

## **Research Reveals Important Coaching Issues**

On the road to building a progressive coaching strategy for Nova Scotia to promote and develop “coach and leadership training and certification standards for all levels within all settings of sport participation” as described in Nova Scotia’s Coaching Policy, a unique Coach Pilot Project began in March 2009. An important foundation of the Coach Pilot Project has been in-depth and *important research into the current state of coaching and its development at the community and school levels.*

Significant information was revealed through discussions with Coach Pilot partners--six sports and the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation-- and through discussions with clubs, schools and coaches in six regions of Nova Scotia, with provincial sport organizations, municipal recreation directors and Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection (HPP) officials. High level results of the research, funded by the Canadian Coaching Association (CAC) and Nova Scotia HPP and conducted by Brenda Robertson, PhD, Acadia University and Peggy Gallant, Saint Francis Xavier University are being presented to a Coaching Association of Canada Research Symposium in Vancouver on November 12, 2009, as per terms of the funding agreement.

The business of sport development is complex and includes public and private partners, volunteers, associations and organizations from the national to the community levels. This objective and independent research has uncovered issues which the sport community in Nova Scotia needs to address before coach and leadership development will be truly successful.

Nova Scotia is proud to be the first province in Canada to address the issues faced by coaches at the community level. Each of the issues raised is important to have identified now as we move to implement the provincial Coaching Policy. Each issue has come from data collected from those active in sport throughout the province. The next steps include meeting with all six Pilot Project sports and School sport participants in order for the pilot sports to begin Action Plans to increase the capacity for community coaches in Nova Scotia. Early in the new year the sport and recreation community will be invited to participate in a roundtable on the issues and key recommendations to address them.

The issues are outlined in the document attached.

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## Issues Related to the Sport System

1. **Understanding the NCCP community coach program:** National Sport Organizations (NSOs) are at various stages of development with regards to their community level (includes both clubs and school programs) coach programs. Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) are the primary vehicles through which the community coach requirements/programs are communicated to clubs, coaches, and prospective coaches. There is no standard means of communicating the information from either NSOs or PSOs to the community level coach. Also the quality of, and access to, PSO web and print materials varies greatly among sports. Therefore it's often very challenging for those at the community level in need of the information to access it easily and to understand the requirements.
2. **Confusion exists over who has primary responsibility for community level coach capacity development:** Research for this study shows that everyone surveyed is in agreement that there is a pressing need to develop coach capacity at the community level in Nova Scotia. At present, no one is claiming lead responsibility to undertake the task. The PSOs have indicated that they are responsible for training coaches yet to date this does not seem to have been their strategic priority. There is a definite gap between what PSOs are offering and what clubs and coaches say they need. Clubs pay fees to the PSO and look to them for leadership. Volunteer-run clubs appear to lack the capacity for developmental work. Municipal recreation departments have capacity but do not consider it their mandate to intervene with community clubs unless expressly asked to do so. Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection (NSHPP) has a vision for sport which includes the development of community coach capacity and is working with other provincial partners in an attempt to promote and support this work. They do not want to take responsibility at the grassroots level. The Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF) works with schools to ensure that provincial championships occur in 19 separate sports but does not determine coaching standards within individual schools. School sport is not a priority for most school administrators who already struggle with the provision of sport facilities, equipment, and transportation and with attempting to find teachers or community members willing to serve as volunteer coaches. Although working relationships may exist between certain individuals involved with these different agencies, there is no systematic vehicle of communication that would enable dialogue and help to determine who should play what role in building community level coach capacity.

3. **Effective connections do not exist throughout the broader sport system to support community coach development:** Coaching is simply one component of the broader sport delivery system that includes athlete development, competition management, and funding to name but a few. There are many players involved in various aspects of sport delivery within the province, some of whom have traditionally worked collaboratively and others who have operated somewhat independently. Comprehensive and effective systemic linkages do not exist today to support coaching development at the community level and it may be challenging to attempt to establish them among players.
4. **Effective connections among national, provincial, and community levels do not exist to support coaching development at the community level:** Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) consultants have been working with NSO coach development committees to develop curriculum and resources, including community coach programs, based upon the LTAD philosophy. Community clubs and schools rely upon the PSOs to provide information about coach standards and to deliver the appropriate training. Despite having these programs/resources, some of the PSOs have not established standards or a system of tracking, monitoring, and assessing coaches. Clubs and community based coaches are indicating to researchers that the information or their ability to access it is not meeting their needs.
5. **Focus of the government agenda for sport:** The results of this research raises a number of issues related to the role of government relative to community/school coach capacity development. One such issue is the degree of value traditionally placed upon community level coach capacity by all levels of government. There is a strong emphasis on the public face of sport which tends to be success at the elite level. With limited resources for sport, it is not surprising that considerable resources are directed towards podium finishes. However, there are many more values associated with the Canadian sport system than just winning. Although government is not the direct provider of sport, government monies are a significant source of sport funding. As such, government, at all levels possesses the power to link funding to promote societal values. For example, females are one group that is highly underrepresented in the sport system at all levels including at the community coach level. Tying desired societal outcomes such as gender equity in sport to funding is a role that the government is uniquely positioned to fulfill.

