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Chair

Mr. Gordon Brown

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC)):
Good morning, everyone. We'll call to order meeting seven of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We have a very busy schedule. To start off the day, we have three witnesses: Don Wilson, chief executive officer of Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton; Peter Judge, chief executive officer of Canadian Freestyle Ski Association; and from Calgary, Alberta, by video conference, we have Curtis Lyon, chairman of Ski Jumping Canada .

We'll start with Mr. Wilson, for eight minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Don Wilson (Chief Executive Officer, Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton): Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

[English]

It's my pleasure to be given this opportunity to speak to you today about the investment, preparation, and strategy that Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton has taken on behalf of Canada to ready our team for the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi. I thank you for this opportunity, and appreciate your interest and support of Canadian athletes and their coaches.

It seems only appropriate to start the status of our preparations for Sochi with the results from last weekend's World Cup held in Calgary. Kaillie Humphries and Heather Moyse dominated the women's two-man bobsleigh, capturing gold by over half a second from their closest rival. Chris Spring and Jesse Lumsden captured bronze in the two-man. Eleven Canadian athletes and teams competed in skeleton bobsleigh. All but one finished in the top ten.

Our mission is simple. BCS creates, nurtures, and supports world and Olympic champions. BCS believes strongly that the important values that underscore any sustainable community are described by what we call INSPIRE: integrity, national pride, sportsmanship, professional, innovation, respect, and excellence.

Our vision is clear. BCS will lead our entire Canadian community in the pursuit of becoming and sustaining the mantle of the leading bobsleigh and skeleton nation in the world. Kaillie Humphries, Jon Montgomery, Helen Upperton, Pierre Lueders, Lyndon Rush: we produce results.

While predominantly concentrated in the west at WinSport and the Whistler Sliding Centre, our champions hail from all provinces. In fact, we have representation from 10 of Canada's provinces and territories on our senior national team. The singular, clear, and

unwavering focus of BCS is manifested in our provincial sections in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario.

In terms of investment in our success, our mission and vision could not be reached without the critical investment of Sport Canada, Own the Podium, and the Canadian Olympic Committee. Our boutique sport is geocentric by the nature of access to required facilities. We receive about 85% of our operating funds from these partners. We supplement those dollars with sponsorship revenues from corporate Canada, and 90% of our funds are directed towards our athletes and our technical programs.

I'll turn now to the preparations for success. In Vancouver, thirty-nine one-hundredths of a second was the margin between getting a medal to not being on the podium in bobsleigh. In skeleton, Jon Montgomery's walk of fame was the result of being seven one-hundredths of a second better than everyone else. We don't have 60 minutes to adjust. Every adjustment is critical at 156 kilometres an hour. Preparation is our key.

Our athletes are preparing for Sochi with a prediction of three medals. We have been in Sochi twice with all of our top athletes. Last year Kaillie Humphries repeated as world champion and medalled in all world cups, including six golds and a bronze at the World Cup in Sochi. Lyndon Rush ranked number one in the world in the two-man. Sarah Reid finished with the world championship bronze medal in skeleton.

Equipment is essential in our sport. We have partnered with a Dutch sled manufacturer, and we feel we have the fastest bobsleighs in the world. We have partnered with SAIT in Calgary, and are on the cusp of developing world-class skeleton sleds. Supported by Own the Podium, we have invested over \$1 million in bobsleigh development in the years since Vancouver.

On-ice training and competitive opportunities in Canada's legacy facilities are key to our ability to race and win on any type of track in the world. The federal government's belief and investment in Calgary in 1988 and Vancouver in 2010 has been the cornerstone of Bobsleigh Canada's ability to develop world and Olympic champions.

Our access to provincially and federally supported training facilities like WinSport and Whistler Sliding Centre allows our athletes to train for specific track conditions and landscapes, as these two tracks are technically very different. These differences are a critical advantage. Pilots learn to drive and adapt to different curvatures and pressures. Brakemen learn to push short for a steep-pitch start and long for a gradual slope. We have significant knowledge for the testing and adjustments of our sleds and runners for both bobsleigh and skeleton.

All across the country, our athletes access the Canadian sport institutes. While we predominantly train in Calgary, our athletes do come from across the country and always utilize the opportunities with the CSI. This partnership with the CSI ensures our athletes get world-class sports science, medical services, and coaching services in their daily training environment, giving us the margin of victory we need.

With respect to our strategy for success, our strategy starts with an ongoing search for the next Jon Montgomery or Kaillie Humphries. Our long-term athlete development pathway in bobsleigh is a little different from the playground-to-podium pathways of most other sports. We utilize the partnerships and services of the Canadian sport institutes, fellow national sport federations such as track and field, rugby, and football, and Canadian Interuniversity Sport.

Most recently, we have had success recruiting athletes from the Canadian Football League, with the acquisition of Jesse Lumsden from Calgary, Sam Giguère from Hamilton, and Jean-Nicolas Carrière from Montreal.

For skeleton, we use the more traditional model in concert with luge, where Discover Skeleton programs happen in Alberta and British Columbia with young athletes, but we also capture older second-sport athletes as well. The sport is extreme, and this intrigues those athletes who live for the adrenalin rush.

The two acquisition and retention strategies bring the PSOs and the NSF into alignment.

I've already discussed the preparation and polish.

Finally, we host national and international competitions in Canada's legacy facilities. Major competitions generate excitement for our sports. They become a critical recruiting tool. They are essential for the exposure of our corporate and government partners. We test our Canadian athletes against the best in the world on home soil. There is no better feeling than winning at home, and this is why sport is essential to the fabric of Canada. Vancouver 2010 proved that.

We simply could not host these types of competitions without the availability of grants through provincial and federal agencies. I thank the federal government sincerely for their ongoing and significant support of Canadian athletes and coaches.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with the committee.

Thank you.

● (0850)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Mr. Judge for eight minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Judge (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Freestyle Ski Association): Good morning.

I would like to welcome everyone. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

[*English*]

First, I want to thank all of you for engaging in this significant process. Having spent over 35 years in the high performance sports system as either a national team athlete or a head coach, or now an administrator, I have witnessed first-hand how absolutely critical it is to have a strong partnership with the federal government.

I was very interested to learn, on becoming aware of this exercise, that Sochi would be my eighth winter Olympic Games as either a head coach or a team leader. As such, I feel I'm uniquely qualified to speak to and respond on the topic of Canada's preparations for the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi. Historically, our international sports performance has seen its share of successes and shortcomings, but it's very clearly on a strong path at this moment. There is no question that Vancouver changed the way in which Canadians view not only the Olympics and sport but more importantly, themselves.

Undertaking an audit of this nature is certainly an expected part of the process, and it provides scrutiny that the high performance sport community welcomes. Obviously, one of the paradigm shifts moving into Vancouver involved the commissioning and commitment to undertake the Own the Podium project. I've been very fortunate to be involved with the project almost since its inception and there's no question it has had a phenomenal impact on sport. It took a significant amount of vision and a significant leap of faith to undertake the project.

Now I'll get to the question of preparation for Sochi. Specifically, with respect to freestyle skiing, we will field 26 athletes for the games in Sochi. Those will be split between the two new disciplines of halfpipe and slopestyle, moguls and aerials, which have been part of the games since they were introduced in Calgary as demonstration sports in 1988, and ski cross, which now is partially an alpine discipline. All 26 of the athletes who go to the games for freestyle will be medal-potential athletes. In fact, we will be leaving home athletes who have medalled at world cups or world championships before.

In the last two world championships we've accrued 14 medals in the Olympic disciplines. The question now is, are we better prepared than we were for Vancouver? No, we're not better prepared than we were for Vancouver. We could not be. We took every painstaking opportunity that we could to prepare on home soil. Are we preparing better than we did in Vancouver? Absolutely. This is the shift that's system-wide now. We're seeing the world differently. We're viewing it differently. We cannot have the same opportunity we had in Vancouver, but we are changing the way we work, changing the way we operate, and changing the way we see preparation.

