your testimony there wasn't a process put in place for complaints.

I note that within Boxing Canada, there is a provision for the high-performance program in the athlete agreement. One thing that is said very clearly is—I'm quoting clause (ff)—that the athlete is engaging to:

Not publicly (including through social media) disparage or advance any grievance against Boxing Canada, Boxing Canada's staff or coaches, members of the National Team, or other HPP athletes except through Boxing Canada's policies for complaints and appeals....

If there wasn't a process in place for complaints and appeals, these athletes were still governed by the athlete's agreement. How could that be that Boxing Canada would not provide an outlet, yet would still, in a sense, oblige a non-disclosure agreement?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Given that I wasn't around during that time, I find it difficult to talk about specifics. However, there are two things that I would like to bring forward.

The first is that, in the last month, we have made a significant change to that athlete agreement, taking away the clause that specifically prohibited athletes from speaking out in any way that was disparaging to the NSO. That needed to change. That's following guidance that we were able to get from both Sport Canada and AthletesCAN.

Mr. Peter Julian: Have all of the high-performance athletes then signed new agreements that no longer have that legal clause?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: It has just come back from translation. It will be put up on our website and pushed out to all of our athletes who are engaged in national-level programming.

• (1640)

Mr. Peter Julian: At this point, the athletes are still governed by the original agreement.

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: They are still under that agreement, but whether we would execute on that I think is....

Mr. Peter Julian: Can you commit today that Boxing Canada will endeavour as quickly as possible to rip up the old agreement and allow those athletes then to speak up?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Absolutely.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I want to go to Mr.—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, but I have a point of order here.

I think that's time.

The Chair: Peter, you have 15 seconds.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

Mr. Gobeil, I would like to know what the team did when.... You were injured. They didn't notify the school.

When they became aware of all of those things, what did the team do for you?

The Chair: Please be concise, Mr. Gobeil.

Mr. Thomas Gobeil: Yes.

To be truthful, nothing, really. I came back and learned from a Twitter notification that I was traded. I guess that became the problem of the new team that I was traded to, but nothing was ever addressed to me.

Mr. Peter Julian: Unbelievable.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to the second round of questions. It's a five-minute round.

I will begin with the Conservatives and Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have up to five minutes, please.

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

Welcome, everyone.

Mr. Lindsay, what is your budget that you get from Sport Canada, from the government?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I haven't seen details of the updated new round of funding, but I believe it's about a million dollars.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: At a million dollars a year, you would be one of the smaller NSOs out of the 62.

You see, this is my problem with the whole system, if you don't mind me saying. You have no money to fight anything. I'm sorry. You're in the bottom half of the NSOs. You're screwed. You have 121 boxers complaining, and you have no money to help them out. I've seen this with three-quarters of the sports out of 62 NSOs.

We were lucky. We got Hockey Canada here and we got Soccer Canada here, because they're the two biggest. Beyond that, you're in the bottom half and no one could care less about boxing until there's shit that happens, and that's what's happened here. This is where I'm blaming Sport Canada. It should have been flagged long ago. Funding should have been stopped. They don't do anything. They're like Christmas. They just hand out cheques and never follow up. This is a problem with this Liberal government. This is the problem with the sport ministers they have had and continue to have. Nobody follows up in Sport Canada. There are no consequences. I saw it when they were here. They have no recollection. They don't have to answer to anybody. It's disgraceful.

Sport Canada could have stopped this long before we lost Daniel Trépanier. This could have been stopped. We had one of the athletes here in April talking about this. This could have been stopped long ago, but Sport Canada is the problem. OSIC will follow Sport Canada and do nothing. You had to sign on because you needed the million dollars, or you probably wouldn't have signed on in late May. You were forced to.

What is your view? You're just getting into the chair, unfortunately, but you know where I'm coming from with Sport Canada. They don't flag a damn thing. That's where the problems exist with Hockey Canada and with Soccer Canada and, unfortunately, with the little sports like yours—boxing. You haven't had success at the Olympics, and funding doesn't come with that.

I want you to comment on the problems we've had with Sport Canada in this country.

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I find it difficult to comment specifically on the problems that boxing has or hasn't had with regard to oversight from Sport Canada. However, accountability in our sport system is critical, and the work that Sport Canada has done in order to move OSIC is a step in the right direction.

