



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

CHPC



NUMBER 053



1st SESSION



41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, February 25, 2013



Chair

The Honourable Rob Moore

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Monday, February 25, 2013

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC)): Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage as we begin our study on the status of amateur coaching in Canada.

Today we have three witnesses from 3:30 to 4:30: Jeffrey Partrick, from Skate Canada; Dino Lopez, from the Oakville Soccer Club; and Jamie Atkin, from Airdrie, Alberta, who is the club manager and head coach of the Airdrie Edge Gymnastics Club.

Welcome to all of you, gentlemen. Thank you for helping us with our study.

As the clerk has probably told you, you have time for opening remarks, and then once each of you has made your opening remarks, members of the committee will have an opportunity to question the witnesses.

We have to start with someone, so Mr. Partrick, we'll start with you.

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick (Director, Coaching and Skating Programs, Skate Canada): Thank you for your invitation to appear before the committee to discuss coaching in amateur sport. It is a very important topic for Canadians.

Skate Canada has a long and rich history of which we are proud. This gives us a wealth of knowledge and experience about our sport and about sport in Canada. Skate Canada will actually be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Canadian figure skating championships in 2014, which is just an example of that rich history.

Skate Canada's structure has over 180,000 members, 1,150 clubs, and over 5,100 coaches under its umbrella. Skate Canada's structure is unique in that all skaters, clubs, and coaches are members of our organization. This centralized structure is extremely beneficial. It is what allows us to create a strong, consistent program delivery and club operation standards which all lead to our success in retaining members and developing elite athletes who have won many world and Olympic medals, and who have represented Canada so proudly on the world stage.

Our sections, of which there are 13—Ontario is divided into four; Yukon is with B.C.; and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are with Alberta—are responsible for helping to fulfill the strategic priorities of the organization, and support rules, policies, and program delivery by member clubs. All skaters, coaches, and clubs pay a membership fee to Skate Canada, and Skate Canada gives a

portion of these fees back to sections to help support and deliver programs and training.

Skate Canada coaches are all members of Skate Canada. To be a member a coach must be certified in the national coaching certification program, must have a valid first aid certificate, submit a police clearance check, complete the Coaching Association of Canada's making ethical decisions course, and finally, pay a fee and register with Skate Canada.

Coaches are paid for their services, not by Skate Canada but by their clients. Some are part-time and some are full-time. Coaches also set their own coaching fee rates. Skate Canada does not set the coaches' fees and the fees are not set by their certification level.

Skate Canada's coaching model has an instruction stream and a competition stream with various levels and contexts. I have provided a model for you in the notes.

Concerning the matter of participation rates in all levels of amateur sport, the number of coaches in Skate Canada numbered 5,182 in our 2011-12 membership season. Over the last 10 years the number of coaches has been increasing while the number of skating members has remained constant and the number of clubs has decreased. Therefore, the number of coaches is not really an issue for Skate Canada.

The number of coaches by certification level, again in the 2011-12 membership season, was 510 for the CanSkate program; 48 for the CanPowerSkate program ; 1,950 for primary STARSkate, which is essentially a program to learn to figure skate; 1,411 for intermediate STARSkate/provincial coach; 778 for level 3; 42 for level 4; and 10 for level 5. In total, there are only 120 level 5 coaches in Canada.

By gender, we have 4,622 female coaches and 500 male coaches. Overall, Skate Canada is well represented by female coaches, something not seen in all sports.

How can the federal government further promote amateur coaching in Canada? We have a few recommendations.

Number one is to mandate that the RCMP allow third party access to vulnerable sector search information. This will ensure consistency of information, ensure consistent costs for coaches, and ensure quick processing times. The safety of children is more important than the privacy of individuals who have relevant charges related to minors.

Number two, we recommend national standardized forms for police clearance checks and vulnerable sector searches, again, for some of the similar reasons, but overall for the safety of children participating in physical activity under the guidance of coaches.

Number three is to support ongoing professional development for coaches. This is important because coach training is expensive but critical for ensuring a quality sport experience for physical activity participants.

Number four is to support the Canadian Sport for Life movement, participation in physical activity, and other healthy living initiatives. This is critical for encouraging healthy living, reduced health care costs, and better quality of life for all Canadians.

• (1535)

Number five is to elevate and recognize the role of the coach. Coaches are critical in determining the quality of the participant sport experience and the likelihood for them to remain active over their lifetime.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Partrick.

Next we'll go to Mr. Lopez.

Mr. Dino Lopez (Technical Director, Oakville Soccer Club): Good afternoon, honourable committee members. Thank you for having me here today.

If you flip to the second slide, that is a picture of me. That's a 12-year-old soccer player, my first organized soccer experience. This was a house league in Mississauga. This little guy ended up moving on to play professionally in Canada and the United States, as well as playing for our province, and for our country one time, which I consider a great honour. But the fact is that all of this was quite a fluke. It was really by accident. There is no grand design within the structure in Canada, —although we're moving towards it right now, that actually will guarantee success for budding athletes.

Oakville Soccer Club started about 40 years ago in the garage of some well-meaning volunteers and we've grown to about 12,000 participants. Eleven thousand of them are house league or recreational players, and 1,000, or just under 1,000, are rep players. Within that rep group probably only 200 or so of them we consider to be part of that high-performance track.

We plan for success by implementing a five-year strategic plan that we started in 2011. That plan is hinged upon the principles of long-term player development, which are tied in with long-term athletic development, which is supported by Sport Canada. We believe that coaching plays a pivotal role to our success and to our meeting all of the elements of our strategic plan. Within our club we have three current players who are in the national men's player pool. We have a little player by the name of Diana Matheson, who scored a goal that won a bronze medal for Canada at the recent Olympics. Kara Lang is a former captain of our national team, and she is another Oakville resident. We also have a number of players in current youth systems at various levels in Canada and in international youth national teams.

On the next slide if you look at Canadian participation rates, we have a very broad base of players, about 867,000 registered Canadian soccer players. Canada ranks 10th in the world. For registered and unregistered players, we rank 22nd, which is only two spots and probably about 100,000 players fewer than the predominant world power in soccer right now, Spain.

At the club level we're starting to see a plateau in registration, or a mild contraction. We think that is partially due to a lack of quality coaching, lack of resources, as well as competition from other sports and from within the sport.

What we see as a difference between here and Spain is that Spain has a large professional and national infrastructure that drives player development and coaching development at a very high level. It shows excellence at a higher level, and that pulls along everybody else. They have over 23,000 UEFA B, A, and Pro licence coaches, which are the equivalent of the Canadian National B and A licence coaches. We have about 553 of those across the country.

It's important to make a distinction between community and high performance. Recreational soccer is very different, but they're intertwined. Community soccer is low priced. It's about fun, enjoyment of the game, and celebration of the game. You can play from cradle to grave. We have four-year-olds who play, and we have 55- and 60-year-olds who play in our club. This still requires investment on the part of our club, but the heavier investment is on the high-performance side. It's a very heavy price tag. It's intense, and a very small fraction of our players use a lot of allocated resources. There's about a 20-year window where we really spend a lot of money on these athletes. What we find in soccer, and I think it's true for Canadian sport in general, is there's a blurred line between high performance and community participation. We want everyone to participate, and you can't treat everyone equally when you're looking at those two streams.

Further into community and high performance, I will say that they're definitely interconnected. Every single high-performance athlete starts off as a recreational athlete and then later becomes a recreational athlete again sometime in their life. As I said, right now because the lines are blurred between the two within soccer, what we find is neither group is actually served particularly well.

At Oakville Soccer Club we have now invested in coaches. We have over 800 coaches within our club alone. We have 750 of them who are volunteers. The circled areas on the sheet are where we've invested heavily. In the red area we have 28 age group head coaches. They are part-time paid professional coaches. As well, we have four full-time coaches: me, two staff coaches, and a coach development manager.

• (1540)

Once again, we've invested heavily in coaching development and increasing our coaching resources. Also, we invest or subsidize all the licensing for all the players, all the coaches within our club.

The reason we invest heavily in U8 to U12, which is really where we put a lot of our resources, is that's the largest pool of players with the potential to go to the excellence stream. We also believe that those athletes who have better skill development from U8 to U12 will stay in the sport longer and, once again, add to the overall soccer community in the soccer for life phase down the road.

At this point we're focusing on skill development, based on the long-term player development, LTPD, plan. We don't concentrate on teams as much as we concentrate on the individual.

The next slide is on the Canadian coaching streams. All of our coaches are also registered with the NCCP. We have a community stream and a high-performance stream. The community stream is managed by the province, the provincial association, and it costs about \$250 to \$500 for each of the levels within that course. They also have to take the making ethical decisions course and the respect in soccer course, which also cost money. In order to move on to the competitive stream, either you need to have a national or a professional playing background or you have to take the soccer for life course.

When you go to the excellence stream, the first two levels, the provincial B licence and the B licence pre-tests, are run by the provincial association. The A licence and the national B licence are run by the national association. These courses cost between \$900 and \$1,200, and that doesn't include the travel costs. At Oakville Soccer Club we subsidize these courses for every one of our 800 coaches.

If you go to the next slide, the structure is the message. As Marshall McLuhan said, the medium is the message. We firmly believe that the structure is the message. If we build the structure properly, it will make sure we're making educated choices at the club level in terms of how we allocate our resources.

We have an inverse power relationship within soccer in Canada. The Canadian Soccer Association wields very little power. The power is really diffused between the provinces and even further down between the clubs that make up the large 867,000 base of players. The way to help that is, obviously, economic power, but even more so, organizational and expertise power. Having that at the CSA level we would be able to pull a lot more interest and passion for the game and be an example of excellence so that our coaches can follow that.

