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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 43 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 31, the committee will resume its study of women and girls in sport.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use your earpiece and select the desired channel right there.

All comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order the best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

In accordance with our routine motion, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning. This will be a difficult study. We will be discussing experiences related to abuse. This may be triggering to our viewers, our members, or our staff who have also had similar experiences. If you feel distressed or you need help, please advise the clerk.

I will let people know that there has been a bit of a change on our agenda. We'll have two panels today. We'll have our first panel now and then a second panel an hour from now.

On our first panel today, we have Myriam Da Silva Rondeau and Ciara McCormack.

We'll be providing you with some flexibility. You'll have five minutes for your opening statements, but watch me; once I start dancing up here, you'll know that the time is coming to an end.

I will now pass the floor over to Myriam.

Myriam, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for having us today.

Until very recently, I was an Olympic boxer. I won silver medals at the 2019 Pan-American Games and had 6 podium finishes at the Continental Championships. I have constantly been in the top 10 in all my years on the national team and competed in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, which were carried over to 2021, finishing in ninth place overall.

I was named to the national team in 2011. Despite finishing on the podium in my first international outing, I was welcomed with the following comment: “We can't consider developing you at your age; you're already old.” In June 2019, I received a call from the high-performance director, who told me that, based on my results, I was now eligible to be carded. However, I would have to permanently leave my team and the trainer with whom I had worked for the previous 10 years and relocate. I also had to leave my job immediately and to give him an answer within 48 hours, or else the card would be offered to someone else.

Since I'm a teacher, I negotiated a centralization that would start at the end of the school year, but he told me that I therefore wouldn't receive the full card funding. I knew that wasn't true, but I nevertheless felt pressured and somehow at fault before I even started. I tried to report the situation because that kind of incident occurs very frequently in sports federations. Unfortunately, my complaint was considered inadmissible and always will be under the new Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, the OSIC.

It was made clear to me from the moment I entered the centre that I had to work first and foremost with the team psychologist, someone I couldn't trust as a result of previous experiences and his close camaraderie with the administrative staff. Since we were required to undergo personality tests every year, I contacted various institutional resources who were there to protect the athletes and reported my concerns. They responded that those concerns were unfounded.

At the 2019 world championships, I witnessed staff members distributing prescription sleeping pills to athletes. The coach, who had a trusted relationship with all the athletes, was replaced by the high-performance director without advance notice or any explanation. The team massage therapist was also required to limit her contact with us. In response, the entire team turned to the institutional resources, and we were once again informed that our concerns were unfounded.

The integrated support team provided the administrative staff with assistance and support in the areas of communications and interpersonal relations. In other words, it wasn't their fault that they were given assistance at the expense of the athletes. That's how the system works, because no one, not even the OSIC, has the necessary authority to issue warnings or impose sanctions.

A few weeks later, our trusted coach was fired without an explanation or advance notice. You can imagine what happened when we then be appealed to the various authorities who were supposed to protect us: our complaints were ruled unfounded.

When athletes say there's no system to protect them, they aren't referring to the number of resources or programs because there are a lot of them. They mean there's no authority to hold people accountable for their actions or to impose consequences, something that's completely nonexistent in the sport system in Canada.

After two full-time years in the centralization process, I began to experience psychological exhaustion and was no longer able to protect myself. I was required, on several occasions, to participate in "test" fights against much bigger and heavier opponents. I expressed and communicated my concerns, but no action was taken.

I suffered a long dissociation episode from April to September 2021 and thus have no memory of what is supposed to be my most memorable experience: my participation in the Tokyo Olympic Games. My only memory is of a video that the new coach posted on social media following my performance. In that video, following my fight, he said that I had not met their expectations, that he felt uncomfortable as a result, that I had not seized the opportunity to win the medal that my country hadn't won in 30 years and that it was extremely embarrassing for him and for the nation.

• (1545)

Despite the complaint I officially filed with various authorities, the coach from the video of course immediately went back to his job without even apologizing to me. I was subsequently isolated from the group during training sessions. After I filed my complaint, the assistant coach and my colleagues harassed me every day for more than a month. I was ultimately forced to leave the centralization process, stripped of my card and prematurely ended my boxing career for obvious mental health reasons.

People in sport now talk about rebuilding the system. However, there can be no rebuilding unless a judicial inquiry is conducted by a third party in order to hold the people who perpetuate abuses and the current sports culture in Canada to account. Adding a system would, once again, be a temporary solution, the latest in a number of such solutions in recent years.

A commission of inquiry into the toxic culture of abuse across Canada is absolutely necessary if there's to be any possibility of building a system that enables Canadians and Canadian sport to rise to a level commensurate with their ability to achieve results and win medals. That's what we all hope for.

I want to thank the members of the committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ciara McCormack, you have the floor now for five minutes.

Ms. Ciara McCormack (As an Individual): I'm from Vancouver. I'm a long-time professional international soccer player and currently a member of PFA Canada, the first pro soccer player union in Canada.

I'm here today to share my lived experience and call for a judicial inquiry into abuse in sport in Canada.

In February 2019, I published a blog that went viral.

The Chair: Take your time, Ciara.

Ms. Ciara McCormack: It was called "A Horrific Canadian Soccer Story—The Story No One Wants to Listen to But Everyone Needs to Hear". It told the story of a giant cover-up in Canadian women's soccer—for over a decade—of a now-convicted sex offender.

In 2008, Bob Birarda was the most powerful gatekeeper in Canadian women's soccer, as the head coach above the Vancouver Whitecaps and Canada's under-20 national team. He was also an assistant coach at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He was fired for sexual misconduct against teenage players after I, and others, had reported his abusive behaviour for over a year. Both the Whitecaps and Canada Soccer covered up Birarda's October 2008 termination, presenting it publicly as a mutual parting of ways, which allowed him to go back and coach teenage girls for another 11 years.

He was suspended from coaching the day after I published my blog in February 2019. My blog detailed how, between 2008 and 2019, I and a small group of my former teammates collectively asked for help to get Birarda off the field over 30 times, to no avail. We went to the police. We wrote a letter to the Whitecaps owner, Greg Kerfoot, and two of his top executives. We plastered the soccer complex Birarda worked out of with a hotline players could call if a coach made them feel uncomfortable. We went to B.C. Soccer with a police report and a victim, and told the story and shared evidence with more members of the Canadian media than I can count. We were gaslit and harmed repeatedly, telling our traumatizing story to people in a system we were told we could trust, but instead was designed to silence us.

On a personal level, during this horrific decade I struggled with depression and suicidal ideation and felt stuck. It was heavy, dark and everything felt hard. I hated returning to my hometown of Vancouver, and I struggled to be around what I once loved the most—the sport of soccer. How does one move on when one knows there's a predator having access to young girls? How does one go about feeling mentally okay, living in a world where leaders are actively allowing this to happen?

When I hit “publish” at 8 a.m. on Monday, February 25, 2019, I was exhausted, terrified and alone. I felt broken from a system that I've since learned was designed to break me, forcing me to choose between my own safety as a whistle-blower and the safety of the teenage players Birarda remained on the field with.

After I posted my blog, it quickly went viral. Soon after, other former Whitecaps and U-20 national team players publicly shared their experiences; and, most importantly, victims of Birarda finally felt safe to come forward.

Last month, Birarda was sentenced to two years in prison for sexual crimes against four former teenage players over a 20-year period. The last victim was from 2008, the year he was fired from both the Whitecaps and Canada Soccer.

Considering the insanity, lengths and harms of what we had to go through to get a now-convicted sex offender off the field, the question I continually ask myself is this: How many more Birardas are out there in this flawed system? How many more athletes are still being harmed?

Yet, the worst harm I experienced in the Canadian sports system came after my time on a field with Birarda. Abuse does not happen without enablers, and let me be explicit about our flawed system that covers up and enables abuse, as well as revictimizing athletes who come forward.

A report into the cover-up of Birarda was commissioned by Canada Soccer, and released in September 2022. Victor Montagliani and Peter Montopoli will both play a leading role in the taxpayer-funded FIFA World Cup that is coming to Canada in 2026 in their roles as the vice-president of FIFA and the COO of the 2026 FIFA World Cup Canada, respectively. Both were named in that September 2022 report as being directly involved in the cover-up that allowed a now-convicted sex offender to have access to teenage girls for a decade. People like this have no place in sport, and we need mechanisms to remove them. What kind of message

does it send to be rewarded leaders of a taxpayer-funded sport, while simultaneously covering up child abuse?

On the financial side, a recently discovered entity called Canadian Soccer Business as well as the Vancouver Whitecaps, separately, have leveraged what should be a public asset in Canada Soccer for the financial benefit of their private businesses. These inappropriate, harmful financial relationships, fostered with no oversight to the detriment of players across the country on and off the field, continue to this day.

