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Chair

The Honourable Rob Moore

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We're very pleased to have our guests here. I understand Mr. Dubé has a motion. He's assured me it will take less than two minutes.

Mr. Dubé.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I want to thank my Liberal and Conservative colleagues for allowing me to introduce this motion. I will be very quick. I know that our witnesses' time is important. However, the topic is appropriate. We are talking about sports.

I would simply like unanimous consent on the following motion:

That the committee congratulate Canadian mixed martial arts athlete, Georges St-Pierre, for defending his UFC (Ultimate Fighting Champion) welterweight world champion title by winning his fight November 15, 2012 in Montreal.

Members of Parliament from all parties were at the Bell Centre on Saturday night. We are very proud of the victory of this great Canadian athlete, who is a good ambassador for us in the sports world. It is with great pleasure that I worked with my colleagues to seek the committee's support with respect to this motion. I hope the committee will support me in this regard.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Dubé has moved a motion for which he asks unanimous consent. Does he have unanimous consent for the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay, we want to welcome our witnesses to the committee. We met with you before the Olympics, and now it's wonderful to meet you after the Olympics. With us today are the Canadian Olympic Committee and Own the Podium. We're very pleased to have at our committee, Marcel Aubut, the president of the Canadian Olympic Committee; Christopher Overholt, the chief executive officer and secretary general; and Caroline Assalian, the chief of sports. From Own the Podium we have Anne Merklinger, the chief executive officer, and Joanne Mortimore, the director of planning and operations.

Welcome and congratulations to all of you. We look forward to hearing from you. We also look forward to having an opportunity to ask you some questions.

Committee members, we're scheduled to go until 5 o'clock with this portion of the meeting, and from 5 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. we'll be discussing committee business.

With that, I will give the floor to Mr. Aubut for his opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Aubut (President, Canadian Olympic Committee): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee.

We are pleased to be back here one year later. We had 17 incredible days in London, and here is an overview of what we saw there.

[*English*]

Let's start with a short video.

[*Video Presentation*]

Mr. Marcel Aubut: This only begins to capture the energy, excitement, and pride of our team. Congratulations to Sebastian Coe, who was the CEO of the organizing committee, LOGOC, for having delivered fantastic games. Congratulations to the people living in London and to all the people living in Great Britain.

We saw with our own eyes, and our athletes told us, that there were excellent venues. The security was first rate. There was a very welcoming atmosphere by Londoners. Even traffic was acceptable.

[*Translation*]

The games were a real success with respect to the team's performance. We knew that what we hoped to achieve in the standings—our goal was to come in twelfth—was very ambitious and that it was not going to be easy. Our philosophy was to have ambitious goals, and that will not change.

[*English*]

Canada came in tied for 13th with 18 medals, which was two medals short of our goal of being in the top 12. With two more, we would have finished 11th. That shows you how tight it was.

Our athletes performed as expected, considering that they won 17 medals at the world championships just prior to London.

In London, all 279 athletes, 94 coaches, and the support personnel gave everything they had. The team had over 600 Canadian team members and over 100 volunteers, for a total of 700 people. The team showed the best of who we are as Canadians. They have earned the respect of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

In fact, I am certain—and you will understand when I say this—that the real test for the team was not in how they reacted to victory, but rather to defeat. In other words, the results and medals aren't all that counts.

• (1535)

There is a much more than that in the Olympics.

[*English*]

Our athletes gave us so many memorable moments. We were on a roller coaster of emotions, for instance, in the heartbreaking women's soccer game against the U.S., and then the nail-biting bronze medal game against France, which resulted in Canada's first summer team medal since 1936, the first in 76 years. Of course, Canada's golden girl, Rosie MacLennan, delivered an amazing performance with a gold medal finish on the trampoline.

[*Translation*]

Jennifer Abel and Émilie Heymans, these extraordinary divers, gave Canada its first medal early on in the games. And Antoine Valois-Fortier is the first Canadian judoka to have won a medal in his category. He won silver. His coach, Nicolas Gill, did the same in 1992. I could go on at length telling you about these memorable moments.

[*English*]

With regard to our team mission, they are the team behind the team, and they were critical to the success. That includes our amazing chef de mission, Mark Tewksbury, and assistant chef de mission, Sylvie Bernier.

[*Translation*]

The mission team made sure the athletes had everything they needed, be it in the village, at the performance centre or outside the village, so that they would perform well.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Canada Olympic House was a true home away from home for athletes' families. What a success. An average of 1,200 people came through the doors every day.

[*Translation*]

Believe it or not, 19,000 people—parents, friends, sponsors and government representatives—visited the house during the games.

[*English*]

These families were well taken care of, because it is crucial for the athletes to focus on their performance. We see it now as a tool for Canada to help the athletes perform better.

[*Translation*]

The athletes and their families, as well as our partners and the media, told us that it was the best Olympic house ever.

[*English*]

It was the best Canada Olympic House ever according to everyone. Many national and international guests, including Prince Harry, government representatives, the CEO of the NSF, and such sponsors and sport partners as George Cope, the CEO of Bell, and Gordon Nixon, the CEO of RBC, all experienced Canadian hospitality at its best at Canada Olympic House.

Truly, this team was Canada's team.

[*Translation*]

We knew that Canadians were going to encourage us and be near us.

[*English*]

According to Canada's official Olympic network, CTV, 31.9 million Canadians watched coverage of the London games. That's quite remarkable.

Since the Olympic Games, the Canadian Olympic Committee hasn't stopped working for athletes and coaches. We promised our athletes that we would tell their stories 365 days a year, and we are. Since the games, we have had the Celebration of Excellence, which you heard about, in 2012, which included the famous heroes tour to Ottawa and Toronto. We visited three hospitals, 65 schools, and a Ronald McDonald House. We visited Parliament, where the Prime Minister of Canada gave Diamond Jubilee medals to the athletes, and we had a great lunch with members of Parliament. Then we took the train from Ottawa to Toronto.

In Toronto we had the Post Olympic Excellence Series, which is a conference for athletes to discuss their careers after sports. It was a great success.

Then there was the famous parade. Thousands and thousands of people from Toronto stood along the streets to applaud our athletes. It ended at Maple Leaf Square with 4,000 students. It was really amazing to see that. The famous gala was the same night, which was at the Air Canada Centre. The induction gala raised over \$3 million net for the Canadian Olympic Foundation. It was a great and unforgettable night. Inductees, London 2012 athletes and coaches were at the heart of the evening and the event.

What does all this mean for the Canadian Olympic Committee and for all Canadians? It means that sport is important to this country and an asset to society. We have to remember, and we do that every day, and remind people that sport is the solution to many of our societal challenges.

[*Translation*]

For Canadians and the Canadian Olympic Committee, this means that, increasingly, people understand that sport has all the assets to solve problems in our society and that we can count on sport as a very important solution.

[English]

There is so much that sport can do for our country beyond excitement and pride.

First, it delivers economic, health, and social benefits in all communities.

