

A DECLARATION BY CANADIAN ATHLETES

**On the occasion of the 10th annual Athletes CAN Forum
September 2002 – Quebec City (QC)**

Preamble

Whereas Athletes CAN commends the steps taken to increase collaboration and interaction among governments and partners in the sport and physical activity community, as demonstrated by the following examples: federal/provincial/territorial commitment to the Canadian Sport Policy, the existence of the Sport Matters Group, the Podium 2002 program, and the establishment of the Alternate Dispute Resolution Centre.

Whereas Canadian athletes recognize the progress made to date toward a more athlete-centered sport system, as demonstrated by the following examples: the existence of a collective athlete voice in Athletes CAN, more effective athlete representation, athlete-centered provisions of the Sport Funding and Accountability Framework, and the development of athlete leaders.

Whereas Canadian athletes acknowledge the efforts and support of the Government of Canada and partners in sport, in the provision of opportunities for the pursuit of high performance sport success.

We, the high performance athletes of Canada and Athletes CAN, our collective athlete voice, hereby declare the following:

1. We call on Canadian athletes to be effective leaders in Canadian sport and in Canadian society.

Canadians will recognize that this has been accomplished when athletes, elected by their peers, occupy constitutionally-recognized positions of responsibility within national sport organizations, at Canadian Sport Centers, and on relevant decision and policy-making bodies in Canadian sport; when elected athlete leaders, both current and recently retired, are empowered to make meaningful and significant contributions in areas that affect them, the sport community and society; and when Athletes CAN is recognized and appropriately supported, both financially and collectively, to provide leadership training, education and effective representation for all Canadian amateur high performance athletes.

This statement draws upon the Canadian Sport Policy – Enhanced Excellence (E5), Report of the Athletes CAN Round Table (Calgary 2001), the Effective Athlete Leadership Manual (Athletes CAN, 2001), Athletes CAN Strategic Plan 2001-2004, Athletes CAN Forum 2002 (Theme and Session notes) and positions of the Sport Matters Group (2000-2002).

The success of Canadian athletes is an indication of a well-functioning sport system, and of a healthy community and country. Athlete leaders have a prominent role to play in the development of sport excellence, community participation and national pride, particularly through their ability to effectively advocate beyond their own interests. The actions of strong athlete leaders, particularly their input into matters that directly affect them, will help sport in Canada (and sport performance) to flourish and advance Canadian society toward fully recognizing and embracing the benefits of sport, play and physical activity.

2. We call on the Government of Canada to invest in a comprehensive sport development program, from playground to podium and beyond.

Canadians will recognize that this has been accomplished when new investments in sport development are included in the next federal budget (winter 2002/2003); when investments in hosting events/ bid processes are balanced with investments in athlete and coach development programs; and when Canadians at all ages can enjoy a full range of quality sport and participation opportunities.

This statement draws upon the Canadian Sport Policy, "Sport: The Way Ahead" Report (May 1992), the "Status of the High Performance Athlete Survey" (1996), recommendations of the Athletes CAN Round Table (2001), "Building Canada Through Sport: A National Summit on Sport" (Ottawa 2001), Athletes CAN Board of Directors meeting notes, recommendations of the Sport Matters Group and recommendations from the 2002 Athletes CAN Forum.

Sport and physical activity contribute greatly to the health and fabric of this country and to the well being of its citizenry. To ensure that all Canadians may enjoy these benefits, we believe that sport development must take place at all levels; from participation to high performance, through youth-oriented programs to activities for seniors. By investing in a comprehensive sport development system of opportunities, access and programs suited to the level and interest of each participant, including high performance athletes, Canada assures itself of a fit, healthy and productive nation.

3. We call on the Government of Canada to establish a Minister of Sport and Physical Activity and a Department of Sport and Physical Activity.

Canadians will recognize that this has been accomplished when, by the spring of 2004, a Minister of Sport and Physical Activity is appointed and sits as a full member of the federal cabinet.

This statement draws upon the recommendations of the Mills Report (November 1998), the unanimous agreement by the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Sport (Chair Dennis Mills, May 2002), testimony of the Sport Matters Group before the Parliamentary Sub-Committee and regional consultations leading to the Canadian Sport Policy (1999-2001).

By establishing a Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, the link between sport and health is legitimized and formalized. Through the voice of a federal Minister and the resources of a full government department, the sport and physical activity sector is more effectively able to promote messages, work collaboratively, enact change, and seek greater investment. Full Ministerial status confers a "seat at the cabinet table", a higher profile for the sector and an enhanced ability to make linkages to Health, other government departments (Justice, Environment, Social Services etc) and the corporate sector.

4. We call on provincial and territorial governments to increase sport and physical education in Canadian schools.

Canadians will recognize that this has been accomplished when children are able to enjoy at least 150 minutes per week of quality physical education in schools; when better and more affordable access is provided to gymnasias, and other sport facilities; and when coaches, teachers and instructors are recognized, trained and supported for the commitment of their time and expertise to enhancing sport and physical activity opportunities for young Canadians.