Andrea Neil, a long-time former player and coach with Canada's women's national team, has also been a whistle-blower on these same issues against Canada Soccer for years, and has valuable information to share.

It is also important to address an entire industry that has been built off the back of a distorted moral compass synonymous with the current state of Canadian sport, where groups, like wolves in sheep's clothing, lie. Examples include an Ottawa-based for-profit called ITP and a Toronto-based for-profit named Sport Law. People within both of these groups have presented themselves as a safe haven for Canadian sport abuse victims, not disclosing that they have business relationships with the very institutions that are causing these same athletes harm.

• (1550)

Let me use Sport Law as an example. Shortly after I published my blog in 2019, I was approached by a woman, Dina Bell-Laroche, who presented herself as someone passionate about women's issues in Canadian sport. I trusted and shared with her private details of our story. She did not tell me at any point that the company of which she was a partner, Sport Law, had relationships with the organizations that had harmed us. I would realize this violating conflict months later, when her group was hired to do an “independent” investigation for the Vancouver Whitecaps into our case. I say “independent” in quotation marks to highlight another normalized lie in our current system. An investigation is not independent if it is paid for by the very institution that has something to lose with negative findings.

I learned later in 2019 that Sport Law was also Ontario Soccer's legal counsel while running Canada Soccer's whistle-blower hotline. You heard me right: In the aftermath of the cover-up of Birarda, Canada Soccer was telling soccer athletes that if they'd experienced abuse, a safe place to call was a hotline run by Sport Law, a group that was being paid to protect the legal interests of the largest PSO under Canada Soccer.

What is clear to me in my lived experience in the Canadian sport abuse space is that we have lost touch with what is right and what is wrong. Let me say it clearly here today to those involved with ITP, Sport Law and other groups engaging in the above behaviour: It is not okay to present yourself to vulnerable abused athletes as a safe place to share information only to weaponize that information for the benefit of your businesses. It is a horrendous revictimization that far too many of us have faced, and this kind of unethical conflict-of-interest behaviour is one of many reasons why trust has been completely broken in the current Canadian sport system.

I am here today to say that enough is enough. The problem is not single “bad apple” coaches. It is a system that empowers abusers, harms and silences victims with no ability to safely report outside of the system, and offers no consequence to sport leaders who enable abuse. If we are serious about eradicating abuse, then we have to start treating the sport crisis as the human rights crisis it is and implement change to make accountability, transparency, integrity and basic human rights the heart of our system.

Systemic change means shining a light into the financial relationships that preserve power and uncovering and dismantling these relationships and systems that protect Canadian sport institutions at the expense of athletes' lives. Groups like OSIC are not the answer, as they are riddled with the same conflicts of interest and people described earlier. Only a judicial inquiry into abuse in Canadian sport, with a broad scope, will shine a necessary light on the harm of the past while rebuilding trust for a better future.

As I said in the closing lines of my 2019 blog, which sadly still remains true today, “what we experienced, and where we are now, is still so far from good enough.”

Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much to both of you for bringing forward your opening comments.

What we'll be doing now is going from party to party and asking our questions.

We'll be starting with the six-minute round. We're starting with Dominique Vien.

Go ahead, Dominique. You have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ladies, thank you both for appearing this afternoon.

I'm quite moved. What we've just heard is not very glorious. It undermines our pride and trust in the organizations that are supposed to have a good reputation and to promote excellence and the desire to exceed one's limits.

Does what you've described to us represent only the tip of the iceberg?

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: Yes.

Cases like mine still occur across the country today. Only yesterday I heard of some new athletes just back from the Olympic Games who are finding it hard to get carded.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. McCormack, would you like to add a comment on this rampant situation on our sports teams?

Does what we've heard so far represent only the tip of the iceberg?

[*English*]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I echo what Myriam says. I've spoken to so many different athletes across different sports throughout this entire thing, and I can say absolutely that across sports there are so many broken people from our Canadian sport system. This truly is.... You could even line up just the people I've spoken to over the last year since I published my blog and we would be here for days listening to stories.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. Da Silva Rondeau, who do you think has an interest in this system, as corrupt as you describe it, being in place? Who benefits from it? Why the silence around it? Why do these people protect each other? Why are people's heads in the sand?

One witness told us last week that we were protecting a brand.

• (1600)

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: This system benefits the people in place who seek power. It shouldn't be forgotten that the people in place aren't interested in sport. They're only interested in power. The current system feeds this type of power. It doesn't benefit sport, the athletes or our international representation in any way. It only benefits the people in place who seek power. Sport is just an excuse.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: What can these people derive from enduring, causing or concealing situations like the ones you've described?

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: The only benefit they derive is power, the impression that they control the sport. Sport inspires pride. It's something big. When you control it, I think you derive a certain satisfaction from that.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. McCormack, how are you today?

[*English*]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: How am I? I'm grateful to be here. It's been a very long journey, obviously. This has been going on for us since 2007, so, yes, I'm very grateful.

It feels as if people who can do something about it are finally listening. It has been a very long, dark, hard road and it has to change. That's why I personally flew across the country and put myself in a very vulnerable situation: to try to put a face on the harm. I have been harmed. My friends have been harmed, and it's not just what we experienced as athletes. It's the aftermath—what we had to go through in trying to report a literal sex offender.

I think that's the biggest message, from a mental health perspective. Before I wrote the blog, until after I wrote the blog, I was an absolute mess for those 10 years. I didn't understand what the harm was, but now I realize it's the trauma of being gaslit for 10 years—reporting children in danger, with nobody listening, and thinking it was a system that actually cared about me, as a person, and about children.

Since I wrote the blog and connected with other people like Myriam.... You feel isolated. You're the problem and troublemaker. You're by yourself. I think I just feel validated and heard. Even in this awful community, we are now among athletes who have experienced the same thing.

I feel a lot better, despite looking like this, right now.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Is my time up, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, you're done.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: My colleagues will have more good questions.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

As I said, take your time, everybody. We're getting through this.

Thank you so much for flying across the country. It does matter, because it's going to make our study much stronger. Thank you so much for doing so.

I'm now going to pass it over to Jenna Sudds for six minutes.

Go ahead, Jenna.

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both of you for being here and sharing your stories, which are so important for us to hear and learn from.

My first question, for both of you—if you'd like to answer it—is, what do you believe we should be exploring and putting in place to better protect athletes like you? I know it's a big question.

[Translation]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: Before anything's put in place, we have to look at what's been done. Starting with this judicial inquiry, we can begin considering what should be put in place. I don't think we can answer that question until we've looked at what's been done and cleaned up the world of sport in Canada.

• (1605)

[English]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I would add that I completely agree with Myriam, and I think also what's been particularly striking through all of this is just how, as athletes, we have no resources. We're up against NSOs. They have money. They have power. They have control. As athletes, even coming forward, there's no support. Any time in society that you have a group that has unfettered access to power, they know they're going to have no opposition, like Myriam said earlier. It attracts a certain personality.

Again, I completely agree with her that we have to have a judicial inquiry to understand the full scope of what has happened. Then I think, from there, something needs to be put in place that is actually outside of the sports system and is completely focused on the athletes and their rights, just on a logical level to have that balance that is completely non-existent right now.

[Translation]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: Allow me to add to that.

As I said in my testimony, when we say resources, we don't mean groups or systems, but rather power and money, which the federations and sport in Canada have at their disposal, unlike the athletes. No new system funded by sport in Canada will help us build anything better.

[English]

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much for both of those answers.

The other piece you mentioned, Ciara, that I'd love to ask more about is around needing to shine a light on the financial relationship. You mentioned Sport Law and ITP. This is something we haven't heard yet at this committee, and it's a bit shocking, frankly.

I'm trying to get my head around that and think about what tools or what is needed in order to stop that, in order to ensure that this obvious conflict doesn't exist and that athletes are protected. You spoke very eloquently and very knowledgeably on that topic, and I'm wondering if you have suggestions about how that could be stopped.

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I think, again, it boils down to the athletes' having a group that's advocating solely for the athletes because, unfortunately, people don't have the moral compass. It is about business and money, and if they can exploit the athletes' information to gain traction in their business on the side that does have the money and power, unfortunately people make that choice to engage in that conflict of interest. Again, I think there needs to be a group that's advocating for the athletes.

I think it's also important to mention that when you come forward, you don't have any experience or background. You are in this whirlwind, and people are reaching out to you. If you don't know the lay of the land, it's easy to.... If someone approaches you, you think that they're there to help you. You don't even know about this whole underbelly that's protecting the institution of sport, and it's super easy to just get sucked in.

That's, again, where I think it's so important that we have that balance in the system so that when you come forward, the way I came forward.... The only reason why even mentally I got through the first month was that, just by chance, my friend was friends with Gen Simard, who was a whistle-blower in the Alpine Canada case. She was on the phone with me for a full month. I've never met her in person, but she supported me.