I agree with the honourable member that if we had more money, as a small sport, we would be able to do a better job of protecting our athletes and, I would hope, of being able to support them and to provide greater opportunities for them to reach their ultimate potential.

• (1645)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm surprised because you can't even afford the third party.... Hockey Canada had gobs of money and their third party was Henein Hutchison. You have ITP. What are you paying them? Nowhere near Henein Hutchison, I would think, so of course you're not going to get the report back.... You're paying them next to nothing. You only have a million dollars in your budget for the entire year. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that you have little or no money, so of course ITP isn't going to come forward right away with a report for you.

I've seen this with third parties. We never hear a damn thing. I'm still waiting for the London, Ontario, police report from Hockey

Canada—five years this month. How long is it going to take boxing to hear back from ITP on your third party investigation? How long?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: My understanding is that they have wrapped up their investigations and are currently putting the report together for us, so I would hope that it is shortly, sir.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Could you share that with this committee then? When you receive the report, as Boxing Canada, would you be willing to share that with us?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I would have to look at the terms of the agreement that our board signed with ITP. However, my understanding is that our board, like me, feels that a policy of openness and accountability is important and that whatever results we get out of the ITP report on the culture of our sport will be shared to the best of our ability.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Kevin.

I now go to Michael Coteau for the Liberals.

Michael, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to take a moment to thank all of the witnesses for having the commitment and the courage to be here to talk about some of these issues that I know are very personal.

We know from the witnesses who have come in over the last several months that this is not a Sport Canada issue. This is a systemic, historical issue that has spanned decades in this country. For the vice-chair to say that this comes down to money simply is not the truth. It's a systemic issue that's deeply rooted in many of our sports cultures in this country—through the organizations but even beyond that. To simply say we need to spend more money to find a solution, I don't think is a real approach to dealing with these systemic issues.

I think the study we're doing today and the openness to major reform by the minister are the types of things this committee and the minister can do going forward to shed some light on these issues and to look for ways, through our study, to position some solutions for systemic change in sport.

I want to start off with Ms. Taylor.

I was reading through some of the documentation and there was a term that was being used, “garbage bag treatment”. Can you talk specifically about this term and how it impacted your family?

Next I can maybe turn it over to the two players to talk about that term and shed some light on the treatment of players.

I'll go over to you, Ms. Taylor.

Mrs. Kim Taylor: When the team decides that they're going to trade you or they're going to hang on to your rights and put you down with the farm team or the level below you, they don't let you take their hockey bag. They give you a garbage bag. It's called the garbage bag treatment, because once you leave that team, you're garbage. It's as simple as that.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can you say that again?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: You're treated like garbage. It's almost an analogy for what they think of you when your time with the team is done. You're not good enough to take their hockey bag with their logo on it, so you—

Mr. Michael Coteau: Are you literally saying that you cannot take a bag, like physically take a bag?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Yes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Wow. You're saying that after years of commitment—it could be months or it could be years of commitment—to a team, which in many cases profits off your effort, your blood, sweat and tears, literally, you're saying that the dignity is not even provided to the player as they are traded to another team to leave literally with their hockey bag?

• (1650)

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Right.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Wow.

Mrs. Kim Taylor: There's a common phrase that players are called “suitcases”.

They talk about education being so important. They're picking up underage kids who are still in high school. If education is so important, then why are they trading kids who are still in high school?

For my son, they made him enrol in the school. There was an educational adviser there. However, if he had been traded that school year, that would have been a disaster. I mean, they're on these long road trips. They work for 40 hours a week. They really own you in every single way: public appearances, going to hospitals, going to the schools, autograph signings. I'm not saying that they don't enjoy those things. It's just that they're not mandatory. It's to make the CHL look good.

There's also another phrase known that sometimes the players say “thugs in suits”. They look really professional and honest on the outside, but on the inside, they're pretty brutal. There are times where players are walked down the hallway and they feel invisible. Coaches and staff will walk by them and not acknowledge them. There's a lot of cruel punishment.

They're called “interchangeable parts”. They've already made this level where they're at the top 2%. They know they're great hockey players. It's like splitting hairs: “You're just an interchangeable part at this time.” They have a way of making you feel worthless.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Now, Sébastien Lemire, you have two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Walter, do you feel that hockey is changing for the better these days? Or do you think that at the end of the day, the good commitments made by some leagues, particularly the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, are not translating to improvements in the locker room?