We also think that long-term player development and following those guidelines are crucial to the development of the game in this country, and that there needs to be a distinction between that excellence stream and that recreational stream. Each needs to be funded accordingly.

On the next one, follow the money, we have an annual budget of \$7.5 million at the Oakville Soccer Club. The CSA, the Canadian Soccer Association, has an annual budget of \$12 million. The fact that these are so close, we think, is problematic. We also, at the Oakville Soccer Club, spend 10% of our money on coaching development, so about \$750,000 a year on either developing coaches or paying coaches.

On the next one, you will see we have an excellent base, a lot of players, and that's fantastic. But in most other countries, if they have

a large base like that, a lot of the coaching development is funded by a robust professional and national network. If you look at Spain and England, they have literally 40 to 50 teams that are driving player and coach development, and are examples of excellence within the community.

What we do know in Canada is that the aggregate investment power of all the clubs together can far outweigh what the provincial associations and the national associations can invest. Once again, we believe that proper structure will help make intelligent resource allocations for those clubs.

On the next slide, when we're looking at creating coaches, we see it as a push and a pull.

The push is at grassroots level. That means we have to continue to drive the structural change that we're driving at the provincial level here in Ontario, where we're making a high-performance standards-based league. We think that will help allocate proper funds to the right channels. We have to differentiate between high performance and recreational tracks. We have to fully support long-term player development as well as strategic planning for all clubs. If you're not planning, you're going to throw good money after bad, and that's a wasted use of resources.

● (1545)

When we look at the pull, it has to be aspirational. We think there really has to be a revamping and a focus on coaching development across the country. We believe that the CSA and the provincial associations need to be pinnacles of excellence. They need to show examples of excellence, because in the aspirational sense, you aspire to be like the best in the industry.

We believe that we need to invest domestically in coaching and administrative and organizational talent, as well as recruit internationally if necessary. We also believe that in the pull part we need to support and drive the professional game here in Canada.

On our final slide is the picture we had at our club of Diana Matheson greeting and meeting one of our five-year-old house league players. Although we don't all make it to excellence within this country, when we do achieve excellence, we all share in it, so we call these people heroes, and we hope to be able to supply and support both tracks within our club.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lopez.

Finally, we'll go to Mr. Atkin.

Mr. Jamie Atkin (Club Manager and Head Coach, Airdrie Edge Gymnastics Club, As an Individual): Thank you for welcoming me to this committee meeting.

I am the head coach and club manager at Airdrie Edge. I've been there for 19 years and in that time I've coached all levels, from pre-school, one- and two-year-old athletes, up to lead athletes. I'm a current national team coach.

Like the gentleman before me, I have participated in and coached at both recreational and high levels. I have worked with both our provincial organization and our national organization.

In Canada in the acrobatic sports our biggest challenge within amateur sport coaching, and something we have difficulty dealing with.... Our recruitment is quite good. We have excellent participation from young people who get into coaching at a relatively grassroots level and at a young age take the initial certification and get into initial coaching and do an excellent job. But as we move to retaining those coaches and developing them up to a level where they are both educated and experienced enough to work with elite athletes, we have a great deal of trouble holding on to them.

Challenges to do with work-life balance in coaching are problematic for us in terms of transferring from a grassroots coach to a more elite coach. In the acrobatic disciplines competitive athletes are training four, five, and six times a week, evenings and weekends. At a grassroots level, fully 85% or 90% of our coaches are young people, primarily women, and very family-oriented people. As they move up the ranks and become more educated and experienced, they develop conflicts between their own families and their availability in terms of evenings and weekends. We find that especially our women coaches drop off enormously at right about the same time as they would be able to move into elite coaching.

We have no volunteer coaches. All of our coaches are professional, paid, educated, and trained coaches. Moving into the level 3 and level 4 coaching where they can begin to work with elite athletes is a matter of many years of experience.

A lot of our challenges have to do with the actual financial reward, both income and benefits for a full-time coach, compared to the lost time, etc. One of the challenges that we were discussing among coaches prior to my attending the meeting is a still prevalent overall attitude in the general Canadian public that when you mention you are a coach, the first question is, "What's your real job? What do you do for real and then do part-time coaching in the evenings?" The professional coach who is involved in amateur sport is a relatively unknown entity in Canada and relatively lightly held....

Some of the things that we think would be appropriate in terms of encouraging participation in and staying with coaching, and following amateur coaching has to do with the recognition of amateur coaching as viable and real work, and the impact that the professional amateur sports coach has on the development, recruitment, and retention of kids within the sport.

Ultimately the amateur coaches in the initial stages aren't going to bring an athlete into the gym or into the playing field in the first place, but the very first experiences of the kids will be affected by the coaches' demeanour, by their positive energy, and by their ability to have the athletes enjoy and also be challenged by what's in front of them.

Currently the challenge we have is in having that recognition and having that balance play out. Public recognition can be a tool. Funding, education, mentorship, and dollars put into taking the excellent work on the long-term athlete development model are important. Also important is to ensure that the work is being brought directly to the coaches who are the ones who are working with the concepts they're in. It's about taking that long-term athlete development work and making sure that each coach at every level has had excellent access to it through education, mentorship, and the

various ways we nurture professionals who want to take on amateur sport coaching.

● (1550)

If we don't have the committed educated and experienced people taking on those athletes and bringing them through both their grassroots experiences and their elite competitive experiences, we won't see the growth both in the participation numbers in amateur sport, which is such a huge factor for the overall health and development of our young people, and in the elite participation that brings recognition to Canada as a whole.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Thanks to each of you for your presentations. Now we'll move to some questions and answers.

We will begin with Mr. Young.

● (1555)

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for participating, Mr. Atkin.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming all the way here today. We appreciate it. It's great to have someone with your expertise here.

We're pretty proud in Oakville of our Oakville Soccer Club and its accomplishments, and of Diana Matheson and her goal that took Canada to bronze in the Olympics.

I want to see what connections there might be between what you called the recreational stream and I think what you called the professional stream. Or was it the performance stream?

Mr. Dino Lopez: It was the excellence stream or the high-performance stream.

Mr. Terence Young: Yes, the high-performance stream.

Mr. Dino Lopez: Yes. I use them interchangeably.

Mr. Terence Young: To start, I do want to ask you, because I think it's really important to talk about the bottom line, if you could just comment briefly, Dino, on how athletes benefit from playing soccer in the big picture.

Mr. Dino Lopez: We try to take a holistic approach in terms of how we coach our players. We want to make sure that we're building good individuals, number one, so character development is a big part of what we do.

What I've found at the end of this is that you have young adults who are able to better manage their time, who have higher self-esteem, who take a skill. It's like learning piano: you take that anywhere you go, and it's part of your life moving forward. You build someone who's able to work within a team and execute towards a goal. You're building more capable and competent adults as well. We do have that holistic approach to it.

Mr. Terence Young: Also, they learn to take direction from people other than their teachers and their parents, etc.

I knew at least one young lady in Oakville who had an offer of a scholarship to a post-secondary institution. Do you have any idea of how often that happens through the club?

Mr. Dino Lopez: Through the Oakville Soccer Club, it happens more on the boys' side than on the girls' side; I'll be very honest. As I mentioned, there's a worldwide group of people and professional clubs that invest in soccer worldwide. Relatively speaking, the men's side struggles because there's so much money invested behind it. On the women's side, this year we had five athletes go to the U.S. on scholarships. The previous year we had seven athletes on the women's side go to the U.S. on scholarships. We'll have one male going this year. There's a large number of players who get a free education in the U.S.

Mr. Terence Young: Do any of them get any scholarships or bursaries in Canadian universities?

Mr. Dino Lopez: Yes, they do.

Mr. Terence Young: Okay. That's helpful as well.

Mr. Dino Lopez: Yes, and we support Canadian universities equally as much, because we know that we can rely on the education system here.

Mr. Terence Young: You said the numbers are relatively stable right now in the Oakville Soccer Club. By the way, are there more girls than guys, or is it roughly equal?

Mr. Dino Lopez: There are slightly more girls than guys, but it's almost a 50-50 split.

Mr. Terence Young: Right, and you said that one reason the numbers are stable now, instead of growing, is lack of coaching. How big an issue is that? What do you do about it?

Mr. Dino Lopez: As I said, we invest \$750,000 a year in coaches. I think that in Canada we suffer. It's almost like a business that grows too fast. We have so many players and we just don't have the built-up coaching expertise, so we struggle to fill the role of a coach who is up to the level of our players. That's one of the issues. People drop out of the game because they haven't developed their full potential due to that.

Mr. Terence Young: Do you have more of a challenge getting high-performance coaches than coaches in the recreational stream?

Mr. Dino Lopez: I would say yes, but I think the overall standard of our recreational coaches could also be higher. I think the overall standard for the volunteer side, as well as for the professional part-time coach, has to increase.

Mr. Terence Young: How do you find more coaches? What do you do to find more coaches?

Mr. Dino Lopez: We advertise. We network. We try to build a network within, because once you've coached a high-level player or a good solid player within your club, you want them to come back and contribute to the club, or at least to the youth soccer community at large.

Mr. Terence Young: Can you comment on the national coaching certification program and its importance in the development of high-performance and youth-level coaches? Are there any gaps that you might be able to identify for us in the program?

Mr. Dino Lopez: A lot of what I said in my presentation isn't revolutionary. We're down the path. The NCCP is a great resource. It

has pushed excellence out to each of the sports, and makes sure we're delivering and executing on the guidelines from the NCCP. I will say that the best laid plans don't always work out unless you have the right execution model, and I think we're trying to figure that one out in soccer.