Second, for Canadian athletes, sport is an asset for our society. Competing against the best in the world is crucial for our athletes; it is the opportunity to be in the Olympics, to really compete against the best, and to be ready for the great events. At the same time, they give so much visibility to our country.

Third, I would say the role model part is huge for the youth of our country, the youth who leave school too early, who have problems with drugs, or problems with alcohol.

[Translation]

It's something we hear often, that the athletes are role models for young Canadians. We saw it in London, and we will continue to see it in the future.

[English]

What about coaching? Coaching is the crucial part of the success of the athletes. It's absolutely essential. Coaching should be absolutely our priority. Great coaching means great athletes, which leads to great performances. We have to revitalize that function. That function is not well known, not well promoted, and we have to do that job to make sure that we have the best coaches, that we recognize them, that we value their job, and especially that we keep them in the country.

I would like to thank the federal government, and Mr. Harper personally for the investment to date. You are the one funding partner for sport in Canada. We thank you for the \$64 million to Own the Podium, OTP, and the approximately \$200 million for high-performance sport.

[Translation]

Thank you for continuing to provide funding despite the austerity measures in place. We would particularly like to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Sport, Bal Gosal.

[English]

Through your investment, the message is that the Government of Canada values sport, values athletes, and values excellence.

You are not alone. The private sector also sees the value in sport, in athletes, and in winning. That's why at the Canadian Olympic Committee we line up corporate Canada to do its share in that investment with the Government of Canada to make sure that we improve our capacity of winning, getting medals, and putting more athletes on the podium.

Through our private sector partnership, as you heard last week, we have announced an almost \$100 million investment in high-performance sport over the next four years, which is a record.

[Translation]

We're talking about \$100 million thanks to our partnerships with the private sector, and that was announced earlier this week. This

\$100 million will be invested in high performance for the next four years to guarantee our athletes financial support that will help them improve.

[English]

This is close to double the COC overall investment in sport. Our athletes are not standing still and neither are we, as you can see. Our summer athletes are already preparing for Rio 2016. Our winter athletes are just thirteen and a half months away from performing at their best in Sochi. They are ready.

[Translation]

We have already started preparing for Rio, and we are finalizing preparations for Sochi.

[English]

This is not to mention preparing for our home Pan Am Games in Toronto in 2015.

[Translation]

These games will be held at home. So we need to be proud of that and be a great success so we can convince the officials to bring other events to Canada in the future.

[English]

I am confident that for our athletes, coaches, and Sport Canada, the best is yet to come.

[Translation]

I am convinced that the future is very promising for our athletes, our coaches and everyone who works in sport in Canada.

Thank you for your attention and for giving us the opportunity to speak to you. I hope you have learned a little bit about what we did in London.

● (1545)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, from Own the Podium, we have Anne Merklinger.

Ms. Anne Merklinger (Chief Executive Officer, Own the Podium): Good afternoon.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The opportunity to meet with you is very important for us at Own the Podium.

● (1550)

[English]

It's of enormous importance to Canada's athletes to know that the Government of Canada and you as the elected politicians care about how they perform. The mere fact that we're here in front of this important committee is a testament to the value that you place on high-performance sport in Canada, and the fact that we're having a post-mortem reinforces again just how much you care about Canada's athletes. On behalf of Own the Podium, let me say that we can't thank you enough for your support.

Let me acknowledge, as Marcel has, the important role that the Government of Canada played in high-performance sport going into London. The federal government is the single largest contributor to high-performance sport in Canada and has been for a number of years. That is the primary reason that Canada's athletes and coaches have enjoyed the successes they have on the world stage to date.

I'm going to focus on three main areas in my remarks. The first one is to look at how Canada performed relative to other countries in the world. The second one is a closer look at how sports targeted by Own the Podium performed. The final one is about some key findings and lessons learned going into 2016 and beyond.

How do we stack up as a nation against the rest of the world? As Marcel said, we finished with 18 medals, at 13th overall, two medals out of a tie for 11th place. Since 2004, there has been a positive trend in terms of our performance relative to that of the rest of the world. We placed 19th overall in 2004, 15th in 2008, and 13th in London. Certainly, that's a positive trend in terms of our overall performance.

There were three nations that were ahead of Canada in 2008 and placed behind us in London, and there was only one nation that was behind us in 2008 and passed us in London in 2012. That nation was the Netherlands; they actually won four more medals in London than they did in 2008.

Several nations had significant drops in their medal tally. We spend a lot of time as an organization looking at how other nations are performing and at what they're doing in terms of their investment strategies to try to win more medals. The most notable ones in terms of nations that fell behind were Australia, which dropped 11 medals, which is significant, from 2008. Cuba was down 10 medals, and France, Belarus, and Ukraine were all down seven medals.

Our performance objective, as Marcel mentioned, was to finish in the top 12 in 2012. We knew it was an ambitious, lofty target. While we were one place shy, we certainly held our own in, as I've described, an increasingly competitive environment. We also held our own in an environment where many nations are investing significant resources, both public sector and private sector resources, in high-performance sport. We really feel it was a significant performance for Canada.

Our investment in summer sport as a nation has been relatively short: for three years the Government of Canada has made incremental investments in summer sports specifically. It increased from \$12 million to \$36 million over the last three years. When we compare that to what happened going into Vancouver, we can see that the investment is relatively short. In Vancouver, it was a five-year investment of \$11 million from the public sector, matched by \$11 million from the private sector. In that three-year period of time, again, compared to the five-year period of time in terms of the investment in summer compared to winter, we're still doing reasonably well.

Importantly, we're also one of the few nations that invests in both winter and summer Olympic Games. Remarkably, we ranked seventh overall in total medals if you combine our summer and winter Olympic rankings.

The second area I'd like to address is an assessment of how sports that were targeted by Own the Podium performed in London. The

core element of our investment approach is really focused on sports that have the potential to win one or more medals.

There were nine sports in this bracket that we focused on seriously. Of these nine sports, eight won medals. That's a pretty good success rate, from our perspective. Of the nine sports, five were targeted to win two or more medals, and four of those five sports did exactly that. They won two or more medals. Again, it's a terrific result in terms of our public and private investment.

There are eight sports in which Own the Podium's investment was one that we refer to as a higher strategic risk, or more of a strategic approach. They maybe don't have as much medal potential going into the games at the start of the quadrennial as the top two brackets I spoke of. Only two of those eight sports won medals, so we've learned that we need to be more cautious in taking those strategic risks, making those strategic investments, as we move towards Rio.

Own the Podium also invested in individual athletes. One of those three individual athlete investments delivered a medal. It's a relatively small financial investment, but it delivered one medal, which was very positive.

Own the Podium predicted 20 medals going into London, and 18 were won. That equals a 90% conversion rate from our organization's perspective.

There are some important observations to share with you that tell a story over and above the performance metrics. There is the incredible accomplishment of the women's soccer team, the first medal in summer team sports in 76 years. That's a long wait for a summer team sport medal. The impact of that bronze medal on Canada was profound on all Canadians, in much the same way as the impact of Vancouver's performance in 2010.

