

# **Fixing the Broken Middle: Making the Canada Games an Effective Instrument for Long Term Athlete Development**

**A Discussion Paper Prepared for Canada Games Council  
by Paul Jurbala, *communityactive*  
September, 2007**

## **Executive Summary**

Between community sport and the senior national team level, Canadian athletes must navigate “the broken middle”: a confusing patchwork of delivery and support mechanisms with a scarcity of specialized development coaches. As LTAD becomes the organizing principle for Canadian sport development and National Sport Federations (NSFs) create and implement their LTAD plans, NSFs are recognizing the difficulties in making system improvements in this middle ground. Between the Learn to Train and Train to Win stages, athletes are confronted by poorly-connected sport club, school, Provincial/Territorial Sport Organization (P/TSO), National Development Centre, and multi-sport organization programs, many of which support promising athletes for a short time then abandon them to find their own way to the next level.

Thanks to its established position and its F/P/T sport and community partnerships, the Canada Games can be a catalyst to fix the broken middle. While the Canada Games plays many important roles in Canadian sport, this paper considers the Games purely as an athlete development tool and presents eleven key recommendations for improving the development capacity of the Games for discussion by the Canadian sport community. Implementation of these recommendations, while they raise some technical challenges, will not diminish the value of the Games in meeting other key objectives including unity, participation and community-building.

The eleven recommendations are:

1. Align Canada Games participation to just prior to the average onset of high performance (High Performance Threshold, or HPT). Typically this is within the Train to Compete phase of LTAD.
2. Remove ability restrictions.
3. Add a wild card system in individual sports to bring the next best athletes in Canada that are not selected for their P/T quota.
4. Award the Canada Games every 18 months (alternating winter and summer) based upon a rotation of Provinces/Territories that engages more Canadian communities in the Canada Games Movement
5. Remember the Ten Year Rule; work toward sending a narrower band of late Train to Compete athletes to Canada Games.
6. Optimize the value of Canada Games by ensuring athletes participate in context of a periodized annual plan.
7. Align P/T, Regional and Canada Games.
8. Investigate tiered competition and/or fewer, targeted sports.
9. Consider using LTAD-linked performance standards for Games selection.
10. Measure conversion rates.
11. Use Canada Games as a paradigm for Competition Development coach preparation.

## The Broken Middle

A recent National Sport Federation (NSF) meeting to plan NCCP development illustrated the problem well. Challenged to list coach competencies for the Competition Development context- roughly from Train to Train through Train to Compete, in Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) jargon- the group said, “This is incredibly difficult. These coaches work in all kinds of settings: clubs, National Training Centres, as Provincial/Territorial Head Coaches, P/T Team Coaches, and private coaches. Some regions have strong programs, others can barely send athletes to competitions. Some have performance enhancement teams to work with, others have nothing. A Competition Development coach is working with teenage athletes right from the time of their growth spurt, when some of them can barely do anything, through to international-level competition. Kids are all over the place at those ages- they quit, they come back, their lives change fast. A Competition Development coach needs to be good at everything!”

The challenge of the Competition Development coach is the challenge of the Canadian sport system as a whole, particularly for late-specialization sports. Stated in broad terms, the community level (Active Start through Learn to Train, in LTAD) has lots of programs and participants in most sports; its weaknesses are coaching and the development of “physically literate” young athletes. The Senior National Team level (Train to Win) is managed by NSFs as a priority project; existing resources are directed to high performance, while initiatives like Own The Podium are providing enhanced support for excellence. But as they analyze their programs under the microscope of the Long Term Athlete Development initiative, Canada’s NSFs are confronting the plain truth: between the community and the national levels, there is a confusing patchwork of delivery and support mechanisms, a scarcity of true, specialized development coaches, and a host of young athletes whose dreams and energy are quickly dissipated by the difficulties in navigating the broken middle of Canadian sport.