There needs to be a formal body that does that. I think that if there is a group protecting the athletes, then they're not going to be susceptible to organizations that are coming at them in their time of vulnerability and that are going to use their information to exploit and gain contracts with the institutions. Unfortunately, at this point, it's all so unregulated that that's happening all the time.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

• (1610)

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Myriam, you mentioned at one point early on that you were balancing work and this requirement to still make a living while training.

Can you speak to whether that's the norm? How do we fix that? How do we balance that better for athletes?

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: Yes, that's the norm for a lot of federations.

[*Translation*]

To be honest, I really would've preferred to continue my lifestyle, which allowed me to train in the mornings before work, then to go and teach and then train after work with a trusted coach and a team that supported me. When you're an athlete, it's not the workload that scares you; it's the people around you. When our resources are taken away, we become vulnerable to the people around us.

I don't think that worrying about the balance that athletes have to establish between work and sport is the priority. We're very good at balancing all that, if I can presume to speak for most athletes. We have a lot of resources to help us do that, and we improve year over year by acquiring experience. The real problem arises when that balance is taken away from us.

Teaching helped me maintain a balance between work and sport. I'm as passionate about teaching as I am about sport. So it was very hard for me to agree to be removed under duress, but I had no choice if I wanted to be carded. There are rules that prevent you from maintaining a balance if you want to be a full-time athlete.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Ms. Da Silva Rondeau and Ms. McCormack, I join with my colleagues in thanking you for being here this afternoon.

The first thing that comes to my mind is that you can be proud of yourselves. You are part of the change that I hope is coming.

Ms. McCormack, you referred in your opening remarks to groups that operate around athletes, specifically ITP Sport and Sport Law, as wolves in sheep's clothing. You cited some examples involving Sport Law, but would you also like to give us some concerning ITP Sport?

[*English*]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I know from speaking with athletes across multiple sports that they were approached by ITP and have shared private information about their cases, again, under the idea that the person approaching them is someone who is sympathetic to their situation. Then they have found months or weeks later that the organization is now representing and working with the NSO.

It's not my story to share, and I think it's also why it's really important to be opening this up to an inquiry, because I can tell you about multiple sports in which I know this has been a practice. I really implore the committee to reach out to athletes and to hear the stories, because I think you're only going to find further evidence for what we're both saying.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: I'd like to add a comment, Ms. Larouche.

That was my case. I filed complaints with ITP Sport in order to protect us, but that organization is now working with the federation to revamp the organization's culture.

• (1615)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Those connections are the reason why you mistrust the system in place, aren't they?

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: Yes, among other things.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much for your comments, Ms. Da Silva Rondeau.

Ms. McCormack, were the Canada Soccer officials held accountable for their disgraceful actions toward athletes like you?

Has the system that Canada Soccer has put in place changed as Canada prepares to host the World Cup in 2026? And do you feel that Canada Soccer really wants to make a real change to the way it operates?

[English]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: No, absolutely not. We still, again, through a private donation, are trying to get even therapy money from Canada Soccer. There are so many conflicts of interest with Hockey Canada information that was coming forward and pressure on Canada Soccer. There needs to be a full financial review into Canada Soccer because I think it's part of the greater issue with Canada Soccer, in the sense that they have had no oversight towards both finances and morale.

Just as an example, the Vancouver Whitecaps have a relationship as a private organization with Canada Soccer, and that played a role in terms of concentrating power. There are all these different and very problematic financial relationships that I think were starting to come to light prior to the World Cup for the men when they went on strike.

Absolutely, Canada Soccer has done nothing in any way, shape, or form to have any kind of reparations for the harm that we went through. There has to be financial oversight and examination. Again, there's a lot of taxpayer money going into FIFA 2026, and there was so much harm done in our situation that hasn't been remedied in any capacity.

I really implore you to speak to somebody like Andrea Neil. She has whistle-blown and seen things first-hand and has information to share. Again, I think the financial part of it is tied in with the harm that we're experiencing as athletes and I think it's a piece in terms of the judicial inquiry.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Regarding finances, Hockey Canada representatives told us during their testimony about money whose existence had been concealed from the public and members of the association.

Would you say that Canadian Soccer Business has also deliberately concealed money from the public and its members?

[English]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: Absolutely, I think this is a private entity that's been set up. It's off the back of the assets of Canada Soccer. It's marketing and sponsorship money that is going into a private organization that nobody knows.

In this country, we don't have a professional or even a national league for women—one of the few countries in the world that are in the top 50 rankings for FIFA. We're Olympic gold medalists and we don't have this basic thing. We were always told, as female players, that there's not enough money. We have the highest participation, or one of the highest participations, of female players in the world, but somehow there's no money.

Absolutely, Canadian Soccer Business is a complete red flag in terms of a private entity attached to a national sport organization. I think it's so important on so many different levels, if we truly want change, that this be investigated.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Da Silva Rondeau, I'd like to take the few moments I have left to ask you a final question.

You say that you no longer trust the system in place and that we can't move forward without conducting an independent inquiry into what has been done in the past. In a few words, why do you think it's essential that such an inquiry be conducted before a new system is put in place?

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: The keyword is “build”. We have to build a new system, but we need a clean platform on which to do it. You can't build a system on something that's broken; you'd just be making repairs. You can't repair furniture that was broken long ago.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to pass it over to Leah Gazan, who is online.

Leah, you have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I'm so sorry that I can't be with you in person today.

I want to start out by thanking both of you for sharing your testimony. I want to acknowledge that it's difficult to share stories, particularly with the experiences you've had of not being heard or believed. I believe both of you. I want to thank you for being here today.

This question is for both of you. I'd like both of you to respond to it.

We've heard directly from you today and from other witnesses who have come before this committee about how calling out abuse in your sport, when there's abuse in sport, impacts you personally.

Ms. Rondeau, today you spoke about how there are lots of supports and resources, but there's nobody to hold them accountable. I think you both provided examples of organizations that were supposedly there to help you but that had clear conflicts of interest of being on both sides. It's very clear to me that wanting justice has come at a great emotional cost for you, for your friends, for your teammates and for your reputations, and has often impacted your careers.

I looked up an article from The Guardian with regard to what you shared, Ms. McCormack. It's entitled “Sexual abuse in sport: Fifa backs executives after failure to tell players about sexually abusive coach”. You were speaking about how when you come forward with abuse and then you're not believed, it results in the abuse of other individuals, children and young people. We need to change that.

I have a couple of questions, but first I want to read this out:

Fifa has backed senior officials within its organization after a failure to tell players and the public the real reason why now-convicted sex offender and former national team coach Bob Birarda left Canada Soccer in 2008.

The officials—Victor Montagliani, the president of Concacaf and a Fifa vice-president, and Peter Montopoli, the chief operating officer for Canada for the 2026 World Cup—were senior Canada Soccer officials with central roles in Birarda's exit from his job as Canada's U-20 women's national team coach after he was found to have acted inappropriately with his own players.

They're still in high-ranking positions.

I want to ask you two questions. One, how can we protect survivors, victims and witnesses, even in this committee, from further abuse as you come forward once again and put your safety—I include emotional safety in that—on the line? Two, what can we do so that future survivors can be allowed to speak their truth safely without being subjected to further pain and further revictimization?

Those questions are for both of you.

Thank you.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: I think we need to be provided with outside legal resources so we can protect ourselves in the public square.

The director of high-performance sport at the federation filed a civil lawsuit against me in response to comments that my colleagues and I had posted on social media and in the public square, which was our only recourse. I received a demand letter, to which I was required under law to respond, relying on lawyers whom I paid out of my own pocket.

It's definitely hard to report wrongdoing publicly, knowing that you're exposing yourself to legal proceedings.

• (1625)

[English]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: Again, I completely agree with Myriam. In terms of FIFA still harbouring people who were directly involved in our case, I think, again, on a societal level, we need to say that it's not okay and find a way to break these relationships. For us, essentially, for 11 years they all just closed in on each other. Whether we went to the media or soccer organizations or whatever, everybody was in bed with each other and everybody was protecting each other, so we had nowhere to go.

Even in the sense of what we could do when people come forward, like for therapy.... I was lucky enough to have the resources to have a lot of therapy over COVID, which completely changed things for me, but that was an absolute privilege and not a right. I was completely harmed by our sports system for 10 years, so I think, again, those sorts of resources, like support, even just.... Those are just the sorts of things where you're so siloed, and you're up against these massive organizations and these people and power, and there's just nothing on the other side.

Like Myriam said, people are signed to NDAs, even those who want to speak out with the Canada Soccer situation, board members, former coaches. I know people directly who do want to speak

to the kinds of things that have gone on, but they're under NDAs and they're afraid to speak because there are legal ramifications for doing so. These are all things that, again.... I think it's just very important that we send a message that they are not okay.