6. **Under- utilization of municipal recreation resources for community level sport development:**

According to the National Recreation Statement, the basic role of the municipality regarding recreation is to ensure the availability of the broadest range of recreation opportunities for all residents. Municipal Recreation Departments (MRDs) provide services as required including leadership training, facility development, and program coordination/ development. MRDs have professional staff who responds to expressed needs of constituents with community owned resources. MRDs report having little connection with community sport other than when they are called upon as a resource. MRDs accurately articulate the issues related to coach capacity development but generally do not appear to be proactive in addressing them within the community unless specifically called upon by clubs to do so. The result is that a valuable resource that could be utilized by clubs in the development of sport, including coach capacity, is not being accessed. There appears to be no formal communication mechanism between the MRDs and PSOs that could serve as a critical vehicle for community level sport development. There also is no formal communication mechanism in place between MRDs and schools that could facilitate collaboration on grassroots sport/coaching development. The MRDs report high levels of confusion/frustration around understanding the community coach programs across the various sports which perhaps serves as a barrier to being proactive in terms of facilitating/supporting coach capacity development.

7. **PSOs and MRDs lack standardized or coordinated mandates and priorities:** Within the province of Nova Scotia there are currently more than 60 PSOs and 60 municipal units with recreation departments. Although there are significant common functions performed by PSOs and MRDs their roles are not standardized or coordinated. This creates challenges when one attempts to develop an effective delivery system for coach capacity development at the community level. Unlike schools whose mandate is governed by policies and guidelines of the Department of Education, PSOs and Municipalities are free to establish their own roles and priorities. As such, negotiating system wide practices relative (words removed) to community coach development is challenging.

8. **Lack of connection of NSSAF and schools to broader sport system:** The Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF) works with schools on administrative issues for 19 sports. The NSSAF sets policy regarding aspects of eligibility and has jurisdiction over provincial championships. Traditionally however, school sport has existed as a separate domain from community/club sport and therefore formal linkages have not been made with the broader sport system. As such, school sport

has existed as an entity unto itself with regards to setting system wide policy and regulations related to issues such as coaching education standards.

9. **Community level coach development is not a priority of Sport Nova Scotia (deleted a word)**

Sport Nova Scotia (SNS) exists as a federation of PSOs providing support, direction and leadership to its member organizations in the delivery of sport opportunities to Nova Scotians. SNS serves as a voice for sport in the province promoting the benefits of health, personal development, and achievement for all sport participants. SNS has considerable resources including Gaming Corporation revenues and has an advocacy agenda and role. SNS as an organization has been highly effective in promoting sport participation and supporting elite athlete and coach development but has not played a significant role in the development of coach capacity at the grassroots level. SNS is well positioned to effect change within the system relative to whatever priorities are established.

10. **Sustainability of paid sport managers:** Throughout the duration of the pilot project, there has been

turnover of key staff members in four of the six sports involved making it difficult to maintain momentum with this initiative. This is not an uncommon occurrence with PSOs generally. Given that development work such as coach capacity building occurs over a period of time and involves partnering and collaboration which takes time to establish, it is important that those engaged in such work serve in their positions for an extended period of time. One question that arises and for which further research is required is the background and motivation of paid sport managers and why there is such frequent job changes in positions with a capacity development mandate.

11. **Mandate and priorities of PSO/sport managers:** Although the sport system is largely volunteer

driven, there are paid sport managers such as PSO staff who have considerable decision making power relative to allocation of resources. Through the research these individuals have reported that increasing community level coach capacity is of paramount importance and that the PSOs are the lead agency responsible to do so. However evidence suggests that such development is not occurring although all sectors of the system have identified the need and most agree that this is a PSO responsibility. Further research is required to determine why the apparent gap exists between intention and action. Understanding that PSOs generally allocate significant resources to high performance athlete and coach development, there is a need to better understand how resources are

allocated when PSOs and sport managers have the dual mandate of development and performance at the community level as well.

