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The Honourable Rob Moore

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• (1540)

[English]

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

We're very pleased to have with us today from Swimming Canada, Pierre Lafontaine, chief executive officer. Welcome to you, sir.

As well, by way of video conference from Warner, Alberta, we have Mikko Makela, director of hockey and head coach at Warner Hockey School. Welcome to you as well, sir.

As our clerk has probably let you know, you have an opportunity to make opening remarks, and then we'll go into a round of questions and answers. This is our first hour. After that, we'll move into the second hour with new witnesses for the second hour of the meeting.

With that, I will turn it over to you, Mr. Lafontaine, for your opening remarks.

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine (Chief Executive Officer, Swimming Canada): Thanks. I forgot to bring my swim caps for you guys today. Last time I gave you a bunch. I hope you or your kids use them.

And you keep getting e-mail messages from John Weston about the swimming lessons for MPs that I teach on Thursday mornings at 6:45, so I expect you there tomorrow. I have a bunch of Speedos here, sizes 28 to 34. So, 6:45 tomorrow morning at the Chateau Laurier, I'm expecting you to be there. If you're late, it's 10 push-ups.

This role is what I feel is probably one of the most prominent of any position in this country, and I'll tell you why in a bunch of points. Then I'd like to mention a few things that we probably should do better within our coaching community.

First of all, the London Olympic and Paralympic Games that we had a few months ago were crucial to inspiring a generation. That was the theme of the Olympics: Inspire a generation. The reason I'm saying this is I can tell you, what happened at Swimming Canada just this year alone was we finished the season going into London with 39,000 swimmers, and we're now just five months into the new season and new quadrennial for the Olympics and have more than 45,000 kids.

Within the last five months the performance of our kids at the international level inspired that many more kids. It's almost a 20% improvement. It's the biggest number we've ever had by way of improvement. When I came to Canada seven years ago, we were at 25,000. The increase in the power of your Olympians is crucial to

moving our country into becoming what I think should be the fittest country in the world.

This whole thing with Mr. Weston and swimming lessons on Thursday mornings came about from a discussion. I strongly believe that people like me at the NSO and coach over here in Alberta will do amazing things from passion. We'd love to think that you guys will keep screaming at the top of your lungs in Parliament that we should be the fittest nation in the world, that we should do everything we can to keep our kids off the streets and fit. I think it's the power of the coaches to help create an environment in which kids can't wait to get to practice.

My best example for this is... I'm just going to bring it back to one of my sons. When we moved to Canada, my kids had never seen snow before; we had lived in Australia. On a Friday night seven years ago, when he was 11 years old, my son was going to practice for cross-country skiing—we live in Chelsea, just north of here—and it was minus 24 degrees, pitch black, with the wind blowing sideways. I said to Marc-André, “You don't really want to go to workout today, do you?” They have to ski in the park with a light on the forehead. He said, “No, Dad, I want to go, I want to go.” I said, “It's so cold”, and he said, “No, I want to go.”

So I was driving the kid there, and the buzz when I dropped him off—if you ever go into Gatineau Park, it's at P8 that I dropped him off—the buzz of a bunch of kids at minus 24 degrees who couldn't wait to get on skis was all because a coach had created a place where kids wanted to be.

I think that's the power of the coach. They're able to destroy or they're able to build. They're able to do amazing things for kids. To me, the investment in coaching and the ongoing work that needs to be done in making our coaches the best in the world is crucial, not just technically, but ethically and professionally, and not just professionally in terms of how much in dollars and cents they make, but in terms of the quality of the product they put out there for kids.

I have just a couple of other items before I go through some of my points. I'd love to think that if you're in town from May 2 to 5, at the brand new Gatineau pool, which was built only three years ago.... I was involved with the building of the facility and I remember in discussion with the city saying that we need a 50-metre pool and a big 25-metre pool, and they said “No, no, no, we don't need this.” Within three months this pool was built, packed to capacity, and there were people on the waiting list.

Investment in infrastructure is crucial, because it allows kids in a community to feel that they don't need to go away from their hometown. On my national team in 2004 and 2008 we had two kids from Gatineau who had to move to Quebec City to swim in a 50-metre pool. Now they have one, and kids here stay at home with their coaches. I think that's really crucial.

Anyway, on May 2 to 5 there will be the FINA Diving Grand Prix. We're going to get basically the top eight divers in the world at the pool here, and it would be great for you to come and see it. We're going to have the Chinese, who basically won all the medals. Alexandre Despatie, if you remember that name, is not going to dive, as he has a concussion, but he'll be there. It will be a great event if you want to come and see it.

Really, for me, when I tell you this, it's because it's about inspiring the bunch of kids coming through. I'm going to be bringing a bunch of kids from Chelsea who are not divers, because I want them to see the world's best and understand the difference between being good and being the greatest.

We also have on June 1 a National Health and Fitness Day that we're trying to push. One of the concepts is to try to get every mayor in the communities in your ridings to open their pools and their rinks for free for one day and allow every kid to try it. If we could inspire one kid, they might join a club, be touched by a coach, and have their lives changed. Not everybody is going to make the Olympic Games, but everybody is going to learn all the great skills, such as being a team player, learning to win and lose, and all of these other things that are not often taught at school.

That was my little pitch for my Thursday mornings. I'm expecting you there tomorrow morning.

The coaches are the key to success in our Canadian sports system, and not just our professional coaches at the international level. You guys hear all the time about Own the Podium. It's a crucial link within our Olympic program, but Own the Podium actually starts at "own the municipalities". It's the volunteer coaches that put the sparkle in the eyes of the kids. What we do at the top end is we just polish it up, but getting the kids involved in the municipalities and having easier access to facilities for clubs run by volunteers is crucial.

More and more, the communities are saying that they have to make money on top of those volunteer clubs. The clubs don't have enough money. The volunteers are not only running a club but they're doing everything else. They're fundraising. Your coaches are doing fundraising. By the time they get to nighttime practice, they're exhausted and they don't do what they do best. It would be like a teacher having to do fundraising for the school and washing the floor also. We have to find a way to facilitate access to facilities so your coaches can keep doing what they do best.

Coaches are the pivot point for creating an environment where excellence is a byproduct. Excellence will happen. You've all heard of Michael Phelps. I've often talked to my clubs over the years and I've asked them if their clubs are ready for a Michael Phelps if he comes in as an 11-year-old or a 12-year-old. They say that not really, but if he shows up, they'll set up the structure. I say that's too late, because that Michael Phelps will have gone through, and the

structure wasn't there. Coaches could create that. We have to give them the tools and the ability to do it.

The challenge is that you have coaches who are very passionate about swimming or their sport, but often they're young. They're 20, 22, 24, or 25 years old. They love the sport and they love kids, but they have no other skills. They don't understand budgets, long-term planning, and all of these other skills.

Often they go to a club, get hired by a club president, and are very soon told by the board of directors about what they're not good at. They're told that they haven't done the newsletter properly or they haven't done their budget, instead of the volunteers taking these young coaches under their wing and mentoring them. I think it's crucial for us to educate the volunteers to do that, because what we're doing is building our country on the passion of young kids.

What often happens is these young coaches get caught up in the paperwork and look at failures all the time instead of what they do best, which is coaching. The reason I'm saying this is that what they're always getting is "The entries are wrong. You did this wrong. You did that wrong". You don't draft a left winger and tell him he's a terrible defenceman. You build on his strength. This is crucial for us.

Coaches set the dream for kids. I can tell you about the notes I've had since I got off the pool deck and into this office, the number of notes that have said things like, "Thank you, because now I'm vice-president of Husky Oil", or this or that, "and you allowed me to think big." Who was the guy from *The Apprentice*? What's his name? He said that if you're going to dream, bloody hell, dream big. I think that's what coaches do.