Mr. Terence Young: With regard to government support, it's delivered through such organizations as Own the Podium and the Olympic and Paralympic committees.

Can you comment on how that's contributed to the overall development and improvement of our amateur coaches and the ones at the high-performance level? If there are ties, can you outline them?

Mr. Dino Lopez: Sure, there definitely are. Any sporting community is a very small community, so you're really only a couple of heartbeats away from top-level coaches everywhere. It happens within our club. We have players who grow up playing with.... For instance, I have friends who talk about playing with Brendan Shanahan and how they're connected to that.

That connection to the elite sport piece really drives interest and drives passion for the game. It also means that we have a few more resources in terms of money to drive coaching education. It really does have an impact on the game overall.

Any investment at the top somehow filters down to us. It generally filters down to us.

• (1600)

Mr. Terence Young: What standards do you or your organization have with regard to requirements for potential volunteers? Is it roadblocks, or—

Mr. Dino Lopez: No, within our strategic plan we definitely have tactical plans for having more volunteers involved. I think we're lucky in that we have a community that really wants to get involved and is eager to get involved. We don't have a lot of trouble with volunteers.

Really, the volunteers are the lifeblood of everything we do. In-house, we want to make sure that we are always telling the volunteers how much we appreciate them, trying to make their lives within the club a little bit more pleasant, showing them the recognition they deserve.

But once again, it feeds itself. The volunteers tend to come out. They all want to support the club in the community.

Mr. Terence Young: You state that the CSA and provincial associations need to be able to display excellence—facility, coaching, organizational.

How should that be done? How is that accomplished?

Mr. Dino Lopez: Most national associations have a home. The CSA really doesn't have a home where we can make sure our referees are getting the best in training, make sure our players are getting the best in training, or make sure our coaches are getting the best in training. You need something there.

Take a look at bob-sledding in Calgary. Once you build a bobsled course, you start to have world-class bobsledders. It isn't as simple as "if you build it, they will come", but really you do need that focal point where you're showing excellence for everyone.

Mr. Terence Young: We can build that in Oakville.

Mr. Dino Lopez: We've got space.

Mr. Terence Young: Yes.

Have I any more time, Chair?

The Chair: You have no more time. Thank you, Mr. Young.

Monsieur Dubé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by thanking the witnesses for joining us today.

I find Skate Canada's point of view very interesting. Even though it seems to be a centralized organization....

Can you not hear the French?

[*English*]

I'll continue in English until someone sorts that out.

In my constituency, I have many figure skating clubs. They do a fantastic job on the ground, and despite the centralization....

We're good now?

[*Translation*]

So I will continue in French.

Despite that centralization, how do you manage to work with clubs? When I met your elite skaters on the Hill, they told me attempts were being made to find ways to promote clubs more.

Skate Canada does some of the work, but what do coaches do to work with clubs? They have a better idea of what is happening in our regions and provinces.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: Let me address your question in two ways. First of all, there's our connection to our clubs. As I mentioned, we have just over 1,100 clubs in Skate Canada and those clubs are all members. We communicate with them on a regular basis. They also have to be meeting certain delivery standards within our organizations. They need to pass and maintain certain standards to stay a member within the organization within their membership requirements, but also in the way they run their programs. That's when the link sort of connects to the coach, because the coach is our primary deliverer of those programs. We provide centralized training in the sense that our programs are developed in one location. They're developed nationally by ourselves at the national office with input from our coaching community. Basically from there we ask our sections, which are essentially our provincial bodies, to go out and deliver that coach training.

We've tried to make sure that as little degradation as possible to the quality of that coach training happens between the national

developing the program and the coaches receiving that training out in their provinces. What happens is the clubs will send their coaches to those training sessions to either upgrade their training or to become trained to start coaching in the club. Those are a number of ways we connect with them. Once they're members of our organization we communicate with our coaches on a regular basis. For example, we have bi-weekly e-mails that go out to our coaching members that tell them all about any updates on technical items, any training updates, any other rule and policy updates that they need to know about to help run their clubs and programs better. With all those things this is how we touch our grassroots club programs and also our grassroots coaches, because, as Mr. Lopez mentioned, it's extremely important for us as well to have a very strong grassroots programming and a very strong grassroots program delivery. Those are a few ways that we connect with our members.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: A number of people I know used to be skaters. One of the challenges is the cost of participating in that sport. It can be very costly. People think it's just a matter of buying a pair of skates, but there are many travel costs involved, especially when it comes to different tournaments, which sometimes take place on the other side of the country. One of my friends lives in Longueuil, and she went to Calgary over the weekend.

Let's talk about costs. You say that coaches are paid, but are they paid by the club? I assume that you don't pay them directly. In addition, I assume part of the budget is used to cover athletes' travel costs and similar expenses. Are any challenges involved in that?

That question is relevant, as this is a sport where coaches work one-on-one with athletes much more often than they do in soccer or hockey. Do you try to help our clubs meet those challenges?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: First of all, I'll comment on cost. I think the cost of participation in any amateur sport can be quite prohibitive. My daughter registered in soccer recently. She participates in hockey as well as figure skating, so I'm getting a good sense of the cost of participating in a variety of sports at a very early stage. Even though skating can be expensive, it's not the only sport that has that issue. I think one of the things that a lot of sports are dealing with is how to keep that cost low, because ultimately that's what forces skaters or other individuals playing other sports out of the sport earlier. They don't get the chance to experience a skill development that allows them to participate for life.

One of the things that was talked about a little bit today was the whole concept of long-term athlete development to long-term player development, depending on how the sport defines it.

For us, our long-term athlete development is actually very much centred on philosophies that are designed to help combat the cost. There's a lot of, I'll call it "tradition" for lack of a better word, around how we feel sport should be for our young people. Unfortunately what we do is we say we have elite athletes here who have done this kind of training, have skated this many hours, have had this much invested in their training, so let's make the 8-year-olds do it. That's not right. We need to try to get our coaches, our communities—and when I say communities I mean our clubs, our volunteers—to understand that they need to view athlete development very distinctly between the various stages that makes the athlete development age and stage appropriate.

In the case of skating, for example, at a low level don't have your skaters travel long distances to skating events. Make sure they're competing locally, competing in your club, competing in your region to keep those costs down. To be honest, even at the very initial stage we're starting to remove competition because of the fact that it can be discouraging for athletes when they're at a very young age. The cost of that can somehow be prohibitive as well. The intent is to give them the chance to develop their skills first, develop confidence, and then introduce the competition components.

Those are some of the things that we're doing in a philosophical way surrounding our long-term athlete development to combat some of the issues of cost.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That brings us to my next question, which I would like to put to Mr. Lopez.

My question is about this controversial idea in Ontario, whereby no score would be kept, and teams would not be ranked. This is somewhat related to what you were saying during your presentation. Scores will no longer be kept in soccer matches involving children under 12, and the teams will no longer be ranked. I think that has to do with what you were saying about prioritizing individuals and their personal development.

Do you have anything to say about that? Is that a step in the right direction for soccer and all sports?

[*English*]

The Chair: We have time for a really quick response.

Mr. Dino Lopez: I completely agree with Mr. Partrick, and that's where we're going in soccer. I think the big difficulty with moving away from keeping score and winning is that's an adult point of view. We try to put our view of the game onto children, and children play quite differently from adults. The biggest challenge is changing the mindset of the parents and then all the coaches to believe in this because it is the way to go. In soccer in Europe the top European nations don't have competition up to the age of 12; it's all about skill development.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Simms, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thanks to the witnesses for coming.

Would I be right in saying that in the individual sports—and I'll compare figure skating to soccer—it would be harder to retain a higher level coach than it would be in a team sport? You said earlier that a lot of coaching, or the payment for coaches, is done through the individual. Obviously if I become a skater who shows promise, I get my own coach and that coach stays with me through the period. For soccer you go up the levels and you change coaches as you go through that. Do you find that problematic in an individual sport?

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: Problematic in what way?

Mr. Scott Simms: To retain coaches. For instance, I'm from a small town, and we have a club with three coaches there right now. If one of them showed promise in coaching, it sounds to me as if that particular skating coach would move away.

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: It's possible. That's why if you look at our hierarchy of coaches and their levels of qualification the base is very large. I would say 50% of our coaches are what I would call purely at the grassroots level. When I say grassroots I mean they also work with grassroots level skaters. We do have coaches in our communities who are working with higher level competitive skaters. What tends to happen is yes, you tend to get some skaters who move away, and sometimes coaches move away as well. Generally speaking, it hasn't seemed to be an issue for us to retain coaches at the high levels. They tend to congregate and also develop a bit of a team approach, so two or three coaches will work together within a club to help develop skaters in a well-rounded way.

Mr. Scott Simms: I thought it would be a little more difficult to retain kids in the sport if you didn't have entry level coaches with a lot of experience. I'm sure it's different for soccer. Obviously, you just go up the league.

Mr. Dino Lopez: That's the ideal model on the volunteer side, so house league and recreational. Generally mom or dad is helping, and that's where we're having a bit of an issue. They're applying lessons from hockey, ringette, basketball or whatever they played as a volunteer coach because there isn't really that embedded experience with soccer across Canada. It's growing now because we have so many kids playing. Most of the parents don't have that. On the volunteer side that's the way it goes, and we try to educate those parents and hopefully find those diamonds in the rough who understand the game and really help the players.