Games preparation is not a copy-and-paste exercise. It changes significantly from venue to venue, and Sochi will probably be one of the most hostile venues we will encounter. There's going to be a very broad spectrum from easy to hard. We've already witnessed that in some cases with some of the disciplines undergoing some very significant hardships just in accessing training.

In many cases, we've been able to learn lessons from a number of variables in Vancouver, which are going to have a significant impact not only for Sochi but also right through until Korea. For example, the kind of weather metrics we were able to gather, the types of waxes, and the types of ice and how they affect things will all be the same among the three venues, so we will have some lessons that carry over.

One of the other areas we've become significantly better at is familiarization. I've always held through my entire career that this is one of the most important pieces: be there first and be there often. I believe it's the cornerstone of performance, so much so that I went to Sochi on my own literally right after they made the announcement in 2008 so I could start to undertake that process. I have made eight trips there since. Our teams have been there four times over the last four years to garner more competition experience and to become more familiar with what we consider to be a hostile environment.

One of the last things I'd like to talk about is the significance of IST, integrated support teams. We've seen over a period of time that having great athletes is not enough. You need to be able to support and care for them, especially on the last run into the games. I'll give you a specific example.

● (0855)

One of our athletes, who was a gold-medal winning athlete at the last world championships last winter, did her ACL, which is normally at least an eight-month to a year-long injury, in August of this year. She will start skiing this week. This is because of the advancements we have been able to undertake through Own the Podium, through collaboration within the sports medical community, and creating these integrated support teams. These kinds of things are significant because they ensure that our athletes stay healthy and more productive.

Last but not least, I'd like to talk about collaboration. I've often said that I don't care how it gets done and who gets it done as long as it gets done. I think we've seen unprecedented collaboration in our sport world today, particularly with the Canadian Olympic Committee, Own the Podium, and with Sport Canada all working together. I don't think we've ever had a better environment than we have today in sport.

To that end, the future looks bright for 2014. For 2018, it's going to be more difficult, and for 2022 and 2026, more difficult as well, as we see the world change, but I think at least we're equipped to deal with those adaptations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to snowy Calgary, Alberta, and hear from Mr. Lyon, for up to eight minutes.

Mr. Curtis Lyon (Chairman, Ski Jumping Canada): Thanks very much for allowing me the opportunity to talk today.

My experience is a little more limited than the two gentlemen you just heard from, but maybe it will be a bit of a different perspective.

I'd like to applaud the continued investment in winter sports throughout the last quadrennial by the federal government, with the goal of being the best in Sochi. I'd also like to encourage the continuation of that investment to help ensure success in 2018 and beyond. Without continued investment from the federal government, Canada cannot compete on the world stage. There was a great sense of pride that was instilled after the success in Vancouver, which has not faded, and return on that investment cannot be measured.

Specifically, for Ski Jumping Canada and our preparations for the games, we are a small sport. We are limited at the moment only to Calgary, with a club starting in B.C. next year, and we're hoping to grow that through the next four years. For an NSO that consistently produces Olympians, we rely on public funding to be competitive and to produce athletes capable of competing on the world stage.

The investment into women's ski jumping after the sport's acceptance into the Olympics for 2014 was encouraging. However, that support has decreased as we have progressed through the quadrennial. Even with that level of decreased support, the level of the program and the professionalism of the program have definitely increased.

We have made great strides in some of the areas that the other two gentlemen also mentioned, in integrated support teams, technology, increased collaboration with other sports, and also partnerships with the Canadian Sport Institute.

Canada was the big proponent, along with the U.S., of getting women's ski jumping into the Olympics, and we need to continue that support to help us be the best at that sport. For Canada to be the best at the Olympics, we need to ensure we invest in sports that can increase medal potential, and in ski jumping, in Canada's case, that is very cost-effective.

Ski Jumping Canada has built some good partnerships with private supporters in the past few years to fill in holes in public funding. However, our capacity to do so is limited. We're mostly a volunteer organization, and once again, we rely on public funding to sustain a level of competitiveness.

Currently we're a volunteer-run organization. We rely on the Olympic legacy coaching fund to pay most of our coaches. We also relied on Sport Canada grants this year to keep our program actually running. With sustained funding over a quadrennial, Ski Jumping Canada can improve all facets of our organization—high performance, grassroots—and the goal in mind is to consistently contribute to the success of Canada at the winter Olympics.

Thank you.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to a round of questioning for seven minutes. We will hear from Mr. Hillyer.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Judge, you talked about Sochi being a hostile environment. Could you expand on what you mean by that?

Mr. Peter Judge: I think we see a number of different versions of that. I think we've already seen some gamesmanship, we'll say, with certain aspects of access to training. Even just getting visas to get into the country is extremely difficult. In a softer sense, too, we're dealing with a country that has an extremely different culture than we do in terms of language and getting around. It's halfway around the world; it's extremely remote. In many versions of the word it is that, but some maybe more malicious than others.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Some are intentional.

Mr. Peter Judge: I would venture to say there has been some gamesmanship, yes.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Mr. Wilson, you're smiling as if you have had the same experience.

Mr. Don Wilson: Unfortunately, the head coach of the Russian bobsled team is Pierre Lueders, a Canadian. I guess he has certainly taken the position that, much the same as Canada looked forward to hosting the world on their home soil, he has fully embraced that thought about ensuring that Russia will host on their home soil, and we now know that.

As Peter has said, some of it is the track. In our particular case it's how it's prepared, how it's available, how many runs you get, things like that. We are finding that, yes, hostile and difficult.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Okay.

Mr. Lyon, do you have the same experience with your sport?

Mr. Curtis Lyon: It's probably a little bit different. We haven't seen any malicious acts or anything like that. We were there once in preparation. It was just difficult—I think that's the word I would use—in terms of the way they operate. It was very disorganized when we were there. Skis were left out in the rain, not intentionally and not just for our country, but I would use the word “difficult” as well.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Mr. Judge, is there anything that could be done at a government level to help that, or does that just go with the territory, and you guys have to deal with it?

Mr. Peter Judge: We have to suck it up.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Well, enjoy.

Mr. Lyon, in your sport, this is the first Olympics that women are competing in. What's been the resistance? Are women just not interested, or is there some sort of philosophy that it's too dangerous? What's been stopping women from being involved up to this point?

Mr. Curtis Lyon: I think that the sport needed to get to a point where it was Olympic calibre. I don't think we were there four years before Vancouver. I definitely think the sport was there one or two years before Vancouver. It is definitely there now.

We have a deep field with a lot of countries represented. It's just progressed to a point of competitiveness that it can now be an Olympic calibre sport. Participation was a key factor. I think that in a lot of the European countries they were definitely opposed to the idea—it was a male sport—but we were very supported in North America. There were a lot of women jumpers even 20 years ago in the U.S. and Canada.

● (0905)

Mr. Jim Hillyer: It's more of a result of a generation or so ago its being a men's sport and just taking time for it to get to a more elite level for women. Do you sense any official resistance nowadays?

Mr. Curtis Lyon: No. After Vancouver.... I think ski jumping is a European-dominated sport; the governance is all European. Once they got used to the idea that this was going to happen, once they got on board, it was full steam ahead.

The professionalism of the women's programs in Europe has taken off greatly. They're using a lot of the resources from the men's side. They're combining the two events at certain world cups. We're going to see that this weekend in Lillehammer. There are going to be men and women jumping interchangeably on the same day and on the same jump. I think the Europeans, once they accepted that it was going to happen, then it was full steam ahead.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Thank you.

Mr. Judge, I understand there are some new events with freestyle ski, like the halfpipe and slopestyle.

I think I know what halfpipe is, but what is slopestyle?

Mr. Peter Judge: Slopestyle, again, is another child of the kind of generation X games events. It really evolved out of what was originally rollerblading. The use of street pieces involved in rollerblading evolved, and we're seeing it in everything from BMX to skateboarding, and now in the snow venues, with both snowboarding and freestyle.