Simply adding resources to the top of the athlete development pyramid will not solve this problem. Nor will the oft-demanded, but far bigger challenge of reinvigorating school physical activity and building better community sport programs across the nation. Practically speaking, it is the connection between the community and high performance that is the best target for improvement. Our best hope of doing this lies in taking what we already have- programs, events, facilities- and aligning them, making them work better together, and providing additional support to fill the gaps. Stakeholders including Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations (P/TSOs), P/T governments, NSFs, National Training Centres, the Canadian Sport Centres and others will need to work more closely together. Here, the Canada Games, a fixture of the Canadian sport system for nearly 40 years, the driver of a great deal of P/T sport activity, an icon of Canadian F/P/T partnership, and a common point of reference for NSFs, P/TSOs, and F/P/T governments, has the potential to be a catalyst for change and a bridge across the broken middle.

Prepared with input from the LTAD Expert Team, this paper examines the effectiveness of the Canada Games (and by extension, Provincial/Territorial and Regional Games) as a development tool for athletes, and presents recommended changes to improve this effectiveness. The Canada Games serve many masters: they carry the weight of goals for national unity, community facility building, and P/T sport development, to name a few. The paper sets those important goals aside for the moment, and asks the question, ***“If we consider Canada Games purely as an athlete development tool, what changes should we make to enhance the Games as a key event in long term athlete development?”***

## The Long Term Athlete Development Initiative

The LTAD initiative has emerged as a main organizing principle for the Canadian sport system. While the relatively rapid acceptance of LTAD is exciting, LTAD Workshops held in January 2006 and 2007 brought forward a wide range of challenging issues faced by NSFs as they build their LTAD models and plans. As NSFs presented their progress reports a number of themes become evident:

- Many NSFs recognize that their youth and junior development programs are inadequate.

- There is consensus that, especially in the area of community-based physical literacy-building programs, NSF's are not well placed to lead all the needed changes.
- A majority of NSF's are identifying coaching, especially at beginner and development levels, as a key weakness.
- Some NSF's are encountering resistance from their P/TSO member-partners.
- Sport Canada has identified LTAD as a "long term project" but has no new money specifically earmarked for implementation of new NSF initiatives arising from LTAD.

Change costs money. In order to implement LTAD plans many NSF's will need to create new programs, especially those targeted to development of younger athletes. More and better trained coaches will be needed, and existing professional coaches will need to be retained, and possibly retrained. New plans will require significant resources and support if they are to be fulfilled; otherwise, LTAD may fail to trigger the system-wide change required to fix the broken middle. All facets of the Canadian sport system, including Games, must be aligned if we are to meet LTAD strategic goals; while system rejuvenation may be on the wish list, system *coordination* is more likely to yield results in the short- to mid-term.

### **The Canada Games**

For nearly 40 years the Canada Games have been a positive influence on sport development based on successful partnerships, community-building, facility and volunteer development. The Canada Games are a model for federal-provincial/territorial cooperation, for building national pride, mobilizing communities, and developing Canada's greatest resource, its youth. Cumulatively, more than \$250 million has been invested in the Canada Games, about half of it in capital projects in the various host communities. At the 2006 Olympics in Turin, 59% of medalists (from Canada Games sports) were Canada Games alumni.

Despite this success, the Canada Games can do more to help develop Canadian athletes. Beginning in 2003 the Canada Games Council spent eighteen months interviewing experts across Canadian sport, and prepared the Canada Games Hosting Rotation Report for the Third Cycle: 2015 and Beyond. Based on extensive analysis of athlete participation in the Canada Games compared with later success, trends in athlete age classification, and P/T team sizes and success factors, as well as the Games mandate stated in the Canadian Sport Policy as the need to "*increase the quality and numbers of the next generation of national team athletes participating in international competition*", the Report recommended a number of options including increasing the frequency of the Games, removing ability restrictions and adding wild card athletes. To date, these recommendations have not been approved by the F/P-T Ministers.