[*English*]

Mr. Lukas Walter: Truthfully for me, I haven't seen much change at all. At the end of the day, what is it? They're still making the same amount. There are the same problems, a.k.a. the sexual abuse problems, going on and all sorts of stuff. That was happening in my dad's time. You would think they would have learned from the whole instance in Moose Jaw way back in the day. Everyone knows that story.

Stuff continues to happen. That's why I truly believe there needs to be a third party involved in this, because how much longer is it going to continue to go on for? This has been going on since the seventies. It's 2023 now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Gobeil, what do you think?

Mr. Thomas Gobeil: Thank you for the question.

It's a difficult question for us, given that it's already been a few years since we left that league. Personally, I am close with hockey players, having coached a hockey team last season and having also been a coach and physical trainer to several hockey players.

Within organizations, it's hard for me to say whether the relationship between people in positions of authority and youth has changed. From what I understand, and from discussions I've had with the hockey players I coach, there's still this kind of idolizing — not only of the coach and the members of the organization, but also towards the league. The kids don't seem to know that there are other options for them. They don't know where they can go to play to keep their dream of playing in the National Hockey League alive.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: So what you're recommending is that there should be changes in the education of hockey players, so that they're aware of all their rights in difficult situations, and of potential opportunities.

Is that it?

Mr. Thomas Gobeil: Yes, that's exactly it.

We also need to re-examine the environment in which young people find themselves. Having lived it, I can say that it's difficult to play and have professional schedules, while at the same time having to meet academic performance expectations to the same degree as other students who aren't on the road and don't have to meet those additional expectations. It really is a lot of work. I believe that if the league's intention truly was to develop young people on a personal level, as students, like in school leagues, then there wouldn't be as many games or training sessions, and the workload would be smaller.

• (1655)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lemire.

I go to Peter Julian for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Walter, I want to come to you. You mentioned in your opening statement that you could cite examples of situations that might have been prevented or in which victims might have been supported had there been a third party investigation process in place. I'd like to give you the opportunity to talk about those examples now, if you're comfortable.

Mr. Lukas Walter: If you look at just his whole school thing, he had to quit school because they didn't even check in with the teachers. Thomas here had his injury. With a third party, he could have said, "Hey, what's going on?" He could have given them a call and said, "Can you make sure my school is covered and everything?" Obviously the team didn't do it for him, so there's one example right there.

There are other examples in terms of things like mental health issues. That's a horrible one. You would hate to see more players end up in bad situations—like while they're playing hockey and they get cut. There's been a bad example of that before. You know, a player gets cut and "screamed out" and then they have mental health issues and bad things happen. They do need a third party, even if it's ex-players, to talk to about situations and to get things done so that we don't lose people to mental health issues and substance abuse and all sorts of things. The list goes on and on.

Also, I'd like to say something to athletes about life after hockey. If I could say something to future athletes, it would be that at the end of the day, it's a game that we love to play. Throughout all of this, I haven't stepped foot on the ice since I've been done hockey and all that. It's become too much. People take it way off, and too many of these foul things happen, so that needs to just stop.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

We started this investigation a year ago. All of us had the intention, I think, of just having one or two meetings, and the deeper we've gone into examining the situation, particularly in hockey—it's our national winter sport—the more we have the understanding that major change has to happen and the federal government has to step up.

I'm going to Ms. Taylor.

You mentioned that there was retribution when your son stepped forward. Could you give us some examples, if you're comfortable, of that retribution that happened?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Well, he got cut. He didn't get cut per se right away. They sent him down and held onto his rights to punish him and said, "He needs to work on some things, and we're just going to park him down there and we'll bring him back up." They didn't call his agent. They didn't call his parents. They didn't call his billet.

The billet family is the surrogate family that loved him, that cried and that helped him.

They didn't ask him if he needed money to get where he was going. They didn't think about, "He's an American, so does he even know how to get to Canmore from Lethbridge?" Nothing.

I heard—

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Peter.

Finish your sentence, Ms. Taylor.

Mrs. Kim Taylor: I don't know where I was.

Mr. Peter Julian: You've already said that he was treated like a suitcase, really.

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Yes.

They did release his rights and he did get picked up, but the damage was done.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

I now go to Martin Shields.

Martin, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here in person and telling your stories.