On the competitive side where we're starting to pay coaches, where we might have high level volunteer coaches, generally in the past the model used to be you would coach that team. You would have them from U10 to U17. Given the stages of development, that isn't always the best thing. You'll find the best European models, and just like school you specialize in an age group or two. You'll do U11 and U12, and the next coach will do U13 and U14. You specialize. The problem is there are not enough qualified coaches who can deliver on a curriculum at the highly competitive level. You find those coaches tend to want to jump around, or they want to cling to one team that's better than the other team. That's where we have a little difficulty.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm sorry, Mr. Atkin, I didn't mean to exclude you. I'm assuming individual figure skating is similar. Do you have a problem with retaining coaches at the entry level?

Mr. Jamie Atkin: Yes, absolutely. We have vast numbers of athletes at the entry level and a pretty good number of coaches. It's still a challenge at the early level.

As Dino was saying, as we move to the competitive level, that's where we have challenges moving them up. They need that higher level of experience. On the drop in percentage from our entry level coaches to our competitive level coaches, there are probably fewer than one in ten coaches who will move up and will pursue it up to that level, or they'll touch on it and you'll have them for six months to a year and then they'll disappear.

The challenge for us moving into that is definitely retention in those higher levels. Like figure skating, it's a highly technical sport, so it involves a great deal of training. The volunteer parent coach is a wonderful thing to have, but in our sport it's not a reality. Your pool of people who potentially could move into that is very, very small. As Dino said, there are those diamonds in the rough you will sometimes find within the parents. We sometimes have them involved in judging and officiating, but not in coaching, so the pool itself is quite small.

•(1615)

Mr. Scott Simms: I have so many things to ask, but I have to be more specific right now.

This is a problem in my area. I get a lot of inquiries about those vulnerable sector checks. The resources here are very low. It's very problematic. It's very slow. We're losing volunteers. They're frustrated. People who have similar names....

Granted, it's a necessary thing, but obviously, it's the resources, it seems to me. Are you finding problems with coaches? I don't know if you know the stories from the coaches at that level.

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: We've made it mandatory for all our coaches, so all our coaches in our organization who are Skate Canada members must have a police clearance check. We've had issue with the vulnerable sector check, as I mentioned, because of now having restricted information. We were using a company called BackCheck, out of B.C., which was a third party supplier that was helping us organize that information, provide that information in a 24-hour turnaround sometimes. Now that we don't have that, it's very difficult.

We found that when we tried to implement that, we were getting completely inconsistent information. Literally, neighbouring towns would have police attachments with completely different forms, completely different information on the form. It was very difficult to decipher, very difficult to discern what, in fact, the information was and what we should be doing with it.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Lopez.

Mr. Dino Lopez: We also have a policy around a vulnerable sector check. Up until last year I would say it was a poorly executed policy. We found that not many people ended up getting them. We've put renewed effort into making sure that all our coaches have their police checks.

At our house league registration and when the coaches come to pick up their...it's called the coaches kickoff, we have the police there. They will subsidize it. You have to fill out the paperwork and then you'll get the vulnerability check and bring it back to us.

The problem with that is we do it. We pay for it, and then they don't bring it back in. We've been having a bit of an issue enforcing that across the board, particularly with 800 coaches. We're just one soccer club within a province.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Next we have Mr. Richards for seven minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you, and thank you to all of you for being here. Jamie is joining us from my hometown of Airdrie by video conference. Thank you, Jamie.

I want to ask each of you some questions, if I can make that work and find the time here.

I'll start with you, Mr. Partrick, from Skate Canada. I understand you utilize the national coaching certification program for figure skating. It's something I'm a little familiar with from my time as a hockey coach when I was younger. I was wondering if you could comment. I did see in your presentation you have the two different streams. You have what you call the instruction stream, which would be similar to what Mr. Lopez is talking about with his recreational stream, and then the competitive stream, which would obviously be similar to his high-performance stream. That's fairly typical in most sports, I know.

Can you give us a sense as to what the differences are through the training program for those two different streams? I recall from my hockey days—I coached what you would call competitive teams; I simply had those at level 1. At that time it was viewed as a qualification you had to meet to be able to coach at the provincials. That was simply about all we were doing. We weren't really trying to develop ourselves as coaches, to be completely honest. I think that has changed over that period of time. We're talking about nearly 20 years ago when I coached, so things have changed a lot since then. Can you give me a sense as to the differences in the training program for those two different types of streams?

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: Basically when you start in figure skating, you're starting more on the instruction side. The beginner context you see on that page is really where our entry level is for both our athletes, our skaters, and our coaches. Really in some ways, the instruction stream is where you begin. Then as you move up through some of those beginning levels, you decide whether or not you want to stay within the instruction stream or move over to the competition side. To some extent really, because of the way our club environments work, if you have competitors within your club, you might actually look like you're in the instruction stream but you've actually got competitive qualifications in terms of your coaching.

When you look into the details of what splits those two, specifically you're looking at the competency base component on the back end. This is in terms of what the coach has to do to demonstrate they have the ability and the expertise to work with athletes within a specific context. If they're working with recreational athletes, the markers of their competency are based on working with recreational athletes, similar to what it would be like if they were working with competitive athletes, but the markers are different. The level and the standard are different working with competitive athletes. Without getting into all the detail on that, that's generally how the split or the divide works. We don't have any difference in level of importance for those individuals because our instruction stream basically makes up the majority of our members.

We have roughly 180,000 members within our organization. Only 4,000 of them are actually deemed to be competitive skaters. Those are skaters who are moving through our system trying to vie for qualifying national championships. There are lots of competitions that are occurring, but in terms of those leaning towards our national championships, there are only about 3,000 to 4,000. A lot of our focus is on our instruction streams. That's why our coaches in many cases are working on both sides of that picture. It's really based on the nature of the athlete you have to work with and the competencies they have to show in order to do that.

• (1620)

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I'll go to you now, Jamie. I'm quite familiar with your club. Obviously I've been in the club and we've talked in the past. I'm aware that you also instruct and coach all sorts of skill levels of athlete or of kids from the very beginning, gymnastics to national champions, of course. I'd like to hear about your experiences at your club.

First of all, I'm not sure whether Gymnastics Canada or gymnastics is part of the national coaching certification program. Is there a different type of training program for gymnastics that's outside the NCCP?

Mr. Jamie Atkin: Ninety-nine per cent of what we do is through the NCCP. We have separate certifications for different types of gymnastics, artistic women's gymnastics, men's gymnastics, trampoline gymnastics, active start, which is for the pre-school ages from two to five years old. These are all different streams and different types of certification, but all are within the national coaching certification program. There is mentorship and clinics and things that are very common in all the highly technical sports on top of NCCP. But NCCP is our base. It's absolutely where it starts.

We pursue what's called foundations which is a level 1. Basically it's the equivalent of the level 1 that you took years ago, but now it's a little different. That's the level you have to attain in order to coach pre-school or low level recreational gymnastics participants. That takes anywhere from six months to a year for someone to complete. It involves three weekends, first aid, respect in sports, a number of different areas of pedagogy. If someone wants to pursue higher level recreational or competitive, they must pursue level 2 certification and even level 3, which is where athletes are attempting to compete at a national championships level, and level 4, which is where high-

performance athletes are looking to compete for Canada around the world.

It's like a martial arts belt system. There are a zillion level 1 certified coaches and then it drops enormously to level 2, and then even lower at levels 3 and 4. In trampoline gymnastics, there are fewer than 10 level 4 certified coaches in the country. The numbers are very small as you get higher in those levels.

Gymnastics is a bit different from soccer and figure skating, I believe. In a competitive stream an athlete might be a young athlete who is doing a low level technical skill but is actually pursuing competitive gymnastics, who might be training side by side with a recreational participant of similar age doing largely similar skills but who is on a different path. That competitive stream typically will have coaches who might be level 3 or 4 certified, even though they're working with young athletes, whereas we might have recreational participants who are older and may be doing slightly more advanced skills with coaches who are level 1 and level 2 certified. It's a streamed approach.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Finally, for this hour, we'll have Mr. Cash, and we're into a five-minute round.

Mr. Cash, for five minutes.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm interested in the coming together of the issues around coaching and how that connects to the general participation of young people in sport. According to the "Evaluation of Sport Canada Programs", published in May 2011:

The continued need to encourage and facilitate participation of all Canadians in sport is demonstrated by the declining general sport participation rates and fitness levels of Canadian children and youth.

Of course, this is something that is of great concern to policy-makers here in Ottawa and generally to Canadians across the board.

What can the federal government do to remedy this situation? As coaches, do you feel you're getting the support you need from the federal government with respect to this mission to increase sport participation among Canadians?

I'm just going to throw that open to all three of you.

Mr. Jeffrey Partrick: I think there can always be more done in this area. When you look at the number of our population who are becoming increasingly more sedentary, and when you look at our health care costs, which continue to increase, a lot of this can be attributed to the general level of physical activity within our society.

I attended the Canadian Sport for Life conference in the last couple of weeks, and it really renewed my opinion that we need to do more to encourage a general level of physical activity in this country. If we have a very strong base of coaches, whether they be volunteer, based on whichever sport it is, or professional paid coaches, those are the individuals who sculpt and create that experience for that young participant, regardless of what their goals are. A coach can turn that off so quickly and can stop that skill development and enjoyment of participating in a physical activity. It's incredibly important that more support be given to becoming active, to encouraging coaching, and to encouraging and supporting coach development. They all go hand in hand and they are all vitally important.

Mr. Jamie Atkin: I couldn't agree more with everything that was said about encouraging coaching and encouraging participation in coaching.

