SAFE SPORT IN CANADA
The Athlete Experience

ERIN WILLSON
ASHLEY LABRIE
AthletesCAN, the association of Canada’s national team athletes, is the only fully independent and most inclusive athlete organization in the country and the first organization of its kind in the world.

As a multi-sport organization, we represent all national team athletes including Olympic, Paralympic, Commonwealth, Pan/Parapan American, Aboriginal and world championship athletes, among others. Athletes who are members of Canada’s national teams, or athletes who have retired from a senior national team are considered members and alumni of AthletesCAN.
SAFE SPORT
Abuse, harassment and discrimination have become the most prevalent threats to sport participants and the positive impact sport can have on society.

ATHLETE WELLBEING
The physical and mental health of our athletes has continued to play a key role in the longevity and wellbeing of our high performance athletes. The new high performance strategy will focus on the holistic development of participants.

ATHLETE-CENTERED SPORT
A system that values the athlete voice as intrinsic to success continue to produce strong ambassadors for sport and society. CDN sport requires the tools to support this principle in action and through a pivot of cultural norms.

DEVELOPING TOMORROW’S LEADERS
AthletesCAN is dedicated to providing effective training and leadership skill development to Canada’s national team athletes to afford them the opportunity to gain a significant level of confidence, comfort and knowledge in representing their voice and those of their teammates both on and off the field of play.
OUR ATHLETE LEADERS – Safe Sport Working Group
BEFORE WE CAN BEGIN, WE NEED A BASELINE

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

- Study intended to understand the various types of maltreatment that Canadian national team athletes are experiencing:
  - How often and by whom?
  - Sexual, psychological, physical harm, neglect
  - Injury and concussion
  - Health outcomes
  - Disclosure and reporting
BEFORE WE CAN BEGIN, WE NEED A BASELINE
PARTICIPANTS

➢ **Athletic Status**: 794 Current, 237 Retired
➢ **Gender**: 38% Male, 61.5% Female, .1% other
➢ **Age**: Mean 27.3
➢ **Disability**: 11%
➢ **Racialized**: 9.7%
➢ **LGBTQ2I+**: 7.3%
➢ **Indigenous**: 1.6%
75%
Summary: Athletes’ Reports of Various Harms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Retired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harm</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Harm</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Harm</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harm</td>
<td>Psychological Harm</td>
<td>Physical Harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Sexist jokes/remarks</td>
<td>1. Shouted at in an angry or critical manner</td>
<td>1. Punished with excessive exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Intrusive sexual glances</td>
<td>2. Gossiped or told lies about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sexually inappropriate touching</td>
<td>4. Intentionally ignored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Criticized as a person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harm</td>
<td>Psychological Harm</td>
<td>Physical Harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. High performance directors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HEALTH OUTCOMES

Psychological Abuse
Physical Abuse
Neglect
Sexual Abuse

Thoughts about engaging in disordered eating behaviours
Engaging in disordered eating behaviours
Thoughts about engaging in self-harming behaviour
Engaging in self-harming behaviour
Having suicidal thoughts
Seeking help to deal with mental health issues
1. Normalization & Willful blindness

“The high performance director thinks that the tougher the coach is the better we will become, so horrible conditions and abuse were not just tolerated but in fact, glorified.”

2. Silencing

“I never felt like there was anyone I could speak to about [concerns about harmful behaviours] because [sport] was my life and I didn't want to jeopardize my career.”
1. Independent 3rd party disclosure, reporting and support

“I would never feel comfortable going to my National Sport Organization if I were harassed in any way and would 100% need an individual body to report the harassment too. I would be far too scared to say anything to my coach or my HPD.”

2. Increased Education

➢ For coaches and staff
➢ For athletes

“I didn't realize that the way I was being treated was inappropriate.”
3. Accountability

“There should be the ability to have the coaching job taken away if coaches are abusive. I believe my coach acts the way he does because he knows he can get away with it.”

4. Prohibit sexual relations between athletes & coaches

“Zero tolerance of coach athlete sexual relationships. The power imbalance is too great to allow for consent.”
5. **People First**
   - Broken culture
   - Funding structure
   - Win-at-all cost mentality
   - Chewed up & spit out
   - Holistic development of athletes
WHY WE ARE DRIVING THE CHANGE NOW

TO ENSURE A BANDAID SOLUTION IS NOT MANDATED IN PLACE OF ANY REAL & MEANINGFUL CHANGE

SAFE SPORT
It is the culmination of 18 months of work within the system that has left athletes dissatisfied with the lack of progress towards an independent body. The athlete perspective has been used for political gain in a less than athlete-centered campaign for change.

ATHLETE WELLBEING
The physical and mental health of athletes has continued to suffer in the current environment. Our 2019 Maltreatment Study, Safe Sport Summit and AthletesCAN Forum have provided direct and undeniable evidence that athletes will not feel safe until an independent body is established.

ATHLETE-CENTERED SPORT
Our members have indicated that Safe Sport is our primary focus and that an independent body is the only meaningful solution to the issue of abuse, harassment and discrimination in sport.
ABOUT US

WE NEED THE CREATION OF A NEW, TRULY INDEPENDENT BODY TO EXERCISE OVERSIGHT OF SAFE SPORT IN CANADA IN ORDER TO:

- TO ERADICATE CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND INHERENT BIAS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SAFE SPORT ISSUES
  - ADDRESS CURRENT CULTURE OF SELF-REGULATION

- THE ABILITY TO REPORT MALTREATMENT WITHOUT FEAR OF RETRIBUTION
  - ONLY 15% OF ATHLETES WHO EXPERIENCE MALTREATMENT REPORT

- TO PROVIDE CENTRAL, CONSISTENT, EXPERT DRIVEN DIRECTION AND OVERSIGHT WITH REGARDS TO SAFE SPORT INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO POLICY; EDUCATION AND TRAINING; INVESTIGATIONS AND ADJUDICATION; SUPPORT AND COMPENSATION.

“Knowing we can be replaced, and our careers are on the line, you are regularly forced to ignore issues or maltreatment out of fear. I have witnessed blackmail, intimidation, favouritism, experienced verbal and mental abuse personally. We are silenced or put down if you ask questions. I am fearful that after I speak out, I will be punished.”

“If we are ever to have truly safe sport, an authoritative, confidential, and INDEPENDENT body must be put in place.”
SAFE SPORT CANADA – MOBILIZING ATHLETES
CREATING THE CHANGE
WE NEED THROUGH THOSE AFFECTED MOST