More Canadians participate in soccer than in any other sport in the nation. Virtually every community in our great country participates in soccer. The medal won by these female athletes was a bronze medal, but it had a gold lining. Every member of that team serves as a role model and a heroine for our communities across our country.

Swimming and canoeing won three medals each. That was a terrific performance. That's six medals, a third of our total medal tally, so great gains were made in those two sports.

Canada won medals in 11 sports. That's the greatest number of sports we've won medals in since 2000 in Sydney. It's up one from 2008, when we won medals in 10 sports. These are all very positive trends. The Government of Canada two years ago made a deliberate, specific investment in a longer term strategy for summer team sports, trying to be more successful in our team sport approach. It's only been invested in for two years, but we saw some initial dividends, including a great performance from the women's basketball team, which finished eighth.

These are some of the good news stories. Of course, there were also some misfortunes, which every competitive, high-performance sport environment brings with it. I'd like to share a couple of those so that you understand just how fragile and vulnerable the high-performance sport world is for athletes and coaches. It's something that all of us as witnesses live, eat, and breathe every day, 24/7, 365 days a year.

These misfortunes begin with a great horse named Hickstead. I'm sure all of you know Hickstead's tragic story. He passed away just over a year ago. That tragic death resulted in the loss of two potential medals for the Canadian summer Olympic team.

We all lived the unfortunate story of Jared Connaughton and the 4 x 100 metre relay team. For a moment there, he and his teammates and the entire nation, and everyone in London were on their feet, knowing that we had surpassed our medal tally from Beijing, which was significant. It was so unfortunate that this happened.

The final one was a very controversial judging decision for a young boxer from Atlantic Canada who everyone felt had won the fight, but at the end of the day it didn't go his way.

Misfortune comes with sport, and it can seldom be controlled. That said, I think there were some sports that may have underperformed in our assessment. As an organization, our standards are pretty high, and underperformance is not good enough. We are working very closely with those sports to identify what went well and what didn't. We are learning from our mistakes. We believe the top 12 target was attainable, even though it was ambitious and lofty. Our present assessment is that, with a few more successes, we would have made the top 12. As an organization, we're never going to be satisfied if we even think there was one medal left on the table. That's our job, and that's what you, as the Government of Canada, and our funding partners, have entrusted us to be accountable for. At this very moment, our technical staff are in the midst of meeting with each and every summer targeted sport to determine what shifts they need to make going into Rio.

● (1555)

The third and final area I'd like to look at is the key findings and lessons learned for 2016 and beyond.

First and foremost, we need to place a much greater focus on building a deeper pool of podium potential athletes. Canada's athletes have ranked in the top five and top eight, and have really flatlined since 1996. In order to not be as vulnerable and fragile, we need to develop a much deeper pool.

That means we need to look at the system of high-performance sport across the country and work with all of our partners, the Canadian sports institutes, the Canadian sports centres, provinces and territories, to really strengthen that system going forward.

We will be launching a national talent identification and development framework that will look closely at how we identify the next generation's athletes and ensure that they're in the best environments possible.

As an organization, we need to continue to make some very proactive and early interventions. We made a few of those going into London and they were very successful. There were a couple that we

could have made and been a little more aggressive on, but we didn't and it probably cost us a couple of medals.

We also anticipate a greater degree of targeting of sports going forward. When we look at the profile of other nations that are very successful in the summer Olympic Games, winning more sports, more medals from a smaller number of sports, what we call multiple medal sports, where they win three or more medals, is certainly a key strategy.

Marcel mentioned the important role of the coach and technical leaders. Recruiting, retaining, and developing the best coaches in the world continues to be a high priority. Without great coaches, we aren't successful in developing podium potential athletes.

We must increase the accountability measures for the investment both from Own the Podium to sports and from Own the Podium to our funding partners. That's top of mind within our organization each and every day.

Finally, the latest research indicates that winning medals in sport is important to Canada and to Canadians. A whole new generation of heroes emerged from London, and we have been able to celebrate those with the great work of the Canadian Olympic Committee each and every day since then. We will continue to celebrate those great heroes.

There's a renewed culture of winning and of excellence in high-performance sport in Canada, and it really maintains the momentum that was established in Vancouver. With each medallist crowned, we need to work with these heroes to go back to their communities and reinstate the importance of sport and physical activity, of living a healthy lifestyle, of building communities. We don't talk enough about what that really means and the value of winning medals to Canada.

Canadian children need Olympic heroes and positive role models whom they can emulate and aspire to be like. Success in high-performance sport truly does build communities. It develops our future leaders, builds civic pride, and instills a belief that we can win, that it's okay to win, and we will win.

OTP became a not-for-profit organization in March, 2012, and it was a very important occasion for our organization. We continue to be a model that is highly regarded around the world and within other sectors in Canada.

On behalf of all of Canada's athletes and coaches, I'd like to thank you once again for the tremendous support you have provided in our quest to help more Canadian athletes win more medals at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Knowing that you care, that you believe in them, and that you support these athletes in their pursuits means a great deal to them as Canada's leading athletes. Knowing that they have an entire government and a country behind them can truly make a difference in their performance longer-term.

Thanks so much.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Anne.

Now we will go to our question and answer rounds. The first up is Mr. Young.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you everyone for coming here today and for the two excellent presentations. The video presentation reminded me of how exciting it was. How proud we all were to see the athletes, not only in their performance but also in the opening and closing ceremonies, and even when they were on each other's shoulders, cheering. They were so well behaved and friendly, and were wonderful ambassadors. I enjoyed every minute of it. I want to mention Diana Matheson because she is from my riding of Oakville, and she got the winning goal. It was a source of pride for us in Oakville too.

Your presentation, Anne, was really fascinating for me. I had a question ready for you, which you answered in your presentation. Are you satisfied? You said that no, you were never satisfied if there's another medal left on the table, which I appreciate.

You talked about doing things differently. Could you expand on that? Specifically, how do you get what you called podium potential athletes? How will you find them? I guess you're on it already. How do you find them? How do you develop the coaches? You mentioned a national talent framework. Is that all part of the process?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Thank you very much. Those are great questions.

Since Own the Podium was created in 2003, our focus has been very much what we would call a short-term-gains approach. We've really been looking at the upcoming set of games. It's a four-year window. We invest in those athletes who are identified four years out. For example, for Sochi coming up in 2014, we looked at the athletes that emerged post 2010. We are working with the sports organizations to support those athletes over the upcoming four years.

In order for us to build the pool of podium potential athletes, we need to expand that investment approach to five to eight years out. We've gone from one to four, and now we need to go to five to eight.

• (1605)

Mr. Terence Young: You definitely need to use kids in some cases.

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Well, they wouldn't be kids. Every sport is a little different, frankly. To use rowing as an example, it's a late-maturing sport, so your investment in them might be when they are a little bit older.