We need to create heroes for young people, not just Olympic medallists, but people who do anything at a high level that is based on fitness, health, positive action, and positive energy. Professional sport has a role to play in that, but amateur sport and the huge variety within amateur sport that can appeal to so many different kids in different families in different approaches.... We want to try to promote the concept of participation in sport and heroes within sport of all different kinds as being a very worthy and worthwhile endeavour. That's partly through ParticipAction-type commercials and nudges towards the media to pay attention to heroes who are possibly less reality TV role models and more healthy people who have pursued something with passion and energy and have accomplished something great. That kind of focused interest in those kinds of things as a nation is what drives kids to wanting to participate.

Mr. Dino Lopez: I agree with both Jeffrey and Jamie. We have to have a celebration of sport. It really has to happen that way.

I think we can all remember that professor or teacher who inspired us to be better, and I think that's what coaching does. We've heard that a number of times. Players remember things you've said that you don't recall saying that have changed their lives. They become healthier individuals and better parents because of it, and I think the nation as a whole improves.

I also agree that we have a sedentary population. There are a lot of video games out there right now. Anytime we can celebrate something that's about activity and being outdoors, or indoors but celebrating activity and sharing in a community, it draws Canadians together.

For the government, there's the pull. Celebrate sport. Whether through ParticipAction or whatever, we should celebrate it and sing as loud as we can about it.

I'll go back once again to having centres of excellence, because that ends up being that guiding star that pulls everybody along. We were chatting about it. We plan on building something in Oakville, and we're hoping it's going to increase participation rates. In Oakville we have a higher number of participants in soccer per capita than anywhere in the country, and that's just because we've built a big program. I haven't done it, but the people before me have. The community itself buys in.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cash.

That ends our first hour. I want to thank each of the witnesses. You've been very helpful for the start of our study. With that, we will wrap up. Thank you for your participation.

We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: We will resume our hearings.

I understand Mr. Nantel has a notice of motion before we proceed with the rest of the meeting.

Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, that's very true.

[*Translation*]

I would like to propose a motion. I think all the committee members will gladly support it. It reads as follows:

That the committee congratulate our artists and creators, who have once again represented our country so well at the Academy Awards.

That was last night.

I hope to have the committee members' unanimous consent. That would be nice.

[*English*]

The Chair: Does Mr. Nantel have unanimous consent for his motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will continue our study on the status of amateur coaching in Canada. We have two witnesses. Mr. deVos, welcome. Shane Esau, welcome to you, sir.

Today is the first day for our study on coaching, so we're very pleased to have both of you here. We will start with your opening comments, and then we'll move into a period of questions and answers.

Mr. Esau, you can take the lead.

Mr. Shane Esau (Exercise Physiologist, Canadian Sport Centre - Calgary, As an Individual): First, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to be here.

I've been a coach of many sports in Canada over the last 30 years. I started out coaching 30 years ago in competitive swimming, and then as my life evolved, I went into triathlon, running, some cycling, and as my kids have grown older, some lacrosse and some hockey. Coaching had been my life until about 10 years ago when I graduated with a master's in the art and science of coaching from the University of Calgary. Now I'm an exercise physiologist with Paralympic teams.

My first recommendation—and I know it won't sit well with a lot of coaches in Canada—is to have a certification system that's university based where our coaches would actually get a degree in coaching. There have been some universities in Canada that have offered the program, but very few, and a lot of the coaching programs are starting to fall away. The University of Calgary had a master's degree in it but it has now disappeared. The University of Alberta has picked it up.

My main reason is that I don't think our coaches in Canada know enough about how to coach and how to teach. They don't know enough about sport in general. Many of them are parents and many of them are former athletes who have no basis of education in biomechanics, exercise physiology, strength and conditioning. A lot of their knowledge is based on what they did, so we're making the same mistakes that we made 20 years ago, now when a lot of other countries are moving forward with professionals.

A lot of the European countries have degree programs, and I think they do better with fewer athletes because they are developing the athletes properly. I don't want to take anything away from the volunteers or the parents, but parents who have kids in programs get a great coach some years and other years they don't. We don't have enough athletes moving through to the international level to really get what we need. I think our athletes are quitting because they aren't having proper coaching.

The downfall of it is that people who go through and get a degree will want to be paid well. The big downfall is the cost of it. I think that if we can have much better coaching, then athletes will stay in it, and parents will be more willing to fund it if their athletes are moving forward.

As the coaches who were here previously said, those are the coaches who should be working with children who are 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 years old, the coaches who know what the children need to have when they are 19, 20, or 21 years old, and move them through. A lot of the European countries will give a group of athletes to a coach, and that coach will work with them and develop them from the ages of 6, 7, and 8 all the way through to the age of 21. If they don't do well, the coach will be fired. Then, when those athletes have graduated from that program, they will go back down to the ones who are 6, 7, and 8 years old.

We tend to put a lot of our less experienced coaches with our less experienced athletes who need to learn the skills, but the coaches don't know how to coach them or how to teach them.

Regarding participation rates, I think it just comes down to cost, and one of the biggest costs is facilities. They tend not to pay as much for soccer as a sport like skating where in Airdrie an hour of ice time costs \$160. You have to have a whole lot of athletes paying a whole lot of money to cover that cost. In competitive swimming a 25-metre lane, not the whole pool, costs \$12 an hour.

When I was coaching in Nanaimo, my budget for lane space was almost \$100,000. My coaching budget was \$70,000. I had five professional coaches on staff. If we can reduce the costs for facilities, I think participation rates would go up, which then means more kids would be able to participate, which would lower our obesity rates.

● (1640)

Other than that, that's all I have to say right now, until you guys ask me questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Esau.

Mr. deVos.

Mr. Jason deVos (As an Individual): Thank you. I'll start by extending a thank you to everyone for inviting me to speak here today.

I'm a former professional soccer player. I turned pro at 16, moved overseas at 22, and spent 12 years there. I was 18 years in total as a professional soccer player. I was fortunate enough to captain my country for five years and hoist the only international trophy that Canada has ever won, the 2000 gold cup on the men's side. I've seen every level of the game.

I retired as a player in May 2008 to move into broadcasting, which is what I currently do. My current employer is TSN, but I've also spent a period of time working as a technical director at the Oakville Soccer Club. I spent time from November 2010 until June 2012 in that position, and I stepped down to focus all of my time on broadcasting. I also knew that I could hand off the reins to the very able-bodied Dino Lopez, who preceded me in this chair. I know that the club is in very good hands.

It was a real eye-opener for me. In part, I took that job because I wanted to experience the grassroots game and to understand exactly what the challenges were at that level. I'm very fortunate in the sense that, because I work in the media, I have a voice, and I feel that I have a responsibility to use that voice in a proactive way. It's very easy to criticize things but it's very difficult to be part of a solution. I'd like to be a part of the solution moving forward for soccer and for sport in our country.

Soccer is the largest participant-based sport in Canada. There are nearly 850,000 registered soccer players in our country. You have asked what the government can do to help improve coaching and improve sport, by extension, in Canada. I'll give you some numbers.

The Union of European Football Associations, UEFA, is the governing body of sport in Europe. Their coach certification program is regarded by most people as the best in the world. The UEFA has a National B licence, a National A licence, and what's called a Pro licence. To be a manager at the highest level of the game, you must have a UEFA Pro licence. I'm currently taking the National A licence and will complete that in June. So I have experience with the course. It is fantastic.

With respect to nationally certified coaches in Europe, France has 17,500 nationally certified coaches. Spain has 24,000 nationally certified coaches. Italy has 29,000. Germany has 35,000. In Canada we have a National B and a National A licence. The CSA, the Canadian Soccer Association, is in the process of developing a Pro licence. It hasn't been launched yet. We have 553 nationally certified coaches in our country for 850,000 players. That's one nationally certified coach for every 1,500 players.

Imagine what our education system would be like if we had one teacher for every 1,500 students. I equate coaches to teachers because I genuinely believe that teaching children sport is no different from teaching them math, science or French. It's about having the skills to impart knowledge and putting children in situations where they can apply those skills and learn and go on to succeed later on in life. Poor coaching at key development stages in our country is a detriment to the game of soccer in our country. I believe it's a detriment to sport as well. We have the largest participant base, but we do a terrible job of developing that participant base because we rely primarily on unqualified, untrained volunteer parents to teach children soccer at the key development stages. I'm a big supporter of the Sport Canada long-term athlete development plan. Those of you who have read what I've written on TSN and CBC prior to that will know that I believe it's a very good plan, a good program. It has its flaws, and we're going through that.

Many of you may have seen in the media criticism of the removal of scores and standings for young soccer players under the age of 12. That was brought about because adults who should be trained in how to coach kids are not trained in coaching kids. They are parent volunteers. They are well meaning and well intentioned, but they don't understand what is required to teach children skills.

The argument against a lot of the changes that are being implemented through the CSA's LTPD, long-term player development plan, is that soccer is really not that important. In the grand scheme of our society, how important is sport? I believe it's very important. I think there are a lot of lessons that can be learned through sport that can be applied to life. I learned those lessons myself as a young soccer player and I've applied them to everything that I've done.

• (1645)

In terms of the government's contribution to the development of coaching and the impact that can have, there are two aspects. One is very much a financial one. I don't believe that our country as a nation funds our athletes especially well, certainly not in comparison with some other countries around the world. We lament the fact every four years that on the men's side we fail to qualify for the World Cup and we wring our hands in collective dismay as to why that is. We do not fund our program sufficiently.