Since that time, further developments in the sport system including LTAD, Own the Podium and others continue to raise questions about how best to improve Canada's sport system. LTAD and sport development experts believe that the Games can play a key role in necessary system alignment. Continuing analysis of how the Canada Games can help build "the next generation of national team athletes" has resulted in further recommendations, including those in this paper, as well as ongoing work with NSF's to increase the effectiveness of the Games while maintaining the traditional balanced priorities.

What do these recommendations mean for NSF's, P/TSOs, and Canadian sport in general? How would they make the Canada Games a more effective sport development tool? How is this relevant to LTAD? Those questions are the basis for this discussion paper.

### **The Missing Generation**

If the aim of the Canada Games is to help prepare the next generation of national team athletes, only athletes who may be considered prospects to attain high performance should attend. The benefit of participation in Canada Games will extend most to the following athletes:

- *Those who can benefit from high-level national competition.* Athletes who are regularly participating in international competition, or those who are not yet ready to be competitive in high-level national competition, will derive less benefit from participation.
- *Those for whom modeling a multi-sport Games will be beneficial.* The newness, excitement and pressure of first-time participation in international multi-sport Games (eg Commonwealth, Pan Am, Olympic) is widely known to distract athletes and reduce performance potential. Progressive exposure to similar environments, such as Canada Games, can help adapt athletes and prepare them for international Games.

Assuming the quality of Canada Games competition is high, athletes who are high-level national competitors just on the cusp of National Team participation will benefit most. The most advanced of these athletes may have some National Team or Junior National Team experience, may in fact have received development-level carding, and are probably within one year of joining the Senior National Team. The least advanced of this group may have been identified as having potential for National Team membership within a two- or three-year time horizon. LTAD principles suggest that athletes late in the Train to Compete stage- in late specialization sports, roughly between ages 17 and 21- are the closest “fit”. This seems to conform well to the average age of first carding in Canada Summer Games sports of 21.9 years for males, and 21.3 years for females.

That’s the theory. In practice, the Canada Games must balance diverse priorities which limit its ability to bring all the “right athletes” together and reduce its effectiveness as an instrument for sport development. These priorities include:

- The requirement to rotate the Games to every province and territory, vital for community-building, sport facility development in smaller urban centers, and national unity purposes, means that a significant portion of the Games budget must be spent on capital projects and athlete travel costs.
- The requirement to field P/T teams of equal size, that is, to allow equal access to the Games by all provinces and territories, means that some strong developing athletes cannot attend if their P/T team is “full”, while other P/Ts send relatively weak athletes or cannot fill all their places. This results in the perennial Canada Games problem of very strong athletes and teams facing much weaker ones, which compromises development for both groups.
- The inclusion of ability restrictions, which aim to minimize athlete disparity and create a more homogeneous competition by excluding carded and National Team athletes, also ensures the best in a given age group may not attend and thus diminishes the relevance of the Games for those who would benefit from competing with the best.
- The fact that NSFs balance their own priorities through the Games Technical Package may tend to dilute the sport-development focus of the Games, depending on the orientation and perceived needs of the NSF. For example, if a given NSF views Canada Games as an opportunity for “the best of the rest” or simply finds it too difficult to recruit young athletes, it may propose an older age group. If a NSF aims the Technical Package at “best of the rest” athletes, or if P/T teams have multiple development options and choose to send “best of the rest” to Canada Games, the level of Games competition declines, making them less effective as a development tool.

The research done by the Sport Development and Sport Selection (SDSS) Working Group showed that of more than 16,000 athletes carded since 1983, only about 38% attended the Canada Games. Of the 62% that did not attend, about a third, 20% of all carded athletes, were born in the younger half of their eligibility, suggesting older athletes took the places. Another third, 20% of all carded athletes, were already carded when they were eligible by age, and therefore not allowed to attend. The final 20% of all

carded athletes did not attend for other reasons, not recorded but known to include: team quota, date conflicts, other priorities, injury, and immigration. The 40% who could not attend due to missing the age eligibility or ability restrictions (previous carding or National Team participation) are the “missing generation”, athletes who could have benefited, or who could have raised the level of competition.