It involves a number of waves of features. There are usually six waves. The first three waves are usually types of street features, rails and different things that the athletes use to perform tricks, and then there's usually another wave of three jumps from which they'll perform large jumps.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Is the original freestyle event, what's been known as the hot dog, where people do ski jumps and flips?

Mr. Peter Judge: Yes.

That's one of the interesting things. We've seen what's old become new and become old again. We've seen it come right around the block. The kind of speak and counterculture that was freestyling in the sixties and seventies, in the hot dog era, has been kind of reborn. Now we have these two kinds of facets really, the classic side of freestyle and the cult side of freestyle.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Mr. Hillyer.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Thank you for coming and sharing your experience with us.

Good luck. We're ready to cheer you on.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dubé, followed by Mr. Lapointe. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Judge, you made a point that I found interesting. You talked about preparing for 2018 and 2022 and certain challenges that were involved. Although we are pleased to see the unprecedented level of funding for the Own The Podium program, we have heard concerns that, despite the funding for the elite level and the desire to win medals, there may be difficulties in developing the next generation of athletes. Is that the case in your organization?

I would like to address the same question to Mr. Wilson afterwards.

[English]

Mr. Peter Judge: Thank you. It's an excellent question.

Certainly, as I spoke a bit about, I think our success for 2014, I won't say is absolutely guaranteed, but I think it will be phenomenally strong. Particularly with the addition of the new events, I think we'll see more medals than we've seen before, and hopefully we'll be one of the first countries to follow up the home games with a larger number of medals than we had at home.

But I do honestly see some significant concerns as we move into 2018 and 2022. As you know, the world is not a static place. I think we saw the long list of candidates come through for 2022, which includes two Scandinavian countries and then three of the former eastern bloc countries. My view is that we'll probably see either Norway or Sweden get the games for 2022.

The Norwegians are phenomenal. We already know they have a strong support system and the means to make significant investments in the sport. They also now have the fire.

For us moving forward, I think our future lies in making that strategic investment now, underneath. The summer Own the Podium project was really built from the bottom up. That's allowed for a much more balanced, much more long-term, sustainable structure. The winter side, because it was only focused on 2010, built the roof, but not much of a foundation underneath. The NSOs that have strong foundations—fortunately, we are one—I think will be able to bear well over the time. For the ones that don't, it's going to be much more difficult, unless we can find how to make those strategic investments, where to make the best ones, and insert the most intelligence with the cheapest investment.

● (0910)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Wilson, could you please comment on the same issue?

[English]

Mr. Don Wilson: In the bobsleigh world, 2018 and 2022, as Peter said, are going to be very difficult. I absolutely agree that what we did in our type of sport is we prepared for 2010. We are very concerned about where will be our next athletes for 2018 and 2022. The difference for us, a little bit, is in bobsleigh we're a second sport athlete. Jesse Lumsden is 28 years of age. They're older athletes, but they also come into the sport quickly, so it probably takes us four years to turn around a novice to a champion.

In skeleton, we're much the same as what Peter has said in the fact that we are, basically, building the ability of finding the next Jon Montgomery tobogganing down some hill anywhere in Canada now.

To get that person into a program and into the level that's necessary at the top level will take at least eight to twelve years. Own The Podium and Sport Canada funding needs to reach down a little bit lower to assist, especially in our case. If we don't get it from the government, and I hate to say this, we then go to corporate, because we don't have a huge membership base. I don't have the ability, like soccer, to say, "Everybody give me a buck and I can do it." I only have 200-some people so it will be a big issue for us and it needs to be addressed now.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Lyon, what do you think?

[English]

Mr. Curtis Lyon: We're in the situation where we need to develop athletes at a very young age. Basically, they need to start at seven or eight to ten years old. Given the depth in our program right now on the women's side, I'm really looking forward to 2018 to see the progression of some of these young ladies. Beyond that, if this sport wants to sustain itself in this country, we need investment. We're a facility-based sport and we only have one, so to grow the sport we need investment into facilities. That's the only way to ensure success.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you.

[English]

How much time do I have?

[Translation]

The Chair: You still have two minutes.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I will turn it over to Mr. Lapointe.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Wilson, I am one of those Canadians who watch bobsleigh racing on the edge of my chair and then up on my feet as they reach the finish line. These are great athletes, but they are taking huge risks. It is a dangerous sport. We have had some tragic accidents in the past. People have unfortunately slid off the track, including one who hit a pole that some people said at the time should not have been there.

What is the environment like with respect to safety? What do we do if one of these wonderful athletes goes off the track or gets hurt in Sochi? Do you think it is being organized quite safely? Has anyone looked into why there was a pole in the wrong place at one point? Has the safety of the athletes been taken into consideration in building the structures? Would an athlete who suffers a major concussion have access to highly specialized care quickly in Sochi? Have safety measures been put in place for these various aspects?

● (0915)

[English]

Mr. Don Wilson: The short answer would be yes.

That's one of the things the COC has been absolutely magnificent at. They've been over to Russia countless times to check out the medical opportunities or support services. That would be the first thing our people have done as well. We've been there twice.

The particular instance that you're referring to was at one of the very first and oldest German tracks, Altenberg. The problem there was that most of the tracks, as it sits today, use, for the sake of discussion, puck board, so when a sled goes out of control and goes up, which this one did, it would normally be forced back down. In that particular instance, they have wood, and at 150 kilometres an hour, a 325 kilogram object going in that direction, it went through.

We don't have any concerns at all with the quality of the tracks that are now built in the world for that type of instance. We're very comfortable that the medical support that will be supplied for the Olympics will be excellent.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Dion, you have seven minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Mr. Lyon, Mr. Judge, and Mr. Wilson, thank you very much for being with us today.

I'd like to discuss Sochi with you first, and then look at what will happen after Sochi. Sochi will be coming in the coming weeks. Is there something you would like this committee to recommend to the government for Sochi, or would you say that the cake is baked now?

Mr. Judge, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Lyon, in that order.

Mr. Peter Judge: I'm sorry, just for clarification, are you talking about athletic preparation, or—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm talking about athletic preparation, anything that may happen in Sochi. Would you say there is a need for more government help, or would you say that everything is settled?

Mr. Peter Judge: I would say that everything is well in hand. I think the investment that this government has made is sound, and that all the different entities, Sport Canada, OTP, and all the others, have done a phenomenal job at preparing in each of their silos. I think the national sport organization has done that as well.

We knew what we were getting into. When we were preparing for Sochi, we knew it was going to be a difficult or interesting environment. The COC has been vigilant about ensuring that familiarization takes place, as have the components of the NSO. I would say that at this point there's not a lot that can be done.

I guess one of the biggest concerns is what might happen over there. My understanding is that the Canadian security detail has this well in hand and has a very good relationship with the Russians. I take great comfort in this.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Don Wilson: Certainly, from a point of view of athletic preparation, the cake is baked.

From a government point of view, visas represent the largest non-athletic issue. I don't know whether government interaction can make that faster and easier for us and for the parents. We're waiting for certain numbers to come back, and the parents are on the edge of

their seats. They want their child to make it through, and they don't know if they're going to be able to get to Sochi. That type of support would be very helpful.

My final point is that certain things seem to happen in Russia that you just don't understand. The safety of our Canadian athletes, families, and coaches is paramount.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Lyon, do you have any specific requests for the coming weeks, or would you say that everything is well handled?

Mr. Curtis Lyon: I think we've prepared our athletes as best we can with the money we have available. We had a significant hole in our budget this year from the lack of Own the Podium funding. I wouldn't sit here and say that more money wouldn't help quite a bit, but the athletes are on a specific path to where they need to be, and we feel that's very solid. At the same time, with our NSO, there are a few things at the tip of the iceberg that we could still put in place between now and Sochi, but I feel that the path we put the athletes on has been very sound. Still, there are some holes in the budget for this season.

● (0920)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay, thank you.

