

# Talking Points

## What Sport Can Do: The Case for Community Sport in Canada



### True Sport

- True Sport is Canada's national movement for sport and community.
- **Our goal is to get the most out of sport for Canadians** – True Sport's mission is to be a catalyst to help sport live up to its full potential as a public asset for Canada and Canadian society – making a significant contribution to the development of youth, the wellbeing of individuals, and quality of life in our communities.

### Purpose of this report

- **While the positive effects of physical activity have long been known, sport's benefits extend far beyond these** – A growing body of evidence points to community sport as a primary generator of social capital and a broad spectrum of other public benefits including education, child and youth development, social inclusion, crime prevention, economic development and environmental sustainability.
- **A new picture of community sport as a critical public asset is beginning to emerge** – Evidence documenting sport's benefits is revealing that Canada's community sport system is a critical reservoir of public benefit that, with intentional effort, can be made to deliver even more for Canadians.
- **This report is about catalyzing new approaches that will help us to realize sport's full potential** – True Sport undertook this research to give concrete evidence of sport's benefits; to enable communities, policy makers, and business leaders to see the tremendous potential that lies within our community sport system; and to catalyze new approaches that will put this potential to work for Canadians.

### Sport is woven into the very fabric of Canada's communities

- **From the playground to the podium** – Community sport is sport led, organized, supported or enabled by community volunteers and institutions, and includes everything from pick-up games, to community and school-based sport leagues, to elite competition.

- **Present in virtually every Canadian community** – There are 33,650 sport and recreation organizations in Canada. 28% of adult Canadians and approximately 50% of children and youth participate directly in sport, while 18% of Canadians belong to a local sport club, league, or organization and 39% of active Canadians take part in sport competitions or tournaments.
- **Volunteer led and supported** – Sport and recreation organizations engage 5.3 million volunteers – 28% of all Canadian volunteers and more than any other sector. 1.8 million Canadians coach amateur sport while 800,000 participate as amateur sport referees or officials. 73% percent of sport organizations have no paid employees at all
- **Largely supported by communities themselves** – On average, sport and recreation organizations receive only 12% of their funding from governments, compared with 49% for voluntary organizations overall.
- **Highly valued by Canadians** – 92% of Canadians believe that community sport can be a highly positive influence in the lives of children and youth, ranking sport second only to families in this respect. 72% of Canadians also believe that sport is a key contributor to quality of life in their communities.

## Good sport can make a great difference

- **Community sport is good for people and good for places**, strengthening individuals and communities. A growing body of international research evidence shows that sport can help advance a diverse range of societal goals that Canadians care about:
  1. **Improving health and wellbeing**
    - Increasing **physical activity** levels
    - Stemming the tide of **child obesity**
    - Preventing **chronic disease**
    - Enhancing **mental health**
    - Promoting **healthy aging**
    - Reducing **health care costs**
  2. **Putting children and youth on a positive life Course**
    - Helping children **learn and develop** through play
    - Building **physical capacity** and motor skills
    - Keeping children and youth **active and healthy**
    - Using sport to reduce youth **health risk behaviours**
    - **Empowering girls**
    - Fostering **positive youth development**
    - Enhancing **academic achievement**
    - Teaching positive **values and life skills**
    - Providing **positive adult role models**
    - Preventing **youth crime and gang involvement**
  3. **Building stronger and more inclusive communities**
    - Building **social capital**
    - **Helping newcomers to integrate** more quickly into Canadian society
    - Fostering greater **inclusion of people with disabilities**
    - Renewing **Aboriginal culture**

4. **Contributing to Canada's economy**
  - Enhancing **tourism** through sport travel and events
  - Contributing to **local economic development and renewal**
  - Enhancing **workplace skills and productivity**
  
5. **Promoting environmental sustainability**
  - Fostering **environmental awareness and stewardship**
  - Providing a platform for **social mobilization**
  - Making **sport facilities more sustainable**