That's one very deliberate approach we will be taking. We'll really be looking at an eight-year investment. We don't have sufficient resources to do that with every targeted sport, so we will have to pick those we feel give us the biggest opportunity for a return. That's the first piece.

The second piece is what you referred to in terms of the talent ID and development framework. We have had some success in identifying talented athletes, but it's really been by accident. It hasn't been a deliberate and intentional approach, one that involves all the partners in sport. That involves the provinces and territories, the clubs and regions, Canadian sports institutes, and Canadian sports centres. A number of key partners are involved in high-performance sport.

Those two pieces, we believe, will have a significant impact on our ability, as a nation, to develop a larger pool of podium potential athletes.

Mr. Terence Young: How about the coaches? How do you get great coaches?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: First of all, we mentioned retaining the ones we have. We are making sure that we are doing everything possible to create the best environment for coaches. Sometimes it's not always about the compensation. We need to make sure that they have the best environment, that they have the services, equipment, quality support, and expert providers working with them. We also know there is a high demand for the world's best coaches, and there is a market rate for coaches that can be pretty steep. For us to make sure that we hang on to our world's best coaches, we need to provide every possible opportunity for them to stay. That is shifting sand in Canadian high-performance sport, but we know for sure that we need to respond to it.

Longer term, we're working very closely, again, with all the partners to make sure that we develop our own Canadian world's best coaches. It's a both ends approach: keep the ones we have, hang onto them, and identify the ones outside the country and recruit them. At the same time, we will develop our next generation of great Canadian world-leading coaches.

Mr. Terence Young: With regard to the summer games, looking ahead, I'm sure there are some things you'll be doing differently. Are those the things you just told me about, or is there anything else you'll be doing differently?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: I talked about the third category of sports that are more of a strategic investment. We will be narrowing that a little more thoughtfully, perhaps, going forward. Rest assured that every podium potential athlete identified between now and Rio will be supported. If a sport does not have a pool of podium potential athletes, we'll be taking a tougher line on that and making sure that if there are no athletes, there is no investment. We were perhaps a little broader in our approach going into London, but we'll be narrowing it going forward.

Mr. Terence Young: I understand that Oakville has the highest number of young people playing soccer of any city in North America. There are 12,000 athletes and coaches. I don't think it's any accident that Diana Matheson came out of Oakville, so I understand the long-term investment and how it makes sense.

I'd like to ask Mr. Aubut a question about the games themselves. Could you please tell me what your three main goals were going into the games and what challenges faced you in achieving those goals?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Of course, the goal in 2012 was to be number one. Second was to lead the best group ever, the 700 people I mentioned to you before. It was important. The reputation of the country was on the line, not only the reputation of the athletes, but the reputation of the whole country.

We have an incredible reputation in the world for preparation for the games, for making every detail a priority, for making sure that the environment is absolutely perfect for the athletes to perform. Madam Assalian led the whole preparation. You just look to get there and keep that reputation, even in hindsight, as being the best in the world for game preparation and the mission team. That would have been my second one.

The third was the need to have fun, too, and to make Canada Olympic House the best one ever. To be at Trafalgar Square and have the opportunity to make all Canadians who came through the door of Canada House feel like they were at home was what we were expecting, and we were rewarded accordingly.

Those three were really what I was expecting. Maybe my colleague could add something.

•(1610)

Mr. Christopher Overholt (Chief Executive Officer and Secretary General, Canadian Olympic Committee): I would only add that, from the perspective of Canada Olympic House, that was one part of an overall strategy, which was to connect Canadians to our athletes. You've seen some of the video that we've shared today. Much of that result was a really strong effort to start to tell our athletes' stories in a meaningful way in the time leading up to the games, and then to continue to work with all of our partners and with the media, of course, to connect the athletes to Canadians. We're a national sports franchise, and we have the potential for 34 million fans, and if we don't tell that story, then no one will, so we take that very seriously.

Canada Olympic House was certainly an opportunity for us to connect on the ground in London with all of our Canadian fans and those of the athletes, but it was part of a larger strategy to do just that in the months and weeks leading up to the games.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Young.

Mr. Dubé, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here, and I also want to congratulate them. To echo what Mr. Young said, beyond the discussion on the number of medals, the behaviour and athletic performances was something to really be very proud of, since the decision often comes down to just a few centimetres.

[English]

Ms. Merklinger, I appreciate your candour about moving forward, because I think any athlete will say you always want to do better. That's a sports mentality to have.

[Translation]

Furthermore, last year, Canadian Heritage did an evaluation of Sport Canada's programs. In that context, Sport Canada was willing to work with us, namely with Own the Podium, to evaluate the London games.

If I correctly understood the answers you already gave, that has already been done. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that

evaluation? Where are we at? Are we going to be able to create some kind of summary?

[English]

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Certainly. Sport Canada is in the midst of finalizing the evaluation tool and they've worked very closely with Joanne and me in terms of designing that evaluation. It will go out to every targeted national summer sport organization and the individual athletes that were targeted. It will look at every aspect of Own the Podium's technical operations in terms of how we partner with the sport organizations, what technical guidance we provide them, and what the review process is. They will evaluate every component of our technical operations. That will be shared with all of our partners and will be a very important tool for us going forward.

Last year we did conduct our own third party external evaluation, which was very similar to what Sport Canada is evaluating, given the Government of Canada's investment in Own the Podium. This fits perfectly into our overall need to be accountable as an organization for the public investment.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Has working with Sport Canada been adequate so far and will it allow for an evaluation that will help us get a good return on our investment?

[English]

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Absolutely. It couldn't be better. They are working very closely with us, seeking our input in terms of whether we are sure that this third party evaluation will meet our needs.

In many respects it enables us to use this as the external evaluation framework entirely, as opposed to us having to replicate it and do it again. The cooperation we've had with the entire Sport Canada staff has been terrific.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I have a question that is sort of for all the witnesses.

I think Mr. Aubut spoke about it specifically. What about the Pan-American Games? When I met with people who supported all the efforts made in that respect, they just mentioned a collaboration with the Canadian Olympic Committee and Own the Podium. Any information about this would be relevant and interesting. What are you doing exactly in this area? I understand there are standings. That has always been the case when it comes to international competition, but this time is there work being done that wasn't being done previously?

•(1615)

Mr. Marcel Aubut: The Pan-American Games are a product of the Canadian Olympic Committee. If they win, we win. We take this very seriously. We are doing everything we can to give them a hand.

[English]

For instance, they need our good network relations as far as making sure there is maximum support. We're going to use the Pan Am Games for qualifying for the Olympic Games. This is going to enhance the importance of the games in Toronto. We are helping them in that area.

There are three or four key Olympic Committee executives on the Pan Am board. We work very closely with them. We wanted to show, by not a big amount of money, by \$2.6 million, that we also want to invest in what they are trying to achieve. It's going to be announced very soon what we are going to do with that money. In the meantime, we are officially announcing that we are going to help them as far as making them the best Pan Am Games ever.

