

Findings from the Athlete Survey

A Brief to accompany “Full Team Ahead: The Benefits of Team Sport to Canadian Sport”, a report prepared for the Canadian Team Sports Coalition

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1. Introduction

In August 2009, the research team for the Canadian Team Sports Coalition invited athletes to complete a simple online survey. This survey was one component of a larger research project focusing on the value and benefits of team sport in Canada. The survey remained open for approximately three weeks and during that time 572 athletes participated: 529 of them responded to the English language survey while 43 responded to the French language survey.

The survey was distributed to athletes by several means:

- The organization AthletesCAN distributed the survey to all athletes in their database
- An e-mail was sent to every NSO with a specific request that the NSO distribute the survey to their national team members
- A press release was circulated through SIRC, the Sport Information Research Centre, inviting athletes to respond
- With the assistance of Canadian Sport Centre Ontario, all Canadian Sport Centres were invited to distribute the survey through their Athlete Services personnel to athletes in their databases
- The survey was distributed by the leader of the research team to organizations and athletes with whom she had regular contact through the Centre for Sport and Law (for example, individual athlete leaders, retired athletes, and athletes accessible through organizations such as Clean Air Champions and B.C. Athletes Voice).

Sport Canada was contacted to assist with the distribution of the survey to athletes receiving AAP financial assistance. However, Sport Canada was unable to assist due to timing conflicts with the delivery of another internal athlete survey.

The purpose of the survey was to determine athlete respondents' involvement in team sport and to obtain their perspectives on the benefits (if any) of team sport to their personal athletic development. Athletes were also asked about their opinions on the value of team sport to the Canadian sport system.

The survey was purposely designed to be simple, quick and easy to complete. It was not designed for empirical purposes but rather to obtain a general snapshot of athlete perspectives on team sport.

The full survey questionnaire is included at the end of this report for reference.

2. Quantitative Results of the Survey

This section summarizes the responses to the questions on the survey that were close-ended and could be tabulated numerically. There were also extensive comments offered in response to the four open-ended questions, and the next section summarizes some themes emerging from those comments.

Question 1: Are you currently an:

Active athlete	537	(93.88 percent)
Retired athlete	33	(5.77 percent)
Did not answer	2	(0.35 percent)
Total	572	(100 percent)

Question 2: What sport(s) do you/did you participate in as an athlete?

Individual sports	247	(43.18 percent)
Team sports	277	(48.43 percent)
Both individual and team sports	46	(8.0 percent)
Did not answer	2	(0.35 percent)
Total	572	(100 percent)

Question 3: Are you currently a member of, or have you ever been a member of, a national team?

Yes	445	(77.80 percent)
No	123	(21.50 percent)
Did not answer	4	(0.70 percent)
Total	572	(100 percent)

Question 4: If you answered “yes” to question 3, for many years have you been, or were you, a member of a national team?

1 year	128	(22.38 percent)
2 – 3 years	135	(23.60 percent)
4 – 5 years	83	(14.5 percent)
6 – 9 years	57	(9.97 percent)
10 years or more	44	(7.72 percent)
Did not answer	125	(21.85 percent)
Total	572	(100 percent)

Question 5: Did you participate in team sports as a developing athlete?

Yes	504	(88.11 percent)
No	62	(10.84 percent)
Did not answer	6	(1.05 percent)
Total	572	(100 percent)

Question 6: If you answered "yes" to Question 5, which team sports did you participate in?

The respondents identified which team sports they participated in.
In most cases, athletes reported having competing in more than one team sport.

Question 7: At what level did you participate in team sports? (check as many as apply)

Elementary/Middle School	423	(73.95 percent)
High School	453	(79.20 percent)
College/University	248	(43.36 percent)
Club	399	(69.76 percent)
Provincial/Territorial Team	353	(61.71 percent)
Canada Games	139	(24.13 percent)
Other	118	(20.63 percent)
Did not answer	22	(3.85 percent)

Question 8: How would you rate the importance of team sport participation to your development as an athlete? Please select one response.

Participating in team sport was <i>very important</i>	406	(71.00 percent)
Participating in team sport was <i>somewhat important</i>	108	(18.88 percent)
Participating in team sport was <i>not important</i>	31	(5.42 percent)
Don't know/Not sure	10	(1.75 percent)
Did not answer	17	(2.97 percent)
Total	572	(100 percent)

Question 9: Do you have any comments on how team sport has influenced you as an athlete?

313 athletes provided narrative responses to this question (54.72 percent)

Question 10: Do you have any comments on the value that team sports bring to the Canadian sport system?

202 athletes provided narrative responses to this question (35.31 percent).