The ability and age restriction constraints on National Sport Federations reduce the pool of potential Canada Games athletes, with predictable consequences. Analysis of 2003 sport eligibility suggests that many sports are sending too broad an age-range of athletes to the Games to ensure that the benefit of Games participation is focused on “next generation National Team athletes”. A broad age-band approach may be necessary to ensure enough athletes are sent to the Games to provide competition; many sports may have too few identified “next generation” athletes to create worthwhile competition pools. The fact that 40% of next generation athletes are missing the Canada Games due to the missing generation effect and/or ability restrictions suggests that many of the right athletes are not able to attend the Games, and NSFs compensate by casting the eligibility net wide to permit second-tier athletes to take their places.

To maximize athlete development benefit, sports need to get more legitimate next generation National Team athletes to the Canada Games. To accomplish this, the SDSS Working Group made four key recommendations, which have been updated for this paper in light of new data provided by the LTAD Expert Group. In addition this paper makes seven further recommendations on how to improve the ability of the Canada Games to knit together the broken middle by acting as an effective sport development tool.

### **Bridging the Broken Middle: Recommendations for Change**

*Recommendation 1: Align Canada Games participation to just prior to the average onset of high performance (High Performance Threshold, or HPT). Typically this is within the Train to Compete phase of LTAD.*

When advanced athletes begin to participate more regularly in international and National Team events, they will derive less benefit from, and be less available for, participation in Canada Games. The Working Group used age of first carding (usually development carding) as an index of the threshold of high performance, and concluded that athletes should participate before the average age of first carding.

Currently most, but not all, sports send athletes younger than average age of first carding, but there is a second issue: some sports have Canada Games ages *too much* lower than average age of first carding, which may also reduce the value of Games participation. Too-young athletes have a lower probability of moving to international and/or National Team participation. Further, sending athletes to Canada Games too young favours early maturers over athletes with late-developing but possibly superior abilities. It appears the best alignment may be to make the Canada Games eligibility ages very close to, but less than, the average high performance threshold (HPT) in each sport, within the mid-to-late Train to Compete stage of the LTAD model.

Age of first carding is not the ideal index of high performance. Data released by the LTAD expert group shows that in some sports, average age of first carding is equal to or later than the age of reaching the first Olympic final or first World Cup podium. In these cases high performance is reached well prior to age of first carding. It is hoped that one key outcome of Canada’s LTAD project will be a clearer definition of the high performance threshold (HPT) for each sport, but until then it is reasonable to suggest that the lower of average age of first carding or first World Cup or Olympic final be used as an index, and that Canada Games participation should be several years prior to the HPT index.

LTAD age alignments have been completed for the 17 sports on the 2009 Canada Summer Games program. Of the 17 sports, eight sports have changed their age categories to align the Games into the Train to Compete phase of their NSO’s LTAD. Of the 22 sports on the 2007 Canada Winter Games

program, five changed their age categories from the 2003 Games. True LTAD age alignments are to be completed for the 2011 Canada Winter Games technical packages over the next two years.

*Recommendation 2: Remove ability restrictions.*

By removing all ability restrictions except for senior international carding, (ie allowing development cards and senior national cards, national team participation, and high level event participation) but keeping eligibility ages below the average HPT, the Canada Games would be open to all “next generation” National Team athletes. In late 2006 there were 27 athletes who were age-eligible for the 2007 Canada Winter Games but were excluded due to holding a senior card. Allowing these athletes to compete would increase the quality of the field, increase media, public and sponsor interest in the Games, increase coach interest in attending the Games, increase the attractiveness of Games’ qualifying events, and reduce conflicts over eligibility.