You saw the way they did it in Rio. They got the Mondiale. They got the Pan Am Games. And they will be hosting the Olympics in 2016. It's a good step to another big event, if you succeed with this one. Let's get comfortable with this one.

I just led a session of the Canadian Olympic Committee last week. I told them once and for all that if there's anyone still on the brakes about 2015, to take their foot off. There will be no more applying of brakes here. We have to cooperate. We have to work with them. We have to support them. We have to make those games the best Pan American Games ever. You can count on the Canadian Olympic Committee to do that.

Christopher, would you like to add anything to this?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: I would only add that the work we do in the lines of the business is significant, and it has been for some time. Going back to early days, as I joined the COC, I met with Ian Troup and his team early on. My team has continued to work closely, both on the sports side, working closely with Bob O'Doherty and his team. Caroline and his team connected.

On the marketing side and communications, Marcel has already mentioned some of the involvement we've had in their broadcast strategy. It's not only at the most senior levels but in the lines of the business as well, committee work-, and as Marcel has mentioned, on the board.

Ms. Caroline Assalian (Chief Sport Officer, Canadian Olympic Committee): May I add that there are two aspects of the Pan American Games. There are the games themselves, where we're playing host to 41 countries, and there's the Canadian Pan American team that will be competing. We need to ensure that they're a success, both the team with a best-ever performance, as well as the games as we host the Pan Am countries.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: This is for the representatives of Own the Podium.

Your involvement in summer sports is more recent than your involvement in winter sports. What will your work for the Pan-Am Games look like?

[English]

Ms. Anne Merklinger: We have not played host to a major multi-sport summer games since the Pan Am Games in 1999 in Winnipeg.

The legacy from the 2015 Pan Am Games will have a significant impact on high-performance sport in Canada. We've worked very closely with our partners in Sport Canada, the Toronto 2015 bid organization, the Canadian Olympic Committee, and all the summer sport organizations that stand to benefit from the high-performance legacy usage out of Toronto. That's first and foremost in our minds. We're already working diligently with those sports to identify what

the venue needs to look like, what kind of access we need to have for high-performance sport users and communities post-game. There's a lot of attention to that.

As in Vancouver when we hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games, for the Pan Am Games in Toronto to be successful our team needs to perform well. Own the Podium's role is to work with each of the summer Olympic sport organizations and ensure that they're doing everything possible to prepare, starting now, because we're four years out of Rio and three years out of 2015, in order to have a great result in Toronto.

We are in the midst of what we call summer sport reviews in which we have four-hour grillings of each of the summer sport organizations. They present their plans through to 2016. The plan around Toronto 2015 is an important piece of that discussion that we're in the midst of right now with each of those sports. It's very, very important.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Simms.

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

To the committee first, what's the formal process to protest a decision that was made in an Olympic sport? Someone mentioned boxing earlier. We also mentioned the women's soccer team. A young man from Atlantic Canada, a team of young ladies from Canada, quite frankly got robbed. They did. I guess we're in a position where we can...but they did.

What do you do when you have serious problems with the way the officiating was done? It was not just one Canadian from Atlantic Canada, a lot of great boxers got robbed. It was quite obvious. I'm no boxing expert, but I've been watching it for quite some time.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: What can I say? There is a process. If you are not happy, you protest and you wait for the decision. If the decision is turned down, that's the end of the story.

Do you want to add anything, Caroline?

Ms. Caroline Assalian: There are a couple of things. One, in the case of boxing there was an appeal that was put in, and the appeal was denied.

Mr. Scott Simms: On what basis?

Ms. Caroline Assalian: Each international sport federation has their rules on reviews, on protests and appeals. We went through in partnership with the national sport federations. We went through the process, put in an appeal, and the appeal was denied.

Mr. Scott Simms: Can officials who are higher than the officials around the ring look at that and say that they think there was a mistake made?

Ms. Caroline Assalian: Part of being such a great team and great ambassador is to accept the rules that are in place. If the rules that are in place need to be changed, look at changing the rules. The rules are the rules. We all know what the rules are. We stood by the rules.

In the case of the 4 x 100 relay, this is a great story. There was a discussion as to whether we should appeal the decision. It was the athletes, with the coach, who said that the rule is the rule, and our athlete stepped on the line.

Mr. Scott Simms: I agree, and I understand that. But on reflection, you must realize that we have to bang our heads against the wall every time there are Olympic Games and that sort of thing.

This is more of a passing comment. I just think we should be more aggressive when it comes to things like this, because that sport of boxing is not going to improve unless countries like ours stand up and say that enough is enough.

I'll leave it at that, since we're a little uncomfortable about it. Well, you may be, but I'm not.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: It's a human area here, and there is room for mistakes. I am a big fan of boxing, and many of those nights I left saying that they were wrong. I'm not saying it's right, but it has to be improved, of course.

Mr. Scott Simms: I just hope a recommendation from the committee would be more aggressive about how we deal with this after the Olympics are done, and say that enough is enough.

I'll just move on, because I don't have a lot of time. With respect to Own the Podium, in a small town somewhere in this country there is the next great world champion badminton player, but that little kid will not be noticed unless it's through the school system. What relationship do you have? You're a federal body, but this is a provincial jurisdiction. Some of these smaller towns may hold the next best talent. How do you go through the school system to find out who's there, if you do at all?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: In some sports we definitely do, and the talent identification process will be an individualized approach for each sport. For some sports, such as gymnastics, you would identify potential talent at an elementary school age. For others it would be much later. Yes, schools are a critical piece. It will be a customized approach for each sport to identify what pathway they need to follow to identify talent.

Again, we'll work with the national sport organizations, which know their sports best, to determine where athletes come from within their sport and how we go about the talent search for those athletes. The schools will definitely be a big part of it in some sports.

• (1625)

Mr. Scott Simms: For kids in the city centre, the accessibility is there for them. I'm from a rural riding. That's why I talk about this. If there's someone in a small town, say in Newfoundland and Labrador, and all of a sudden they want to find themselves at the top of their game at a young age, the infrastructure is not there in most of these sports, fencing for example, and I've mentioned badminton, and they have to find some centre in the country.

Ski jumping is a good example. Not every place has that size of jump. How do you get from a small town in Newfoundland to Thunder Bay or Calgary to train?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Yes, we need to find them. We need to engage with all the sport organizations to see where is the potential talent, what do they look like, what's the profile of the future gold medalist, what's their wingspan for rowing, how long do their legs

need to be to be a great ski jumper, and how do we search for that profile of an athlete in communities, in schools, everywhere, frankly.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, because it seems to me that if you could meet with these high school coaches and minor league coaches on a regular basis.... Do they feed you information all the time, saying that you've got to check out a certain kid?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: They do. We know that the Canadian sport centres and the Canadian sport institutes, of which there are seven strategically located across the country, will be key places for us to reach out to them and use their networks to identify talent with summer and winter sport organizations as well.