There's a great expression: coaches make the impossible just a little easier to get. Impossible is possible. The only thing is that these kids have never been there yet. Our job is to get them to where they never thought they could go to.

● (1545)

We have to build on work ethics. This country has to build on the future kids through the greatest work ethic program we've ever done, and it can only be done when we have very ethical coaches. That's crucial in our program. Excuse the expression, but we have to fight like hell to make sure our coaches are ethical, that they are clean, that they are ready to do what's right all the time, and not cross the line, whether it's in drugs or any of these other issues. We have to make them accountable. Every child in this country needs to have a certified coach. Everybody that coaches a kid needs to be certified, so we have to facilitate coaching education.

We coaches have to be careful that we don't just think about the National Hockey League or the Olympians, as I said earlier, Own the Podium and own the municipalities. Just in Chelsea, there are 7,000 people who live there. There are 1,000 kids who play soccer, and every single one of them is coached by parent volunteers. These guys work 30, 40, 50 hours a week and then they give their time to our kids. We have to help them get educated quickly and easily, maybe through online education.

The problem, I feel, with the online education we have in Canada is that for all of our 52 sports, we reinvent the wheel in our coaching education. We look for a platform on IT instead of all of us under one umbrella saying, "Here's a great platform and that's what we'll use." I have to pay IT people. Hockey has to pay IT people. Baseball has to pay IT people. We're not using our dollars and cents at the NSO, the National Sport Organization, level to the best of our ability because we're all reinventing the wheel. We all have to and want to do coaching education, but we need to be able to easily get to people in Gander, in Fort St. John, in Brampton, and it should be done through online education.

As for the school program, you know very well that these PE programs are dropping like flies. We need to find a way to get PE back into the school program. I'm not sure about any of you, but if it weren't for that recess and the PE classes, they would have locked me up a long time ago. We played dodge ball at recess. We ran through the corridor to go play dodge ball for 11 minutes and the teams were already done by the time we ran and jumped off the staircase. If it weren't for that, we wouldn't be able to do it.

There's a great book called *Spark*, which is about doing 15 to 20 minutes of active work with kids, especially delinquent kids, before they start learning in school. They found that in the first hour and a half, it was amazing how well they could learn.

Within our coaching community, ethics has to be of importance. The passion is what we have to build on, but we also have to help the coaches not lose their passion because they're too busy doing everything else. Coaches are the visionaries, the educators, the programmers, the ones who often mobilize the volunteers and teach the volunteers how to run swim meets and how to set up or run gymnastics competitions. Your best coaches are on all the committees. My Olympic coaches are all on regional, provincial, and national committees. The best coaches do it all. They're also the ones at the Olympics and at the world championships, so we really tug at them a lot. The point here is, you're either involved and part of the solution, or people make rules on top of you and then you're stuck. That's often why these best coaches are the best coaches: they get involved in decision-making.

I have a couple of more points. We have to find ways to recognize the power of coaches, whether it's through a recognition program or a coaching day. I'm not even sure how effective it is, but for all these kids around the country who are touched by a coach, and I have four of my kids and I have often asked them which ones are their best coaches. They've had so many coaches. You know the expression that it takes a village to grow a child, these people are so much a part of this village to help this child grow.

● (1550)

I will mention a few points that I think we need to work on in this country in coaching.

Women in coaching programs is crucial. Our program is good. I can tell you that when we've done women in coaching, the women don't want handouts. They don't want to be put on the Olympic team because they're a woman. They want to be put on the Olympic team or the national team because they deserve to be there. We have to give them the tools to get there.

One of the challenges we have with women is that they often can't go to swim meets, for example, because they have children to take care of at home. We have to look at finding a way, through different platforms, so coaches can bring their kids and there would be a daycare there for them, and so on. We have to facilitate the work that the coaches do. I think the women are certainly the most touched by those changes.

We have to build mentorship. We all learn through school, but probably all of us have learned our best with a great mentor. We have to find a way to have much better mentorship programs. There are very few programs in this country to get a degree in education for coaching. I think we need to blow the doors open to the PE and kinesiology programs and offer way more university coaching degrees and master's degrees.

● (1555)

The Chair: Mr. Lafontaine, I think we'll have to wrap up the opening remarks.

We could perhaps get to your other points during the Qs and As. I know that all the members are anxious to ask you questions as well.

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: No problem.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We now move to Mr. Makela from Warner Hockey School, joining us from Warner, Alberta by video conference.

Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Mikko Makela (Director of Hockey and Head Coach, Warner Hockey School, Horizon School Division): Thank you for having me here today.

It's a very difficult task for sure to follow that kind of act. That was very well done. I'll try to keep my portion very short so we can get to the questioning.

In hockey we maybe don't have as much of a problem with the facilities, even though you can always have more facilities. In general in hockey we're pretty lucky to be taking care of that half-decently. I think that is what is good for hockey.

To go right away to the certification for coaching, I think everyone knows that it's at the grassroots that we need to have a little more experienced coaching. That's where you teach the players, and that's where you learn a lot. I think that is a problem we're facing, in our sport anyway, as we don't have enough experienced coaching at that younger age.

There are a couple of reasons. Sometimes a parent can be a very qualified coach in peewee teams, for example, but they're not allowed to do that because of the parent and employer situation. Then we'll have another coach who is not as qualified as the other coach could be. That may be a situation that we can change. It doesn't matter if it's a parent or whomever; if we can find qualified coaching, I think we should use it.

I have experience from Finland. Some of you who follow hockey know of Saku Koivu and Mikko Koivu. Their dad was coaching our team at the same time that the boys were playing hockey. I thought that worked very well.

I know that there have been examples in Canada. I can use Darryl Sutter as an example. He's coaching the Los Angeles Kings right now, but he was coaching the Calgary Flames at one time, and in the last lockout he was coaching his son's team. I believe it was a peewee, atom, or bantam team. In the final game of the season when he was coaching, he was escorted from the rink because, by Hockey Alberta standards, he didn't have the qualifications to coach.

Those are situations we're facing once in a while, so maybe there could be a little bit of understanding in a certain situation.

There are good experiences with the parents who coach, and obviously there are not so good experiences, but I think we should look at who is the most qualified to coach these younger ages.

Obviously, money always comes into play. In every category we're talking about, everybody has their hand out and is asking for more money, but that's just a fact of what we have.

I think the participation rates in Canada are declining dramatically. I have no numbers, but the provinces have a problem getting the players to their provincial camps. They're declining from 200 players to 80 players. I understand that computers and all that type of thing, the cheaper activities, are taking over. That's also one of the cases that we're dealing with.

On Canada versus Finland, for example, in female hockey, Ontario has about 45,000 female hockey players, while Finland has 2,500. Those are the numbers we're dealing with. Finland obviously is starting to do whatever they can. But we have a lot of volume here, and we're coming to the place where, if we have qualified coaches, we could make way more noise in Canada, in my opinion, than we're doing right now.

Therefore, I think that for this government help, for money, obviously it's a situation where everybody's looking for it.

● (1600)

I think it's very good to have these types of discussions, and I'm very privileged to be part of them.

If there are any questions, I'd be more than happy to answer them. That was just a short portion of my opening statement.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Makela.

Now we will move to our time for questions and answers.

We will begin with Mr. Hillyer, for seven minutes.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Makela, I'm the member of Parliament for Lethbridge. I live in Raymond, about 25 minutes from your rink. My kids and I have played in the Warner rink quite a bit. Thank you for joining us today.

I know that your school is nationally known and that you focus on high level of play, but as has been mentioned many times already today, and in previous sessions on the study, most kids aren't going to make it to the Olympics. Most kids aren't going to make it to the

high level of play. I want to talk about balancing that focus on helping the excellent achieve that excellence, balancing it out with making sure that kids can just play to have fun.