Groups like FIFA are not above basic human rights and treating people properly, and athletes should not have to go through this. I would love nothing more than if the 11 years during which we were silenced turned into Canada being a strong voice and a strong leader to say that this is not okay, that their coming into our country with our taxpayers' money for their event and harbouring people who were part of covering up for a sexual predator is not okay. I just think support is completely lacking, legal, emotional, all of it. There's absolutely none of that currently, and I think that alone needs to change.

The Chair: We're going to do our next round. As you can see, I'm being as flexible as possible. We have 15 minutes for our last round, so that's five minutes, five minutes, two and a half minutes, and two and a half minutes, and that's how we'll end today.

If you want to share your time during that five minutes, do your thing.

I'm going to pass the floor over to Michelle Ferreri for five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for being here. I really appreciate it. I know a lot of people really appreciate what you're doing. It's a lot of responsibility to be the voice of many, so I really appreciate your being here. It is very emotional and tough to hear, so I can only imagine how tough it is to relive it and say it, so thank you.

Myriam, if I may ask you, you touched on something that I was really interested in. You asked, if there are no systems in place, how do we enforce accountability? Ciara, you talked about a national judicial inquiry, which is what you guys have both asked for over 30 times. It's really shocking to hear that number. Both of these comments kind of overlap, so that's why I'm asking both of you. You said that it's not just "bad apple" coaches. That really jumped off the page for me, because I think some people think that predators will be drawn to wherever children are.

To your point about power, Myriam, those were very powerful comments as well. What will a national inquiry do to address the system? Myriam, you talked about no systems being in place.

Could you both touch on what I've said here?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: To get a clearer idea of what's going on, we'll have to clarify the situation and clean out all these toxic connections between the systems that are supposed to protect us and the sport federations. We need to do that cleanup and to hold the individuals who perpetuate the toxic culture in our sport to account.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: In terms of what a national judicial inquiry would accomplish, what I mentioned before was the fact that I can see there's such a lack of acknowledgement of what is right and what is wrong. I think what my blog served to do, at least, was...everybody in Vancouver who was in elite-level soccer knew some version of misconduct that had happened. When you have that kind of transparency, you have accountability. You can't hold people accountable and change things if you don't know the full scope.

I'm telling you that we reported over 30 times. That's a fact.

We were just sitting in the lobby, discussing different stories that we've heard, and it's shocking. Part of the harm that we experienced was that we knew.... You know that what's out there is so shocking, horrible and awful, yet the reaction you're getting back does not match. It's classic gaslighting, and it's so harmful.

That's what's important with this. We have to understand what the harm is in order to start to remedy it, and we have to set clearly what's right and what's wrong. I think sometimes things are so convoluted in the current system with power and conflicts of interest and whatever. To give people the benefit of the doubt, maybe they don't even see how shocking it is, but I can tell you from living within it that it's horrendous.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Well said. I think the base for normal when you're living in it is that you don't know any different. That's often shocking for a lot of people.

This is my last question. Has there ever been a call before for a national judicial inquiry? If yes, why do you think there hasn't been one to date?

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I think to this point, we've been so silenced and siloed as athletes. Again, we spoke about it before we came here. Finally, even to just listen and connect with athletes in different sports.... For so long, I felt like I was a troublemaker and I was a problem person for speaking up. I'm siloed, while these organizations and the people who are causing this harm can hide behind the veil of an organization. I'm standing in front of everybody with this big allegation.

We've had no power as athletes. You get broken by the system and then you want nothing to do with sports or your experience or whatever. I think, to this point, that's what's gone on. We haven't been collectively together to know each other's experiences, to know we're not crazy and that our experience is happening in different versions in other sports.

I also don't think that our voices have been amplified to the level that they're being amplified now. This massive system has suppressed all of us, and I feel like we're all starting to rise above.

I hope that people now understand the full scope of what we've been through. I hope that people now feel like this cannot continue, that we have to change this and we have to hear every story and understand fully the conflicts of interest that have allowed this kind of harm to happen.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Has there been one asked for that you know of?

Ms. Ciara McCormack: There was a call for it last week, wasn't there?

The Chair: There was call for action last week, yes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It was just last week, though.

The Chair: We'll pass it over to Anita Vandenberg.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you.

I really want to thank both of you for being here. It's not easy to give this kind of testimony.

What strikes me is that we're hearing this now across different sports, so this is clearly systemic. What I'm really touched by and horrified by, actually, is the fact that you were victimized not just by what happened to you, but by the fact that when you tried to stop it from happening to other people and other children, you weren't heard. The idea that the very people who were meant to protect you were weaponizing your information and were gaslighting and shaming you is something that we need to make right. The fact that nobody listened....

I want you to know we're listening, so thank you for being here.

Ms. Ciara McCormack: That means a lot, and it's very healing, honestly.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Ms. McCormack, you talked about things you've cobbled together, informal peer networks, trying to get therapy where you can, and you mentioned not being able to access legal supports and different things, and being siloed and alone.

There are organizations and places where, if somebody comes forward with a testimony of something that happened to them, they're immediately given an advocate who can walk them through what they need. We know that that changes over time. If it's therapy, if it's peer support, if it's legal support or if it's just advice about what the process is, they're an advocate for that child or for that person.

What would that have looked like? Let's look at it right now, for a young girl who is in soccer or in boxing. If the system worked properly, what would it look like when that young girl comes forward? What would a good system look like?

• (1635)

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I think the first thing is education. There were so many situations as an athlete where I just thought it was a consequence of being an outspoken person; I got benched or I had bad things happen to me. I think I learned two years ago that it's a form of abuse called "neglect".

That's my big question: Why are we not educating children and parents as to what abuse looks like? You're never going to eradicate predators. They're always going to be there, but there are ways you can mitigate the damage they're going to do. I think that's the first thing. You need to empower children to know, and then you need to have a safe place to report.

For 11 years, I literally described every possible...to the point of posting up the sports complex where he was. Again, there was just nothing. There has to be some kind of entity that is removed from sport, because I think the biggest thing to recognize is that institutions are liable for abuse, so they don't want to empower the victim. That is the fundamental issue in the system.

Again, I think that in order to mitigate, you have to have an entity outside of anything that has to do with liability from the institution, an entity that provides legal support and therapy and peers who have been through it and who can help walk them through the steps they need. Educate them as to "this was abuse that happened to you" and "this was a criminal situation that happened to you".

Again, I honestly and truly believe that if there was that kind of balance in the system, a lot of these power-hungry coaches and predators and whatever probably wouldn't do half of what they do, and I think athletes wouldn't be harmed for 11 years. My soccer career in Vancouver ended in 2008. It's 2022. I'm still talking about this. It should have been done in 2008. He should have been investigated. He should have gone to prison, yet so many of us over the last 14 years still have this situation running our lives.

I honestly and truly believe that if those sorts of things.... Again, it has to be outside the system. We have to treat it as a human rights thing, as opposed to a sport thing, because it's gotten so convoluted and the harm is so deep.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: He should have been. It is a human rights issue and these are children.

Ms. Ciara McCormack: Yes, 100%.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Children cannot know these things. This is something that we need to do to protect the children.

Thank you.

I also wanted to give Ms. Da Silva Rondeau a chance to answer on what a good system would look like.

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: I completely agree with Ciara on the outside system that needs to be in place. As you said, they are children. They don't know. Even as adults, we don't know. It's a complicated system when we get into sports. Make no mistake: 30 complaints, that's not a lot. I did more than 10 in two years. I was in that system for 12 years. Multiply that by 12. I'm one person. Imagine all of those athletes who have done the same. Thirty may look like a lot but it's kind of the norm, and nothing is done year after year. As Ciara said, she is still going through it. It has been two

years. I'm still going through it. I pay for my own therapy. I pay for my own medication. There's no support for that. It's thousands of dollars.

I am a teacher. I am passionate about kids and helping them and giving them hope. It's getting hard to give them hope when I see no change happening. Right now, I don't know what to say to a kid who is abused, and I'm a teacher. I feel guilty for that. I don't know what to say to kids who have been abused because I have been abused and I didn't have any resources that were efficient. What am I supposed to say to a kid who comes to me and tells me all those things? Because I know the system is not working, am I supposed to say to him the same thing that happened to me...go complain to that system? I know it won't work. I can just stay there and look at this failing over and over again. This is part of me. It's hard.

I don't know what to do. I want to do more. I want to be involved, but for your question of what needs to be a perfect system for a kid who is going through abuse, for now the answer is that I don't know.

• (1640)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Your being here is changing things. Thank you for being here.

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to pass it over to Andréanne.