In qualifying for the 2003 North American championships, the gold cup, I, as captain of the Canadian national team, and my teammates were forced to train in a public park in Burnaby, because we did not have sufficient funds to train in a proper facility. People were walking their dogs across the training field of the national team that was trying to compete with the best in the nation, trying to compete against the likes of the United States and Mexico, which have full-fledged professional leagues. It's a constant struggle. The players on both the male and female sides will tell you that it's a constant struggle.

Coach education falls into the area of lack of financial support. I've been lobbying for the Canadian Soccer Association to start finding ways to offset the cost of coach education.

There are two barriers to coach education for a lot of people who want to become involved. One is cost and the other is availability. Many parent volunteers believe they're giving up their time as it is.

They can't afford to give up any more time to train to become qualified. I think that's a big mistake, and it's something for which we need to try to find a solution.

The coaches of players at the young ages can have a profound effect on a young mind, and not just in a sporting context.

I wrote a story for CBC in 2009, I believe it was. I've been very fortunate in my career to work with some fantastic coaches at the professional level. The best coach I ever had, aside from my father, who has been coaching me my whole life, was my hockey coach from when I was 10 years old, a man by the name of Jack Mackinnon. He taught me more about what it took to be a professional athlete than anyone I've ever come across in 18 years as a professional soccer player. He got me to understand that the goal of the team is not about being an individual and that sometimes you have to give up a little of your own success as an individual for the benefit of the team.

I distinctly remember that in one practice he was teaching us how to skate and to cut on the outside of our blade. He demonstrated a number of times how to do the correct technique. When I got it, he grabbed me and literally picked me up off the ice and said to me, "Boy, I'm gonna make you a player." Hearing that as a 10-year-old kid has stuck with me my whole life. He taught me more at the age of 10 about being a professional athlete than any professional coach I ever had.

How can we support coaches like Jack Mackinnon? How can we get them the training and education they need if they are to have that impact on kids? I think it's a huge initiative which the government could undertake to find a way to offset those costs so that it becomes more accessible to more people. There are lots of people out there who want to do it, but cost and time are two big considerations.

Thank you.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. deVos.

Thank you both. This has been a very informative presentation so far. We're going to move to our questions and answers.

We'll start with Mr. Richards, for seven minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being here.

Mr. Esau, obviously I know you, as you are from Airdrie as well. I'm glad you're here to share your expertise with us. I know you've had a lot of experience coaching at a variety of levels and in a variety of sports, so I think your testimony and your answers today will be very helpful for us.

Mr. deVos, the experience you just shared when talking about the coach you had at age 10, Mr. Mackinnon, ties back to what Mr. Esau had to say with regard to ensuring that we have coaches for the young age groups who have that expertise.

I can only speak to my own experience with hockey. I've seen it with my son as he has gone up through hockey, and I saw it as a kid when playing and later when coaching. As you said earlier, Shane, some years you get a great coach and some years you get a not-so-great one. I have seen it in my son's experience. He had one year with someone who was a terrible coach. It was at the wrong point in his development as a hockey player and it discouraged him from the game. The coach can make all the difference in the world. It is important to ensure that our coaches be trained and understand the game.

I also get the reality of the fact that in minor sports there are thousands and thousands of coaches out there. In an earlier panel, for which you were here for at least a part, we heard from representatives of the more technical, specialized sports, such as gymnastics and figure skating. Those are both very difficult sports for parents to coach. Those sports need professional coaches to provide training.

During that earlier panel, I mentioned my experience with coaching hockey. I was just out of junior hockey myself. I was about 20 years old and was coaching kids who were three or four years younger than I was. A number of the players I coached went on to quite successful junior hockey careers, or even further.

Did I know what I was doing as far as coaching was concerned? No, I was just sharing with them the stuff that I knew from having played. Could I have been more effective? Yes. Could some of the coaches I had or whom I have seen through my personal experiences and with my son have been more effective, with better training? Yes, absolutely.

How do we put pursuing that goal into practice? I'll throw the question out to both of you. We talked earlier about figure skating and gymnastics, those kinds of sports, being different from soccer and hockey, which have thousands of teams across the country for which we have to rely on volunteer coaches. I have heard of models in which minor hockey associations will hire one paid coach to run the whole thing and have the help of some parents. Maybe we need a model like that.

Could you elaborate on how you think we could see this done?

• (1655)

Mr. Shane Esau: I like the mentor approach, the one coach who basically runs it and has assistant coaches. Even at the Airdrie Minor Hockey Association level I've tried to push for the coaches to get together with a group of atom players and sit down and talk about the skills they've taught and which skill development workouts or drills they've used have worked and which haven't. But it's always competitive; it's this team versus that team, and it's always about winning.

The other thing that you look at is, yes, gymnastics tends to be a very young, maturing sport. It's the younger athletes who tend to be at the international level. But a lot of sports that we have in Canada tend to be older, maturing sports. If you look at the long-term athlete development model, these athletes shouldn't be doing one sport at a young age anyway. Why don't we have a recreational program where on Mondays they play soccer, on Tuesdays they play hockey, on Wednesdays they swim, on Thursdays they play basketball, on Fridays they do something else, and every day they go? If we have a

coach who's not a specialist in that sport, they can develop those skills. They're just general kinesiology-type skills, physical literacy. People learn to run. People learn to throw a ball. People learn to kick a ball. That's physical literacy, and a lot of our kids don't have it at all. Probably 50% of the kids in elementary school don't know how to kick a ball, and that's wrong. It's wrong. You go out and look at an elementary school field and a lot of kids don't know how to run, because they don't run. They don't run anymore. It's scary to watch. It's because physical education has fallen off, right? Physical education is not a huge part of our development like it was when we were younger. You had to learn how to throw a ball, otherwise you just didn't survive through murder ball, or whatever it was.

I think that's one thing we need to do. The other thing is just having those general physical skills. If we develop those through to the age of 12 or 14, the cream will rise to the top. If they're really skilled at controlling a ball with their feet, they'll go to soccer. If they're really skilled in the water, they'll go to water polo or swimming or diving. They won't specialize at 8, 9, and 10 years old and be finished the sport at 14, like they are now.

Mr. Jason deVos: I think one of the challenges we have as a society is that our kids are overscheduled. All of their activities are on the family planner. They do soccer twice a week for an hour and they do hockey twice a week for an hour, and parents are unpaid chauffeurs shuffling them from one activity to another. Kids don't go outside and play anymore. I have that with my own children. I have a daughter who's 10 years old and a son who's 7. I asked my wife the other day why our kids never go outside and just play, just pick up a stick or a ball or something and play. I think it's because we also become very protective of our children as society changes. Technology has also played a big role in that.

I've been asked many times about the 10,000-hour rule. If you do any research into the development of elite athletes or elite specialists in anything, whether it's music or piano or whatnot, they talk about the 10,000-hour rule: you need 10,000 hours of concentrated training in order to become an elite anything. Someone asked me once if I had 10,000 hours of soccer practice as a kid growing up, and I did the math in my head and said, no, of course not. I didn't. But then I thought more about it and I thought about my childhood. I would get up in the morning, go to school, come home, stuff my face, do my homework, and then I was told, "Go outside and play with your brother". That's what we did until it was dark. It was hockey, basketball, throwing a football, throwing a baseball, kicking a soccer ball. I look back on it and I tracked it back and I probably did have 10,000 hours because I was always refining my athletic abilities.

To back up what Shane said, I am very, very supportive of kids playing multiple sports for as long as they possibly can. I turned pro at the age of 16. I still played high school basketball, volleyball, and badminton until I graduated from high school because it helped me in terms of my athleticism as an overall athlete. I don't think kids do that enough anymore. They're too overspecialized and overscheduled.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Dubé, for seven minutes.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Chair.

I want to keep going on that point, because I find it to be interesting. You talked about your experience with a hockey coach. I look at a guy like Lars Eller who plays for the Montreal Canadiens who did the same thing but it was a soccer coach, and now he plays hockey.

I get that sense of overspecialization. Do you—

Mr. Jason deVos: I'm sorry to cut you off, but if you watch the behind the scenes stuff, a lot of the NHL guys will juggle a soccer ball as a warm-up before they go out on the ice. The Montreal Canadiens do it. They've had a lot of Swedish players. They're very big on that.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: In that same vein, do you think that not just coaches and parents, but we as a society tend to focus too much on these sports? I'm guessing you adopt the same holistic attitude that Mr. Lopez was talking about, since you preceded him at the Oakville Soccer Club. When you talk about that, or even funding and time on the field, that sort of thing, do we need to build more of an approach where we're giving to most elite athletes, but we're looking at the bigger picture as well? Do we need to do more of that?

• (1705)

Mr. Jason deVos: Yes, I think the holistic approach is one I definitely believe in.

The CSA launched their LTPD, which is the soccer-specific adaptation of LTAD back in 2008, and I've spent the last five years researching the science behind it. Comparing it to my own upbringing as a child, I definitely had that rounded background in multiple sports which helped me. I believe that's definitely the way forward.

The challenge we've had in soccer is that people think soccer is easy. They think that you just put on a pair of shoes and go out and kick a ball, that it's not difficult to figure it out, and anybody can teach it. Have you ever seen a hockey coach who can't skate? Have you ever seen a swimming coach who can't swim? How can you teach a child to kick a ball if you can't kick one yourself?

What's happening with the participation rates is really interesting. When you dig down and do the research on it, soccer is the most played sport in our country, but the drop-off rate is crazy when kids get through that learning stage, the 8 to 12 age group. Why? They haven't acquired the skills they need to play the game at any level moving forward. You throw a group of kids who are 8, 9, or 10 years old on a field and they run around like a swarm of bees. They kind of chase the ball wherever it goes. You probably all have kids and they've all played the game, so you know what it's like. It's kind of funny for a while, but after a while you get a little frustrated. I'm at that stage right now with my own kids. I'm very frustrated watching them play, because I know they need to be taught. If they don't get taught, they're never going to have any level of success in the game moving forward in life.