After Sochi, we need to keep the momentum. You will know which countries you're competing with. You know the experience after Vancouver.

Do you have specific recommendations for the federal government that you would like to express today?

Mr. Peter Judge: We know for sure in the business plan that increasing the gene pool, having a larger number of bodies in the hopper, is our most critical shortage right now. In order for us to have long-term success, we need to have more athletes in the system. I think there are a number of different ways we can do that, and they vary quite widely.

This is a Canadian issue. We don't really have a venue where you can watch Canadian amateur sport right now. Some of the networks pick up bits and pieces of it, but we need a reliable source for viewing, like Eurosport in Europe, where you can watch all the amateur sports. Through that, you develop followings, and then you can draw more people out. I think that would be something the government could do great good with.

I think we have to make investments at the bottom, at the grassroots level, into the NSO and into programming. We might see investment in gymnastics and track and field that pays dividends in bobsleigh and freestyle skiing. I think we have to look at a number of different investments in order to try to create that larger gene pool.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Don Wilson: I would say coaches. Peter referred to athletes, but they need to have the right people putting them forward. The support of the Canadian coaching program is essential.

It needs to be a profession. It needs to be individuals who don't run away to Russia because they can make more money. It's people who stay here, believe in the country, and want to see the next generation go through.

In terms of operations, I know we have two legacy areas. For us it's Calgary and Whistler. We need to ensure that these facilities continue. I don't think we need new ones. I don't expect anybody to build a \$150-million bobsleigh track in the east of Canada. We just need the operations and the continuation of the current facilities to be very good.

As a parent of two kids—one's a freestyler—I love the tax credit I get from it, but my child would be in the sport whether I had a tax credit or not. I know that for all of the sports, we want to rely on and we need to rely on government funding, but corporate donations are essential for sport. If the federal government can give strong consideration to how we can have the corporate community come and give us support financially so that we have the 3P opportunity to be able to generate more money inside sport, much like the U.S., I think that would be very useful.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Leung, for seven minutes.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Not being a participant in any of your sports, to me they seem to be fairly high risk. About the only thing I do that is high risk is scuba diving and also a bit of alpine skiing.

I'm sure in Sochi the technical facilities are all there. What I want to know is what happens if an athlete sustains an injury? What is the triage to ensure their safety? If the injury is just a sprain or a minor injury, you can probably treat it on site, but what happens if there's a compound fracture? What happens if there is a spinal cord injury? What is the process to get them out of Sochi to get the best medical attention available?

We'll start with Mr. Judge, please.

Mr. Peter Judge: As Mr. Wilson discussed earlier, one of the Canadian Olympic Committee's beachhead pieces that they have to deal with is to ensure that athletes have the utmost in medical care and safety. Part of that is to ensure and to verify that what goes on, on the ground, on the venue, is done to what we would consider to be exceptional standards.

The other part of it is making sure that Canadian athletes have the best Canadian help there. They go to great pains to ensure that we have our own doctors, our own physiotherapists, our own medical experts there, to deal not only with traumatic issues but with, as you said, issues that could just affect performance as well.

• (0925)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Would our team doctors have access to Russian hospital facilities?

Mr. Peter Judge: Within certain parameters, yes, they would. Obviously there are always certain protocols around medical facilities or around evacuation from the hill, let's say. There's certain protocol as to whether or not they can be involved in certain aspects, but I don't think we've ever seen an issue where they have been excluded to the point of not being able to be on the inside of the information circle.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: What contingency plans are in place for evacuation, if necessary?

Mr. Peter Judge: To be honest, I don't know exactly what those detailed plans are. The Canadian Olympic Committee would have more information on exactly what those detailed plans are.

I know from our own standpoint, though, that when we go in to do our own events as a national sport organization—we had a World Cup there last year, a European Cup the year before—a medical evacuation plan is undertaken by our insurance policy. Athletes can be flown out within a very short period of time, if it's necessary. That option certainly exists.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Wilson, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Don Wilson: I don't think I could add anything to what Mr. Judge said.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Okay.

What about you, Mr. Lyon? I mean, it seems to me that hurtling 60 to 70 metres through the sky and then landing would be a pretty difficult thing for most human beings.

I guess you don't have anything to add on how you can medically evacuate a person.

Mr. Curtis Lyon: No. We're very confident in the COC and the preparations they've made. Also, with our insurance through the CSA and the organizations in Canada, we're very confident in the operations over there and the preparations we've made.

Peter explained it very well.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: My next question centres around the unfortunate event in Vancouver where the athlete from Ukraine met with a fatal accident. Who provides the insurance for this type of thing? Is it Sochi? Is it the IOC or the COC that will provide insurance for a fatality or someone being turned into a quadriplegic?

Mr. Peter Judge: To be honest, I have no idea.

Mr. Don Wilson: In fairness, obviously, the organizing committee would have a substantial liability program. Each one of the NSOs has substantial liability programs, as does the COC.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Is that the same for ski jumping, Mr. Lyon?

Mr. Curtis Lyon: Yes, it is the same for ski jumping.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: In many ways, the athletes are then entering these sports at their own risk other than what the organization provides them with in regard to training and medical attention. That small incident of a critical injury is really at their risk. Is that correct?

Mr. Peter Judge: I'm sorry, I'll qualify what I said before in terms of "I have no idea". What I meant was I don't know the tumble-down of subjugation. In the insurance world, subjugation is the way things operate.

There's never a single liability. There is always liability of one party against another against another against another. Where that falls in terms of percentages, again, I don't have any idea.

I know at games even at the level of world cups and continental cups there are significant insurance undertakings. Whether you're the organizer of a NorAm mogul event or whether you're running a World Cup bobsleigh event, there are levels and layers of insurance that go through and ensure there is coverage. It is there. I just don't know exactly what the structure and mechanics of that are.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Is it more a commercial insurance body that would look after it, which the COC would purchase or which your particular organization would purchase?

Mr. Peter Judge: It would be all of those, yes. The national sport organization would have some. The COC would have some. The IOC or the organizing committee would have some.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: This is my last question. Can you share with us how we can attract more corporate sponsorship in this area? I won't say it's a fringe type of sport, but it's certainly not the mainstream as in hockey or as in alpine and cross-country skiing. How do we attract more corporate sponsorship?

● (0930)

Mr. Peter Judge: That's the pick a number \$50-million question.

Own the Podium, in the beginning, in the partnership that it undertook between the Government of Canada, the corporate entity, and VANOC produced something that was significant and quite unique. It is possible to recreate that. We just have to find the way and what that mechanism is. I don't know whether it's creating greater tax credits for companies or what exactly it is we can do to try to stimulate that allure.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move to Mr. Nantel for about four minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I think that Mr. Leung is being too modest. With respect to risky activities, he also makes the House of Commons staff sing when he plays the bagpipes. That is risky, but I congratulate him.

I would like to come back to something you said a little earlier, Mr. Wilson. You talked about attracting private sponsors and so on. You said that you had to run after all the kids who go really fast on their toboggans. Clearly, the visibility of certain sports is an issue. That information is relevant for a committee like this one.

On a number of occasions, and even here today, we have heard the expression

[English]

“the cake is baked”.

[Translation]

Where Sochi is concerned, the cake is baked. Mr. Lyon, Mr. Judge and Mr. Wilson, thank you for being here to share this information with us.

Mr. Judge, I also noted that when you knew that the next games were going to take place in Sochi, you took the trouble to go there in order to be prepared. That is interesting, because I think that in order to be prepared and get where you are going on time,

[English]

timing is everything,

[Translation]

Visibility is also an issue. You alluded to that fact.

In that connection, I would point out that public meetings like this one are rare. So I want to take advantage of the fact that this meeting is public in order to call for a vote on the motion that I introduced last week. The motion is to have Mr. Blais, from the CRTC, appear before the committee on February 7, 2014. Time goes quickly, and since our next meeting will not be until February, if we want to give the clerk enough time to invite Mr. Blais, I would like the committee to vote on this motion that I presented last week. As you can understand, our being televised here has a direct connection with your point about visibility in sports. I would therefore call for a vote on my motion.