Andréanne, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Da Silva Rondeau and Ms. McCormack, as a new mother of a young daughter, I want to thank you for being here and for testifying about your situation; this will shake things up.

Sport Canada is reviewing the Canadian policy on sport, which is to be renewed in February. Were you consulted on it? Do you know any athletes who were consulted regarding that policy?

[English]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I personally don't.

I also want to put out there that I hate the word "policy". I think our case shows that you can have a million policies out there, but if you don't have people with moral fortitude to follow through with the policies, or have systems in place to force those policies, I personally think they are a waste of time. Again, they're a nice decoration on a website, but in reality, for athletes at ground zero, they do nothing.

Again, I think Sport Canada is in the system and part of the problem. I don't necessarily think they even answer to doing the policies. Perhaps Myriam knows.

To answer your question, no, I had nothing to do with Sport Canada and wasn't asked for anything.

[Translation]

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: The same is true for me.

That policy is nothing but nice words that mean nothing concrete.

Besides, there are many policies, and it's hard to understand them. It's complicated for an athlete to understand what they mean. So it's not easy for young athletes or adults to understand all those policies. When we file a complaint, we kind of get lost in the complexity of the system.

We haven't really been consulted.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: All right.

Canada is preparing to host the World Cup. We've discussed human rights.

Ms. McCormack, you mentioned incidents of mistreatment, but I'd like to go back to a question that was put to you. Were you surprised to see that Victor Montagliani and Peter Montopoli still have their jobs and can represent Canada Soccer in Canada and abroad?

[English]

Ms. Ciara McCormack: No. In terms of how broken the system is, it seems as if he's a perfect representation to show where we're at, currently. Unfortunately, he's a perfect figurehead for how broken Canada Soccer is and how athletes have been treated within the organization.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over, for our last round, to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's alarming testimony, but we knew about this. That's the thing. You're talking about systems. Let's talk about the abuse of gymnasts. This is something that has been in the news forever, in terms of human rights violations. FIFA.... It's in the news, all the time.

We talk about sports organizations, but we also have a responsibility, as elected officials, to put in laws to protect people.

I want to read a quote from Lianne Nicolle. It's from an article in The Guardian, from this past April, about the investigation of sexual misconduct. I want to hear your perspectives on this. She said, "The only people in the system with moral courage are the athletes."

That was Lianne Nicolle, a former soccer board member who was also, previously, the executive director of the Canadian Olympic Foundation. She goes on to say this: "Repercussions need to be higher for people not willing to have moral courage. It's not just the perpetrators [who are the issue]. It is the enablers."

I want to hear your thoughts about what she had to say.

• (1645)

Ms. Myriam Da Silva Rondeau: If administrators had the courage we have, they would have launched a judicial investigation a long time ago in their own federations. We asked for that in boxing. We asked for that investigation three times. It was rejected by the board three times.

Yes, the only people in the federations who have courage are the athletes in sports.

Ms. Leah Gazan: What struck me—again, part of the system—is that she said it's not just the perpetrators; it's the enablers, the bystanders and all of the people who know about this and continue to not act. What do you think should be done about that? What are some consequences for that?

The Chair: I'm going to say here that we have only a very short time to finish these last few questions. This will be the end.

Go ahead and finish up.

Ms. Ciara McCormack: I think that it's really important to recognize that there are always going to be abusers. I think, unfortunately, people care about themselves, their own survival, their institutions and how they look, ahead of doing the right thing. Unfortunately, I probably wouldn't have had such a negative and jaded viewpoint before all of this, but that's currently exactly how I feel.

I think we need laws. We need to recognize enablers with the same gravity that we do abusers. At the end of the day, even in our situation, if somebody had stepped up in 2008 and done the right thing, then this wouldn't have gone on as long as it did. It did go on because of those people and all of the people who continued to silence us as we came forward again and again.

I think we need to have laws where there are consequences. Unfortunately, the only way I think you're going to change behaviour is if people are going to personally have ramifications for their bad behaviour. Again, we have a long history now to show of harms being done off people's making the choice themselves of whether to do the right thing or not.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I'd really like to thank Ciara and Myriam for being here and sharing their stories.

I'm going to remind you: If you need any assistance, please feel free to call our status of women office. If there are any supports you need or anything like that, we're here to support you. Thank you so much.

We're going to suspend for a few seconds so that we can start our next panel.

Thank you. We're suspended.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1650)

The Chair: We're reconvening this meeting now.

I would like to welcome, as an individual, Fran ois Lemay, who is here in the room with us. From the Coaching Association of Canada, we have Lorraine Lafreni re, chief executive officer.

I'm just going to remind you, Lorraine, that if you're looking for the French, it's at the bottom of your screen. Here in the room, there's French and English interpretation on our earpieces.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to François Lemay for a five-minute opening comment.

Go ahead, François.

Mr. François Lemay (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My name is François Lemay.

[*Translation*]

I would first like to thank Ms. Larouche for her invitation and for persuading me to come here today.

Hearing the testimony today, I can assure you that I am very humbled to be here today. I have over 30 years' experience as a volunteer and in sports administration in Quebec. However, I do not have the experience of Ms. Lafrenière, who trains the trainers in Canada, nor have I shown the courage demonstrated by Ms. McCormack and Ms. Da Silva Rondeau in my career. With that said, I am before you today to talk about my experience on the ground and in the development of young athletes. I train teams of boys and girls: mixed teams.

In recent months, due to a combination of circumstances in the media, I became a sort of unofficial spokesperson for parents who were furious with Hockey Canada. We were the first, in Granby, to speak out against our national federation, by refusing to pay our dues, among other things. A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then, but little tangible progress has been made. While there were only a few of us rebelling against Hockey Canada, we were stunned to learn that the Canadian government was powerless, so to speak, before a national federation: it had no direct leverage other than money and public opinion.

On top of that, we saw the failure of Sport Canada, rightly condemned by Justice Cromwell, in its role as toothless guard dog. So I ask you, our elected representatives: who is guarding the guards, especially when the board of directors is useless?

As a parent, I am involved in my children's sports 12 months a year: schedule planning, training camps, practices, evaluations, games, 12-hour days at tournaments, and much more. We are disappointed to see that even our federal government, or its delegate Sport Canada, is unable to take action directly, and we are overcome by discouragement. We don't have time to handle the governance of our national bodies, since we are on the playing field four or five times a week. We were entitled to trust an institution like Sport Canada. In light of the news reports and the recent testimony, we have to admit that this was a mistake.

In fact, the problem concerning amateur sport in Canada lies precisely in the word: "amateur". The bulk of Canadian sports development rests on the shoulders of volunteers acting in good faith, but whose resources and experience are limited. While in Europe there is the civil club structure, and in the United States a network is taking shape in the secondary schools, in Canada we have a weird

mixture of the two models, where there is a fundamental absence of professionalization.

Organizing a tournament, registrations, and, in a pinch, a budget: experienced volunteers can get those jobs done. However, to build a sports program based on long-term athlete development, to handle an abuse or harassment situation fairly, to establish governance and organizational transparency and to develop a strategic plan for women's sport takes time, experience, and the necessary training.

What we are seeing in the upper echelons of sport came from somewhere. The toxic culture did not appear by magic; it was allowed to grow, through a lack of experience and resources. Even with all the good will in the world, amateur sport is defined, for the most part, by cohorts of volunteer parents in succession, and this leaves too much room for error and abuses.

If we want to do something concrete to improve and help Canadian sport and, necessarily, help women's sport, which has enormous potential, the various governments have to commit to supporting volunteers. Amateur sport has to be professionalized and volunteer training in governance and development of their sport has to be funded. It is bizarre, for example, for the Canadian women's handball team to have to fundraise in order to qualify for the Pan American Games. In the same vein, it is bizarre for volunteers to have to investigate and monitor possibly abusive coaches. There are high hopes for our athletes and a lot is asked of our volunteers, but few resources are offered or it's gone about the wrong way.

To achieve this, we could start by allowing a tax deduction for the first \$5,000 in income earned from refereeing or league management. The federal and provincial governments could also agree to fund full-time positions in amateur sports clubs directly. Sport Canada and its missions could also be reformed.

However, above all, there has to be cohesion in amateur sport. There are a lot of actors around the table whose roles are ill-defined. The more fractured amateur sport is, the bigger the opening there will be for mismanagement. Shaky leadership tends to go to ground when things are not working, but everyone is available to pick up a trophy.

I am not talking about a one-size-fits-all solution that would apply to all sports. Each discipline has its own circumstances. For example, handball needs resources, while hockey needs governance. The volunteers across Canada need your tangible help. We need full-time sports staff, not to replace us, but to keep our efforts going, and especially to guarantee more safety for our girls and boys. Canadian sport has to be modernized.

Thank you for the time you have given me.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Joining us online is Lorraine Lafrenière.