Mr. Scott Simms: If you were to get an extra million dollars, what would you do with it?

I throw that open to both of you.

Ms. Anne Merklinger: We're 13 months away from Sochi. Just as we went into London making sure that every summer sport organization that was targeted had all the resources they needed to make sure there were no regrets and no obstacles, we need to make sure we have exactly that same approach for Sochi.

First and foremost, we need to contend for number one and be first in Sochi. There are still several gaps, both in Olympic and Paralympic sport, frankly, for us to make sure that we've answered every question around Sochi.

Mr. Scott Simms: Monsieur Aubut.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: If it's a million dollars for us, it's going to go to game preparation to make sure that, as was said, no stone is left unturned.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank you all for your presentations.

Congratulations on the performance of our athletes at the Olympics. I think your preparation paid off in London. I thought it was a national celebration despite some disappointments such as the women's soccer team.

To pick up on what Mr. Simms said about finding athletes, as a coach myself, I've coached at national championships and have played in a couple of them. If you can play and you can perform and you have potential, you'll be found. Carl English of Newfoundland is a great example of a tremendous story. You'll be found if you can play. I don't have a lot of concerns about talent identification. I think that will take care of itself, particularly in the age of technology and the Internet. You can look on YouTube and think, "Wow, look at this kid." At age 14, this kid is jumping over the high jump bar at a certain level. You can see it. You'll find them. Coaches will put them out there.

We don't think you're going to be a high jumper or a pole vaulter or anything, but if you could, we would find you.

I believe the key to developing this deeper pool of athletes is to develop better educated, better trained coaches who are going to work at the ground level when children are younger.

Am I on the right track there? Would you agree with that statement?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: By the way, I forgot to tell Mr. Young earlier, that the Canadian Olympic Committee, under pressure from Caroline Assalian, created the first coaches award system.

As you know, the athletes were getting money when they won medals. Nobody talked about the coaches before, and we just started to distribute those cheques to the coaches for the first time about a week ago at the session in Montreal. We saw tears. As coaches they were not expecting that at any point in their lives. It's so normal. If the athletes are rewarded, knowing the crucial part the coach plays, the coach should get something.

It was the beginning of a long list of things we want to do for coaches.

As Anne said earlier, that's so important, first of all, to find the money to keep them, and to be able to steal some from other countries, absolutely. We have to do that. I did that in the past for hockey players for many years. We have to value the job.

Do you have anything you want to add, Caroline? That's something close to your heart. Go ahead.

• (1630)

Ms. Caroline Assalian: No, you were great.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: I did great? Okay, thank you.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: My point was, is the key to developing a deeper pool of talent to start younger? To do that you're going to have to have the actual coaches on the ground in places like Newfoundland and Labrador all the way to northwest B.C.

Ms. Anne Merklinger: I think coaching is certainly a gap that we have yet to fully close in Canada, at all levels of the system. I talked about four years out and we needed eight years out. There's no doubt about it: we need more and better coaches at the five- to eight-year part of the pathway.

Frankly, in order for us to continue to develop generation after generation of podium potential athletes, we need much more physically literate young boys and girls. Our physical literacy, the amount of quality physical activity and education that our young

people are afforded in school is really falling behind what other nations are doing. We need a strong base in school at a very young age where we're really improving the level of physical literacy of Canadian boys and girls. That's the future 15 to 25 years out.

With more physically literate children, we would have a jump in terms of enabling them to get on the high-performance athlete pathway sooner than they might otherwise.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I want to expand on what you just said.

What initiatives are you promoting or supporting through Own the Podium, not just in funding the athletes, but in sport science, innovation in sports, coaching, and technical leadership?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Let's talk about coaching and technical leadership first. With each of the targeted national sport organizations with which we partner, we work with them to make sure they have the best possible coaches and high-performance directors. Without them, we're not prepared to go forward with an investment.

They need to have great coaches throughout all levels of the pathway, or we're not prepared to partner with them. That's first and foremost. If they don't have them, we're at the table to try to figure out how they can find them. How do we recruit coaches—maybe beg, borrow, or steal them from other countries—who can come in and bring our programs up to the level they need to be?

Your other question was around sport science, research, and innovation. Let me share with you a snapshot of where we are relative to Vancouver. We had \$2 million identified solely for research and innovation, what we called the top secret program for Vancouver, for 19 sport programs. We now have \$1 million for 40 sport programs, which spans winter and summer programs.

We've really fallen behind relative to what other nations are investing in innovation and research. We think there's a reasonable potential fit with some private sector partners, who may be able to work with us in doing the research, the innovation. But that is a big gap for Canadian high-performance sport.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: I want to come back to what Mr. Simms was mentioning.

Right now we are starting a mission about convincing provinces and territories to get more involved in high-performance sport. There might be some answers there to what you are talking about.

We feel the same way. There is a plan right now that we—the president of OTP, me, and the secretary general—go around the country to see every premier and their ministers of education and sports, depending on the culture in each province, to convince them they have to come on board with us. It has to be Canadian. Right now it's only federal, which I think is a great beginning, but it has to be improved. What about involving every province in this country to do something to find those great prospects? It's easier for them to identify prospects because they are on site. Also, they could work with us to invest in improving high performance in the whole country.

If we achieve that, I think this country is going to change totally as far as performing and delivering the goods in future games.

I just wanted to make that side comment, because it's something we are planning to do in a very short period of time.

•(1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

Now we're moving into five-minute rounds, beginning with Mr. Nantel.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. It is a real pleasure to meet you. We saw you before you left for the Olympic Games, and we are seeing you coming back with a good haul. Obviously, I congratulate you on that.

Earlier, Mr. Aubut called to mind the magnificent image that our athletes represent for our young people, be it during the Paralympic Games or the Olympic Games. It's good. That is where we can see how relevant having sport in the Canadian Heritage portfolio is. Ultimately, these patriotic images are the best legacy sport provides. These images are very important.

Don't you think we could hope for much greater support from the population? I'm not an expert in sports, like my colleague Matthew Dubé, but I did some calculations. I added up the medals. If I understand correctly, we won almost 50, so 49 medals in total for the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games.

Overall, how much money comes from the federal government? How many millions of dollars are devoted to supporting athletes?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: As I explained, there are a number of programs. Sixty-four million dollars will go to the Own the Podium program, and \$200 million is set aside for the rest. There are also programs that distribute amounts of money to the athletes each month or every 15 days. I don't know those numbers off the top of my head. The director of Sport Canada, who is sitting behind me, would be in a better position to answer the question. All I can tell you is that something is missing.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I agree with you.

[English]

Mr. Marcel Aubut: What's clear is there is a big lack of money over there.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I asked the question because when these sporting and Olympic events are held, that's when all Canadians are the most equal and proud to be Canadian. I hope we will be able to speak to the minister, Mr. Moore. Actually, I hope we have him here before December 4 to talk about the Supplementary Estimates (B), but also to talk to him about something that often bothers and concerns me.