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Emma-Leigh Boucher): Are we doing a recorded vote on the motion?

The Chair: Yes. He first needs to read the motion.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): He's out of order. He has called a vote—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I can read the motion:

That the Committee invite the President of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to appear before February 7th, 2014 for a two-hour televised session to present the Commission's approach to the future of Canadian television to the Committee, including measures taken to solicit Canadians' participation in the “Parlons Télé” consultation.

The Chair: Is there any debate on this?

An hon. member: Call the question.

The Chair: Okay. We'll proceed with the vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: I'd like to thank our witnesses for contributing to our study.

We will briefly suspend as we bring in our next panel.

● (0930)

(Pause)

● (0935)

The Chair: We will start up the meeting again.

We have two witnesses: Canadian Olympic gold medallist Katie Weatherston, and from the National Hockey League Players' Association, Robert Zamuner. If I remember right, he was pretty handy on the face-off.

Katie Weatherston, we'll start with you for 10 minutes.

● (0940)

Ms. Katie Weatherston (Olympic Gold Medalist, As an Individual): I brought notes, but I'm just going to talk, I guess.

I'd like to thank Rick for inviting me here. It's a pleasure to be here. Usually we speak in schools, so I'm not used to this.

My name is Katie Weatherston. I'm 30 years old. I played on the women's Olympic ice hockey team in 2006. We won gold in Turin, Italy. I brought the medal to show you guys today if you'd like to see it. I won gold as well in the world championships in 2007 in Canada. It was great to win gold in my home country. We won silver in 2008 in China. I will quickly show you this to get you excited about sports. It's pretty big. It's heavy. The 2010 one was a little bit bigger, but ours is pretty unique with a hole in the middle.

As for my story I was pretty fortunate because I got to play hockey in Canada. It's our national sport. We were pretty well taken care of by Hockey Canada. We were not as well taken care of as the men were, of course, which kind of annoyed us at times—no offence. We always had our flights, our meals, and all of our equipment covered. While we were with Team Canada all of our physio and training expenses were covered as well. Those are the two biggest things for an athlete: having full time to dedicate to our sport to train, and with that comes money, because we cannot work; and the other big one, especially for me, was the number of injuries I sustained and keeping my body physically fit and healthy. Those are two big things that I think you guys should focus on and work towards helping athletes with.

With hockey it's a little bit different, because we usually train in our cities. We'll train in the city for the entire year and play on local club teams. Club hockey in Canada is not that great once you're out of university. We'll meet five times during the year for three training camps and two major competitions. We're really only together about seven weeks of the year. It's a little bit different from the way some of the other athletes are constantly on the road and travelling.

I asked a few of the other athletes what they thought I should tell you guys today. One suggestion was to focus on more in-house training. There are a bunch of satellite training centres, but for us to have a big centre in Ottawa would be great. We have one in Toronto, one in Montreal, and one in Calgary. I don't think we have enough.

The other thing I think we could do a better job at is partnerships. We definitely need more medical coverage. It's a bit of a soft spot with me because my career ended in December 2008 due to a severe concussion. I was given my carding money, \$1,500 for the rest of the year. We also got \$500 from Quest for Gold. That made a total of \$2,000, tax-free, that we were getting. I had no support after that.

Being an athlete and getting injured on the job left me with no medical coverage. I'm sure there are not as many people in my situation, but it has been pretty hard trying to come up with the funds to pay my medical bills. Dental plans and health benefits are huge. We need physiotherapy, chiropractic, and all that stuff to be good athletes.

Funding is pretty good at \$2,000 a month, but it could be a little bit better. That's what I think you guys can do better. That funding is great. It definitely helped me when I was a rookie trying to train for the Olympics in 2006. We moved to Calgary. In Olympic years we move and train for about eight months straight. We were by far the best prepared country, and I think that's why we won. We trained longer than any other team did. The U.S. quickly followed suit, but we still beat them in 2010. I'm sure we will beat them in Russia again.

That's all I have to say.

Thank you for inviting me here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Zamuner.

Mr. Robert Zamuner (Divisional Player Representative, National Hockey League Players' Association): Thank you very much for having me here today. It's an honour to talk to this committee.

First, I'd like to congratulate Katie. I know she gave me a little shot before. In 1998, I learned to appreciate what the women's team went through: the dedication, the hard work, the sacrifice they made. We went to their gold medal game and supported them. Congratulations to them. I'm jealous. I wish I had one of those medals. It's a testament to you. You make Canada proud. The history of the Canadians' program is outstanding, so congratulations.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: Thanks very much.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I think I'm a little different. Obviously, being an NHL player, I come from a different angle. Wayne Gretzky, a teammate of mine in Nagano, said that hockey had given him everything, and it's very true.

When I think about it in my own way, I went to Guelph and played junior hockey for the Guelph Platers. I met my wife there, and had three kids. I've travelled the world. I've met some amazing people. I've had the great honour of representing Canada and having that maple leaf on my jersey. It's very difficult to articulate. Katie's had that opportunity. I played in 1997 and won the world championship in Helsinki. In 1998 I was in Switzerland and then in Nagano—probably the greatest professional moment of my life and also the biggest disappointment in the sense that with Canada if you don't win gold in hockey, it's a disappointment.

Something that I take more from being on that hockey team was being a Canadian, and part of that experience in Nagano was absolutely amazing. Two moments stick out for me.

If you recall, Roots had outfitted us all in these red and white uniforms with the poor boy hats. We were quite distinguishable. Obviously, we're big guys and we had these uniforms on, but I'll never forget. Keith Primeau, who's about six feet five inches tall, and I wanted to go down to the city of Nagano, just to see the local sites. You can imagine the two of us in the train. Just like in the movies, you think there's no room for one or two more people and 30 or 40 more local Japanese jump on this train and we're all tight in and you've got Keith and me looking over everybody, and no exaggeration, people were literally poking us and saying, "Canada, Canada," and smiling at us. I get emotional about it because I'd never felt so patriotic. Walking through the village at Nagano people were stopping us and taking pictures of us. They didn't know I was Rob Zamuner, the NHL hockey player; they thought of me as a Canadian. That's what I found was amazing.

The second moment from that Olympics that I recall and which sticks with me is the closing ceremonies. As I said, we didn't win gold—the Czechs had this guy named Dominik Hašek who was insanely good. We had a team meeting after we lost that semi-final game against the Czechs. It was quite remarkable. Wayne Gretzky said, "Listen. We're Canadians. Let's go to the closing ceremonies and represent our country." We had the choice of going back and joining our NHL teams and getting the NHL season back under way, but we all decided to stay and attend the closing ceremonies. It was an amazing night. I still remember us all walking into the stadium with our uniforms, fireworks, the long two- or three-hour ceremony. At the end, one of the Canadian athletes had snuck in a big flag. I don't know how he snuck in this flag because it was the size of a football field; it was massive.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: They do it every year.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Is it every year? Okay, there you go. We were not aware of it.

All the Canadian athletes started waving this flag and an amazing thing happened. All the athletes from the different countries swarmed the Canadian flag and started grabbing the flag and waving it with us because they wanted to be part of our team. It was just incredible.

I think what I'm trying to say here is, when we talk about Katie and we talk about the challenges that the athletes have, funding is obviously an issue. For us it's a little different. About 14 years ago, we, at the NHL Players' Association, established a goals and dreams fund. Mike Gartner and Adam Graves and a bunch of us wanted to give back to grassroots hockey.

● (0945)

The gentleman who presented before us talked about grassroots. That's very important, obviously, in sport. Over the last 12 or 13 years, we've given hockey equipment to over 60,000 kids around the world. That's coming personally from NHL players, from those who played 12 or 13 years ago and from present-day players.