Maybe you can talk to us just a little bit about your school. What's the nature of the Warner Hockey School for girls? Who's it focused on? What's the objective of people who go to that school? What's the objective of the school itself?

Mr. Mikko Makela: We are Canada-wide, actually worldwide. We have had players from Finland, Sweden, the United States. We now have Canadian girls from Newfoundland to Kelowna. This is an elite program, for sure.

We're very proud of what we've done in the last 10 years. The difficult part is the location, where we are; it's difficult to try to get the players to come in here. Luckily, with the status that we have, we have been able to do that.

Other than that, I don't know what else you would like to know. I'm sorry, I kind of missed some of the questions you had.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: I was just asking whether the girls who come to your school are trying to make it into university leagues, as an example, or whether they're just kids who want to play to have fun.

Mr. Mikko Makela: No, we are kind of a bouncing ball for the girls to go to the NCAA or CIS. That's what they come here for. This is kind of preparing them for their post-secondary education. It's very important for them to come to a place like this. We've been very successful in placing girls in the NCAA and CIS, and hopefully we can keep doing that. We've also had girls in the national team programs, which is very nice. We had a girl this year who won the world championships in Finland, playing for Canada.

So this is what we do here.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Thanks.

Mr. Lafontaine, you talked about the pursuit of excellence and about making coaches create an environment where kids can't wait to get to practice.

You know, in my years of playing hockey and getting my kids through hockey, I've seen different kinds of environments. I've seen environments where coaches are so committed to excellence that the kids who aren't the superstars end up not loving going to practice, because they end up being the grunts or being forgotten or being benched.

How do you balance that? We want to help the superstars become superstars, but especially in these small communities, where we can't have three levels of hockey in one town...

Do you have any thoughts on that? I know you're in swimming, but just in sports in general, how can we balance that?

● (1605)

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: I think your role in hockey is really kind of a high-end business. Actually, most clubs run everything. They will run the learn to programs all the way up to trying to get to the international level.

To me, the key is to create a place where even the not necessarily gifted ones feel a part of something special. Building different levels within a team and within a hockey program.... You do have the house league. I'm not sure of all the models in hockey yet, but I could tell you that within many of the club sports, a lot of kids don't necessarily make it to the top but they have a great experience because the club itself is awesome. There's a spot for them; there's a place for them to progress at their level. To a certain point, it's to be the best that you could be, not necessarily an Olympian. There are not a lot of top spots in that program.

To a certain point, coaching education needs to be done. We need to keep improving coaching education, but in the end, you have great school teachers and you have some bad ones. If we're lucky enough in a community, we have some great coaches who are able to build. That's why mentorship is crucial—like Koivu or Sutter; if they could take a young coach with them, because they know they're not going to be there very long—it's crucial within the growth of the quality of our coaches. I think it's possible to have an Olympic program and a great team together.

It all comes down to, first of all, the investment of the parents within the board of directors. I think one of the biggest challenges in clubs is that they don't have a clear mission and vision. People come into the club and don't really know what the club is about: is it just to participate, or is it to be one of the best in the world?

I could also tell you that kids want to be very good, regardless of the level they're at. I don't necessarily agree in terms of fun. Fun is being part of something special. If the experience is good, it could still be really fun even if you don't win today, and if the experience is not good, it could be no fun even if you do win.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hillyer.

Mr. Dubé, go ahead for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Lafontaine, since you are here with us today, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you the best of luck in the new challenges that lie ahead.

I would like to talk specifically about the momentum created by the Olympics. You talked about the increase in registration and so on. I cannot really bring in any studies to support my argument, but based on what we have heard about other sports, it seems that it is difficult to retain that flood of people.

In your view, is it because of the coaching? That is what you seem to be saying.

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: I think there are a number of factors. The first one is infrastructure. Canada's sports infrastructure is not up to the task. We can put a lot of kids in a pool. We can fit 8 swimmers in a lane, but if there are not enough lanes and we have to fit 15 kids per lane, that is too much. That is no longer enjoyable. There is not enough space and they end up hitting each other.

I can even tell you—and I stress this—that, if parents want their kids to join the gymnastics club and there is a waiting list, they will enrol their kids in another sport right away, in soccer, for instance. I

feel that more facilities need to be built in Canada. In addition, as I said, they should be within the financial reach of the clubs. That aspect is a challenge because the municipalities are the ones that have to assume those costs.

Training enough coaches relatively quickly is also a challenge. Let me go back to university programs and to access to programs, even in secondary schools. Why would there not be a coaching course to address the shortage?

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Moore, I have a report here from the Australian government when I was there. They started an after-school program. One thing that was crucial in the after-school program in 2004 was that they started this program because of overweight kids. The first year, 180,000 kids started the program. What they found was that 7,500 new coaches were developed because of the program. I brought the report for you. You could pass it around, and I think we might translate it. The program is still going strong. I did talk to Mr. Gosal about it, because I think it is about developing coaches.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That reminds me of what you said when you were here last time and you talked about the pyramid. We want to help the elite, but we also need to take care of the bottom of the pyramid.

Actually, that is very much like the example that you gave of Michael Phelps. If the programs are not appropriate and there is not enough support for local and community leisure activities, we will not have future Olympians even if the highest level of funding is provided—which is important, of course. That is part of the problem.

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: I think we have to be careful and stop thinking about Olympians all the time. Olympians are the product of a country's fine sport structure. If someone has talent, they will go to the Olympics because there are coaches at that level.

I am not sure if you remember, but two years ago, the government added a tax credit for volunteer firefighters. I can tell you that we would not be able to have any sports in Canada if it were not for the volunteers. I would like to think that we will find a solution to do the same for volunteers in sport because no soccer program would last if we had to pay coaches. No rowing program would last if we had to pay the rowing coaches and so on.

I think that would be another incentive. It is not enough to give \$500 as a tax credit to young people. We must also find a way to inspire volunteers, to recognize their contribution and to give them a tax credit the way volunteer firefighters get one.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I have one final question because my time is almost up. I would like to talk about the university programs and coaching degrees. Other witnesses also talked about this. I am a bit concerned about it because the volunteers are often parents. That is their activity.

Today especially, parents do not spend a lot of time with their children. This also includes sports. Do you feel that if a program like that were in place, we could lose some of the good things? I am not saying that we are opposed to it, but I think that is one of the concerns.

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: Giving someone something does not mean taking something from someone else. I think a university training program is needed for those who want to pursue a career, not for those who volunteer on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

The same goes for school teachers. Training and programs are available. As I said, one of the problems is that people don't understand how budgets work. They don't know how to write protests or newsletters. If that is something someone wants to do in life and they want to become a coach at an international level, we can show them another way to get there. I studied biology, not coaching. I surrounded myself with some mentors who helped me become a coach at an international level.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I still have a bit of time left.

Let me turn to the issue of inactivity among young people and retention in sports. You talked about sport culture in the interview you gave before you left Swimming Canada. That sport culture had to do with infrastructure. Are we focusing too much on the Olympics? I am not saying this to be disrespectful to the athletes who go to the Olympics. Are there more concrete ways to accomplish this?

You talked about the tax credit, for instance. Unfortunately, sometimes, people do not make enough money to obtain a tax credit. Accessibility becomes very important.

• (1615)

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: Our champions are our Olympians. They do what they need to do. I remember the day after the Olympic Games. I told my athletes that the most important day was the one after winning their medals because that is when they would go to give talks at schools and companies. They would go and talk about the importance of an active life and the fact that you don't need to take the elevator to go up one floor.