### But we have to be intentional in order to achieve these benefits

- **Greater attention, cross-sectoral collaboration, and effort are needed** to ensure that community sport experiences are positive experiences, accessible to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, and appropriately designed to meet broader social, economic and environmental goals.
- **Sport's benefits are particularly tightly linked to the quality of the sport experience** – Studies have shown that the full value of community sport is only realized when sport is driven by positive values – when it is inclusive, fair, fun and fosters genuine excellence. This is what we mean by true sport and why true sport is important.
- **Access to community sport for all Canadians is critical** – 71% of Canadians believe cost is currently a major barrier to participation in our community sport system. Together, sport's increasing formalization and the uneven distribution of sport resources and facilities within and among communities contribute to high participation costs for individuals and families.

### And close the gap between the sport we have and the sport we want

- **The vast majority of Canadians understand sport's potential and want the good that sport can do** – 57% of Canadians believe that community sport currently reinforces positive values to a great extent. 33% believe this is true to some extent.
- **But there is a growing gap between the sport we have and the sport we want** – While most Canadians believe in sport as a positive influence, only one in five believe this potential is being fully realized. Canadians are concerned that community sport has become too focused on winning at any cost, to the detriment of positive values. These views point to a growing gap between the benefits Canadians believe sport can provide, and what they are actually experiencing.
- **This is reflected in declining sport participation** – In the period 1992 to 2005, sport participation rate for Canadians aged 15 and older dropped from 45% to 28%.
- **...and in the issues affecting community sport** – In a 2002 Decima survey, respondents identified the following as the most serious issues facing community sport today: **focus on winning/competition** (16%), **violence** (10%), **parental over-involvement** (10%), **parental under-involvement** (7%), and **poor coaching/leadership** (6%). Other very serious issues identified include: **harassment** (38%), **intolerance/racism** (29%), **lack of fair play** (21%), and **injuries** (18%).

- **We need to do more to get the most out of sport** – We need to build a more comprehensive and inclusive community sport system that delivers the quality sport that Canadians want.

## What you can do

- **Sports people need to recognize the importance and value of true sport** — The values, attitudes and behaviour of athletes, parents, coaches, administrators and volunteers ultimately determine the kind of sport we find in our communities.
- **Athletes have a particular responsibility as role models, not just for performance, but for character and values as well** – Athletes capture our attention and carry our hopes and hearts with them when they compete at home and around the world. Canadians look to them reflect our highest values and aspirations and to communicate to young people, in particular, the importance of these values in our lives and communities.
- **But this is not the job of sport alone** – Local communities have a leading role to play, together with all levels of government and the private sector, in helping to ensure that all communities have access to the sport infrastructure they need and every Canadian has access to quality sport opportunities.
- **Local communities have a leading role to play in building a comprehensive and inclusive community sport system that provides the sport Canadians want** – Communities are where sport takes place and are its primary beneficiaries. As such, they are critical to realizing the full range of benefits that sport can generate. Well-distributed sport opportunities help close the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged individuals and communities, while high quality sport encourages participation, fosters the positive development of participants, and strengthens communities as whole.
- **Municipal governments are key to amplifying and harnessing the power of sport** – Through intentional and strategic action, and the development of inclusive community sport plans, municipalities can amplify and harness the power of sport to advance key social and economic goals and improve quality of life in their communities.
- **Government policy makers at all levels need to move sport out of its current silo and actively integrate it into broader social and economic agendas** – The first step is to pay attention to the ways in which sport can help achieve the social and economic outcomes they are seeking. From there, intentional strategies, policies and programs can be developed that mobilize the power of sport to achieve these goals.
- **These efforts will determine whether we close the gap between the sport we have and the sport we want – or widen it** – The benefits outlined in this report compel us to recognize sport's value as an enormous, yet largely untapped, public asset that, with intentional effort, can be made to deliver still greater benefits for Canadians. Realizing these benefits requires thinking about community sport in a new way and bringing greater attention, effort and collaboration to its expression and development.
- **By intentionally making the right choices together, we can make sport truly count for Canada.**