Ms. Lemay, we had a witness here from a women's group that works with the Alberta Junior Hockey League—same age as the young man—and they did sessions with all 16 teams. I've talked with the commissioner, who was also involved in those sessions. He said it was a fantastic program. You're looking for a program. There's a program. It's out there and it's working in junior hockey.

Have you had any knowledge of an NDA being used in any experience with hockey players, with sports?

• (1700)

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: You mean non-disclosure—

Mr. Martin Shields: Right.

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: —in sports?

Yes, I did, based on how you have to protect the image of the team so—

Mr. Martin Shields: Do you think they should be used?

Mrs. Mélanie Lemay: No. I don't think they should be used at all, because at the end of the day it serves not the players nor the youth. It serves the image.

Mr. Martin Shields: Ms. Taylor, was a non-disclosure agreement ever involved with your son?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: No.

Mr. Martin Shields: It's too bad that he didn't go to the Brooks Bandits. They have hockey players from all over the country and from the United States, with one from California and one from Texas. By the way, it's not a lower level down. The most valuable player in the Stanley Cup last year was a Brooks Bandit. There are a lot of good players at different levels, absolutely.

Non-disclosure for you, sir, Mr. Walter...?

Mr. Lukas Walter: For me...?

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

Mr. Lukas Walter: I didn't need a non-disclosure.

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay. You didn't have it. There was no non-disclosure for you.

Now let's go to non-disclosure in your organization, Mr. Lindsay. You're saying that you're changing the policies. Is that right?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: That's correct.

Mr. Martin Shields: Going forward with the new policy, there will be no opportunity for non-disclosure.

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: That's correct.

Mr. Martin Shields: I'm not sure what your background is, but if somebody gave me a million dollars, I would think they might be interested in how I accounted for that. Are you accountable for how that money from Sport Canada is spent?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Yes. Boxing Canada is subject to accountability through Sport Canada.

Mr. Martin Shields: How?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Through evaluation through the sport accountability funding framework.

Mr. Martin Shields: Can you describe that framework?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I cannot. I have not personally been through that process yet.

Mr. Martin Shields: Are you saying that you believe it's a one-time event?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: My understanding is that reporting is due annually.

Mr. Martin Shields: You fill out a report and send it in. Would that be your guess?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: That is my understanding at this point, yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay. That's one-way traffic on funding you would get. That's problematic to me in the sense of... I have to be honest about boxing, because the history of it in Olympics, in international sports federations, is not good. I personally would like to see it gone from the Olympics, really, because we have problems.

How do you choose the athletes to compete to the next levels? Are you familiar with it?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: All combat sports have, essentially, a hierarchy for selection, which is quite brutal at times.

Mr. Martin Shields: As we learned from fencing, it might be the favour of the coach. It has nothing to do with the competition. It might be where they're from. I don't think boxing today is a lot different from what it was in the past.

How are you going to change that?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Boxing Canada is committed to simplifying and objectifying selection policies and procedures to the best of our ability. One of the advantages of direct combat sports that are not essentially point-based is that you have a clear winner and a clear loser.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, judges make points, which is a huge controversy when you have three judges. Who knows what that is based on? It's not the first across the finish line—is it?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: No, it is not, but the referee and judging system we have in Canada, in my estimation, is world-leading in trying to make sure they have as much accountability as the rule book will allow them to have.

Mr. Martin Shields: Because you've just moved into the job you're in, you're looking for accountability in your organization. Do you believe Sport Canada is looking for accountability to fix the problems you've had?

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: I do.

Mr. Martin Shields: Good luck.

Thank you.

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Martin.

We are now going to Chris Bittle for the Liberals.

Chris, you have five minutes.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I appreciate everyone being here. I know these are difficult stories to tell.

I'd like to focus on hockey.

It's been troubling, in Niagara, to see it time and again. We've had two general managers of the local OHL team suspended in a row, even with new ownership. It seems the problems keep continuing, as Mr. Walter mentioned.

Ms. Taylor, you mentioned that you didn't want to get into the business model, but do you believe that leads to the problems in the CHL?

• (1705)

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Absolutely.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'm wondering whether you could expand on that.

Mrs. Kim Taylor: I don't know what their policy and procedures are.

I had an issue. My son's entrance into the Western Hockey League, and his exit, were both disasters.