*Recommendation 3: Add a wild card system in individual sports to bring the next best athletes in Canada that are not selected for their PT quota.*

One way to bring more of the “next generation” to Canada Games is to implement a wild card system. This would permit more identified, potential high performance athletes from P/Ts which have “filled their quota” (reached the maximum team size) to participate, raising the level of competition and allowing more athletes to benefit from the Games. This would likely be more effective in individual sports rather than team sports, as the nature of team sports does not easily allow for addition of a few wild cards per team, and teams in general represent a range of athlete skills and abilities.

To quote the SDSS Working Group report, “Approximately 10% of the field in each sport is recommended as the number of wild card places. This (could) mean an increase of approximately 220 athletes in each of the Winter and Summer Games, plus extra team support staff.” Three options were explored to accommodate wild card athletes without increasing the size of the Games:

1. Reduce each PT team quota in individual sports by ~10%. Create a number of wild card places equal to the reduction in quota places.
2. Use unfilled capacity for wild cards. Actual participation at the Games is approximately 80% for Summer Games and 82% for Winter Games (i.e. compared to the theoretical maximum number of participants). The host societies are expected to accommodate 85% participation. Thus, additional spots could be granted to wild cards up to the 85% participation rate. This option would however, result in only 70-110 wild card places, rather than the recommended 220 places.
3. Reduce the number of sports in the sport selection process. Those places could be granted to wild card entries.

Wild cards would be allocated to P/Ts based on objective performance standards: rankings, times or scores of athletes taken in national or selection events.

*Recommendation 4: Monitor the missing generation effect as other changes are implemented. Consider increased Canada Games frequency if the missing generation effect does not improve.*

The Hosting Rotation Report to the F/P/T Ministers made a direct recommendation to increase frequency:

*“(It is recommended) the Canada Games be awarded every 18 months (alternating winter and summer) based upon a rotation of Provinces/Territories that engages more Canadian communities in the Canada Games Movement.”*

Increasing the frequency of the Canada Games is the surest way to reduce the “missing generation” effect, allowing the 20% of carded athletes who miss the Games to participate, and increasing the value of the Games to athlete development. The impact of increasing frequency was calculated as adding 3 additional Canada Games over the proposed 23-year hosting cycle. There would be an increased cost, which was factored into a recommended new funding model. This new funding model is seen by Canada Games Council as indispensable to maintain the current level of facilities and services for athletes, standards which are threatened by inflation and other cost pressures.

The basic principle for aligning Canada Games with LTAD concepts to facilitate optimal athlete development is that the Canada Games should occur at just the right time for each athlete. Of course, the Games dates are fixed, so the question becomes, “How can the maximum number of athletes who would benefit, attend the Canada Games?” The four recommendations presented by the SDSS Working Group speak to this question. But there is more that can be done: changes which could be implemented by NSFs, P/TSOs, P/T governments, and multi-sport organizations to more fully capitalize on the Canada Games, as well as Provincial/Territorial and Regional Games, and integrate them better as a key focus for long term athlete development. The following recommendations should also be considered:

*Recommendation 5: Remember the Ten Year Rule.* According to LTAD principles, “it takes a minimum of ten years and 10,000 hours of training for a talented athlete to reach elite levels.” Given that Canada Games is most effective as a tool for development of late pre-elite athletes (Train to Compete) it is reasonable to suggest that athletes who have participated in 7 or 8 years of progressive training and development and are on track to elite performance are best-suited to attend Canada Games. Data collected by Gendron and Hodgins in 2003 may indicate that many sports send athletes to Canada Games too inexperienced for maximum benefit. Their survey of Canada Winter Games athletes showed the *average* athlete had competed for seven years prior to Games participation- close to the figure suggested by the Ten Year Rule. When broken down by sport, however, it appears that 10 of 20 Winter Games sports were sending athletes with insufficient experience.