This statement draws upon the recommendations of CAHPERD, the resolution of the Canadian Medical Association, the International Charter of Sport and Physical Education of UNESCO (1978), resolution of the World Health Organization (1997), Federal Provincial Territorial *Action Plan for Sport - Enhanced Participation* (P2), the Foundation for Active Healthy Kids, *Six Point*

Plan for Action by the Coalition for Active Living, submissions by the Sport Matters Group to the Mills Committee, and a brief by Dr. Bruce Kidd to the Ontario Education Equality Task Force (“The Necessity of Quality Health and Physical Education”, September 2002)

Research shows that physical inactivity is a large factor in child obesity, heart disease and associated cancers. A large portion of young people in Canada do not meet even minimum standards of fitness and physical activity recommended for healthy growth and development. Sport and physical activity combat feelings of loneliness and isolation experienced by today’s youth through building connectedness, acceptance, belonging and self-esteem. We believe that strategic investment in school sport and physical education, including bilateral agreements with Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments, and a national sport and physical education program for Canadian youth, will create lifelong sport habits and foster a fitter, healthier and more active population.

5. We call on the Government of Canada to lead the creation of a national infrastructure program, with funding dedicated specifically for sport and recreation facilities.

Canadians will recognize that this has been accomplished when a specific Federal Sport Infrastructure program has been established; when relevant governments agree in 2003 on program resource levels under the Canadian Sport Policy; when clear infrastructure benchmarks are set under the Action Plan for Sport; and when government budgets specifically and clearly designate funds for facility maintenance, development and capital investment.

This statement draws upon the *Action Plan for Sport (2002)*, “Enhanced Capacity”, and is supported under proposals by CODA, Canadian Sport Centres, and the Advisory Committee of the Secretary of State (Amateur Sport).

The rationale for building and enhancing infrastructure is clear and incontrovertible. The playground is the first place for activities and games. It is where all Canadians start sport...where we learn lessons, make friends and play games..... and it is where the dreams of future champions begin. Gymnasiums, arenas, pools and playgrounds of Canada are in urgent need of a comprehensive infrastructure program. Sport facilities are also where champions are developed. New facilities must be built to both service the needs of all participants and meet the demands of athletes striving for excellence. Canadian Sport Centres have been established to address these needs, but would further benefit from linkage to high performance sport facilities for training, hosting and international competition. Proposals such as the “Action Plan for Future Canadian High Performance” prepared by the Calgary Olympic Development Association, must be looked at in earnest.

6. We call on the sport community, governments and the corporate sector to affirm a commitment to athlete-centered sport, and to create an optimal environment for athletes to pursue excellence.

Canadians will recognize that this has been accomplished when high performance athletes are consistently provided with the tools to compete and win; when athletes have access to accurate, trustworthy and timely information about sport science/medicine practices and products, including nutritional supplements; when the activities of the various agencies responsible for high performance sport are effectively integrated; when the corporate sector is actively engaged with partners in the support of amateur sport; when the support to athletes, both developing and at the high performance level, is on par with successful sporting nations of similar size and population; when athletes constitute at least 20% of relevant decision and policy-making bodies in Canadian sport; and when the Sport Funding and Accountability Framework (SFAF) process actively seeks input and adopts athlete-centered recommendations by Athletes CAN, and involves Athletes CAN in the annual SFAF evaluation process.

These statements draw upon the Canadian Sport Policy: *Enhanced Excellence*, the National Summit on Sport (Ottawa 2001), Athletes CAN Round Table recommendations (1999), Athletes CAN Strategic Plan 2001-2004, "Status of the High Performance Athlete" (1996), and "Sport: The Way Ahead" (1992).

International sport excellence is a laudable goal, albeit one which is incredibly difficult to achieve. We believe that to succeed in high performance, the Canadian sport system must work more collectively, embrace new partners (particularly the corporate sector) and involve athletes in all processes that affect them. Athlete centeredness does not simply mean "thinking of the athlete" – it places athletes at the table, makes them accountable and allows them to contribute to their own future, and to that of sport in Canada. To expect high performance athletes to represent Canada and win, without having the tools (coaching, sport science/medicine, input, competition etc) and proper financial support to accomplish the task, is to invite confusion, frustration and ultimately, disappointment. Unfortunately, the lifestyle, sacrifices and levels of support have not significantly changed since 1996, when the "Status of the High Performance Athlete" survey was commissioned. While innovative programs such as Podium 2002, a collaboration of Canadian sport agencies, have made a contribution, athletes share the responsibility with governments, the sport community and the corporate sector to find new, coordinated and timely approaches to athlete support. Recognizing the contributions and performances of athletes is one factor in building profile for sport and supporting athletes, and we recommend that proposals similar to the former *Athlete Information Bureau* be revisited.