Lorraine, I invite you to take the floor. You have five minutes.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière (Chief Executive Officer, Coaching Association of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I join you today from the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

[*Translation*]

I want to stress the courage of the victims and survivors who have broken the silence. We have heard you. I also want to honour your bravery.

[*English*]

For those who continue to sound the alarm, as we've heard today, we are with you.

The system requires wholesale cultural change. The only way to achieve this is through a national judicial inquiry. This is an issue of national importance—the baseline. An inquiry will create a public road map for united cultural change. We have seen similar mechanisms used around the world, resulting in dramatic change to address systemic safe sport. I witnessed the power of the Dubin inquiry in 1988 after the Ben Johnson scandal. The legacy of that inquiry is that Canada is a leading anti-doping nation.

[*Translation*]

The mission of the Coaching Association of Canada is to oversee the development of coaches and sports workers, in accordance with ethical principles, and to put in place and promote a professional development program in association with all levels of government and all national, provincial and territorial federations.

On average, we train 50,000 coaches annually under the National Coaching Certification Program, from the community level all the way to high-level sport. Safety and ethics are central to the training that coaches are offered. Since 2006, a trainer has had to successfully complete the Make Ethical Decisions training in order to be certified.

[*English*]

In the last three years, we have worked with leading researchers to develop training in teen dating and gender-based violence, bystander empowerment, modelling healthy relationships, creating a positive sport environment, and anti-racism. This work is supported by Sport Canada, Status of Women Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

In 2019, at the request of then minister Duncan, we created mandated safe sport training to educate all sport participants. As so eloquently spoken about previously, we need training and education to be part of it, and yet that's not all. We also partner with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection to deliver training on grooming awareness. We work with Respect Group and Kids Help Phone. We launched the responsible coaching movement, which includes evidence-based prevention strategies in the “rule of two” and training and screening. We screen coaches for major games. We offer a designation for coaches, but coaching is not a regulated profession.

The training and prevention programs I have spoken about are only one facet of safe sport culture. We are one organization. More is needed from us and more is needed from others. That's why a na-

tional judicial inquiry is required. This is a complex issue. Canada does have great coaches, and coaches play a vital role in supporting athletes and participants, as we just heard. At times, they are the only trusted individual in a young person's life. But that's not why we are here today. The power imbalance in coaching is a huge problem. Professional standards are a huge problem across the country. The lack of resources is a huge problem.

While we know that predators predominantly use the coaching role to abuse, it's also important to acknowledge that predators come in many forms. It's not just the coach-athlete relationship. Dr. Larry Nassar is one of the most horrific long-term abuses cases. Pairs skater John Coughlin sexually abused his partner, Bridget Namiotka, who committed suicide. Parker Egbert, a 19-year-old swimmer with autism and an intellectual disability, just recently filed a lawsuit alleging that he was violently and repeatedly raped at the Tokyo Paralympics and at the national training centre by a two-time Paralympic gold medalist. There was a recent assault by eight hockey players in 2018, and again at the 2023 World Juniors.

If we fail to recognize that abusers come in many forms, we will fail the system, and we will fail our athletes again.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

As a final point, we respect the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. However, if we want safe sport measures to be effective, the federal, provincial and territorial governments will have to join forces and create a national registry of all predators and assailants.

[*English*]

If we have no centralized registry or coordinated registries, then abusers and predators will continue to travel from sport to province to territory and to any role in sport, which will set the stage for more abuse.

[*Translation*]

To summarize, we are calling for three things: for an investigation to be conducted, for safe sport for all to be the goal, and for there to be a national registry or, at the least, collaboration.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to our first round of questions, starting with Anna Roberts for six minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for speaking to us.

I have a couple of questions, but before I ask my questions I want to ask another thing. I know that the government has given money to ensure that the athletes have an opportunity.... In 2021, they funded the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre. I'm just going to assume here, by listening to the previous witnesses we all heard, that it's not working. I agree with our previous witnesses. The system is broken and it's been broken for too long. I'm ashamed. I'll be honest. I'm totally ashamed that we have not done more to protect our young people.

The two questions I have for you are on this: How do people become safe sport-qualified? What do you think about that? I'll throw that out to both of you.

Mr. François Lemay: Madame Lafrenière, do you want to start?

[Translation]

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

[English]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

We have a program, the national coaching certification program, that's funded by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. While it's not perfect, it does focus on ethics. We do have training. It's not mandatory in clubs and organizations across the country. It has a very solid penetration. We have about 50,000 coaches annually who might take one of our workshops, but it's by no means enough, and with that education there's the challenge that Monsieur Lemay brought up, which is the professional standards. It's not about one function, and training and education about one function. It's about the system and the professional standards and expectations across all functions in the organization.

Monsieur Lemay, go ahead.

Mr. François Lemay: Yes, if I may add, it's also a question of time. Sports in Canada are based on volunteers. Between the suppliers and the practice, you need to talk to the parents, explain what an abuse case is, what harassment is, what phone number you can use, what can be done, who you can talk to, and sometimes those things are just pushed aside. There's a lot of good faith but sometimes time is missing.

Having professionals, hiring people within clubs to do that, year after year, to repeat that information and be guardians of good faith, would be very helpful. As parents, we're lacking time to manage the sports of our kids.

• (1705)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: But here's the issue. It's not working. Our children are still getting abused.

Mr. François Lemay: Yes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: We have not done them any justice, as we heard from our witnesses, and not just from these two witnesses but from previous witnesses in all sports. The system is broken. They're tired of words. We need to seek action because if we don't seek ac-

tion, there's going to be more and more brutality, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not trying to be mean, but there's an issue here.

You're talking to me about training and you're talking to me about recertification. What good is recertification, what good is training, if these abusers continue to abuse? Would you not agree—and I'm sorry if I get a little passionate but I'm quite upset about this today—that a registry must be completed so that these predators are put on a registry for the rest of their lives and they don't abuse our children any longer?

Mr. François Lemay: I'm not a legal expert but definitely information needs to be shared. I'm not sure if a registry is the appropriate thing. I'm not an expert but definitely.... We have a recent case in Quebec about a basketball coach who went from one organization to another. The information wasn't shared. So we need to find a way, definitely, as Ms. Lafrenière said, to share the information within the sport and with the other sports.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: That's a criminal offence. If it's a criminal offence, then they should be charged and it should be shared because if they are charged criminally, then everybody has access to that.

Mr. François Lemay: That's a very good thing because every year we have to do a criminal record check for every single coach or volunteer who is working with the kids in the organization. So everybody has to have a criminal record check. If you have a criminal record, you can't be a coach. One of my coaches a couple of years ago had a DUI, driving under the influence, but he was able to coach because that's not related to the kids. But if it was anything related to the kids, he wouldn't be able to coach.

So every single year we screen all the coaches we have, but we aren't screening the coaches who are yelling, who are borderline. To have a criminal record means you need to be reported and there's been a police investigation and everything, so that's highly complicated but—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I don't agree. I don't think it's that complicated. What we need to do to sports, whether it's recreational, professional or amateurs.... These are children; they are our future. I think what we need to do is be accountable and put practices in place where we can automatically, without notice, check it out. In private industry.... I come from the financial industry, and I never knew when the inspectors were coming in. I knew that every single day I had to do my job ethically, morally and respectfully.

If we put those practices in place—and this is just one thing that I offer—this could stop the abuse. I'm sorry.

Mr. François Lemay: Don't be sorry.

The Chair: We all care about this passionately. I get it. I'm going to pass it over to Emmanuella for six minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank both of our witnesses for being here with us today.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemay, we have learned a lot of things from witnesses about sport at the national level, but I think you are involved more at the local level.

[English]

What have you noticed at the provincial level in terms of abuse? Have you heard of cases? Do you think this is something that needs to be dealt with not just at the national sports team level but at every level? Can you speak a little bit to that experience?

• (1710)

Mr. François Lemay: It can be seen at every level. I'm going to speak in French, if you don't mind, because it's a very specific question.

[Translation]

I have worked a lot at the local level and I have had to handle abuse cases. Ms. Da Silva Rondeau and Ms. McCormack have eloquently explained the problem from a national perspective, but the roots of this same evil can be seen at the local level, even if it is on a smaller scale.

The people who rise through the ranks started somewhere. The people who put toxic systems and abuse in place in national sport started at the local level 15 or 20 years earlier. They did not arrive at the national level from nowhere.

That is why we have to work at the base by training volunteers and promoting professionalization. From my perspective, this is very important, since doing that will, in itself, mean that prevention work can be done.

I believe it was Ms. Da Silva Rondeau who said this was the tip of the iceberg. Everything we don't see is what goes on at the local level.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

I read in an article that you had complained to the management of Hockey Quebec, asking it to change its culture, which is problematic. Have you had a response? Have you seen any changes since your complaint?

