



# WOMEN IN SPORT: FUELLING A LIFETIME OF PARTICIPATION

A REPORT ON

## THE STATUS OF FEMALE SPORT PARTICIPATION IN CANADA.

*Made possible by Canada's dairy farmers & The Canadian Association  
for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS).*



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*Fuelling a Lifetime of Participation was developed by an integrated team including authors Michelle K. Brunette, MHK, PhD Candidate & Norman O'Reilly, MBA, PhD, CGA/CPA, along with the complete Advisory Group and CAAWS with contributions by Tanya Scarapicchia, MA, PhD Candidate & Rachel Micay, MSc Candidate.*

## THE FOREWORD

From the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity.

As demonstrated in this report, a considerable amount of work remains to be done for girls and women to realize all the benefits that participation in sport offers. CAAWS continues work to create opportunities for girls and women to be actively engaged as participants and leaders in sport and physical activity in Canada. With support from the Government of Canada, CAAWS focuses on developing and supporting women in leadership positions, working with provincial/territorial/national sport organizations to increase their commitment to creating gender-equitable environments where girls and women, and the organization, can reap the benefits of having more females involved as participants and leaders at all levels. As well, CAAWS works to make the sport environment more welcoming to sexual and gender diversity.

It is great to see Canada's dairy farmers stepping up through their Fuelling Women Champions initiative. It is a positive step to have initiatives like this publication shine a light on the current hurdles impacting girls and women in sport in Canada, and what role the media play in their participation and success. The next step will be the need for action to address these findings. Please read this publication and circulate it amongst your network. It is important that each of us looks at ways we can contribute to making a difference for girls and women in sport. Please join us in answering the call to action.

Jennifer Fenton - CAAWS Chair  
Karin Lofstrom - CAAWS Executive Director



# ADVISORY GROUP



**Brenda Andress** is currently the Commissioner of the Canadian Women's National Hockey League where she has been instrumental in leading the CWHL to become the world's most exceptional women's professional hockey league. Brenda is highly acclaimed, being recognized with a "Women of Distinction" award by the YWCA, by The Hockey News as one of "The Powers of the Future," by WXN as one of the top 100 Most Powerful Women in Canada and by CAAWS as one of the Most Influential Women in Sport. Always athletic, Brenda was a varsity hockey player, and holds a Level 6 ranking for refereeing the game.



**Dr. Cheri L. Bradish** is the Loretta Rogers Research Chair in Sport Marketing with the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University. Before Ryerson, she was the founder of Brock University's successful Bachelor of Sport Management (BSM) degree. A sport marketing professional, she has developed a line of research and action related to women, sport and strategic management. Cheri also has significant experience in the sport industry, including work with Nike Canada Inc., Vancouver Grizzlies (NBA) and most recently with the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games (VANOC).



**Michelle K. Brunette** is a PhD candidate at Nipissing University with an interest in intersections of sport, education and culture. Michelle directs institutional planning, teaches international health and has been recognized for contributions to the status of women at Laurentian University. Through her research, Michelle supports the advancement of sport through cross-cultural approaches, responsible partnerships and targeted global marketing. Michelle balances roles as an athlete, coach and volunteer, and has held board roles for the Sudbury marathon and Ringette Ontario. Active in distance running, ringette, soccer and backcountry canoeing, Michelle aims to inspire lifelong athleticism in her daughters, Malin and Nellie.



**Rochelle Grayson**, Board Member and Chair of the Revenue Generation Committee with CAAWS, has worked with numerous women's organizations including the YWCA, Canadian Women in Communications and Women in Film. She has served as a Fundraiser and Board Member for private corporations, global non-profits, national industry associations and world-class educational institutions. Rochelle was nominated as one of Canada's Top 100 Most Powerful Women and named "The New Executive Cool Hunter" by Canadian Business Magazine. Rochelle holds an MBA from the University of Chicago, and is passionate about increasing funding and media coverage for all women in sport.

**Jennifer Fenton**, MSc, Chair of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) Board has been a consultant in the physical activity and health education field for close to 30 years. Her career has specialized in the development and delivery of highly successful British Columbia-based healthy school initiatives. Jennifer is also the Past Chair of ProMOTION Plus, and is passionate about increasing opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport and physical activity. Jennifer was instrumental in developing and delivering CAAWS's On the Move initiative and has published research on girls' experiences in physical education.



**Karin Lofstrom** is the Executive Director at CAAWS, and for more than 30 years has been an active participant, volunteer, leader, mentor and advocate for girls and women in sport and physical activity. Karin's commitment to achieving gender equity in the Canadian sport system is shared through her collaborative approach. At the national level, she contributes her experience in the sport sector and expertise on gender equity to a number of committees and working groups, sharing resources and knowledge to ensure the needs of girls and women are considered and integrated from the beginning into resulting programs and initiatives.