For the 10th anniversary, P.J. Stock, who's on *Hockey Night in Canada* and was my teammate with the Boston Bruins, Devin Smith, and I travelled around. We went to Bosnia, to Moscow, to Sweden, just to give the gift of hockey equipment and sport, for kids to be

active. I hope that one day one of those participants will be in the Olympics and have the opportunity that Katie and I also had.

In closing, I'd like to say that what Katie talks about with the funding and the grassroots is something that I'd encourage everyone in this room to be creative about to try to help our athletes, because our standing internationally is quite remarkable, and to have that experience to be proud of—not being part of the hockey team, but being part of Team Canada—is quite remarkable.

I thank you for your time. I very much appreciate it.

● (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Young for seven minutes.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today and coming all the way from Oakville. I just had to get that on the record. It's my riding, so thank you.

Thank you for being here as well, Katie, and for telling your story. It's a very important story.

With regard to injuries in sport, concussions are, as we've heard, life-changing events. We also know that they're not always an accident.

I just wanted to ask you, Robert, have you done any analysis into the frequency of concussions at the NHL level and trends you may have witnessed?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Actually, ironically, I've been part of a joint concussion working group with the NHL and the NHL Players' Association. I represent the players, obviously, and I've been on that committee for approximately the last five years.

The program has been around since 1997. As for what we do, we look at the mechanism of the injury, the recovery times, and the return-to-play protocols. It's obviously very important to us as an association to make sure that the well-being of our players is taken care of. It's an ongoing challenge, if you will.

On rule 48, two years ago we changed the rule to try to make the game safer. You acquire all this information. You acquire how these injuries happen, and you try to figure out how you keep the integrity of the game and try to make it safer.

I don't know if I've answered your question.

Mr. Terence Young: You answered it, but I would like to follow up a little bit. How do you communicate the issue? How do you address the issue with the players themselves?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Right now, we're actually in the process of doing what we do every fall. We meet with all 30 teams. I met with three teams last week. We actually have a doctor come and present for about 20 minutes. Our meeting is about two hours long. We dedicate that whole 20 minutes to it. We have three doctors who work with us: Dr. Rizos, who consults with us, Dr. Kutcher, and Dr. Comper. Those three are available for our players 24-7.

It's a constant educational thing that we do. We talk to our players. It's a big part of it. You can imagine that hockey is this big tough sport, and your jobs are on the line, so we're trying to tell the guys that there's time after their hockey career.... I think the awareness is much better, but I think we still need to improve on that.

Every time we get a chance, we get the doctors in front of the guys without any distractions, without the GMs, the coaches, or the media, in a meeting room similar to this one. We have 25 Montreal Canadiens and the doctor, Don Fehr, and me in the room, so we have their undivided attention.

Mr. Terence Young: Do you have any ideas on how concussions can be reduced at the lower levels of the game?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: You're nodding your head, Katie. Do you want to take this?

Ms. Katie Weatherston: Yes.

Mr. Terence Young: That would be great if you want to reply. Thanks, Katie.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: My case is actually really sad. It has been life changing. I've suffered from severe depression. I still can't exercise to this day. I've had headaches for almost five years straight.

I don't think people know how serious it is, because you look like a functioning human being. It's pretty tough when you're a tough hockey player, and here you are with depression and a bunch of other things going on in your personal life and you can't play your sport anymore.

Going back to the camp in September 2006, I got hit from behind and went headfirst into the boards. I kept playing, and between periods—this is in 2006, which is not that long ago—I approached a Team Canada doctor and I said to her, “I got hit pretty hard; I just want to make sure I'm okay.” One of my teammates said to get the doctor to look at me.

She did her concussion tests, put me back in the game, and I got two more hits to the head. I got second-impact syndrome, third-impact syndrome, and that changed the rest of my life, basically. I went home and I ended up in the hospital the next day. Often your symptoms will not come out for a few days; your worst symptoms come out two days later.

In my mind, when you see a head impact like that, it should be automatic removal from the game. I like this whole darkroom concept.

If you get hit again, you are in real trouble. I don't think people understand that. I run hockey camps with kids, so I'm on the ice all the time with little kids. They're falling back and hitting their heads, and you have to remove them. They're not going to know until the next day.

● (0955)

Mr. Terence Young: Have the other levels of the game adopted that method, or not?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: For example, in Oakville, they have now implemented impact testing. I believe they did that three years ago. That's a baseline. If a child is injured, it's one of the tools that the doctor, or whoever is treating that athlete, can use.

I think it's also a culture thing and we have to change that. If during a game on January 27 on a Thursday night, a kid has bumped his head or something like that, who cares if he plays for the rest of the game? If they're hurt, take them off the ice. It's not going to hurt their career if they miss the rest of the game.

I think it's changing. I really do. I think the awareness is there. They moved the hitting age this past year up to bantam—that's when they introduce it—and I'm sure that's going to be looked at again in house league. House league is the base. You're always going to have your elite programs and your rep programs, where it's a bit of a different animal, but the house league is where you build the base and you have your adult non-contact leagues. That's what we need to foster. We need to grow that.

We don't want kids, when they're 15 years old or 16 years old, leaving the game of hockey. We want them to stay in hockey.

I think we have to concentrate on that house league and build the base of it. It's recreational. It's someone being active, and it's a great social thing too. We have to be very careful with that.

Mr. Terence Young: Robert, in your association, you help your members prepare for retirement and to have a good healthy career.

Would you mind sharing your candid view on the practice of having enforcers on hockey teams? I read that some enforcers regret the way they spent their career. They were known as the tough guy, and they suffer for it later in life, in retirement.

The Chair: A quick answer on that, please.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Okay.

Again, I think with this concussion working group, it's constantly looking at different ways of making the game safer.

The Chair: We're going to move to Ms. Mathysen for seven minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much.

It's truly an honour, a treat, to meet you today.

I thank you for being so candid about the issue of aggressive playing and violence in hockey.

In regard to that, we hear a great deal of debate at the professional level. Does the leadership of hockey at that professional level need to step back? Have we forgotten about the beauty of the game?

I've heard former NHL players, professional players, talk about the fact that when they grew up, they were on the pond and nobody came at them from behind. There was respect on the ice.

In terms of that leadership, do we have to get away from "rock'em sock'em" hockey?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: It's a different conversation when you're talking about house league hockey or rep hockey than it is when you're talking about the NHL game and the professional game. We have to be careful not to blend them together. I can't make the argument that the young kids don't try to emulate the professionals. I understand that. But they're adults, and I think it's a different conversation.

When it comes to youth hockey, I think that's where we really have to focus on all those issues you brought up. I think I can speak for Hockey Canada on what I see. I have two young children who are in the system, and I think Hockey Canada does a great job. I think it's always something they have to get better at. You can't be satisfied with it. We're much more aware of concussions now. The hitting has been eliminated under the bantam age. As I said before, maybe that's something that Hockey Canada or all the stakeholders would look at again to see if it's something they want to raise again.

• (1000)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Katie, when you began you talked about the funding difference between the men's and women's team. I wonder if you could expand on that. Exactly how different is it?

Ms. Katie Weatherston: We don't know what Hockey Canada gives them, because most of them are NHL players so they're making a pretty good salary. We very well could be paid more than they are by Hockey Canada; I'm not sure. I just know that in my experience and from talking to some of the other girls, it was more like they'd go out for fine steaks, and we'd be going to Kelsey's. You know what I mean? It was more about things like that.

I guess it comes with the territory. They bring in more money than we do. We do realize that as well.

Female hockey players are always going to be a little bitter, because we put in the same amount of effort, the same amount of hard work, and we don't get the funding. We don't really even have a professional women's hockey league here. Playing after university was very tough for me. There's nowhere to play. You only look forward to those seven weeks of the year when you're with your team, and it's often red-white games in which you're getting your best competition, 40 people at a training camp, Team Canada versus Team Canada or U.S. We're in a tougher situation, and obviously most girls also have to have jobs back home.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You talked about the need for another hockey centre. I was listening to a CBC program on Saturday or Sunday. I love the CBC. They're very good about the Canadian reality. The discussion was in regard to the cost to families of getting those boys and girls to the rink, along with the ice time and the equipment. For a lot of families that was a significant deterrent, as

was the travelling, just having to travel around the province or even internationally. The comment from those who were discussing this was that we need more public arenas, and that hockey has become so privatized that private investors are reaping incredible profits from arenas.