Again, I only can talk about my own experience. I learned how to play hockey because I had a great coach when I was a kid, Jack Mackinnon. I stopped playing hockey at the age of 12 because I couldn't play both hockey and soccer. Soccer became a 12-month commitment for me at that point and I couldn't fit hockey in. I did

not skate for 22 years, until the day I retired as a soccer player. As soon as I did, the first thing I did when I moved back to Canada was go out and buy equipment because I wanted to pick up and play with my buddies again. I was able to do that without a problem because I was taught those skills, how to do it properly, at the age of 10.

That is something we need to focus on in every sport. Train the coaches so they can teach kids the skills, and the kids will stay active for life. It won't be about developing national team players, because the reality is it's a very, very, very small percentage of athletes that reach that level. It isn't about them. As Dino said before me, every national team player, every single one of them starts out as a grassroots athlete.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: It becomes de facto, right?

Mr. Jason deVos: Absolutely.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I guess that's what I was wondering. I look at the piece you wrote on the whole idea of where we had success internationally in soccer this year, in the Olympics, for example, but I guess it's all relative, most notably the fantastic performance by the women. Even I naively said to myself last summer that that's great, and maybe a lot of young women and girls will be inspired by that to get involved. If I'm following this line of thinking, there's probably a lack of support at the lower levels that prevents this success from being capitalized on, right?

Mr. Jason deVos: Absolutely.

We have a great opportunity as well. Canada will be hosting the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, and the 2014 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup. We have a great chance to expose the game to the nation, and not just on the female side. I believe the success or failure of either of our programs, male or female, can inspire both genders. Countless hockey buddies who never kicked a ball in their life came up to me after the bronze medal game and said, "That was unbelievable! What a game!" Everyone was talking about it. We have an opportunity to do that.

The success we've had on the women's side with winning a bronze medal at the Olympics is not because we've got everything right underneath that. It's actually that a great coach has come in and has worked with that group of players and they overachieved. They'll tell you that themselves. What we have underneath that at the grassroots level is broken and needs to be fixed. It needs to come from a huge push to train coaches to teach those children who are 8, 9, or 10 years old how to kick a soccer ball, how to skate, how to swim. The skills that they learn in those sports can stay with them for the rest of their lives. The lessons they learn through sport they will be able to apply to their education, to their jobs, to their families, to their relationships. Everything they do in life, they can apply the lessons that they learned in sport.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I have one last question for both of you.

Mr. Esau, you mentioned the idea of a university degree for coaches. What's the challenge there in terms of keeping it accessible? I think that's a fair point, in the sense that there is coaching the coach. Do you feel that might create extra barriers for sports that are actually becoming increasingly difficult to access, whether it's financially or whatnot?

Mr. Shane Esau: I think financially it will become more difficult to a certain point. If you use the model of having that professional, whether it be at the young ages, at the grassroots level, being a mentor and helping along parents who are volunteers.... The big issue is just that: we aren't teaching our kids how to be just generally active.

You'll hear parents at a hockey rink or on the soccer pitch say, "My kid's going to make it. My kid's going to make the professional levels." As a parent, you hear it from just about everyone. I sit back and say, "Do you really know what the numbers are? Do you know that two in 100,000 kids who play hockey are going to make the NHL?" The numbers are staggering, but they all think their kid's going to make it.

I think if we go the education route, where we're teaching our kids to be physically literate, those kids who are going to make it are going to make it. I've been a professional coach for 20 years. Parents are more apt to listen to someone who has an educated background than to someone who doesn't. So if you can, educate the parents. Your kid may make it, and if they're going to make it, they're going to make it. But what we want is someone who at the age of 40 can strap on a pair of skates and go skating and have fun playing beer league hockey. For someone like me, because I was in swimming and could never go skating, I didn't learn to skate until I was 30 years old. I can't play beer league hockey—I just can't—because I don't know how to skate well enough.

Those are the sorts of things we need to teach our kids, especially in Canada: how to skate, how to swim, how to throw a ball, and how to kick a ball. That's what we need, and then the cream will rise to the top.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Simms for seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, gentlemen. This has been quite interesting indeed.

The MPs actually have a soccer team. I'm a member. We're called the Commoners.

Mr. Jason deVos: Are you any good?

Mr. Scott Simms: Well, I'm getting to that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: We're called the Commoners. Your analogy of the swarm of bees hovering around the ball is not exclusive to children. It actually applies to....

That's a fair assessment, don't you think, Pierre?

● (1710)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It's very true.

Mr. Scott Simms: Anyway, thank you for coming.

A friend of mine I grew up with at the age of 12 picked up a badminton racket and very quickly was defeating kids three and four years older. There was this connection between him and the ability to play badminton that he naturally adapted to. He played it. He beat other kids. No one could really beat the guy and everybody wanted to be his partner. He was never recognized by someone who was a

professional badminton coach. Would he have gone to the Olympics? I don't know, but he could have. He probably could have won a medal. But we lived in a rural area and there was nobody around that area.

I understand what you're saying about having a coach at a very early age sticking with individuals, whether it's a team or an individual. Where I come from, to make it to the big leagues.... We now have a female figure skater from a small town in Newfoundland, but she hasn't lived in Newfoundland for quite some time. She had to move away.

The question then becomes...in most of these places where I'm from, talent does not get recognized at the early level. How do you get around that?

I'll just add one quick point about the school system. Are phys. ed. teachers taught and do they have discussions about...? As a person who played professional soccer for so long, you have an eye for someone.

Coach Mackinnon obviously had an eye for you. He knew you had that talent.

Do phys. ed. teachers go through a process where they say, "If you see a kid who can kick a ball and has a natural ability, call this number?"

Mr. Jason deVos: I got an 80% in soccer in grade 9 phys. ed. The next year I turned pro. So I'd say, no, teachers don't generally have an eye for that.

Again, you have to go back to lack of training for coaches at those key development stages. My daughter is 10. She plays house league soccer at the Oakville Soccer Club. I go and watch her every Saturday when I'm not broadcasting, and virtually every week I'm there watching the house league program I send Dino an e-mail saying, "You need to look at the number four kid on the orange under-nine team, because he's got something."

There was an article printed in the *New York Times* recently about Ajax, the development academy in Holland. Ajax is famed as a developer of talent. They play obviously in Holland, and their academy system is arguably the best in the world. Barcelona certainly is making a push to be up there as well. The interesting quote from the coach was this: "I don't look at who scores the goals. I don't care about that. I look at how the players move. I look at the way they move at the ages of 8, 9, 10 to be able to tell if they have what it takes to go to a higher level."

That comes from training and knowledge. Are you going to get that in a small town? Absolutely not. But what we need to put in place I think in every sport is a pathway. When you are living in Appin, Ontario, which is where I grew up, and playing coed house league soccer in Glencoe until the age of 10.... I had a father who recognized that I needed to move to a more competitive environment for my development as a soccer player, and I did that. I've seen countless players over the years get pigeonholed and not recognized, not identified.

Hockey certainly has a much more developed pathway than any other sport. Look at the list of players who are Canadian in the NHL and at how many of them come from some hick town in Saskatchewan that you've never heard of.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jason deVos: No offence to anyone from Saskatchewan, but you see it all the time.

Can you develop into an NHL player in that environment? No. But the talent is there, and that talent knows that it needs to move to an environment where it can grow and develop.

Mr. Shane Esau: I want to build on this a little bit.

I think the big thing with the Saskatchewan background in hockey is ice time. They can go and hop on the rink and skate in a non-structured environment for hours and hours. If you go to a local rink at shinny time, when the kids can go play and there's no score being mentioned, the kids will do things with that puck that they would never do in a game, because it doesn't matter. There's no score. No one's going to get after them for trying this dippy-doodle.

It's the same with the soccer ball. Throw the kids out on the field and let them play with a soccer ball and they'll do things with the soccer ball that they would never do in a game, because it doesn't matter.

That's where not keeping score at the lower ages is huge: because it doesn't matter. If you're just there to develop them as a soccer player, or as a swimmer, or as a hockey player, they will learn much better skills if there's no score and it really doesn't matter. If you watch tyke hockey, they just play for a minute and they come off. They score—yay!—and then they go back, and then they go again. They learn how to skate. They learn how to play with the puck.

Now all of a sudden it's time to keep score. Now it's time to make triple A and double A. That's where we run into problems.

• (1715)

Mr. Scott Simms: I brought up the school analogy because to me that seems to be the best avenue, especially now.

If my friend were at that age now, the coach could say, "You know, he's pretty good at this sport". He could make a video, put it on YouTube and send it to a friend, or to somebody who has asked if you know of anybody who can play this sport.

I suspect, though, that sports like soccer could probably benefit greatly from that, because it's played everywhere, but—

Mr. Jason deVos: What's the first thing that gets cut when the funds aren't there for education in school?

Mr. Scott Simms: Phys. ed.

Mr. Jason deVos: Phys. ed. is the first thing that goes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Phys. ed and music.

Mr. Jason deVos: When I was growing up we had phys. ed. every day.

I hate telling "when I was a kid" stories because it makes me feel really old, but we had phys. ed. every day. I looked forward to that so much because that was my avenue to explore different things.