We need to use our assets to help them understand that this is not just about the sport and that you have to give something back. Canada has a program called the athlete assistance program. We might decide that one of the roles of Canada's 1,800 carded athletes is to give presentations in schools, for instance.

I don't think Olympians or international athletes understand the power they have in their hands. They can change the world. We must give them that opportunity. We must encourage them to knock on doors and to go to elementary schools and hand out T-shirts. That is what Chris Hadfield is doing right now with the space station. He gives presentations to young people in schools. That is what we should do with our great champions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Simms, go ahead for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Lafontaine.

[English]

Thanks for coming in.

I had a conversation a while ago with one of my colleagues, Kirsty Duncan, and we were discussing the witnesses coming in. One of the things she wanted me to bring up, and I think you have already done it, was the absence and the increasing absence of emphasis on physical education in our schools. She said it seems that every time money is cut in schools it comes from the phys. ed. program first. If it's not from that, it's probably from music, but phys. ed. is certainly up there.

One of the things we talked about here, as far as the coaching level is concerned, is that in smaller communities, and this was also brought up here earlier, it's obviously harder for a phys. ed. teacher to be the best coach in every sport, because they have to be generalists; they have to do everything. It's all about physical fitness. But it's harder for them in some sports to recognize that talent that draws a person from a small community into what I'll call the big leagues. For example, my phys. ed. teacher specialized in volleyball, but he probably wouldn't know a good badminton player or a good swimmer for that matter, if one walked right up to him and said hello.

Do you think there's a vast amount of improvement to be made when it comes to getting talented people in our schools into a certain discipline that allows them to become a far greater athlete than they ever imagined?

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: It's hard in this country to have an East German type of program where if you're 6'3" you go into rowing, and if you want to eat, you go into rowing. I think we have to find a way to have within a community—and that was my point earlier about the Gatineau pool—quality installations and quality infrastructure which will bring quality teachers, principals, and doctors, which will give kids a chance to experience all sorts of things. I think it's hard to do everything for everybody. There's a bit of luck sometimes: if you're tall and you have a volleyball coach and he happens to look at you, great.

One of the challenges we have within our national sporting organization is that we don't necessarily have the capacity to be everywhere. We have our coaches and we try to empower the coaches to look around. I also think the coaching community, whether it's the health, education, or sports community, needs to find a way to have a consortium so the coaches in an area can work together to do clinics or talks at schools.

I moved to Canada in 2005. I was invited back to Australia to speak to the ministry of health, ministry of education, and ministry of sport together within one room about how we bind all three of these to bring back fitness and a fit country. It was really interesting, because all three ministries were there, and the discussion was about how they are not silos but are so important together. I can tell you again that your coaches, your sporting organizations, your provincial organizations, even your private organizations will do anything to help, but sometimes we're not given the platform to go knocking on doors. It's hard for us to get into the schools, to get them to say to us, "why not" instead of "why".

● (1620)

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you for that. To me it's also a breeding ground for good coaches for the future, as well, certainly at that level. I say that because I represent small communities.

Recently there was a coaching issue that came up. I'm going to bring in Mr. Makela as well on this one. I'll ask him to answer this first.

One of the big deterrents to volunteer coaches are what I will call over-enthusiastic parents. I use that as somewhat of a euphemism, because we had an incident in my riding that was just absolutely shameful, carried on by two parents. Many coaches I talk to say that's one of the big deterrents to their getting involved, because they don't want to deal with angry parents if they have to say no to their children.

Would you care to comment on that? I'll go to the hockey world first, because that seems to gather all the news when it comes to angry parents.

Mr. Pierre Lafontaine: Well, we have no-contact swimming, so it's all about hockey.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: I can well imagine. I'll get to you later. I don't know if that's true.

Mr. Mikko Makela: That is so true, and that is the most difficult part of this whole structure, in my opinion. We were talking about getting good coaching and qualified coaching at the grassroots, but that is almost impossible. I hear a lot of talk about how an educated coach is asked to coach an atom or peewee team, let's say, but that is their dilemma: they don't want to go there because of the parents. They can't do what they need to do in that environment to make the players better and, in my opinion, make the environment better and make it competitive, because of the parents.

That is the dilemma we're facing every day. It's at my level. It's at levels below mine. I know that even at some of the levels above mine it is a dilemma. This is something that's been there for years and years, and I believe it's going to be there for years and years, because how can we change that? We may have a qualified coach who doesn't want to coach for that reason.

How do we change that other than to educate the parents on this whole journey we're on? Educate them that maybe little Johnny is not an NHL-calibre player right now, but just let the coach do the job, and in two or three years it may be a possibility. This is something that we have a problem with, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Finally, for the remaining seven minutes of the meeting, we will have Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to both of you for being here today.

Mr. Makela, you have at least a couple of girls at your school who come from my riding. I know that you have some girls playing there who are from Airdrie and Cochrane in Alberta. In particular, Mackenzie Ebel, who played with my son, actually, up until peewee, is down there at your school now. You can say "hi" to her from Quinn and his dad.

I have questions for both of you, but I want to start with you, because obviously you have some experience in coaching hockey here in Canada, but you also have your experiences from when you were growing up. You grew up in Finland and played hockey. When did you come to Canada? Did you come over as a pro or did you come over to Canada at the junior level?

● (1625)

Mr. Mikko Makela: Actually, I first came to Canada in 2002. I came to coach the Hurricanes in the WHL. I moved out of Finland in 1985.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, you came over to North America, and I guess you were with the New York Islanders? Yes? Okay, so you came over to play with them.

Obviously you played hockey as a kid growing up in Finland. You played the equivalent of junior hockey, etc., in Finland, so I'm curious about your experiences, your time growing up with coaching there, and what you've seen since you've been here.

Also, you mentioned that you coached junior hockey. As well, now you're coaching in a minor hockey program. Tell us about your experiences in terms of how they train and qualify coaches in Finland and how coaching works there, compared to how it works in the hockey system in Canada.

Mr. Mikko Makela: That's a very, very good question and I hope I can be very short with my answer. It's kind of a long answer, but I'll try to make it short.

If you compare, in Europe there are so many players and in Canada we have so many players, and there are so many players falling through the cracks. In my opinion, in the minor hockey structure itself, I think we should look into that a little better. I don't know if this is a discussion that needs to be taken.

In my opinion, if you're signed to a AA midget team, for example, and you excel at the start of the season during the first two or three months, which can very well happen on many occasions, now you cannot move from this team. You have to be there. You're not allowed to call the AAA midgets because they already have their team. Now, you have a AAA midget player who is not performing at all. He's slacking off. His school work is not getting done. But you stay there because that's where you were signed.

It is completely opposite if you're looking at the European structure. They have all the age groups. They have all the different levels. They put them in at the start of the season in these levels, wherever they belong. During the season there's a lot of flexible movement between those levels. I think that is something we should definitely look into, because I don't think we should waste good talent in Canada, even though we have a lot of volume. I think that is big thing, more or less with the minor hockey end of the discussion. That is something that I see, and it's a huge issue.

Also, we were talking about the qualified coaching as an issue. We don't have a structure in the minor hockey system. Everybody is on their own. Everybody is doing their own thing, and it's win, win, win. That is a mentality that we have. I would bring Europe in again. Don't get me wrong: I'm more Canadian than a lot of Canadians themselves, but they're trying to maximize every player because they know they cannot waste any talent, in any which way.

I think we've been a bit too comfortable in our success, of any sport in Canada. We haven't talked about what we can actually do to change and make it better. We talk, talk, talk, but not about things we can actually do.

I think if we could get some type of a system in minor hockey—I'm talking hockey now—to get a person who is very qualified, he could make the structure from the peewee or atom, whatever they do, and educate the parents and players as to how they're going to do it, how it's going to work. They are going to make all the practice plans, and it should only be skills and more skills, I would say, until the end of bantam. Then when we hit the midget, we have a coaching staff that is very qualified to do that, and you have the tools. This is your time to make some noise.