Would you concur? Do we need more government and community investment in arenas and in facilities, so that kids can actually get out there without begging their families?

Ms. Katie Weatherston: Yes. In every city I know, ice is scarce. I know that a lot of organizations for females are saying, "You know, we started later than the boys did, and we're having a hard time securing more ice. It's not fair." We definitely could use more arenas for just our youth and grassroots programs.

I'm also talking about national sports centres. We need more national sports centres across Canada. An athlete said to me this morning, "Katie, having to travel just to go and train, or having to move away from home is a really big sacrifice when you're not really making any money." It would keep the costs down for the national sports associations too.

Having a centre right here in Ottawa where all different disciplines could train and you'd be with other Canadian athletes would motivate you to do better. You're going to learn from other athletes, not just those in one sport. It brings community to us as Canadian athletes. Then we also have the junior kids training with us. I think that needs to be a really big focus. I know it's easier said than done.

There are also other little things, such as health benefits. That's a huge one. I have a private health benefit plan right now that's terrible, but that was the only option there was for me. When we played on Team Canada, we also had food cards, so teaming up with a place like Metro or Superstore.... I think there are a few simple things that could be done, which are just a few phone calls away. I think in Canada we're a very proud country and we really support our athletes as a whole, so I wonder when we are going to take that next step and everyone is going to get on board and help these athletes who aren't making much money, who have to raise funds themselves, and who are not getting many sponsorship deals.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Does it jeopardize the future of the game, particularly with regard to girls, to not have that support?

Ms. Katie Weatherston: I don't know whether it jeopardizes the sport. It just makes life damned hard. That's the bottom line. We're working. We're training. There is no wasted time. I was at school and working at a job. I was playing hockey and going to an Ivy League school. I was also going away to Team Canada training camps. You have to learn good time management, I guess.

For sure, you will see our careers.... Also on the length of one's career, there have been a few girls on my hockey team who have retired early due to injuries. You will see the length of careers also extend. People are drained going to work and going to train. It's not the ideal situation.

We do need to put more money into our junior national team programs, because those are the kids who are really suffering. If you're one of the top female athletes in the world, you're going to get those private sponsorship deals, but it's the ones who are just below that level or just about to make it there who are really scraping by and having a hard time getting that funding.

•(1005)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dion, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for being with us, both of you.

How aware are you of the preparation for Sochi? Is there something you would like to point out to this committee, or as much as you understand it, is everything well done, and let's go for Sochi?

Ms. Katie Weatherston: Every year we're getting better and better. I don't know as much about what's going on in Sochi because I've been removed from the sport for five years. Definitely, having the Olympics in Canada—look at our showing, the motivation of being in our home country and never winning a gold medal on home soil, just how much better we've done every year.... Based on our medal count, if you look at how much better we're getting, especially in the Winter Olympics, we're going to be looking really good in Sochi. Our winter programs seem to be moving in a good direction.

I don't know if you want to add something.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Our members are extremely excited. We have members on all eight teams, and it's going to be an amazing experience. I went to Sochi about 12 months ago, and it's a fascinating place. The village is going to be tremendous, and it's going to be a wonderful event. Obviously the Russians on home soil are going to be tough to beat.

We have been part of making sure that the medical facilities are there. We have doctors there this week, actually as we speak, checking all the facilities out.

It's going to be an exciting event, that's for sure.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: On the relationship between the NHL and the national teams, is it optimal or do you have suggestions to improve it?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I can't speak for the NHL teams, but I can speak for the players. Obviously, the Olympics is something very dear to their hearts, and we have members from many different countries. International hockey is something that's on the top of their list. We know that for the growth of sport, hockey in particular, we need other countries to develop their programs so that we have more than seven or eight countries that have a chance for gold.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay, there is no uncertainty between the NHL and the Olympic teams.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I don't know if I understand your question, Mr. Dion. I apologize.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: We are always afraid that one day the NHL will say, "We don't want to interrupt our calendar. We want to keep our players." There seem to be some difficulties there, but maybe I'm wrong, and that would be good news.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Again, I'm not in on those conversations. Those are league conversations with the 30 owners.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay.

Has the status of women's hockey in the Olympics solidified, or are you concerned that there are not enough countries that are competitive? We hear once in a while that maybe there are some uncertainties there.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: For sure, the sad part is that it's a two-team sport right now. Finland was in there for a while, and Sweden. A few other countries are starting to make a move, as is Russia because they are hosting it, but the sad part is that the other countries are not funded. These players are not playing for that long because they start families or they want to move on to other things. Funding is a huge issue in women's hockey in other countries.

As I said, we train harder and longer than any other country, and it shows when we play, but I still think a Canada-U.S. final at the Olympic Games is worth having women's hockey in the Olympics. For some sports it's a few seconds down a hill. You go through trials and heats, and what it really comes down to is that final race or that final game. I really don't see it as different from other sports, but I'm sure I'm biased.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I will make some comments in French, since we are talking about hockey. After all, it is the sport of Jean Béliveau.

I am very concerned about the headaches you have had. I think that many parents will be increasingly...

•(1010)

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Weatherston: Oh, there's translation. I'm new to this.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: As I said, it's the game and language of Jean Béliveau and Guy Lafleur, and so on, so I need to use it.

[*Translation*]

With respect to concussions, my concern is that more and more parents will be worried about letting their children play our national sport. I know that we have already talked about this, but I think that this may be a major crisis for this sport, as well as for football. I may be off the mark here, but I have the impression that—and I haven't studied this issue—there are fewer serious injuries on the larger European ice surfaces because players have more room to move around and it is therefore less dangerous. Is that your impression as well, or is this something that I just dreamed up and that has no basis?

[English]

Mr. Robert Zamuner: When you talk about the international game, their rinks obviously are bigger. There are studies that are out to look at the number of injuries that have occurred with a bigger rink. There's no doubt that the NHL players are getting bigger, faster, and stronger. There are new buildings that are going to be built in the future and it's something that.... We have a competition committee that's a joint committee between the NHL Players' Association and the NHL and that is actually one of the topics that has come up: the size of the rink and does it make the game safer. Everything about the game is being looked at.

We also have an equipment subcommittee that is headed by Mathieu Schneider and Brendan Shanahan. They're looking at all equipment. They're looking at the skates. They're looking at the shoulder pads. They're looking at helmets. They're looking at everything in terms of how you make the game safer.

For example, shoulder pads are getting bigger and material is getting harder. We're looking at maybe making the shoulder pads smaller. It's counterintuitive. You think that if you make things smaller, it makes it less safe, but the thing is, they're almost as—

A voice: —important.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Yes, exactly.

These are all things that we're looking at, the rink size, the equipment, and just where these concussions or injuries are happening. It's something that is constantly being looked at.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: If you would like me to add to that, as I said, I always think there is room for improvement with concussions. I do think the NHLPA has to really talk to the NHL, too, because the kids are watching them and that's where the message has to come from. The whole idea of the black room is a great idea but I think it should be you're removed from a game and monitored, and you're not allowed to do physical activity for at least 24 hours.

I know that in my experience it's ruined my life, so I have strong opinions on that.

I see it every day. Parents tell their kids, "She's faking it. She complains all the time." Kids don't know so you can't really.... The way I approach a kid is that you can't lead them into saying they have a concussion. It's a very careful protocol you have to go through with them; balancing on one foot, following the hand...I'm sure doctors might disagree, but that only goes so far. I passed every concussion test. I passed the baseline impact test six times, and I still could not play because when I walked up the stairs, I got a head rush, a hot head.

It's hard to see the symptoms of a concussion. There are certain questions you have to ask.