**Leanne Nicolle**, idea generator, girl advocate and globally minded social innovator left her private sector marketing executive career to dedicate her life to helping girls around the world. Leanne has a passion for human development and has worked in the social space for UNICEF, Plan Canada and as the founder of Girl Impact. At Plan Canada, Leanne primarily focused on the domestic and global platform for girls' issues and rights. Most recently, Leanne continues her journey as the Executive Director of the Canadian Olympic Foundation. She is personally invested in ensuring girls stay in sport and that marginalized youth have access to achieving their athletic dreams.



**Norm O'Reilly**, MA, MBA, PhD, CGA/CPA is recognized as one of the leading scholars in the business of sports. He holds the Richard P. and Joan S. Fox Professor of Business and is Chair of the Department of Sports Administration at Ohio University's College of Business. Norm has expertise in a range of business topics, including marketing, sponsorship, social media, sport finance, social marketing and management education. He has authored or co-authored 7 books, 14 case studies and more than 90 journal articles. Norm has also taught at the University of Ottawa, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Laurentian University and Ryerson University.



**Chantal Petitclerc**, OC, is one of Canada's most decorated athletes of all time. As an athlete she participated in five Paralympic Games, won 21 Paralympic medals and earned the Lou Marsh Trophy as Canada's Top Athlete. In her life outside of athletics, she is an international-level coach, Chef De Mission for Team Canada, highly sought-after speaker and consistently recognized as one of Canada's most influential women in sport. She participates in projects by various sport organizations and initiatives, including as a spokesperson for Défi Sportif, and as an athlete ambassador for Right To Play and Fuelling Women Champions.



# INTRO

Across the country, Canadian women are clearing hurdles to balance personal, professional, social and volunteer commitments. Women play leading roles in work and family life, but fewer and fewer Canadian women are maintaining lifelong roles as sport participants and leaders.

In this report, researchers situate the status and challenges of Canadian girls and women's participation and leadership in sport, and identify actions to fuel lifelong participation. This collaborative report led by Canada's dairy farmers, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), and a sport leader advisory group is part of a commitment to research about the state of female sport participation in Canada.

This work is informed through analysis of extensive academic work, media data, National Sport Organization reports, industry studies, sport stakeholder surveys, Census data and consultations with experts in the field. A primary survey of Canadian sport leaders added important context and helps define a roadmap to improve the state of Canadian girls and women's sport participation.

Through this report, and the Fuelling Women Champions initiative, Canada's dairy farmers aim to inspire girls and women, regardless of age or ability, in local communities across Canada to realize the universal benefits of sport and provide action-oriented recommendations to advance female sport in Canada.

## The Benefits of Sport

Across all demographics, Canadian females consistently participate in sport at lower rates than males, with a continual decline observed generation over generation. Yet, the girls and women who do continue to participate reap abundant benefits.

Girls and women who participate regularly in sport are defined as those who participate in sport at least once a week during a sport season or throughout the year.<sup>2</sup> Participation in any of the many types of sports, from individual sport pursuits, recreational team sports and physical activity pursued for pleasure, can contribute to building and maintaining healthy and active lifestyles. Girls and women who participate in sport realize significant physical, psychological and social benefits, as detailed in Table 1.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 - Benefits of Sport Participation

PHYSICAL BENEFITS	PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS	SOCIAL BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved bone mass density</li> <li>Overall health benefits from increased physical activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreased risk of developing depression and anxiety</li> <li>Improved psychological well-being</li> <li>Improved mood</li> <li>Increased feelings of empowerment</li> <li>Greater sense of identity and ownership over one's body</li> <li>Promotes self-exploration, self-esteem, and self-concept</li> <li>Provides a sense of being in control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides opportunity for leadership and achievement</li> <li>Undermines traditional gender norms</li> <li>More likely to attain higher levels of education and academic success</li> <li>Greater involvement in extracurricular activities</li> <li>Opportunities for cross cultural exchange and learning<sup>38</sup></li> </ul>

For girls and women to reap the benefits of sport, they must continue to play across their lifespan. Girls and women need to overcome the many hurdles that impede their sport participation in Canada. And few girls and women do.





OUR

# METHODOLOGY

## DATA SOURCES & ANALYSIS

In order to describe the landscape of Canadian girls and women in sport, the researchers used secondary and primary sources to identify and articulate the numerous hurdles that girls and women face in sport participation and leadership.