In my son's case, he had a groin injury. He came late to the team. I think we had to drive him to L.A. This is before there were direct flights from San Diego to Calgary. We drove him to L.A. He got on a plane by himself, as a teenager, went to Denver, got to Calgary, and then got on another plane and flew to Lethbridge. The GM picked him up, dropped off his bags at the billet and told him to get his clothes on, go to the rink, meet the coaches, get his equipment on and play in an exhibition game.

He never warmed up with the team. He never knew their team systems. He is one of those whom you hear about. On his first shift, he came out, got checked from behind—headfirst into the boards—and was out with a concussion. The other player had a multiple-game suspension, but the damage was done. He was tired. He wasn't fed. He didn't have his own equipment. He was wearing new equipment. He didn't warm up with the team.

Mr. Chris Bittle: It's back to that "interchangeable parts" management.

Mrs. Kim Taylor: Why was it so necessary to have him on the ice that night, in a game that didn't matter? It was an exhibition game.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'd like to turn to Mr. Walter.

We've heard from other witnesses about the difficulties and exclusions that different provinces have for CHL leagues that are excluded from provincial employment standards legislation.

Do you feel that's an important step for provinces to take—to include athletes, such as CHL athletes, back into provincial employment legislation?

Mr. Lukas Walter: I think, with the CHL, it is pretty difficult, because, as well as teams all over provinces, you also have teams in the States. It's tough, but you need a general thing on how to.... That's why, with a third party, you are essentially looking out for all the organizations, including the teams in the States.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Would a union be a better vehicle to achieve that goal rather than a governing body that might look after teams and be policing teams? We've seen in professional leagues such things as the NHLPA, which seemingly acts for players, protects players and acts in their best interests. Is that something you would like to see again, through provincial legislation that would allow players to unionize?

Mr. Lukas Walter: Yes. I would definitely say there should be a union, but also within that union you need a group of ex-players, because they know what they're talking about. You see countless people in unions who have never played the sport. They know nothing about the game. They don't know where you've been. At the end of the day you need those ex-players to make the game a better place for all athletes.

It goes even further: When players are done with that, they can also learn to fill in those positions within the union to make it better and better.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Again, I just want to say thank you. I know it's a difficult task to come here, but you have every party here listening and seeking to take action and make recommendations. I do want to say thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Chris.

We have time for one more round, guys.

I will start with Richard Martel.

Richard, go ahead for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today. Their testimonies are interesting.

I'll start with Mr. Walter.

Mr. Walter, you think you should have a bigger salary. We've heard that junior teams pay for food, lodging, studies and a substitute teacher.

Is this the same in other organizations? Do all teams offer the same conditions and salary? Do you think 18-, 19- or 20-year-old players receive the same?

• (1710)

[*English*]

Mr. Lukas Walter: Absolutely not. Everywhere you go it's going to be different. Honestly, for the billets, the people who take us, that's pretty much volunteer work. They don't get paid nearly what you think. We could probably find those numbers somehow. They don't get paid much. Within that payment is the food the billets provide for us. Really, at the end of the day, they're making money off of volunteers here. With the billets, it's pretty much a volunteer thing.

As for the gear, that's all from sponsorship. The gear is covered by sponsors and stuff like that. In terms of costs, yes, you need to fill up the bus and stuff like that. You have to pay some people. With respect to the billets and all that, it's pretty much volunteer work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: If you were paid a salary, you'd have to pay for food and lodging. I don't see why an employer would pay a salary while offering these benefits.

What salary do you think you're entitled to? I don't know if you can answer that. If you were paid a salary, you wouldn't have all these tuition and scholarship benefits. How do you see it?

[*English*]

Mr. Lukas Walter: At the end of the day you see people who are supposedly working and they all live almost in a commune and stuff like that. That's not a question I can really fully answer in terms of the direction of the league. I'm sure it wouldn't be too hard to find housing for the boys and all that and to consider giving them a livable wage so they could live off it.

Also, what I would like to say is that if the boys do end up getting money and all that, they should have the union or somebody offering to put their money in almost an investment so that, after they're done with their hockey, they'll have something as well as their school to look forward to. There could be different funds that could earn interest or whatever.

I think there's a lot of work to do on that sort of stuff.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: In my opinion, the minimum wage doesn't allow them to support themselves.

[*English*]

Mr. Lukas Walter: Yes, but how do they get away with making so much money off of volunteers? That's what I'm asking.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: That's interesting.