Mr. François Lemay: During the summer, when the 2018 scandal came out in the media, I had an opportunity to speak with Mr. Thibault, the executive director of Hockey Quebec, and Mr. Fortin, the chair of the board of directors. I would not go so far as to say that I had some influence on them, but I had the opportunity to speak to them. I told them that the problem was much more serious than they thought.

At the time, there was wide coverage in the English-language media of the unacceptable situation going on at Hockey Canada. In Granby, it was resolved not to pay Hockey Canada, and that snowballed. There were reactions.

I might think that this fueled discussion at Hockey Quebec in the right way. After that, Hockey Quebec took the bull by the horns and displayed some degree of leadership in putting pressure on Hockey Canada. It had some success, since the two chairs and the CEO, Mr. Smith, resigned.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: A witness spoke about the importance of empowering our young people and their parents by educating them and giving them training. If the parents told their children what is appropriate and what is not, in front of the coaches, might that encourage coaches not to engage in abusive behaviour?

Mr. François Lemay: Yes, absolutely.

The coach has to be present, because we are all members of a big sports family. In theory, there should be no dividing line between the coach, who is very often a parent, and the children.

As Ms. Lafrenière said earlier, coaches' training involves ethics courses, among other things. I have taken an ethics course myself, through the National Coaching Certification Program.

Then we have to know how to train our organizations and follow up with parents. When it comes to ethics and abuse, you don't talk the same way to 6-year-olds as you do to 14-year-olds. Progressive instruction has to be provided for children and parents. There has to be continuous follow-up.

Canadian amateur sport is based on volunteerism. Every three or four years, the composition of a local board of directors changes completely, and the result is a loss of expertise. So you have to start all over, but that is not what is given priority. Instead, the priority is registrations, jerseys, schedules and the like. The point is that we have to help Canadian volunteers, everywhere in Canada.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

I am going to go to Ms. Lafrenière next.

[English]

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: What do you think needs to change specifically in the training of coaches? You've said there's a lot of education regarding that, but it's not regulated. They're not necessarily forced to go through you, and they're not necessarily followed up with after they've passed their course.

What recommendations would you make that coaches are required to have in order to work with children in terms of training and follow-up?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Honestly, the inquiry has to be asked that question. I would suggest to you that the school system, which has coaches, has a formative role at a very early stage with students and student athletes, and that should be considered.

• (1715)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you both very much.

I probably only have 10 second left, so I want to thank you for coming in and informing us of your perspectives.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

I'm now going to pass it over to Andréanne Larouche, for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lemay, I want to thank you for your testimony. You can rest assured that you do belong here. As a parent, you instigated an important movement this summer. Your testimony is an important addition to our study.

I would like to come back to certain points that you raised in your opening presentation and the fact that we have heard numerous revelations of sexual violence that have left their mark on the sports world in the last few months, that in fact being what made you react.

I would like you to tell us about the culture of silence and the toxic behaviour that too often characterize sport.

Mr. François Lemay: Sexual violence emerges very early on, but it is often trivialized. It takes root because of a lack of education. You will maybe say I am belabouring the point, but Canadian volunteers are not necessarily trained to respond to sexual assault or harassment cases. It can start with a bad joke in the locker room that continues when the children get older. The volunteers do not have enough training to respond to situations like that.

Personally, I am lucky to be a physical educator and vice-principal of a school, so I was trained and equipped to respond to situations like this, although I would not go so far as to say I am comfortable in those cases. However, if a volunteer's job is as a factory manager, their primary skill isn't dealing with sexual assault or harassment cases, not to mention that they also may not have the necessary lens for spotting them.

To combat the toxic atmosphere, the housecleaning has to start at the top, but we must not ignore the training and help that volunteers and local associations need.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In the wake of all these cases of abuse of very young athletes in the sports world, the Minister of Sport was repeatedly pressured by people involved in that world, calling for a change of culture.

Given the toxic nature of the present situation, what do you expect from the minister and from us as federal politicians?

Mr. François Lemay: Thank you for your question.

What I would like is for a solution to be found. We have to work with the provinces. Ms. Lafrenière said earlier, and very eloquently, that we have to work with the schools, because they have front row seats, and with the sports clubs. Canada has to have its own way of doing things.

The committee has rightly talked a lot about what has happened in high-level sport. The federal government takes a strong interest in elite athletes or national teams, which is entirely to be expected. However, we have to keep in mind that the abuse and harassment started somewhere. If we want to achieve a complete result, I think we have to focus on all stages of the “making” of an athlete, starting at age 5 or 6 or 7, at the point when the child is having fun exploring a new sport, and right up to the point where they become elite athletes at age 25 or 35 or so.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: On that point, what do you think about the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner? Does it have what it takes to conduct independent investigations? Do you believe athletes trust that system?

That office has no coercive power, but it is funded directly by Sport Canada, which has repeatedly let a number of athletes down. If we want athletes to regain their trust, should we be doing things differently?

Mr. François Lemay: I think that Ms. McCormack and Ms. Da Silva Rondeau explained the problems encountered with ITP Sport and Sport Law very well. They also explained the failure of Sport Canada very well.

I think there has to be an independent body in Canada or in the provinces to handle complaints and cases of abuse and harassment. There has to be a place that our athletes, our parents and our coaches—because there are also coaches who are victims—can trust.

Given the failures on the part of Sport Canada, does the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner still have people's trust at this time? I couldn't tell you, or say that, beyond a doubt.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You are a coach at the local level. If I am not mistaken, that Office only deals with high-level athletes, so that means that an entire category of athletes might suffer abuse but not get help from that Office because they don't meet the criteria.

Mr. François Lemay: In Quebec, we can go to Sport'Aide, which offers support at the local level. I have referred people to that body, which deserves wider recognition and is in fact becoming increasingly well known. There needs to be an equivalent in all of the provinces and territories. That might be the equivalent of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, in terms of its independence at the national level.

I think it was Ms. Vandenberg who explained earlier that it is fundamental for athletes to also be able to have assistance in the process. When a complaint is filed, it is easy to get lost in an administrative labyrinth. Getting assistance in the process really is an advantage. I think Ms. Da Silva Rondeau also said it was relatively easy to get lost in all the policies.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: When you talk about athletes, you use the word “independence” a lot to talk about this independent commission of inquiry. That is something like we saw in the case of doping in Canada. The many cases there have been have got to be investigated.

Mr. François Lemay: As Ms. Lafrenière explained very well earlier, the Commission of Inquiry into the Use of Drugs and Banned Practices Intended to Increase Athletic Performance, which was created in the wake of the Ben Johnson case, made Canada a leader in the anti-doping battle. We even have the head office of the World Anti-Doping Agency here in Canada.

If we want to get results, we have to undertake a broad, rigorous process of self-examination into Canadian amateur sport at all levels. We are going to learn some unpleasant things. We are going to see flaws. We have already seen some of them. However, I think it is something that has to be done.

● (1720)

[English]

The Chair: That's wonderful.

Thank you very much.

I'm now going to pass it over to Leah Gazan for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

My first questions are for Madame Lafrenière.

Excuse my ignorance, but I'm just trying to understand this. You were talking about certification for coaches. How are coaches currently licensed? Is it through the province?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Licensing is a different practice. A licence is used as a licence to practise. That's a different type of process that doesn't really exist. Some sports have it.

On education, I will give you the analogy of medical doctors. They go to McGill University and get their medical degree, but then they're part of the regulated profession that gives them their licence to practise.

Ms. Leah Gazan: That's right.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: When they're removed from their licence to practise, they don't lose the degree from McGill, but they can't practise anymore, and that is what's missing.

Ms. Leah Gazan: That's where I want to go with this. I'm a teacher by training. In order to become a teacher... You were talking a lot about professional standards and things such as passing an abuse registry check, for example, and having to take certain courses to be able to do your job. These are things that... I use teaching as an example because we're working with kids, with many kids who are vulnerable and are from diverse backgrounds. We have certain educational requirements but also professional standards that have to be licensed by an independent body. You used a doctor as an example, and I would use provincial education systems.

Do you think that if there was a separate licensing board it would help provide greater oversight and regulation in sports?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Yes. I think there are many ways this could be created. A licensing board would absolutely regulate the ability to practise for all participants.

When I talk about professional standards, professional standards are really what sets the tone for how a person should behave. Predators are so good at grooming people to make them think they're the best person, the pillar of the community, and then it's shades of grey. They groom the gatekeepers, the clubhouse key master, the board members, and they blind them: "Oh, no, no, that's just him. He likes to do X." That's how predators work. They slowly push the boundaries.

What we need is clear boundaries. If the professional standards are there, then the alarm bells go off much more quickly. Licensing is absolutely one way to achieve that.