12. **The current sport “buddy” system is non-sustainable:** (note: underlining here is new!) It has become evident throughout this project that success in many sport and coaching development initiatives within the province is achieved as a result of informal personal rather than systemic relationships. Being a small province and sport being a small community, this is not surprising. Many initiatives that are undertaken for the good of sport that are based upon personal relationships rather than policy or set procedures. Such initiatives are not sustainable because when an influential individual changes roles – and is for instance, no longer the principal of the school, municipal recreation director, or president of the local sport club-- then the positive work he or she has achieved often ceases. The solution is to formalize and make systemic key initiatives and actions through establishing policy, standards, and procedures to ensure that progress is not purely relationship based and is sustainable.
13. **Lack of values-based planning and decision making:** It appears from the research that too few people have too much work to do to maintain, let alone grow and sustain, the sport system in the province. Sport administrators at the provincial and club levels are constantly “putting out fires” and using energy and resources on crisis management. As such, many of the development aspects of sport such as building community coach capacity often get little if any attention given that they are not firestorm type issues. When a shortage of coaches becomes apparent one solution appears to be either to cancel the opportunity for a group of players/athletes. The other is to accept any individual as coach who can provide evidence through a criminal record check that it is not predictable that s/he is likely to be criminally negligent in dealing with team members. Until such time as sport organizations are able to establish a set of values, identify desired action based upon those values, and commit resources to specific strategic ends then developmental work such as building coach capacity is not likely to occur.
14. **Lack of grassroots action on coach development:** In order for development work such as coach capacity building to be sustainable, there needs to be buy-in from a broad base at the grassroots in communities throughout Nova Scotia. Top down initiatives that lack grassroots support seldom are universally successful. Within sport and coaching, the professional staff who are paid to have

particular sport knowledge generally exist at the provincial and national, but not the community level. Such individuals possess the background and training to identify ways to improve the system as well as a mandate to do so. There may exist a disconnection between the professional staff at the provincial and or national level who develop coach education and training programs and those at the grassroots who are the intended recipients and consumers. Therefore, it would be prudent on the part of the professionals to spend time helping to raise the awareness of volunteers as to the perceived value of the programs and providing appropriate levels of local support should the volunteers wish to proceed. Having so few professional staff in PSOs and NSHPP makes that a challenge. However, there are professional recreation staff in every municipality, who have a mandate to facilitate and support the provision of recreation opportunities in their communities which includes community sport. When called upon for expert assistance, recreation staff can potentially provide considerable assistance to local volunteer groups. These individuals are well versed to represent a grassroots perspective and to mobilize local resources.

### **Issues Related to Coaches/Coaching/Coach Development**

15. **Extrinsic motivation of community level coaches:** People who coach at the community level do so for a number of reasons: because they want to stay connected with the sport, to give back to sport, to facilitate experience for their kids, or because no one else is willing to step up. Many who coach do it do not have the time or interest to invest to develop themselves as coaches. The motivation tends to be extrinsic rather than intrinsic and so there is little long term commitment. Few individuals are coaching because they really want to be a coach and to commit to that as a leisure pursuit. There exists a need to find a way to attract individuals into community level coaching because they understand the benefits of coaching and see it as a means of satisfying their personal needs. A large percentage of the population may not be aware of the personal benefits to be derived from being a coach at this level.
16. **Lack of recruitment strategies and appreciation for diversity:** During data collection, the question was asked of clubs, schools, and PSOs whether a policy or practice of attempting to recruit coaches based upon certain factors exists. The question was designed to elicit information regarding the desire of the group to recruit coaches representing diversity based upon factors such as sex,

racial/ethnic background, or age. The overwhelming response was that groups did not actively recruit but rather sought simply to obtain sufficient number of bodies mainly through word of mouth or asking known individuals rather than strategic recruitment against objectives. Such “recruitment reality” has resulted in a rather homogenous profile of community coaches: who tend to be middle aged males who played sport themselves and now have a desire to give back to the sport, stay connected in some way, and or to ensure playing opportunities for their own children. Lack of time was the most frequently reported constraint for these coaches. This approach to obtaining coaches has not produced a sufficient supply to meet the demand. Given the marginal success of current “recruitment” practice, sport groups may wish to consider purposefully targeting a cross section of the population as a means of not only increasing capacity but also providing opportunities to marginalize/disenfranchised groups who could benefit from and welcome such an opportunity. Increasing diversity within the coaching ranks could also bring a refreshed enthusiasm and energy, new approaches, and different skill sets to the club as well as broadening mentorship potential.