That's where we are lacking in this whole structural situation. If we could get a little bit at that.... It's only getting the coaching staff who are qualified and putting the money into it so we can have that.

We can talk about this whole scenario, different things here, different things there, but what would we actually do? I think with the structure of the minor hockey systems, at least in what I've seen in Alberta—I don't know anywhere else—there's a lack of knowledge and a lack of making this more seamless, the movement from team to team if the player is qualified to move up.

• (1630)

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you very much.

I think I've run out of time, but I appreciate that answer.

The Chair: Mr. Makela and Mr. Lafontaine, thank you both.

I think we could have extended this meeting. There was a lot of great information that you both provided. However, we have another panel coming in at 4:30.

I want to thank both of you for your contribution to our study.

We're going to recess for three minutes to switch to the next panel.

Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: We'll get started.

Welcome to both of our witnesses: Mr. Chuck Toth, commissioner of athletics for Regina High Schools Athletic Association; and Mr. Clive Tolley, provincial regional coach mentor with the Saskatchewan Hockey Association. They're both joining us by way of video conference from Regina, Saskatchewan.

Welcome to both of you. Welcome to our heritage committee and our study on the status of amateur coaching in Canada.

As you've heard, you'll each have an opportunity to make some opening remarks. Then, with the time that's remaining, we'll have our members available to ask questions of you.

We'll begin with opening remarks from Mr. Toth.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Chuck Toth (Commissioner of Athletics, Regina High Schools Athletic Association, Regina School Boards): Thank you.

I'll start with my title. As commissioner of athletics for Regina high schools, I represent separate, public, private, and French school boards within the city. The affiliation I have is that Regina district is one of 14 districts in the province. It's primarily governed by the Saskatchewan High Schools Athletic Association, SHSAA, which is the provincial body.

The SHSAA is charged with the administration and organization of school sport by the participating school boards. Its guiding principles include the commitment to amateurism, student athlete welfare, gender equality, sportsmanship and fair play, cultural diversity, and the overall athletic experience. This is reflected in the organization's decision-making process and administration. Their motto is "education through athletics".

In terms of structure, the Regina district consists of 18 high schools. We also have three associate schools from outside the city. The RHSAA administers league play and playoffs in approximately 11 sports. Many of them are at the junior and senior boys and girls levels.

Our teams are primarily coached by faculty members, that being teachers. However, we have a percentage of teams coached by what we call non-faculty coaches, primarily parents perhaps, or community people of some type. The ratio is probably about 75% teachers and 25% non-faculty.

That's sort of an overview of what our organization is about.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we'll go to Mr. Tolley.

Mr. Clive Tolley (Provincial Regional Coach Mentor, Saskatchewan Hockey Association): I'm one of seven provincial regional coach mentors at the Saskatchewan Hockey Association. These positions were created just in the last two years. We're volunteers who get honorarium expenses to be a liaison between the Saskatchewan Hockey Association, our provincial governing body for hockey, and all the hundreds of minor hockey associations in this province.

All of the coaches in our province are volunteers running minor hockey, and we wanted to try to support them in ways that they weren't previously being supported. If there's someone out there who coaches who's feeling that they're disconnected, they now have someone they can contact who can provide mentorship.

As the seven mentors working within this province, we report to the Saskatchewan Hockey Association manager of coach development. We work throughout the year on coach training, coach support, coach mentorship.

We're a liaison and actively try to provide the coaches in this province with more skills so that the young players who are joining hockey in Saskatchewan are getting a fun and skill-development experience.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you for your opening remarks.

We'll now go to our question and answer period.

We will begin with Mr. Boughen.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Hi, Clive, and hi, Chuck. Welcome to the committee, gentlemen. We appreciate your taking time to share your thoughts with us on the matter of coaching and what needs to happen in coaching various sports.

Let's start with you, Clive. Talk to us about the transfer of skills.

A couple of weeks ago, I saw a young guy, about 10 years old, playing basketball. This kid could move like you wouldn't believe in terms of his footwork and speed. It turns out that this young monkey is a soccer player, so his footwork from soccer stood him in very great stead on the basketball floor.

Can you give us some kind of insight into how this transfer of skill works so that we get away from a youngster playing baseball 12 months of the year instead of playing baseball, soccer, a little basketball, and hockey in the winter? How do we try to ensure that this happens?

Clive, do you want to start that off?

Mr. Clive Tolley: Thanks, Ray, it's good to hear from you.

The national coaching certification program is really pushing for long-term athlete and player development across all sports. We at hockey are a big part of supporting that initiative. We think the kids should be doing everything as much as they can in the season. For example, for an athlete who before would have been asked to choose between a basketball team and a hockey team, maybe the coaches get along to the point where they allow the player to play both sports

concurrently. We're very supportive of initiatives that would see the kids develop as athletes first and sport-specific athletes second.

There are a number of spring hockey programs that are not part of the normal winter hockey program. Those are going to continue to exist because parents feel very strongly that they want to give their children that extra ice time, those extra trips, and the experience that comes with that.

On a personal basis, at the end of the hockey season I'd like to see us go out and play baseball, soccer, lacrosse, or any of the other sports. But we in hockey are committed to long-term athlete development, not just the development of hockey skills.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Thanks, Clive.

Chuck, what do you say?

Mr. Chuck Toth: High school athletics are somewhat different. I think there are going to be some major differences here between educationally based sports, such as in high schools, and community programs, whether they be hockey, like Clive is involved in, or any of the other club teams as we'll call them, volleyball, basketball, community baseball, or such sports.

High school sports have definite boundaries. We have fall sports, winter sports, and spring sports, and none of them will overlap. So the big push for high school is in fact exactly what you're talking about, and that is multi-sport athletes because there are transferable skills from one to the other. We see at the end of our fall sports that basketball does not start until provincial football is over and vice-versa, and it continues on through the rest of the year. That's already a big component of high school athletics.

• (1645)

Mr. Ray Boughen: If we're talking about the elite athlete and owning the podium and going to the Olympics, when we look at the spectrum of sport, will other sports eventually catch up to hockey?

When youngsters are 12 or 13 years old and identified as hockey players, before you know it they're off living and playing hockey in Kamloops when their hometown is Yorkton, Saskatchewan. They're going to be part of that whole hockey fraternity that is really raised by surrogate parents, if you will, because they are billeted out. But you can't debate the skill level they're undergoing in terms of training at the junior level with the coaches who are there across the west, and the east for that matter.

Will the other sports ever catch up, following that kind of strategy, or is there a different strategy we should be using? How do we train the elite athlete?

Mr. Clive Tolley: I think the reason we're so superior—and I don't think this is a surprise to you or anybody on the committee—is partly cultural. Canadian athletes view hockey as the ultimate goal and many of them pursue it.

I was out on the ice yesterday with a grandfather and his four-year-old grandson. They were having races and shooting against each other on the ice surface. You don't often see a grandfather and a grandson playing basketball, soccer, or baseball. I think a big part of what's going to help Canada advance in other sports will be the influx of new immigrants from around the world who will bring more of a cultural passion for other sports.

I think we can offer the children a full gamut of all the different options, so that if their passion is basketball, baseball, or soccer, there are some opportunities to travel and play and simulate some of the things that are currently being done in hockey.

Getting back to this year-round training for hockey, as you said, soccer has skills that transfer tremendously to hockey. I think what we want to do is provide opportunities for mass participation, so that everybody gets an opportunity to play all these different sports. Then we can identify those people that have the special skills and get them to elite camps and get them when they are 12 to 15 years of age when they really want to excel and maybe choose a sport. There are avenues for them in other sports, not just in hockey.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Chuck, what do you say? Is there a technique we should be using at the high school level to train kids? We know that some kids mature more quickly than others and some are more athletic than others. Do we identify those kids who are athletically inclined and move them into another arena? What do you think?