• (1725)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you for that, because I was thinking about that. There seem to be constant cases where there's conflict of interest. It's just a massive conflict of interest at all levels.

Everybody who has testified today has spoken about the need for a national judicial inquiry. Would a national judicial inquiry help, for example, what we just discussed? I'm talking about licensing and being able to look at things more closely so that we can decon-

struct a system that's clearly unsafe and reconstruct it into something safe.

Do you think a national judicial inquiry would help with that, and if so, how?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: I'll give you a concrete example of what you just spoke about.

In the Ben Johnson doping scandal—and there were others—they all knew each other. They all had a built-in relationship. They all knew each other. "Oh, no, that person wouldn't do that", or they had a cone of silence. It was one or the other, but the inquiry brought it to light, removed that from being an acceptable standard and created the independent agency that was charged with monitoring and investigating doping.

So yes, a national inquiry would do that, because it would remove what you aptly described, which is the familiarity we all have with each other in sport that blinds us: "Oh, that is a good person. They would never do that." Well, that's how predators work. They're good people, because that's their cloak.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, and there's no measure. There's no impartial oversight that's looking over things. It sounds like *House of Cards*. Would you agree? If one person is caught, there's a whole slew of people implicated, so everybody protects each other. That's what I'm hearing over and over again.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Yes. Whether they even realize they're doing that is another question, because predators manipulate everybody around them.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: It's a sick process, and that's why we have to set professional standards in sport. It's the only way you're going to remove or reduce predators from coming into the system.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Leah.

I have a couple of questions—I'm just looking at the committee—and then I'll share the rest of my time with Michelle. Is that okay with everybody?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Ms. Lafrenière, I'm just looking at this and trying to understand the national coaching certification. Part of your job is doing the safe sport program. Is that correct?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Yes.

The Chair: I tried to go online. When I'm doing research, I like to go online to see what I can do. I tried to see if I can become a coach. I saw that it was basically an online program for safe sport. Is that correct?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: There are many. There are in-person "Make Ethical Decisions" workshops. Online, they are synchronous—in other words, there's a person online with you—or they're asynchronous e-learning. You would have seen that.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: COVID has absolutely pushed us towards the online learning.

The Chair: Yes. Thanks so much.

I sat on the heritage committee with a few of my colleagues in this room. The Hockey Canada scandal really opened up some doors and thoughts on how everybody is interrelated, which takes me to the coaching association.

Right now, the chair of your board is associated with Hockey Canada. Is that correct?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: He was a vice-president of Hockey Canada until about 2018.

The Chair: Is he still associated with Hockey Canada?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: He is not associated that I know of. It's quite possible he does contract work, but he's not an employee of Hockey Canada.

The Chair: I know nothing about this gentleman, and he may be the best guy ever, but I think what we're really seeing are those relationships and that complex web, as many of our athletes have talked about. I've spoken to many people who say that they protect their people, too. That's what they do. They protect their family. A lot of time in sports, it is family. You're not going to tell on your sibling in sport. You're going to protect them.

That's some of my concern when I'm looking at these organizations. I wonder if Gymnastics Canada—which we're hearing hundreds of complaints for—is part of the safe sport mechanism. We're hearing from this group from bobsled—are they part of it? Are the ones actually at the top of these boards teaching these things? At the end of the day, are we going to make any difference?

I just want to pass it over to Michelle, so she can continue with this.

Thanks very much for that clarification.

• (1730)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I think what I'd like to dig into, Ms. Lafrenière, is the “not mandatory” part and how you put regulations in place. I understand we're asking for a national judicial inquiry, but I think diving a little bit deeper into the coaching association protocol is really important.

How often is recertification or training required?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: We would call that maintenance of certification. It is required over a four-year period.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: You can go for four years without having any further updates.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Yes. Sports can add on requirements and professional development. The maintenance of certification is additional requirements. It's not a retaking of all of the content and curriculum that gave them the designation.

Much like a regulated profession, they have requirements to maintain their designation within their profession, which is not go-

ing back to their university curriculum, but rather enhancing their knowledge.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Who's enforcing that they're doing that?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: We actually have a national database. If a person does not maintain adherence to that recertification, it actually shows up on their education transcript that they were certified but not renewed, which is what we would call that.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: As you said earlier, it's not mandatory, so there would be lots of people who don't have this anyway.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: That's right.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: If you have somebody who wants to report abuse, what's the procedure?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: We are the education body, so while we do receive complaints, we actually don't have the authority through the education program to do anything. We try to pass people on to the responsible organization so that it is dealt with.

When an individual has the professional coaching or chartered professional coach designation, if there is a complaint, we ensure we try to investigate that to see if we need to remove that designation, but that changes with OSIC.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you very much.

I guess I would just come back to the great comment by Mr. Lemay about who's watching the watchers.

The Chair: Awesome. Thank you very much.

We'll go back to Jenna.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to direct my questions to Ms. Lafrenière.

First of all, I want to make sure I understand your involvement—or not—with the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner to date.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: We are required, as per the contribution agreement, to become compliant. We've reviewed all of our policies and we will be signing on officially as of January 20.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: How do you view those requirements and the establishment of OSIC in how you move forward as an organization? How does it impact you?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: I think for us, it is a good process that gives us a body that informs us, if a complaint has happened, whether it's a registered coach. From our perspective, that is a really important step forward.

We don't employ coaches. We educate coaches, and we screen and register them, so that's where we have the ability to remove a coach from an “in good standing” status. There are very few coaches who go through that process. It's primarily our major games coaches.

I want OSIC to be established. Even if it's not perfect, as our athletes have described, it's a step, and we need an interim step to at least move us forward and give us some level of independence from the national federations to hear investigations or complaints.

• (1735)

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Terrific.

Does your organization currently have a coaching registry?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: We don't have a coaching registry. We have chartered professional coaches, and it's a back-end screening that we do for coaches who go to the Olympics, Paralympics, Commonwealth Games, Pan-Am Games, and some national championships. Some sports require that screening. It's a screening, the mandated safe sport training, a criminal records check and two good references that we receive, and we provide that green light back to the Olympic Committee or to the national sport federation.

However, it is not widely used. Maybe it's 1,000 coaches. I want to be very transparent about that.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Why isn't it widely used? This is so I understand that piece.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: It's because we've never had the buy-in of our partners to create a registry. A profession is typically regulated at the provincial level, so in that complexity of provincial/territorial regulation, a national registry is really hard to enforce.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: That's very interesting.

Maybe this is the last on this piece. As you move forward with your agreement with OSIC, as OSIC is established and is moving forward, if they have a complaint against a coach, what will you then do with that? What is the outcome, or what does that look like?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: If we're informed, if we receive the final decision and the appeals process has been exhausted—because that is due diligence—if they were one of our chartered professional coaches or a registered coach, we would remove them from “in good standing”.

The Chair: The clerk is letting me know that we have to end this very soon. We have three minutes left.

Andréanne, you have one minute. Leah, you have one minute, and then we'll be done.

Go ahead, Andréanne.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Lemay, the federal government is currently reviewing its sport policy. We have alluded to other things that the federal government could do.

As representatives of more local entities, have you and your colleagues been approached about that policy, which the minister is to present in February? Have you been able to say your piece?

Mr. François Lemay: No, not to my knowledge. I have not heard of any local association that has been approached about this, and I am actually involved in several sports.

On that subject, I would say this: if we want to achieve some success in Canada, and I think we have all the means to do that, we have to work together. Maybe the policy should not be presented in February; maybe, instead, we should take the time to consult our colleagues in the provinces and territories to determine what can be done as a team.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you again, Mr. Lemay.

I also want to thank you for raising the issue of the national women's handball team: those girls came to see me at my office to speak out about their lack of funding.

In the world of sport, there is real inequality among the various sports associations. I think that if we want to make a real change in the culture and give female athletes and girls back the place they deserve in various sports, we have to take a look at the issue of the inequality among the various sports in Canada.

Mr. François Lemay: Absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you so much.

Leah, this is your last minute of questions. You have the floor.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

My last question is for Madame Lafrenière. I find it disturbing. You provide coaches with training. It sounds like most of it's on-line. If coaches are found in violation, they are taken off the good list, but we've heard so much testimony that's indicated very clearly this is not happening. This is not happening and coaches, as we heard in the testimony before yours, continue to be able to coach in spite of significant allegations of abuse.

Because I don't have time, unfortunately, I want to ask you a yes-or-no question. Do you think the current system, the way it is now, is protecting kids from coaches who abuse children?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: No.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: I must say that I don't think we could have ended anything on that more powerfully. Wow.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank François Lemay and Ms. Lafrenière. Thank you so much for bringing the truth and your testimony here today. We really appreciate it.

Just as a reminder, committee members, we'll be meeting at 11 o'clock on Monday morning.

We're adjourned.

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