*Recommendation 6: Optimize the Value of Canada Games by Ensuring Athletes Participate in Context of a Periodized Annual Plan.* Regardless of the theoretical value of a stage-ready athlete attending the Canada Games, the actual value of the Games experience will depend on how well the athlete is prepared. The Games should be the centerpiece of the annual plan, or at least one peak in a multi-peak plan. Achieving this objective will require more focus by P/TSOs on Canada Games qualification and coaching, coordination of P/T Team coaching with athlete’s personal coaching, and improving the skill level of Competition Development-level coaches working with these athletes. Gendron and Hodgins reported only 56% of athletes surveyed at the 2003 Canada Winter Games had received an annual training program. NSFs could do more by preparing training program templates for use by coaches in their sports and coordinating the competition calendar of national events around the Canada Games.

*Recommendation 7: Align P/T, Regional and Canada Games.* An analysis of LTAD principles suggests that Canada Games, as a high-level national competition, is ideal for preparation of late Train to Compete-stage athletes. Which athletes should high-level P/T and regional Games (eg Western Canada Games) be targeting?

It is reasonable to suggest that participants in high-level P/T and regional competition should be post-growth-spurt (for late specialization sports) and engaged in year-round, progressive, periodized training. This fits the late Train to Train or early Train to Compete stages of LTAD- athletes between the end of the growth spurt and, roughly, ages 15-17. Such athletes would be at about year 6 or 7 of the “Ten Year Rule”, that is, about one or two years prior to Canada Games readiness. Again, alignment of P/T and regional Games to this system would entail implementation of athlete development and coaching support to optimize the benefit of P/T Games to participating athletes. In NCCP terms, coaching for P/T Games would also fall within the Competition Development context.

*Recommendation 8: Investigate Tiered Competition and/or Fewer, Targeted Sports.* A 16-0 blowout in Canada Games competition improves neither the winning nor losing sides. And, as noted above, removal of ability restrictions and addition of wild cards would tend to widen the competition level gap between P/T teams. A solution which would improve the quality of competition for all competitors in team sports and some head-to-head events is the introduction of tiered or preliminary competition.

A second approach, suggested by the Own The Podium rationale, is to reduce the number of Canada Games sports and focus more on development in the targeted sports. This could free resources to enable a Canada Games Dreams and Champions (ie between-Games) program to selectively support athlete development in specific P/Ts and sports, along the lines of the IOC's Olympic Solidarity program. This could ensure that no sports or P/Ts are disadvantaged by a more targeted approach. Both approaches could help level the playing field and improve the quality of competition for all Canada Games participants.

*Recommendation 9: Consider Using LTAD-linked Performance Standards for Games Selection.* Like the Olympics or Commonwealth Games, we should not be sending athletes to Canada Games just to have a great time or as the happy ending to a junior career. We should be sending the best athletes, those most able to use the Games experience as a stepping stone to future high performance. This suggests creating selection standards linked to LTAD development milestones. A key principle of LTAD is that athlete preparation and coaching be based on developmental age, not just chronological age. It follows that using close-ended chronological age criteria (eg "Ages 17 to 21") does not permit athletes outside the age range who would benefit from Games participation, to compete. The other typically used criteria (ie "Under 17") is open-ended for younger, exceptional talents but excludes older athletes.

Simply opening up the age criteria so any athlete can compete is not the answer. The challenge is to ensure the right athletes are competing. To accomplish this, athlete selection would have to be based on a combination of ability standards, such as race times, points scored in qualifying events, etc, and "stage readiness" defined as the personal readiness of the athlete based on progression through LTAD stages. While this is a more complex method of selection, it should be considered for the future, when sports have progressed far enough with LTAD implementation to make it workable.

*Recommendation 10: Measure Conversion Rates.* If all the above recommendations were implemented, we would have an athlete development system that is much more focused on progressive development, using P/T/regional and Canada Games participation as key milestones. This in turn would allow much more sophisticated tracking of athlete progress than we commonly do today. Having the best, identified athletes together at P/T/regional and Canada Games allows for longitudinal analysis of athlete performance and success, making Games a much more effective talent identification and development tool. One of the most important, and easiest measures to track, would be conversion rates: the number of P/T/regional Games alumni that were selected to Canada Games, the number of Canada Games athletes who graduate to carding (41% of 2007 carded athletes are CG Alumni) senior National Teams (35% of 2007 Pan Am Games team are CG Alumni, 52% of 2006 Olympic Team are CG Alumni), and the number of Canada Games alumni athletes who are able to convert World Championships medals to Olympic medals. In addition to helping establish the value of the Canada Games as an athlete development tool, these conversion rates could become more important parts of sport evaluation and funding processes. They could also be a basis for partnership agreements between NSFs and their member P/TSOs which would form frameworks for shared athlete and coach development within sports.