Mr. Chuck Toth: I want to take a little bit out of what Clive was talking about. One difference I notice between hockey and what we have as sports in high school is that at the high school level there's not an emphasis put on the elite athlete. It's on the experience. It's on the multi-sport athlete, and on developing all skills.

I've attended a number of athletic director conferences in the United States. The big thing for them—and this was actually one of the topics of the sessions I went to at which they talked about what they were looking for. Are they looking for an elite athlete or are they looking for somebody who can do a lot of different things? The general consensus was that people who are looking for kids and giving them U.S. scholarships are looking for well-rounded athletes. So in the States they're looking to get scholarships.

In Canada I think it's different, because with hockey there's a goal, a target. You keep working your way up the ladder and hopefully... Everybody has the idea that they're going to make the big show in the NHL. In Canada it's difficult to do that at the basketball level. Where do you go? Once you're finished high school, there are a limited number of opportunities to play, whereas in hockey there are all of these leagues and you can continue your way up. There is no professional basketball. In fact, many of the kids, as Clive said, who go to hockey camps in the same way go to basketball camps. They'll play club volleyball 12 months a year with the idea of getting a scholarship in the States. That's what they're aiming at.

I think with hockey it's the same idea. They want to make that next level. For other sports, particularly in high school, there isn't that next level other than in university, and everybody wants the scholarship at the end of the rainbow.

•(1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boughen.

Next we will go to Madame Boutin-Sweet for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Good afternoon, gentlemen.

We started the study last Monday. In talking about young people's training, I was very surprised to see that four of the five witnesses

thought it was best to reduce, even to eliminate, competition. The reason why I don't play any sports today is because I don't like to compete. If there had been less competition, I might have played sports today. I am sure that I am not alone in feeling this way. The witnesses were focusing more on the idea of encouraging talent rather than competition, developing children in sports and helping them learn rather than compete.

Mr. Toth, you talked about multi-sport athletes. I think your remarks were along the same lines.

How do you feel about removing competitions from young people's training?

Either one of you can give me an answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Chuck Toth: Shall I go first?

Mr. Clive Tolley: She asked you, not me.

Mr. Chuck Toth: I thought you were asking Clive.

I'm actually going to steal Clive's thunder here and talk about hockey a little. I have a friend by the name of Drew Callander who played with the Regina Pats years ago. He was big into hockey. He pointed out something many years ago and it stayed with me. He talked about a hockey school that he was at in Calgary and it was done by, I think, some Russian players. He talked about the number of times a kid passes or receives the puck in a game and the number of times he actually takes shots on net in a game. Those numbers are very low. So you're not developing skills in a game, because you're only shooting the puck at the net two or three times or receiving the puck half a dozen times in a game.

Personally, I would like to see more practice, because I think those skills are developed more in practice than they are in a game. So when you talk about less competition, there's some merit to that.

The problem is there are many coaches out there who, for various reasons—some of them I have personal thoughts on—want to play games; let's play games. To my mind, in some of the sports we have, there are too many games and not enough practices. In basketball at the high school level you may have three practices to one game. Some people would argue that's not enough practices for the one game to develop the skills. Again, that comes to mind from taking a page from this hockey school that I heard about.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Before you answer, I would like to mention that those people talked about the possibility of children playing a number of sports instead of just one.

Go ahead, Mr. Tolley.

[English]

Mr. Clive Tolley: That's what we're trying to do through hockey. The entire hockey program runs on volunteer coaches, and parents are paramount to the success of any program. So when a child starts hockey at the age of four, five or six years, we give the parents a talk. We try to get them to see they are entering hockey for the same reason they would be taking up any other sporting or cultural activity. You put your child into music lessons because you want them to learn music and enjoy it for a lifetime. You put your children into hockey or sport for the same reasons, and at ages four, five, and six the parents seem to buy into that and saying that yes, they're putting their little child into this and he will learn skills and have fun. It's going to be non-competitive, and everybody is in it for the right reasons.

Somehow through the years it becomes more and more competitive and more and more elite, but we continue to pound away at the thought that you start playing sport for fitness, fun, and health reasons and you can play it for a lifetime. I'm in my sixties and I play old timers hockey. There is a whole bunch of us out there enjoying the camaraderie, the fitness, and the fun of it. We're trying to transfer that kind of thinking to the beginner programs.

Also, when we run practices for the introduction of players, what we call the initiation program, we use a variety of teaching aids. We don't just use a hockey stick and puck. We use soccer balls where they hit the ball with their hands or feet. We use different obstacles that they go around, over or through. We're trying to develop a total athlete. We're trying to develop a healthy attitude in terms of the players and the parents. We're trying to have people involved in the sport for a lifetime, and if some of those people happen to have that special competitive ingredient in their heart that they want to become an elite player, then they'll surface sometime in their late teens, but we want enough programs that you can choose your place.

There should be competitive elite programs and recreation programs and everything in between so that, as a player, you don't have to quit at some point in time because you're not competitive. You can find a place where you can continue to enjoy the sport for a lifetime.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: My second question is different.

Mr. Toth, you talked about gender equality in the programs you work on and about the fact that girls—who usually don't play sports as much as boys—have the same opportunities as boys. In some sports, boys are greater in number, and in other sports, girls are greater in number.

Are coaches able to deal with sexism and bullying from one gender to another?

[English]

Mr. Chuck Toth: I'm going to try to answer the question, as I understood it to be asked. I think that's the advantage at the high school level of having teachers involved in coaching the kids. When you have the educational component, much of what happens in the classroom can be translated and applied to the court or the field or whatever.

Just to throw something in there, coaching makes better teachers, and teaching makes better coaches, in my mind.

On what they deal with in the classroom with both sexes, the idea is those skills you learn in the classroom from dealing with both sexes are transferable to the athletic pitch in some way.

Do we teach that this is how we coach girls and that is how you coach boys? No, we do not, and I'm not sure anybody does necessarily. You learn from experience. I've coached girls' basketball and I've coached football. I've looked at both. Sometimes you handle them differently, and sometimes you don't.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Boutin-Sweet.

Mr. Simms, for seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us. I've struck a theme over the past two or three witnesses of the involvement of high schools, only because that is probably the most important gateway in smaller communities for people who want to go from being a participant in a sport to getting to the elite level as someone who shows a lot of talent.

Mr. Toth, if, say, a 12-year-old kid in school is showing a great amount of talent in a certain sport, how do you go about advising physical education instructors to recognize that talent, and where do you go from there?

Mr. Chuck Toth: In phys. ed., I'm not sure how much that's going to show. I don't think the phys. ed. classes would necessarily focus on that. I think phys. ed. classes are primarily for the ideas of fitness, being involved, and long-term activities. As Clive said, he's in his sixties, and he's playing hockey.

I think high school phys. ed. is supposed to be trying to give those kids an opportunity to be introduced to as many sports as possible, and certainly in the classes we call credit phys. ed., where they give a lot of different activities that supposedly would be for the long term and for the rest of your life—

Mr. Scott Simms: And in the case of school sports?

Mr. Chuck Toth: In the case of school sports, if a coach, and not necessarily the phys. ed. teacher—I think that's important: I know many, many coaches and they're not all phys. ed. teachers. One of the best high school football coaches I know of is an English teacher. It doesn't fall just on the phys. ed. people; it's people who have an interest in it and are going to pass on that knowledge to the kids.