17. **Barriers exist to coach education/training:** Research data suggests that certain individuals do not understand the need for specific education/training in order to coach at the community level. Others feel that they do not have time for training which suggests that they do not value it highly enough for it to be a priority use of their time. Some coaches, who do value the education and training programs, find that the delivery format does not meet their needs. Finding blocks of time to travel and participate in group training sessions is prohibitive for many. Being able to access the material on line or through print resources at a time convenient to their schedules, would be far more conducive to busy schedules. Clubs support the idea of training but express concern about the effect on obtaining coaches if training is a requirement. Clubs are most concerned with getting anyone to coach and not prepared to lose potential coaches by training requirements. From the data, there appears to be some support for the idea of standards and training but considerable concern about the time and costs associated with training.

18. **Coach needs are not understood or addressed:** An important aspect of building coach capacity is investing resources in the training and development of volunteer coaches but also in trying to ensure that once trained, coaches will be willing to commit to this volunteer activity for a considerable period of time. One factor to be considered relative to retention includes recruitment of volunteers who are intrinsically motivated to become coaches. Community coaches want to work with the

children and youth to provide a positive sport experience. But often coaches are expected to take on numerous administrative tasks such as fundraising, arranging transportation etc. that takes them away from focusing on the task that they want to do and causing them to experience volunteer burn out. It is challenging for one person to do all the jobs that are expected/required of a community coach in a way that brings sense of accomplishment. Enabling the coach to focus specifically on coaching duties while other volunteers assume support roles creates a more satisfying experience. It is important to understand and address the needs of volunteer coaches in order to retain them. In order to do so, formal vehicles for feedback must exist through which legitimate concerns of the coaches can be raised.

19. **Data for capacity development purposes is required:** According to those surveyed, other than the basic demographic information collected on the NCCP forms, there is no data being gathered or stored in data bases related to community level coaches. As such, little is known about who is currently coaching or has coached in the past, how to contact these individuals, their motivation for coaching, their personal needs and level of satisfaction, their level of training and experience or training needs, what support they would like to have in order to be more effective in and satisfied with their coaching experience, or why they decide to stop coaching. Data on current coaches and their motivations and the barriers they face is fundamentally important when determining ways and means of building and sustaining community coach capacity at the grassroots level. It is not being collected at the present time.

20. **Lack of coach networking opportunities:** Coaches have indicated that one of the best sources of relevant coaching information is that which is acquired in conversation with fellow coaches. Through this study, coaches have indicated that opportunities for networking with other coaches would be a very valuable means of ‘education’ through which questions could be asked and answered, issues discussed, techniques shared, and best practices identified. Although certain PSOs offer provincial coaching symposiums, with time and cost having been identified as barriers, regional or even online networking opportunities could serve to enhance the volunteer coach experience possibly assisting with retention. A related aspect is that of mentoring and the opportunity for novice coaches to learn from those with experience. The data indicates little evidence of mentoring opportunities available other than as a component of the NCCP training. With volunteer recruitment being such a significant issue and the need to consider tapping non traditional

sectors in order to increase numbers, networking and mentoring opportunities could become increasingly important.

21. **Sport is valued within society but community level coaching is not:** Sport is important to the province and to residents politically, economically, socially, and personally. The economic and political aspects of sport have been well researched and reported. On a personal level, many Canadians experience the benefits associated with sport first hand at some point in their lives and/or enjoy sport through the active participation of family and friends. Many Canadians are consumers of elite sport as a primary or secondary leisure pursuit. The recent health promotion movement has placed physical activity, including sport, on the radar screens of most Canadians yet little recognition or consideration is given to those responsible to provide these experiences such as coaches. Although considerable resources are being spent on the ‘get physically active’ message, resources are not being committed to ensuring that trained leadership is in place to facilitate the experiences. In sport, those individuals are community and school coaches who hold the power to either foster positive and possibly lifelong connections to sport or to turn youth off sport, again possibly for a lifetime either as a participant or spectator. This lack of attention to leadership development is evidenced by the fact that no one has accepted responsibility for community level coach development despite the fact that many agencies actively promote the virtues of sport engagement.