The Chair: Thank you. We're going to have to move on to our next questioner, and that will be Mr. Dykstra and Mr. Richards, who I believe are going to share seven minutes.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to touch on a couple of things. One is the obvious question, what do you think of our teams' chances both in women's hockey and obviously in men's hockey to win a gold at Sochi?

Ms. Katie Weatherston: We're going to win.

Mr. Robert Zamuner: It's a great tournament and it's one game elimination and anything can happen. It's water cooler talk as to who is on the team and who is not on the team, but Bob Nicholson and Steve Yzerman and their staff have a tremendous task at hand trying to put together a team, and I like their chances.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: The follow-up to that is, in terms of support, going back to 2006 and prior to that with you, Rob, obviously to 1998, what do you think of the federal government's involvement in this process of supporting our athletes?

We've had almost all areas of sport covered at committee here and you're the last two witnesses to present. I wonder what you think of, or if you have any comments on, the federal government's involvement in this process and how it's improved over the last number of Olympics.

• (1015)

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I can't speak so much about that. I think hockey is a little different, as I mentioned before. I have tremendous respect for Katie and her teammates. For the other sports, anything we can do to help the athletes....

My experience in 1998, Rick, was tremendous. I don't know what it was like for you in Torino, but in the village, there was an area where the Canadian athletes could watch the feed of all the events. I know that every time Peter Lueders, the bobsledder, or whoever went out to their competition, everybody was in that room. We were all cheering him on. As I mentioned before, it's seeing it first-hand, the commitment, the pride, and everything that goes with it. I don't know their world. I can't imagine how difficult it is.

I'll let Katie speak to that.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: As I said, more funding is needed, especially right before Olympic year, because a lot of athletes are into full-time training. You can't do anything else the year before an Olympics. We're lucky that we relocate to Calgary and Hockey Canada covers our food and living expenses. If anything, the federal government could focus on the year before the Olympics to make sure those athletes can train 100% and be focused. That's a huge year for us as athletes.

It's very tough. What you guys don't know, you don't see the stuff going on behind the scenes, where it's December 20 and there are 27 girls on the national team and by the end of the day, there are only 20. For seven people their season and Olympics dreams end right there. Other athletes don't have their finals until the new year. It's a very stressful time for athletes because they don't know who is going where.

The federal government definitely can help alleviate the financial stress. They could assist with the medical attention these athletes need. The year before the Olympics your body is taking a beating and you're trying to compete for a spot. I always tell people the Olympics was a breeze. Winning a gold medal is nothing. The most challenging thing in my life was getting on that Olympic team. I think that's what most athletes will tell you as well.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I'm going to turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Richards.

One of the pieces I think he may touch on is the whole idea of the corporate world assisting in a much stronger and greater way. In the United States, the federal government doesn't engage itself in terms of support. It's all corporate. We have kind of a half-system here. I know he's probably going to ask those questions. I'm going to turn the time over to him.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Maybe I will, maybe I won't. We'll just see.

I think the real question everyone wants to know, and I'm not going to actually ask it, Mr. Zamuner, because you played on the '98 team, but the question everyone always wants to know is why was Wayne Gretzky sitting on the bench in that shoot-out?

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I'm not going to answer that. I am asked it often. I wish I had a dollar for every time I am asked that question.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sure you have been asked it a few times. I know you're not the person who can answer that question anyway.

What I would actually like to ask relates somewhat to the corporate sponsorships that Mr. Dykstra had mentioned. It is a two-part question. I'll ask it to both of you.

We've had a lot of the other sport organizations here prior to your being here. I don't think any of them actually mentioned it to us here at the committee, but I'm sure they were thinking about it.

I come from the Calgary area. Canmore is in my riding. A lot of the sports organizations and the training facilities are located in my riding, or close to it, for the winter sports. I talk to and meet with those organizations and also with some of the athletes who live in my riding. Everyone always says to me that they wish they were hockey. The reason they wish they were hockey is the pool of athletes to draw from.

I know it's changing somewhat but I know when I was a kid, everyone played hockey. It was a foregone conclusion that was the sport you played. There were a few other sports available, but not that many. That's really changed over the years, I know. There's that. Obviously the support is there, and I think corporate sponsorship is there to a greater degree than it is with a lot of the other sports.

The first part of the question is this. What can other sport organizations learn from hockey? A lot of kids play hockey and obviously there are some successes. What can other sports learn about how to attract kids and keep them interested? Also, more importantly, the sponsorship that's there may not be to quite the same degree with the women's team, but certainly, what can we do as a government to help encourage...? What can other sports learn from hockey in terms of encouraging that corporate sponsorship?

The other part to the question is the flip side of my first question. Over the last number of years, we've seen more choices for kids in what sports they get involved in. I've heard now, for example, that hockey is below soccer in terms of the number of kids playing the sport. Is there something that hockey needs to learn from other sports now that there's a bit more competition for those kids? What can hockey learn from them to ensure that we continue to have a great hockey program here in Canada?

If you want to answer that from both sides, I would appreciate that.

• (1020)

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Katie Weatherston: I hear you.

It's affordability. That's why I think soccer is booming. Why is hockey booming? Because it's our national sport. We're a cold country, so I think those are the black-and-white answers. As for funding, it just comes down to who is more creative with ways to seek funding. Sprott, the gold company, gave us, what was it, \$20,000 per gold medal, as part of the CAN Fund. The CAN Fund funds every sport discipline. They don't just cover one. We have a few great private organizations that are helping to fund athletes, and they're bringing in corporate sponsors, but they're sharing it with all the athletes, so I really don't think there's tons. Maybe he would know more if hockey is doing better than others.

Oh, we're out of time.

The Chair: Thank you. We're going to have to move to Mr. Nantel, and I think he's going to share about three minutes with Monsieur Lapointe.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Time to wear these translation devices again.

[Translation]

There are certain people that we would really have liked to have heard from during our study but we were not able to. So I would like to thank Mr. Dykstra for inviting you here this morning. I hope that our analysts will be able to add the testimony from both of you, showing the best and the worst of your experience. This is the sandwich when it comes to sport.

Mr. Zamuner told us a very patriotic story about the flag. It was a time of great national pride and it is the kind of thing that we need and that should happen more often.

Ms. Weatherston, you talked about your experience and the serious problems you have had as a result of concussions. You also talked about the lack of support for athletes as they prepare for the Olympic level and the fact that there is often nothing available afterward. I want to say that this is very important testimony.

I will now hand the floor over to my colleague, Mr. Lapointe.

Mr. François Lapointe: Ms. Weatherston, you said that women receive little or no support after their Olympic career. In your case, you even had health problems and did not receive any support.

I would like to ask Mr. Zamuner a question along the same lines. Your players' association does have financial resources. On the basis purely of solidarity within the sport, have you thought of including elite women athletes in your post-career assistance programs? Is that something you might consider?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I think it's a conversation that could be had.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Zamuner: Sorry, I apologize. It's difficult. I guess I won't be a politician.

I think it's something we always talk about. We talk about the youth programs; we talk about hockey in general. One of the issues Mr. Young and I were speaking about before was the transition. It's the life or the development after hockey, because hockey lasts this long. Katie talks about it going to 30, but there are a lot of guys in the NHL whose careers are two or three years long. They're finished at 24 or 25. All you know your whole life is hockey, so transition is difficult. Both Katie and I are probably going through certain difficult things. Your life is focused on hockey.

We're in the process of looking at a program as to how we can help our current members, and the greater area of how we do this as a transition program. Those are conversations that are being held internally.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: So your association might be open to that approach. If, for example, an association of women players told you that it had too many players in difficulty after their careers ended, you might consider finding resources to help them.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Zamuner: I don't make those decisions; it's our board. We have 30 members on our board, and that can be discussed at that level.

• (1025)

The Chair: That will have to be the last word. We appreciate our witnesses who came today who represented us in hockey at the Olympics. Thank you for your contributions to our study.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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