If you do recognize that, in the cities it is easier, absolutely, because they're more exposed. However, there is some connection between the high school athletics and the sport governing bodies. For example, in Saskatchewan, whether it be basketball or football, there are ID camps, whereby the sport governing bodies would recognize or have camps that would recognize the elite athletes there. If you have a kid in small-town Saskatchewan who is a pretty good athlete, that would be a very good place for them to go in order to see how their skills stack up against others in the province.

• (1700)

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Mr. Toth. That sheds a lot of light on what I've been asking about for the past little while.

Mr. Tolley, one of the huge issues, I think, and from my own experience—and I'm not as heavily involved, obviously, as most people here—is the retention of volunteer coaches, especially in hockey, and in other sports as well. They have bad incidents, or it takes a lot of their time, or whatever it is. To you, what is the biggest obstacle to retaining good, dedicated volunteer coaches?

Mr. Clive Tolley: We're currently involved in that daily. Almost all of our coaches in minor hockey are parents. They typically have some experience in the game, maybe not always but mostly, and some even at an elite NHL level. They go back to their Canadian town or city, let's say, and start a family. Now their child is four, five or six years old. It could be a boy or a girl. We have a huge increase in female hockey registration and a very active program. Now the parent says, "I need to be involved. I need to coach. I've played. I want to pass some of this on."

One of the obstacles—I don't see a way around it currently, but we could brainstorm about it—is that we must ensure that any coach on the ice with our children has a criminal check. We also must ensure that they have a basic coaching training. For instance, with the four-, five-, and six-year-olds, the course is called Introduction to Coaching. Of course, it's based on teaching the core technical skills of skating, puck-handling, passing, and shooting. We require each and every coach to be trained in that way before they're allowed on the ice.

We also insist that they take a Speak Out course to make sure they're up to skill on those issues. So we're asking somebody before they even—

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm sorry to cut you off, Mr. Tolley.

Did you say a "Speak Out course"?

Mr. Clive Tolley: Yes. Each Canadian hockey coach takes a Speak Out course. That is about learning how to protect themselves and the children around the whole area of abuse and sexual abuse. It's a standard requirement to make sure that everybody's operating a safe and healthy program.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay.

I agree with you that these vulnerable sector checks, background checks on individuals, are highly essential. I'm asking both of you this question: are you having any problems in getting these checks done in a timely fashion in the case of people who have red flags? Maybe their name is similar to that of someone who has committed offences or that sort of thing.

Mr. Clive Tolley: I'm not currently aware of any problems. It seems to me we have good people with good intentions doing the vast majority of our coaching, and we've put up enough barriers to stop anybody with potentially the wrong kind of attitude or behaviour.

I guess what I was saying was that we already have so many requirements of a volunteer coach. Many of these things take their time and their money, and that's before they even get on the ice. Once they get on the ice, we're asking them to wear a helmet. We're asking them to have a proper training suit, to wear hockey gloves, to carry a stick, and to wear proper skates. There's an investment that we're asking here in terms of finances and commitment for these parents who become volunteers.

We cannot operate Canadian hockey without volunteer coaches. If we had to pay each one of these volunteers, the system would simply fall down. It just wouldn't work.

As to what we can do, I think we can do things like provide more exciting skill development opportunities for them, bringing in people who are experienced from other parts of the world or from the professional leagues to do clinics. We can send some people on trips internationally to get training. We can maybe work with manufacturers of equipment to get sponsorship for the kinds of things the coaches must wear—helmets, skates, sticks, gloves, and training suits.

What we're trying to do in Saskatchewan is to make it fun in terms of skill development for the players and for the coaches. As we develop these coaches, when we do a clinic, we want those coaches to go out there with a smile on their face because they had a fun time and they learned something that they can pass on to the children.

• (1705)

Mr. Scott Simms: Gentlemen, thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Now we'll go to Mr. Richards, for seven minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Tolley, I'll start with you on the hockey side of things. On the previous panel, we had Mikko Makela, who coaches a girls hockey program down in Warner, Alberta.

I'm going to ask you the same question that I asked him, because I see here, in the background we have on you, that you also happened at one time to have coached the Turkish national hockey team.

Is that correct?

Mr. Clive Tolley: I did, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'd be interested in hearing the story behind how that came to be. If you'd like to share that, I'd be interested in hearing briefly about it, but the question I want to ask you is the same question that I asked Mr. Makela.

Having had that experience in another country, I'd like to hear your comparison between the two. In other words, is there anything we can learn from your experiences there? Is there anything in terms of certification, qualifications, or anything else that you think you've picked up from the way they've set up their hockey program there that could be helpful for us, or something that we could pick up here in Canada that would be helpful? Maybe it's the opposite. Maybe there's something you saw over there that we're not doing that is a good thing.

Can you give us a bit of a comparison as to what some of the differences are in terms of how they approach coaching certification and qualifications, and the whole program?

Mr. Clive Tolley: Hockey Canada is a leader worldwide in terms of coach training and coach development. Part of the reason I ended up being the national team coach for Turkey was that the president of Turkey's ice hockey federation was at International Ice Hockey Federation meetings with the Canadians, and he wanted to know what he could do to move their system to be more like ours, ours being seen as the most successful in the world.

One of the reasons I was hired is that not only do I have a lot of coaching experience but I have coach training experience. I do an awful lot of clinics where I teach the coaches, coach the coaches. My job over there was multi-faceted in that I had about five assistant coaches for each one of the four national teams I coached, and my job was to mentor those coaches. At the same time I ran a level one, which we now call coach level in Canada, hockey coaches clinic over there in conjunction with the university.

In Canada, for instance, if you want to take a level one clinic, which we know as the coach level, it would take one Saturday. Over there, we extended it to a full week and we incorporated things about Turkish sport culture, and had lectures at the university, and we had an American goal-tending coach come. We gave them a lot more than a typical Canadian clinic.

What was interesting for me to learn was that the International Ice Hockey Federation has purchased all the Canadian coaching programs. The curriculum, the books, everything is exactly the same as what I would typically give on a Saturday to somebody here in Regina, Saskatchewan, except I was giving it in much more detail and over a longer period of time in Turkey.

Their goal was to move their Turkish ice hockey federation toward a Canadian model using International Ice Hockey Federation books and teaching methods, which are all Canadian, and that's why I was there.

I think we've had some success in terms of planting a seed and seeing it grow, because Turkey was 43rd in the world, I think, when I was there and now they've moved up to about 37th. So they see Canada as a leader. I don't think we need to do too much in terms of changing our coaching curriculum or how we're doing things. What is interesting is the comparison of Canadian ice hockey and Turkish football—or soccer, which they call football of course. They're mad about soccer. They are so passionate about it. All the children play in the street, in the alleyway, in the parking lot the way we see our kids out on the streets playing road hockey and doing all those things in Canada.

It was interesting. I was coaching these young under-18 boys and they would go in and take shots at the net, and when they missed the net, they retreated. I said, "What are you doing?" They said, "Well, we missed the net". They think they're playing soccer and the goalie gets to bring it out.

The Turkish people who are very passionate about hockey are now adopting the Canadian model. They're using Canadian coaching systems and they're trying to catch up to us and get some of that passion, which we have for hockey and they have for football, into their hockey program. On a smaller scale, they're doing it. They have built a number of rinks and they've developed a lot more coaches.

How does it transfer to what we're doing here? It kind of reiterates how much passion we have for hockey and why we continue to be number one in the world at hockey.

• (1710)

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate that very much.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have a minute and 20 seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, I guess I'm only going to get to one of the two questions I wanted to ask you.

And I did have some stuff for you, Mr. Toth, but I guess we're not going to get there either.