*Recommendation 11: Use Canada Games as a Paradigm for Competition Development Coach Preparation.* Within the new NCCP model, every stream and every context within streams should have a clear set of outcome objectives. An obvious objective for the Competition Development coach is "Prepare an athlete for Canada Games". If every NSF participating in Canada Games used this as a key coach

development objective in the Competition Development context, coaches would be better prepared to help their athletes extract maximum benefit from Canada Games participation.

## **Conclusion**

Objections may exist to these recommendations. Recommendations 2 and 3, removal of ability restrictions and addition of wild cards, would tend to widen the competition level gap between P/T teams, although this could be mitigated by simultaneous implementation of tiered competitions or competition pools as suggested by Gendron and Hodgins. From an athlete development perspective, close competition is the most fruitful kind. Recommendation 4, increased Games frequency, has an obvious financial cost. But Recommendation 1, moving Canada Games eligibility age closer to, but just below, the HPT and in the late Train to Compete stage has no negative P/T “equality” or financial impact.

From a NSF perspective, the “broken middle” pressures which work against NSFs as they attempt to implement LTAD plans also confound efforts to use Canada Games more effectively. NSFs have limited control over development of athletes at the P/T level (Train to Train though Train to Compete) just as they have limited control over how P/T teams for Canada Games are selected and prepared, and no control over the funding and policy directions taken by P/T governments. As a result, NSFs may choose other athlete development opportunities over which they have more control, such as Junior World Championships or development through National Training Centres, as methods-of-choice for athlete development. At the same time, due to P/T government funding constraints, PTSOs often terminate support and development for Canada Games athletes immediately post-Games, leaving these athletes in a “no-man’s-land” between P/T and national programs. These decisions effectively undermine the Canada Games and the significant investment made in Canada Games by F/P/T governments; but they are decisions which are in effect forced upon NSFs by broken-middle pressures.

Implementation of all the recommendations would likely result in a Canada Games which would be much improved as an athlete development tool. They would also make the Canada, P/T and regional Games a unifying concept for the broken middle. By better connecting the various organizations responsible for sport and athlete development, the existing F/P/T partnerships and investments that are the foundation of the Canada Games would be more fully leveraged. And there is a momentum effect- the more important the Games become, the easier it is for NSFs to use them as centerpieces of athlete development programs.

Strong leadership is needed to fully realize the potential of Canada Games as an athlete development opportunity for next generation national team athletes, and create system alignment consistent with LTAD principles. Considering our resource constraints however, building on successes, connecting and strengthening what we have, is by far the most practical way to fix the broken middle.

## **References**

Balyi, I; Cardinal, C; Higgs, C; Norris, S; Way, R. Long Term Athlete Development - Canadian Sport for Life. Canadian Sport Centres, 2005

Gendron, M and Hodgins, K.A. 2003 Canada Winter Games Technical Assessment

MacPherson, B; Trono, C; Farrar, L; Nicholson, S; Jurbala, P; Marier, A ; Balyi, I; Gallant, A; and Chene, E. Canada Games for the Next Generation: Training Athletes to Compete Nationally and Beyond. Report of the Sport Development Working Group prepared for the Hosting Rotation Review Steering Committee Dec 17, 2004

Way, R. LTAD Training to Win: Sport Specific Age Data. Powerpoint presentation, May 2006.

Report for the Federal – Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Sport. Canada Games Hosting Rotation Report for the Third Cycle 2015 and Beyond. Canada Games Council, April 20, 2005