How much would the average Canadian be willing to pay to win more Olympic medals? I am doing a rough calculation. If you tell me that you get \$60 million a year, that's \$240 million in total for each Olympic Games. If I divide that amount by the population, it doesn't cost each Canadian much to be so proud. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: What you're saying is very interesting.

[English]

The image is great. It's a very good picture of what's going on. That means we have to find a way to get the money from Canadians. One way it is going to be easier for Canadians to participate would be through the foundation. We created the Canadian Olympic Foundation. The foundation is going to go to individual Canadians through the website and other ways where people can give \$5 for the athletes they prefer.

There are two ways. There is all that, and my colleague is going to talk about it, as far as getting to individual Canadians is concerned, but before going to that level, we need to line up corporate Canada. The government kept the level of contribution when they were cutting everything else. We owe a lot to the Prime Minister of Canada and the government, but that doesn't resolve the needs, which go higher and higher, and the gap goes higher and higher as far as what the athlete needs.

I will tell you what concerns me the most. Right now it is to stay where we are when we perform internationally. It's going to be an incredible achievement already. Why? As you just said, most other countries in the world are saying the same thing, that it's great when athletes win a medal for the visibility of the country. It's like Formula 1. Why do you get a Formula 1 race? Often it's not for the race, but because everybody's going to look at you—

•(1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It's even more patriotic when we talk about sporting events.

[English]

Mr. Marcel Aubut: That's why we have to find a way to get what's out there. That's why we are distributing the \$100 million for the next four years, because with our team we really line up sport with corporate Canada. That is the first step.

Then I'm going to go back to the government and say, "This is the private sector contribution. What else can you do?" That will be the first part.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Even better...

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Second, it's the process that we want to involve.

Third, it's the individuals.

I would say the fourth one would be to find a way to get recurrent revenue. With recurrent revenue, there are projects in place right now that could be very successful through, for instance, a national amateur sports network, where you would pay a basic fee and you could learn about the sport. If you don't see it, you will never appreciate it. Then you discover the athletes, and you don't discover the athletes only for two weeks every two years, but all the time. That makes a big difference. It could be a recurrent revenue. We are subjected too much to a government that has to cut everything to sponsor the way they feel. They decide to invest or not, or the economy becomes very bad and nobody invests. We are related too much to the uncertainty. We have to find a way to stabilize the revenue because the needs of the athletes don't go with the economy. They always go up and continue—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: So, you might say that you have a vision.

[*English*]

Mr. Marcel Aubut: I love that question for that reason. Let's go about getting everybody to put a dollar in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nantel.

Now we go to Mr. Gill.

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for the contributions that you have made, along with our athletes, in terms of making our country proud in London. It is really much appreciated.

My question is for Mr. Aubut. I'm wondering if you can describe to us the federal government's involvement or help leading up to the London games. Also, was High Commissioner Campbell supportive of the Olympic Games as he was during the Vancouver Olympics, or was he more supportive?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: I don't know what would have happened without him over there. He was our best fan. First of all, for the preparation of the games he was the absolute partner we were dreaming about. He knew what we wanted. He knew what we were all talking about because he was the architect of what happened in Vancouver. Every time we said, "Commissioner, we need this", he would say, "Yes, but I think you forgot something. You also need this." He was ahead of us.

He deserves incredible credit for the achievement we had over there. He was a tremendous partner.

Mr. Parm Gill: That's great.

Can you also describe the corporate role and the support that corporations are providing in terms of funding athletes? Where is it at the moment? Do you see that increasing in the coming years? Do you see the line on the graph going up or down? What sort of feeling do you have from the corporate sector?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: The status quo is not an option. It has to increase. That's why we announced the \$100 million coming from the private sector, and that's just the beginning.

Did you want to add anything, Christopher?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Gill.

As Marcel has mentioned several times, the focus that we've had in the last couple of years with the private sector has been to go out and really build on the Vancouver story and talk about all the wonderful momentum our athletes and coaches in sports gathered up in that moment in time, and to literally take it back into the private sector as a story of success, as one of excellence, as one that can stand for a symbol for the country and for the Canadians it represents.

As you have no doubt read, we've had some success doing that. We've had unparalleled and incredible support from the private sector not seen before in this country. It is on the increase with the Canadian Olympic Committee. It's also our responsibility, as part of that, to continue to tell our athletes' stories, our sports stories, to continue to architect a conversation around why those sports and why participation in those sports is critical so that we can continue to drive marketing dollars and investment in our athletes to get them to help tell their stories to Canadians as well.

If we can do all those things, then we can be successful over time, not just building on the momentum of Vancouver, but rather sustaining that momentum, not just over 4 years, but over 10 years, 15 years, 20 years.

That's been our purpose over the last 30 months. We've been laser focused on this. We've had some incredible support, as I've said. But as has been commented on a couple of times, if you're standing still, you're going backward. In this world right now we're watching the U.K., the United States, and Australia make record investments in the sport community to compete at the highest levels possible. The private sector has just started off the conversation. As has been mentioned several times, there is still lots of work to do.

• (1645)

Mr. Parm Gill: Thank you.

I have a question for Own the Podium. Can you tell the committee more about how your organization determines the amount of funding that is allocated towards each individual Olympic sport? How do you go about doing that?

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Each of the national sport organizations presents their four-year high-performance plans. Summer sport organizations are now presenting their plans for Rio. We will, first of all, identify and assess each of those sports and determine which sports have the highest medal potential for Rio. We then rank those sports based on that number one criteria, which ones have the highest medal potential for Rio. In that analysis, we identify what it would cost for the sport to develop and implement a world-class high-performance program.

At the top of the ranking list, if it were rowing, which was our number one sport going into London, we would make sure that the investment approach for rowing was addressed first and foremost. Then we would go to the next ranked sport based on total medal potential, and address their investment priorities. Then we would just go down the list, making sure that we have not left any sport with medal potential going into Rio off the table.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gill.

Mr. Dubé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The conversation today is focusing a lot on the long-term vision and the role that sport plays in culture and the communities. A post-mortem usually requires us to look back, but in sports, we simply consider how to do better next time. I think the comments show that.

Having said that, those athletes started somewhere. But we are seeing that young people are perhaps participating less in sports. The comments you made lead me to believe that you share my point of view on this. In our constituencies, we hear these stories from people who were encouraged to take part in this or that sport. It may be girls who see women play soccer and so on.

What role do you think those athletes play in our communities, in other words, at a truly local level? In terms of the future and an overall vision, how can this encourage young people to get involved, be active and have more fun, but perhaps also keep fit?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Overholt: It's absolutely the right question. As the Olympic movement, we have the wonderful platform of the values that the rings represent. While our high-performance athletes around the country have a chance to serve as great representatives of this country, and have a great chance to serve as symbols of national pride, they also have a very powerful platform to engage the youth of this country, as has been said several times already today.

