



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**

**‘One step forward two steps back’:  
The dilemma of effecting change  
in the Canadian sport system**

**By Bruce Kidd  
Play the Game 2019**

# The Canadian sport system

- ▶ Pan-Canadian network of state-directed, financed, monitored and rewarded agencies, NSOs and MSOs, primarily in Olympic sports
- ▶ Led by Sport Canada, a line federal agency, with legislative authority from the *Physical Activity and Sport Act*, a 2003 revision of *Fitness and Amateur Sport Act* of 1961
- ▶ Similar provincial and territorial agencies direct, finance, etc., PSOs and TSOs.

# Recurring policy cycles:

- ▶ Crisis and public concern
  - ▶ government consultation
  - ▶ policy response
  - ▶ sport sector resistance
  - ▶ government failure to monitor and enforce compliance
  - ▶ New crisis and cycle repeats
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- ▶ Not only GBV but other requirements of social policy, facility development, major games, etc.

# Baby step forward

- ▶ In 2018, Sport Canada chose to renew and strengthen the failed 1996 policy
- ▶ Most NSOs now accept responsibility
- ▶ Sport Canada has
  - Agreed to monitor compliance
  - Established Canadian Sport Helpline at <http://abuse-free-sport.ca/en/>
  - Contracted SDRCC to provide independent investigators (some NSOs have appointed their own)
  - Initiated the creation of a Universal Code of Conduct

# Two steps backward

- ▶ NSOs still define misconduct and abuse; draft UCC **exempts**
  - ▶ *Conduct and coaching methods that are acceptable to Canadian standards for skill enhancement, physical conditioning, team building, rule enforcement or improved athletic performance*
- ▶ NSOs still control process of complaints; calls to Hotline referred to them
- ▶ Athletes and researchers ignored
- ▶ No effort to change the culture around acceptable coaching and interaction

# Huge opportunities

Broad public support for

1. A completely independent, universal mechanism to address maltreatment and GBV

- ▶ FPT task force, CCES, Athletes CAN and a National Safe Sport Summit all called for such a mechanism
- ▶ Supportive public and media commentary
- ▶ Successful examples in non-sport organizations; successful examples of independent sports agencies in CCES and SDRCC

2. Athlete-centered, humanized sport

- ▶ Yet federal sports minister persuaded to leave the existing inadequate system in place

# Why?

- ▶ Powerful, persistent pushback from NSOs and (mostly male) coaches who fear change
- ▶ Government fearful of
  - jurisdictional complexity,
  - controversy and criticism, and
  - an activist agenda
- ▶ Relentless pursuit of the podium has marginalized athlete concerns

# The dilemma of state-led sport

- ▶ Canada seeks to shape sports culture:
  - *The Government of Canada's policy regarding sport is founded on the highest ethical standards and values, including doping-free sport, the treatment of all persons with fairness and respect, the full and fair participation of all persons in sport and the fair, equitable, transparent and timely resolution of disputes (PASA 2003)*
- ▶ Yet rarely interested in more than HP; reluctant to spend to sustain change
- ▶ Though heavily subsidized, NSOs scream the 'autonomy of sport'.
- ▶ Few NSOs have the interest or capacity to pursue a social agenda



# What will effect real change?

## Two themes of this conference:

- ▶ Athletes need to gain more control over their sports, eg Athletes CAN Representation Project
- ▶ Governments must be pushed to take more responsibility for the lived experience of sports

# To this end

- ▶ Athletes and activists need to
  - Bring sport policy into public discourse (sadly no discussion of sports policy in 2019 election)
  - Forge links with other actors to recruit them for safe sport and other campaigns
  - Leverage encouraging international developments to pressure national and provincial governments
  - Continue to problematize HP culture