Mr. Lindsay, on April 24, the committee heard Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau testify. She explained that, when athletes use the mechanisms in place at Boxing Canada, it can take several months for things to change. During this time, the athlete does not take part in competitions or training camps, and does not accumulate any points.

What do you think of this statement?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Finding opportunities for athletes, especially in combat sports, to go into the world to compete against other world-class athletes is very difficult. Boxing is particularly challenged, given some of the international upheaval that has already been referenced.

We are hopeful that there are changes afoot that will clarify some of that pathway, to provide boxing athletes and other combat athletes with multiple levels of international competition, so that, if they are not on our A team, they can be on a B team, which is still able to go out into the world and rack up international points.

If I had my way, I would put that all the way down to a C team and D team. However, as one of the members mentioned, we will need to find other sources of investment for that.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you very much, Mr. Lindsay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Martel.

Next we will have Anthony Housefather for the Liberals.

You have five minutes, please, Anthony.

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

Are we sure that Ms. Hepfner didn't want to go next? I want to make sure that it's not her time.

The Chair: I asked Ms. Hepfner and she said she wasn't ready. She may go after you.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay. Thank you so much, then, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses.

[*Translation*]

As you know, we have a former hockey coach with us today. His questions are perhaps a little more specific than mine.

[*English*]

I want to start with my questions related to hockey.

As you know, we've had intensive interactions with Hockey Canada. The leagues are members of Hockey Canada.

I am wondering whether you have seen over the last year, since there has been a new board in place, a change at all in the attitude of Hockey Canada toward the CHL or toward the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League? Have you seen anything...?

I guess I'll go to Thomas and Lukas first.

Mr. Thomas Gobeil: Thank you for your question.

No, there's nothing I can attest to that I've seen. It doesn't mean it didn't happen, but there's nothing I can attest to that I've seen that has changed.

Mr. Lukas Walter: I've seen nothing change, besides them advertising that they're giving a lot to the scholarship fund. But here I sit with my scholarship gone.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Basically your scholarship was taken away because you didn't exercise it in the first year after you left.

Mr. Lukas Walter: You have to use it in a year, but what if someone wants to go travel? There are other things to life than hockey. You've done hockey your whole life and now you're forced to go back to school.

You need longer on that, or you need.... I don't think it should ever expire. You've earned that. You've earned your three years of school. It should either be a buyout or it's with you forever. Maybe I want to go to adult school right now, but I can't do that because I don't have it.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Again, I understand. I think it's part of the hockey paradigm.

Richard was asking whether it was different by team. As you stated, I think it's the same as when your dad was there in the eighties. Whether it's a new hockey family or an old hockey family that goes through generations, the league stays relatively the same. Given that this committee's goal is to make recommendations related to....

Each sport is different, but in hockey, we've tackled the safe sport issue a little bit. I think the new board is committed to dealing with a safer sport.

In terms of labour conditions within junior hockey, what are the major recommendations you would say we should make? We can only really exercise them through funding from Sport Canada to Hockey Canada. We don't have leverage over the leagues themselves, necessarily. What are the major things...?

Chris explored whether it should be unionized, whether the league should have policies. Basically, they're taking mostly under-age kids away from their parents, putting them with billet families and not really taking care of them in a proper way. What should we recommend?

I'll go maybe to both of you.

Mr. Thomas Gobeil: I can go first.

Like I said, I think the CHL players should be recognized as federal employees, because, if we look at the demand....

If you will allow me, I will share a bit of my experience.

I was 15 when I left my home. I was told exactly how to dress and when to dress that way, when to get to the rink and when to eat. I couldn't eat the food I chose. It was the food I was given. I was told how to act and how to speak, also, in certain situations. They also commented on my hairstyle and the way I walked.

If this doesn't look like a regiment or a company trying to build a culture image around their employees, I don't know what does.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

Go ahead, Lukas.

Mr. Lukas Walter: He hit the nail on the head.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Do you have anything to add, Kim?

Mrs. Kim Taylor: I'm a proponent, definitely, of an association or a union. I know the league cannot police itself. It's apparent. It keeps happening decade after decade, so I believe strongly that's the direction we should go in. I would like to see them become federal employees. At least they would have protections as employees. They have nothing now. These kids are literally in limbo, without any protections.