I think you would find in talking to any of our athletes that most of them already feel that great sense of responsibility and, for those from small towns around the country, I think you've probably even seen evidence of that in those communities. The great thing about the national sports franchise that is the Canadian Olympic team is that it is from the communities that we're from. It's as diverse as the nation is diverse. They have a chance, at every opportunity when they're in those communities, to make those statements about the importance of health and wellness, about not only physical fitness and physical literacy, but mental fitness and mental—

• (1650)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I don't mean to cut you off, but my time is limited.

Do you do stuff to promote—

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Of course.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: —to get them out there and capitalize on the visibility that these sports, which not everyone follows regularly, get during the Olympics?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Of course. I don't have enough time to explain all of that, but I'll point you to two things quickly.

First of all, in reference to when we were together in May, we have an outstanding and world-leading reputation in the area of education with our Canadian Olympic school program. It touches tens of thousands of children across the country and has authored in many ways our athletes' stories and the inspiration they can and should appropriately provide the kids of the country.

In the brief time that this leadership team has been together, we also have been working diligently with our sport community and with many members from municipalities across the country to engage our athletes in everything from the Santa Claus parade to, as was mentioned earlier, hospital and school visits. That's been a far, far more aggressive part of our education, youth, and community engagement strategy over the last six months in particular, but even since the games. Dimitri and his team, working with our marketing department and our athlete services area, have been in many communities across the country doing just as you describe.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Do you feel that those folks, municipalities and such, have the resources to capitalize on those things? I remember at the lunch we had here on Parliament Hill, I spoke to an athlete who said that sometimes it's tough when you have to go across the country to practise a sport when you wish you could do it your own backyard. Mind you, that's part of the sacrifices that are made, but is there work being done to improve that?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Certainly, separate from the investments that we're making in our athletes, in both a targeted and non-targeted fashion, from the COC's perspective, the work that is required in the community, as you point to, the important work that our athletes can represent, is space that we've taken up at the Canadian Olympic Committee in the last couple of years. We understand, again, the power of the message that can be delivered to those communities, so in many cases we have been the ones paying to take athletes into those communities. We have been the ones sending them here to Ottawa to connect or sending them into those hospitals. We have been making those efforts and those investments to make sure that Canadians have those chances to hear those stories and to connect directly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Along the same sort of theme, what has the reception of that been so far? I'm getting the sense that it's something new with the new leadership, as you mentioned. Has there been success? Is there still more work to be done?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: It is incredible. Reference was made to the Atlantic provinces. Of course, after 2010, we took our hall of fame and celebration of excellence right out to Moncton, but we didn't stop in Moncton. We were in Halifax visiting the CFB. We were at mile one of the Terry Fox run. We stopped in Charlottetown, P.E.I. with Heather Moyse in her middle school. We finished off in Moncton with a concert for 6,000 middle-school-age children and a great community engagement in the market on Saturday morning. Anybody who was witness to that or witness to what we just finished delivering in Toronto on Bay Street and during all of the efforts that we made in the schools and the hospitals, would know that every time it is a powerful tool and an opportunity for us to demonstrate that the rings can stand for more than high performance.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Brown, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to our witnesses for coming back a year later and giving us a little update on how everything has gone.

I'd be remiss if I didn't put in a little plug for Conlin McCabe from Brockville, winner of a medal in the men's eight rowing. After he returned to Canada, we had a big celebration in Brockville to celebrate that, which was great news. I spent many years training and racing in sprint kayak, so I was especially excited. In fact, I got up in the middle of night to see the medals that were won by Adam van Koeverdon, Mark Oldershaw and Mark de Jonge. It was great. I know we were all excited about that. We did very well on the water over in London, which is really exciting.

I'll turn to what the Canadian Olympic Committee is doing, because you're really in the media a lot; you're very present. I think it's great, and it keeps sports top of mind in the media. Maybe you could tell us if, in fact, that's deliberate, and why it really is important.

• (1655)

Mr. Marcel Aubut: If you go back to 2009, I proposed a platform to the Canadian Olympic Committee for the future, and it was very clear. I said we had to build a Canadian Olympic Committee that was going to become a natural leader, not a leader that just says, "Follow me", but one that you want to follow. You do that by achieving goals, by delivering what you promised, and by having a team like the one I am leading, a fantastically talented team.

We started by bringing all the Canadians who were pretty much outside of the country back home and saying that we have a job to do together. We got them back from the Miami Dolphins, from Nike in New York City. We said, "Let's work together to make this organization an organization that's going to get the prestige, that's going to get the credibility of being able to lead a sports team in Canada, with partners like OTP and others." We just started that, I would say, two and a half years ago. You could see the results right away. It's absolutely on purpose that we are very visible, that you see us working day and night. It's about making the athletes the core business. It's the same thing for coaches. You see them. Their story has to go 365 days a year. Professional sport is there. They take up the whole room. That's the end of it. We just decided that we were going to have our fair share. Those athletes deserve to be recognized, deserve to be supported, deserve to be loved, deserved to be appreciated for what they do for free for this country. There are no millions there for them. We just decided we are going to get it, we are going to do it, and after two and a half years we are right on the page. There is lots more to be done, though.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Anne, maybe you can tell us this about the Own the Podium program, how government money is spent, and how it helps an athlete improve and get to the podium.

Ms. Anne Merklinger: Own the Podium doesn't actually write the cheques. We just recommend where the financial investment should go. We're the technical advisers. Lots of people think we write the cheques. Ninety-five per cent of the funding comes from the Government of Canada, with the rest from important partners like the Canadian Olympic Committee and the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

Ryan Cochrane won a tremendous medal in the men's 1,500-metre swimming event in London. Four years ago we sat down with the swimming people and they told us what Ryan needed in his daily training to contest for a gold medal in London. He needed to continue with his great coach, Randy Bennett, who is one of the best in the world. We didn't want to lose Randy, and we've just signed him to another four-year contract. First and foremost, we talked about the importance of coaches.

We also needed to make sure that Ryan had access to a swimming pool to train in a way comparable with what the rest of the world was doing. We needed to make sure that he had the best strength and conditioning equipment, and that he could go to every competition that would help him advance. We offered him the best physiologists, sport massage therapists, strength and conditioning experts, physiotherapists, athletic therapists, and sport psychologists. He needed everything to be world class, day in and day out in his daily training environment. In addition, Ryan needed a group of seven or eight other swimmers to push him every training day. We work with the sports to identify what all this will cost. We made sure that we, with all of our partners, were able to deliver that for Ryan, and it worked.

We do that with every single targeted sport, making sure that every athlete who's identified gets what he or she needs. This is not always just for four years; for some sports we have the resources to look eight years ahead.

That's an example of what Own the Podium does on behalf of our funding partners.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Thank you for that. It really helps.

The Chair: That will have to be the last word, Mr. Brown.

I want to thank the Canadian Olympic Committee. I want to thank Own the Podium. Congratulations on all your hard work on behalf of Canadians. We were really pleased to have you here with us today.

With that, we'll take a two-minute recess before we go in camera for committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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