I'll go back to my earlier point. We've taken that away from kids. Shane made a point about kids trying things that they would never try. I've got my kids in skating lessons so that they can be taught by a professional coach how to skate properly, because I know it's going to be beneficial to them for the rest of their life. The other day I was watching my kids skate, and there were two kids no more than five years old in full hockey gear, with a net pushed up into the corner of the ice, just playing one on one. There was no coach, nothing; they were just playing. They were trying things and doing things. They'd obviously been taught by a hockey coach who knew what he was doing, but they were on their own, exploring that, trying things and just playing around.

You can learn so much in that environment as a child, because that self-guided learning is so important, but you do need to have somebody who puts you on the right path to begin with. If you want to be a hockey player and you step on the ice for your first practice with your new team and your coach is clinging to the boards because he can't skate, what is that coach going to teach you? What training has that coach had in how a five-, six-, or seven-year-old child learns?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Young for seven minutes.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you, Chair. This is very interesting. We obviously have two gentlemen who are knowledgeable and passionate about sport.

If it makes you feel any better about kids not being able to run and kick a ball, which really shocked me, under this provincial government in Ontario, the principals in the Halton board of education won't let the teachers teach cursive writing. They're not teaching children to write with their hand anymore.

There are a lot of strange things going on in the school system.

I want to get back to something you said, Mr. Esau. You said we need degree programs in coaching. How would you do that?

Mr. Shane Esau: Instead of it being pedagogy or a biomechanics specialization or an exercise physiology specialization, it becomes a coaching specialization. You have a kinesiology degree or a physical education degree with a specialization in coaching.

Mr. Terence Young: How do you practically make it...? The federal government is not in charge of post-secondary education; it's provincial. Do you persuade them? How do you communicate the need?

Mr. Shane Esau: I think you have to persuade them. I won't win any favouritism medals here, but I think the Coaching Association of Canada wields way too much power. Their 24-hour or 36-hour weekend learn to coach program isn't enough. You don't learn how to teach kids. You don't learn what is necessary. You learn the basic minimum.

I'm one of the facilitators for swimming at level 3. Do I teach them how to be better teachers? No. It's giving them the background, and then you have to go out. Swimming tends to be professionals. If you're not good at it, you don't keep a job.

• (1720)

Mr. Terence Young: You said degree holders want to be paid well. It was you who said that, right?

Mr. Shane Esau: Yes.

Mr. Terence Young: I recently found out that World Cup soccer coaches can make up to \$20 million a year. I don't know if that surprises anybody here, but I was shocked.

What does that mean in the Canadian context? We need coaching programs, degree programs, and when the students graduate from that degree program, they want to get a well-paid job. How much money would they—

Mr. Shane Esau: It depends on where you are.

Mr. Terence Young: And what sports. Could you magnify that?

Mr. Shane Esau: In competitive swimming, and I know that fairly well, someone who is starting out as a grassroots-type coach will make \$15 an hour. Someone who is at the provincial level will make \$60,000 to \$75,000 a year. Someone who's at the international level will make somewhere between \$100,000 and \$150,000 a year.

It's funny that Jason brought up the swim coach who can't swim, because the head Olympic swim coach last year didn't know how to swim when he first started as a coach. Twenty years later he's the head of our Olympic swim team.

Mr. Terence Young: I want to ask Jason a question.

If you were in charge of national coaching, let's say there was this imaginary position and you could do whatever you wanted to do, you were going to make the decisions, what would you do to increase the number of coaches?

Mr. Jason deVos: The first thing I would do is make coach education free. I would find a way to make coach education free. If that comes through government funding, through a combination of government funding and private sector partnerships.... I've suggested this to the Canadian Soccer Association. Find a corporate partner that will offset the costs of coach education.

We have volunteer coaches. We rely on them in our country. The reality is we're a pay-for-play sporting society. You pay a fee to play a sport. In that type of system, in soccer anyway, there's always been a desire to make soccer the cheap option. It's the cheap sport because all you need is a pair of boots, a grass field, and a ball, and you can run around. If you spread that cost over a bunch of kids, it's not that difficult. I said before it's not that hard to teach a kid how to kick a ball. That's the mentality of most people involved.

I think there's a lot more to it than that. If you don't teach those kids at the right stage of their development, they're never going to fall in love with the game. They're never going to learn the skills they need for lifelong success in the game and they're going to fall away from sports entirely. They're going to miss out on the opportunity to learn those life lessons that we all talk about, that you learn through sport, because they won't be engaged in the games.

How do you make it free? Obviously there is a financial impact. Whether the government's in a position to fund that entirely is not for me to say or suggest. I think it is very important and I would agree with Shane's assessment of making it more academic in a lot of ways. I'm fortunate enough that I hold a U.S. national A licence and I'm doing my UEFA Pro licence at the moment. The most enjoyable aspect of this for me is learning the science behind it, learning the academic approach: how does an eight-year-old learn? There's nothing I learn on those courses about how to play a formation or a tactical analysis. I don't learn that. I have that professional background. I learn the academic side. That's what I have a hunger for.

I think we do have to move into that, but it's a fine balancing act because the more you move into that, the more prohibitive it becomes for a lot of people to get involved. The vast majority of coaches in Canada are volunteers. How can we make it accessible to them but also raise the standard at the same time?

Mr. Terence Young: The parent coaches at Oakville Soccer Club have their courses paid for. It's a fairly well-off club. They have a \$12-million budget or whatever. I forget.

Mr. Jason deVos: It's \$7 million actually.

Mr. Terence Young: Is that a pool for professional coaches? Those are a bunch of dads and moms who just want to help out.

Mr. Jason deVos: When I started in Oakville in 2010, the coaching budget, the overall expenditure on salaries for coaches at the club, was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$350,000. That didn't include the technical director's position, but it did include the staff coaches and the part-time staff coaches.

What I did is restructure that entire budget. We hired 24 professional part-time coaches who were paid anywhere from \$15,000 to \$20,000 each. We put aside a significant six-figure sum of money for the training and education of all of our coaches. If the parent volunteers wanted to get the active start, fundamentals, or learning to train stage, or the active for life stage, we would pay the full cost of that. That's a significant investment. There aren't that many clubs in Canada in soccer that have the financial wherewithal to do that, in part because they believe cheap is better. We priced our programs accordingly and competitively and still were able to offset the cost of that.

As I've said in my criticism of coaching in this country, all you need to coach the best youth soccer players in Canada right now, given the standards in place right now, is a heart beat. That's all you need. If you have a heart beat, you can go to one of those courses. All you need to have is the active for life course, which is not assessment based. It's participation based. You show up and take the course, and you'll receive your certificate, but no one ever assesses your ability to teach. I think that has to change.

We're in the process of implementing a high-performance league in Ontario, called the Ontario Player Development League, which is standards based. To coach in that league, starting in 2014, you must have a national B licence at a minimum. You will have been assessed at least three times—a pre-B, a provincial B, and a national B—and passed those assessments to be able to teach young players. That's at the high performance level, the elite level. If we don't set standards for elite sport, those standards will never trickle down to the recreational level.

• (1725)

Mr. Terence Young: Chair, could I ask one quick question?

The Chair: No, you're out of time, and it's Mr. Nantel's turn.

Mr. Terence Young: Is there anything you can do to help the Leafs?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Don't invade my territory by being competitive.

[*Translation*]

My question is for the two of you.

[*English*]

Is this okay? I can speak English. That's no big deal.

[*Translation*]

Let's say the competitive aspect was removed from young players' training. The sport I am most familiar with is hockey. Obviously, in hockey, we are talking about little pros.

[*English*]

From day one they dress like pros. They have the stuff, the equipment, and everything. They pretend to be pros.

[*Translation*]

It would be very difficult to do away with the competitiveness.

[*English*]

It's like moving a mountain a centimetre.

[*Translation*]

Taking away the game's competitive aspect would imply changing the mentality of the parents and volunteers in charge. However, if that goal was achieved, rather than disseminating strategic efforts and competitive skills, could we not focus—both in terms of the budget, and in terms of human energy and competence—on the elite athletes who distinguish themselves naturally?

Would it be possible to move toward elite sports in search of excellence? As Mr. Esau was saying, that would enable more people to play the sport with less pressure.

When it comes to young people who are new to sports, would setting aside those funds and efforts for the pros result in savings?

[*English*]

Mr. Jason deVos: It's an interesting debate. Should we focus on the elite and then that drags everybody else up to that level because it gives them something to aspire to? I don't personally believe that's necessary, and I think you're going to have a lot of opposition to that as well.

Ultimately, what is your goal in all of this? You're studying the state of coaching at the amateur level in Canada. You obviously want to improve the standard. Is that for elite players, or is that for everyone?

By improving the standards for everyone, your elite players will find a way through the system. I grew up in Appin, Ontario, on a dirt road. There is no high-performance soccer program there. I found my way to the highest level because I was able to wind my way through the system.

A clearly defined development pathway for all of the sports in our country, I think, is very important, as are standards for each one of those levels.

What does it mean to be a recreational youth soccer coach in our country? Right now all it means is you volunteer your time. Clubs are begging parents. No soccer experience is necessary. They are just begging them to coach kids because they don't have enough.

This is the analogy I use. I go back to the education system a lot because I believe there are a lot of parallels with sport and education. Would you trust the education of your child to a parent volunteer who has no training as a teacher? I would never do that, and yet we do it in sport. We certainly do it in soccer. I can't speak for other sports, but we definitely do it in soccer, and that's having a negative impact on our ability to produce elite athletes, and our ability to teach kids the skills they need to stay in the game even at a recreational level for the rest of their lives, and that is having a negative impact on their well-being.

• (1730)

The Chair: That will have to be the last word. It's 5:30.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for their very informative, very passionate testimony. We certainly appreciate it.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>