It crosses over into a lot of other things. Yes, the team pays for their.... You're paying to see these players. They are getting all the rights. They have merchandise. They have the snack bars. They are making millions of dollars and the kids get nothing.

They get one guaranteed week off for Christmas. Other than that, they don't even get a guaranteed scheduled day off.

• (1720)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: As a question, because, for those of us—

The Chair: Thank you, Anthony. You have just finished your five minutes. I'm sorry.

We now go to Monsieur Lemire.

Sébastien, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the courage of those who dared to speak out, starting with your son, Ms. Taylor. I'd like to highlight the whole legal movement he created in relation to Mr. Daniel Carcillo. I'm also thinking of people like Mr. Walter and Mr. Gobeil, of course, as well as Mr. Sheldon Kennedy, a former hockey player.

Ms. Taylor, what legacy would you like your son to leave by speaking out? What message do you want to send to other victims who have yet to speak out, whether in hockey or elsewhere?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kim Taylor: The reason why we came forward was to help those younger players coming up. We want to see.... I think you can ask all players who have been through this. We love hockey. It's not that. We still love hockey, but we want to make sure these kids.... That's what they are. They are teenagers. I think we sometimes forget that, because it's a professional sport. It's big business, but they are kids. They are trying to go to school. They are on the bus for these long road trips.

My son said he would get to the parking lot at 6 a.m. You're exhausted and they would make you go to school for public appearances. He also had a broken wrist. The educational adviser came in during the day. He was in a lot of pain. He had asked the coach whether he could stay home. They said, "Go to school." The educational adviser at school came in, checked on him and sent him home.

I feel they do a lot for good publicity, but there's a lot of abuse going on behind closed doors.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Gobeil, we often hear that people don't want to speak out because they're afraid of losing what they've gained, losing their reputation or suffering reprisals.

Now that your career is behind you, what message would you like to send? Why did you speak out so courageously today?

Mr. Thomas Gobeil: Actually, it's from a sense of duty. I've grown more mature and realized, years after playing in a hockey league, the fervour and emotional intensity with which I pursued my goal. So I did it out of a sense of duty. It's about leaving a legacy for the next players. By verbalizing certain problems I've seen in the league and shortcomings on the part of teams, I want to enable change.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Sébastien.

I'll go to Peter Julian.

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. You have stepped forward with a lot of courage.

We've had a sports system that has been irresponsible and not responsive to victims for decades. These problems have been swept under the carpet, and your coming forward today, I think, will help us. Certainly all four parties here are wedded to the idea that we need to start taking action and that it can no longer be a situation where sports organizations sometimes act well or sometimes act poorly, but it always happens with impunity and the federal government funding continues to flow to those organizations. That, I think we all agree, has to stop. The tied funding now has to ensure that it is safe for athletes, safe for the public, safe for kids—safe for everybody.

It's going to be a long road for us to get there, but your testimony today has helped us start to form the recommendations that will set us in the right direction.

Mr. Lindsay, I want to ask you the question about Boxing Canada, because you also have a road to take. Boxing Canada had a huge blow to its credibility a year ago. People did courageously step forward. What are the other things that Boxing Canada has to do to re-establish credibility and confidence in the organization?

• (1725)

Mr. Christopher Lindsay: Boxing Canada is currently updating its strategic plan under the guidance of our board of directors. Along with that updated strategic plan, I, as the lead staff person, will be demanding significantly greater attention from the board to direct key performance indicators. I believe that, like a lot of sport organizations, the board of directors is made up of people who love sport, just like everyone who is here today, but loving sport is different from making sure that we have strong accountability for the heroes we have within our own organizations.

With those stronger KPIs, it will be easier to form operational plans that will be easily evaluated, and everyone involved should be held accountable on Boxing Canada's ability to follow through on the plans it has made.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I'd like to thank all of you for coming today and for providing us with your experience. I know it's difficult for you to express it, but it's been very helpful to us. Thanks for your courage in stepping forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

We have three more minutes left until 5:30. Do the Conservatives and the Liberals want to go an extra 10 minutes, or should we end at this round?

Mr. Chris Bittle: I have a point of order, Madam Chair. It's Chris.

I move that we adjourn.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for coming and for sharing with us some painful stories. It takes a lot of courage for you to do this, and I want to thank you for being with us today.

As Mr. Bittle said, unless there is someone saying “no”, the meeting is adjourned.

Thank you.

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