Mr. Tolley, the other day we had a couple of other panels in and I mentioned the idea.... I've heard of a few instances with hockey programs where professional coaching.... One of the points that was being made by a number of the panellists the other day was about younger levels. We need to have the more qualified coaches coaching these kids so that when they get to the older levels they've got that skill, that basic skill.

I'm not sure if there are any in Saskatchewan like this—maybe you're aware—where towns are actually hiring a professional coach, who is coaching at every level, and then having the volunteer coaches, the parents, coaching underneath the professional coach. So this coach is running the majority of the practices and is there for the games he can make but he has these volunteers working with him, the assistant coaches. That's one of the ways...recognizing the realities in Canada that there are thousands and thousands of coaches and there's no way they could all be professional coaches, but they try to use that model of having a professional coach working with the parent volunteers.

What are your thoughts on whether that's a viable and worthwhile thing to pursue?

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Mr. Clive Tolley: We recognize that's not going to work for every community. It is being done in some communities successfully. But what we've done is adopt this coach mentorship program as another road to the same goal. What we're doing is we're going out and modelling how you would teach a practice to these young people. There's a big difference between teaching a four-, five-, or six-year-old how to skate and teaching a 16-year-old how to do a toe drag. We're trying to give the skills to the local coaches to really teach the fundamentals well. That doesn't require a professional hockey skill level. That's just a sound understanding of the core skills of skating, puck-handling, and the ability to model and follow the modelling and the examples that we've set.

The Chair: Madame Sellah.

Now we're into the five-minute rounds.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the witnesses who have joined us through videoconference.

I am not a member of this committee; I am replacing my colleague Pierre Nantel. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Health. However, I am a former international athlete. I have always loved team sports. I used to play handball. My children were born here and, when I wanted to get them to play sports, because I thought it was important, unfortunately I discovered that, in amateur sports, parents were the ones who volunteered. My daughters started to play soccer. I pushed them a little in that direction. However, I found that there was a problem with the volunteers and I was very surprised. In fact, volunteers meant instability. But in my view, developing the skills of people so that they become professionals requires follow-up from the bottom up.

Could you tell me what measures have been taken by the federal government over the past few years to find amateur coaches?

I was also an athlete in my country of origin. The pool, the schools, produced international athletes. I was not able to address this issue because I did not have a chance to talk to the two witnesses, but I have to say that, although amateur coaches trained the athletes to begin with, those who reaped the benefits were professional coaches at an international level. But I found that this situation was unfair for some amateur coaches.

So could you tell me what is required of a professional coach, on the one hand, and of an amateur coach, on the other hand? My question is for both of you.

Thank you.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Chuck Toth: When I think of the word “amateur” versus “professional” I see dollar signs. An amateur coach is doing it for nothing and a professional coach is being paid.

There are no professional coaches at the high school level in any way, shape, or form. Somebody asked the question about the retention of coaches. It's one of the problems. When you're dealing with teachers for the most part, you've got the teacher staying after school to coach basketball, football, volleyball, or whatever it might be, making the same amount of money as a teacher who is leaving at 3:30. That becomes an issue. Clive had talked about retention of coaches. That's a difficult sell at the high school level. There is a certain amount of turnover. I'm understanding that's what you meant by the word “instability” that you used earlier.

Another thing that Clive said is that for someone to have basic coaching skills, at the high school level, they don't need to be a professional. It needs to be somebody who... Again, I was a math teacher but that doesn't mean they couldn't have told me to totally turn around and teach a science class, which I did. Guess what? You learn and teach yourself enough so that you can teach the kids. It's the same thing at the sports level. If I'm going to teach badminton, I'm not a badminton player, but I can research the game and find enough information to give them the grassroots foundation skills that will lead them to getting good enough to maybe join a club team or whatever they're going to do. Whatever the next level is I can help them find that badminton club team, volleyball club team, or whatever.

I don't necessarily need to be a professional. And you're not going to get that as long as it's volunteers.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Do I still have time?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: I'll ask Mr. Clive if he has any comments regarding the question.

Mr. Clive Tolley: I basically agree. We're trying to give our volunteer coaches the skills to teach the fundamentals so that a young person starting in our sport has lots of fun and develops skills. We believe we can teach coaches to do that. You may need highly trained and professional coaches at an elite level, but not at the very beginning, the grassroots of the game.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Sellah.

Next we have Mr. Calandra, for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Hi, guys. Thank you very much for appearing today.

I don't think I'll use all of my five minutes, but let me ask you a question, Mr. Toth. It was mentioned earlier that in hockey you have somewhere to aspire to. There are a bunch of different levels above you, and for the most part, of all of the sports that are handled in high school, that's about it in Canada.

Do you think we would benefit if we were to put in place scholarships for athletics at post-secondary institutions?

Mr. Chuck Toth: On a personal note, yes. When I graduated from high school here in Regina, I went to the States on a football scholarship. The States do it so much differently in terms of the coaches there. As the lady asked before, they are more at the professional level. They are getting paid, and it is pretty serious stuff.

Football is not bad, particularly in Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan alone, there are four post-secondary places where you can play football after high school: two junior programs and two university programs. The other sports don't necessarily have that. If you are a volleyball player, there's really only two teams: the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina. They have 12 or 14 students on those teams. But in comparison to the number of kids playing volleyball out there, that's not very many spaces available for students to develop at the next level where there is... Again, I go back to this idea of professional coaching. The coaches at the university level are getting paid, and theoretically they should know more than, say, I do, at the high school level coaching volleyball.

I think it would help. It's a bit of a biased opinion. I know that some people will point to the downfalls of U.S. colleges, and the scandals and unfairness and such that goes with that, but that's a pretty small percentage. What you see on TV in the States is a very small percentage compared to the number of schools out there that do have scholarships. They are getting an education and they are actually developing their skills.

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Still with you, Mr. Toth, and if you're not comfortable in answering, then that's fine. Using the Ontario perspective, right now there has been a work stoppage. That means that extracurriculars are not being done in the province of Ontario, at the primary or secondary levels.

That always seems to be a bit of a dilemma. A number of years ago there was some discussion about allowing professionals to come in to the school systems. Where there were no certified teachers available to do the job, professionals would be allowed in to the schools to fill positions with respect to music, but in this case coaching.

I know you said that teachers can fill these roles. I had great high school teachers who were coaches for me, but I've always thought, and you mentioned it, that it's a bit unfair that they are being paid the same as the teacher who goes home at 2:30 or 3:30.

My question is twofold. Should we be inviting more professionals into the schools to do athletics, where there is a void? Should our education system be looking at rewarding those who take on extra responsibilities and maybe go out to get training to become professional coaches as well as teachers?

Mr. Chuck Toth: I was going to answer your question with a question of my own. From where are we getting the professional coaches who are going to come into the schools?

If you look at the programs, and again I'm going back to the four football programs in Saskatchewan, if you look at the football coaching staff of those four programs, you would be stunned at the percentage of them who are either teachers or ex-teachers. Most people start at the high school level. I can talk about Regina Thunder Football Club because I'm part of the executive for that. When we're

looking to fill a coaching position, we look at the high schools for who has the most experience, who is an outstanding coach at the high school level, and they come to the next level, that of junior or CIS. Of the Regina coaches, there are some high school people who are on the Regina Rams coaching staff, for example.

I'm not sure where the professionals are coming from. For the most part, they are already coming from the high school levels. Where are you going to bring others in?

Then we start with the Ontario thing here. I don't know where you're finding those professional coaches unless they are somehow being trained by the sport-governing bodies within the province, and then I suppose there would be some sort of certification that comes from them that they are professionals, which is the word we're using.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Toth and Mr. Tolley, thank you both for your time and your contribution to our study on amateur coaching in Canada.

We will suspend for 30 seconds or a minute until we go in camera to discuss some committee business.

Thank you both.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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