3. Qualitative results of the survey

The four open-ended questions in this survey asked respondents to:

- Identify their sport (Question 2)
- Identify the team sports in which they had participated as developing athletes (Question 6)
- Comment on how team sports influenced them as developing athletes (Question 9)
- Comment on the value that team sports bring to the Canadian sport system (Question 10)

With regard to Question 2, it was possible to categorize the narrative responses after the survey was completed in order to determine that approximately 48 percent of the respondents competed in team sports and 43 percent competed in individual sports. For this task, the Sport Canada definition of team sport was used.¹

The narrative responses given to Question 6 are perhaps less relevant than the finding that over 88 percent of respondents had participated in team sports as developing athletes. Very few respondents noted that they had participated in only one sport. The clear majority of respondents had participated in many different sports in their developmental phase.

Responses to questions 9 and 10 raised fascinating new issues. Over half of the respondents wrote about the impact of team sports on their development, and over a third offered comments on the value of team sport to the Canadian sport system.

Question 9 – The impact of team sports

This quote from a respondent summarizes much of what was said in response to Question 9:

“Team sports help foster important qualities in athletes such as teamwork, determination, cooperation and communication, that will help athletes in ALL sports, as well as throughout their lives”

Respondents made abundant references to the value of team sport in terms of:

- Personal development (developing communication skills and social skills)
- Leadership development (teaching athletes how to be a contributing member of a team, either as leader or follower)
- Values development (teaching ethics, integrity, responsibility)

There were also many references to team sport’s unique ability to develop skills and competencies that are widely applicable outside of sport – namely, in personal, family, community and work life.

Question 10 – The value of team sports

This quote from a respondent summarizes much of what was said in response to Question 10:

“In my opinion, team sports are integral to the development of all athletes, and people in general. Team sports such as soccer, field hockey, and basketball provide an unparalleled platform for further athletic development by teaching a wide range of motion in simple and easy ways, and by instilling basic values in children. They are invaluable to the success of the sports system as a whole.”

¹ “Team sport refers to sports that are practiced between opposing teams, where the players interact directly and simultaneously between them to achieve an objective. The objective generally involves team members facilitating the movement of a ball or similar item in accordance with a set of rules, in order to score points.” This definition is provided in the Sport Canada report, *Summer Team Sport Strategy*, a draft document dated December 23, 2008.

Respondents also referred to:

- The unifying effect of team sport on national identity and pride
- The effect of team sport on physical activity and their contribution to physical literacy in young people
- The accessibility of team sport to children and youth everywhere, and their positive effects on this demographic

One respondent asserted that: “*Team sports are the cornerstone of our sports system*”. Another stated: “*Team sports are the essence of what we are as a country. We seek to have unity among our diverse cultures, which is exactly what team sports do.*”

4. Conclusion

This simple and accessible online survey likely does not meet rigorous scientific criteria, but we believe it has still provided very useful initial findings. Notably:

- Nearly nine of ten athletes, regardless of their sport, participated in team sport as part of their athletic development
- Seven of ten athletes said that participation in team sport was *very important* to their athletic development. A further two out of ten acknowledged that participation in team sport was *somewhat important*. Only five percent of respondents said that team sport were *not important* in their development as athletes.

The abundant narrative responses to open-ended questions also corroborated much of what the limited existing research literature has said about the unique contributions that team sport makes to personal, social and leadership development, and about team sport’s ability to hone skills that have wide applications outside of sport.

Canadian Team Sports Coalition – Athlete Survey

A coalition of over 20 Canadian team sport organizations is carrying out a research project on the contribution of team sports to the Canadian sports system. One component of this research is a survey of athletes. This survey will take only a few minutes of your time – thank you for being a part of it!

Please note this survey closes August 15, 2009.

1. Are you currently:

- Are you currently: An active Athlete
- A retired Athlete

2. What sport(s) do you/did you participate in as an athlete?

3. Are you currently a member of, or have you ever been a member of, a national team?

- Yes
- No

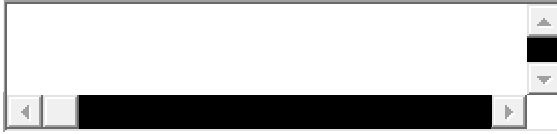
4. If you answered "yes" to question 3, for how many years have you been, or were you, member of a national team?

- 1 year
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- 6-9 years
- 10 years or more

5. Did you participate in team sports as a developing athlete?

- Yes
- No

6. If you answered "yes" to Question 5, which team sports did you participate in?



7. At what level did you participate in team sports (check as many as apply).

- Elementary/Middle School
- High School
- College/University
- Club
- Provincial/Territorial Team
- Canada Games
- Other (please specify)



8. How would you rate the importance of team sport participation to your development as an athlete? Please select one response:

- Participating in team sport was VERY IMPORTANT to my development as an athlete
- Participating in team sport was SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT to my development as an athlete
- Participating in team sport was NOT IMPORTANT to my development as an athlete
- Don't know/Not sure

9. Do you have any comments on how team sport has influenced you as an athlete?



10. Do you have any comments on the value that team sports bring to the Canadian sport system?

