

ATHLETE FUNDING INITIATIVES IN CANADIAN HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT

Author:
Lucie Thibault

email:
lthibault@brocku.ca

Co-authors:
Babiak, Kathy

University:
Brock University

Faculty:
Sport Management

performance athletes in their development and their quest to reach the podium in international competitions. Among the sources of funding for athletes, we discussed the Athlete Assistance Program, a federal government program (also replicated by provincial governments), the Canadian Olympic Committee Athlete Excellence Fund, Own the Podium, along with the support of two charitable nonprofit organisations assisting high performance athletes, Canadian Athletes Now Fund, and B2ten. Corporate support of Canadian athletes is also discussed particularly in light of the decreased opportunities following the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

While there has been a considerable increase in funding commitments for sport by the federal government, nonprofit sport organisations, and corporations leading up to and following the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, calls for ongoing support for Canada's high performance athletes are still being heard (cf. Ekos Research Associates, 2010). In their study of high performance athletes in Canada, researchers from Ekos Research Associates noted that athletes often leave their athletic careers because of insufficient support (financial and technical). Given the extent of resources invested in developing these athletes to reach international results and the important role they play in being ambassadors of Canada in high profile sport events, their support is central to their success and longevity in the sport system.

Abstract

Athlete development and excellence in international competitions have been central to Canada's sport system for many years. As so aptly noted by the leaders of Athletes CAN, an organisation created in 1992 for athletes by athletes, "athletes are the *raison d'être* of the sport system" and as such "it is critical that the sport experience be positive for athletes" (Athletes CAN, 1994, p. 3). In fact, the concept of an athlete-centred / participant-centred sport system has been raised as an important principle for Canadian sport. For example, the Canadian Sport Policy called for a system where "athletes / participants ... are the primary focus in the development of policies, programs, and procedures. Athletes / participants [should be] involved throughout the system in decisions that directly relate to them" (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 13).

Athletes are also central to the Canadian Sport Policy. In this policy document, the importance of "closing the gaps in athlete development" was identified as a priority (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 9). The policy called "for a systematic, analytical and collaborative approach to the development of high performance athletes" (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 9). Furthermore, it sought increased "opportunities for the seamless development of athletes, taking into account their age, maturity, and skill development needs while promoting their health, well-being, and general quality of life" (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 9).

The purpose of this paper is to examine and analyse programs and services that have been developed to support athletes and their development in Canada's sport system over the past 10 years. Although the focus is predominantly on initiatives of the federal government and national nonprofit organisations, we also analysed programs and services in various areas of the country aimed at financially assisting and supporting high

In light of retrenchment, fiscal restraints, and reduced involvement in public affairs, as well as increased focus on adopting the neoliberal approach, governments have had to decide what services and programs to offer, what services and programs not to offer, and what services and programs are best delivered by the private sector (cf. Albo, 2002; Cochrane, 2007). Using concepts from the neoliberal approach, we discuss the emergence of alternative sources of funding for athletes and the increasing role the private sector (nonprofit and for profit organisations) is playing in the funding of Canadian high performance athletes. In addition, the climate for Canadian athlete funding following the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games is addressed.

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