Secondary research included a review of over 75 academic articles, and 25 industry reports, as well as an analysis of media data, National Sport Organizations's annual reports, sport stakeholder surveys and Census data. A review of traditional and new media, including television, national print media and event viewership/attendance added data about the attention and exposure of women's sport in Canada.

To help contextualize and add to the secondary analysis, the researchers initiated a bilingual online survey that was broadly distributed to a network of female sport leaders. Responses, in English and French, were received from 657 female sport leaders with wide-ranging experience in contact and non-contact sports across Canada, in roles as athletes, officials, coaches, board members and administrators from the grassroots, high-performance and professional sport world.

Quantitative analysis of the survey results, via the statistical software (SPSS), helped the researchers identify trends, relationships and comparisons among variables. A qualitative analysis of open-ended questions added depth to the findings, and identified core themes, based on the female sport leaders' perceptions of the major challenges that girls and women face in initiating and maintaining sport participation and leadership roles in Canada.

CAAWS and the advisory group helped clarify and contextualize the findings, with particular attention toward identifying and prioritizing action plans at the system-wide, community and individual levels.

“There are old fashioned attitudes of established sports organizations that favour boys over girls, and perceptions of certain sports not being 'feminine'”

– Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent



## STARTING THE RACE: GIRLS' SPORT PARTICIPATION

For young females, participating in sport brings positive physical, psychological and social benefits. Girls who play sports are also more likely to continue to be physically active as adults.

In Canada, 59% of girls between the ages of 3 and 17 years participate in sport. A small proportion of all girls, 22%, participate in team sports.<sup>3</sup> Yet, girls choose different types of sport compared to boys; they are three times more likely to prefer individual and creative forms of sport, as illustrated in Table 2, such as dance, ballet, gymnastics and trampoline, which are often identified as “good for girls” by parents.<sup>3</sup>

Although a majority of girls participate in sport in their early years, evidence points to significant declines in sport participation in the transition to adolescence, with a sharper decline in girls' participation rates than boys at this stage of life.<sup>2,3,6</sup> Girls are often discouraged from participating when they feel they lack competence or fundamental skills in sport, or when they do not find value in the sport.<sup>40</sup>

Adolescence is a pivotal time for predicting whether or not a girl will continue to participate in sports as she grows older. Alarming, as girls enter adolescence, their overall participation rate drops by 22%,<sup>3</sup> and school sport participation drops by almost 26%.<sup>7</sup>

**By 10 years of age,**

if a girl has yet to participate in sports, there is only a 10% chance that she will be physically active as an adult.<sup>5</sup>



## SPORT PARTICIPATION from GIRLS to WOMEN

### TOP 10 ORGANIZED SPORTS CANADIAN GIRLS PARTICIPATE IN<sup>3</sup>

- 1 **Swimming** (20%)
- 2 **Dance** (17%)
- 3 **Soccer** (10%)
- 4 **Ballet** (9%)
- 5 **Gymnastics** (9%)
- 6 **Skating** (7%)
- 7 **Running** (5%)
- 8 **Basketball** (4%)
- 9 **Volleyball** (4%)
- 10 **Trampoline** (4%)

“Girls still believe sports are for boys. Coaches pay way more attention to boys than girls”

– Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent

Despite the wide-ranging evidence of the benefits of sport, the decision for girls to play sport, and continue playing, is frequently influenced by social pressures from parents, guardians and peers.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, peer influence, lack of social support, encouragement, positive role models, self-confidence and money are the top reasons why adolescent girls say they stop participating in sport.<sup>8,9,10</sup> Sadly, even though sport has been found to bring social benefits, for many girls the social pressure to drop out of sports can outweigh the encouragement many girls are getting.<sup>11</sup>

Increased support is imperative in getting girls to play. Looking to role models, such as female athletes, can help demonstrate to girls that success in sports is attainable, and can provide girls the confidence and determination they need as they seek to overcome these hurdles.<sup>11</sup> Female sport leaders noted a lack of inspirational role models for girls, and an overall lack of social acceptance of women/girl sport. Female role models are important, but the encouragement of girls in sport needs to come from both females and males.

Both female and male coaches impact girls' decisions to play and keep playing.

A female sport leader emphasized that coaches, both female and male, play a huge role in creating a welcoming and safe place for girls. Coaches who understand emotional, psychosocial, physical and hormonal changes that girls are experiencing can be instrumental in retaining girls in sports. As one female sport leader described, “my biggest concern is the lack of attention on male coaches” who can be key supporters of positive sport experiences for girls.

By fostering beliefs about the benefits and importance of sport, role models and coaches, both female and male, may help inspire girls to continue participating in sport beyond high school.<sup>11</sup> Girls need this encouragement.

**Because, once girls stop, they may never play again.**

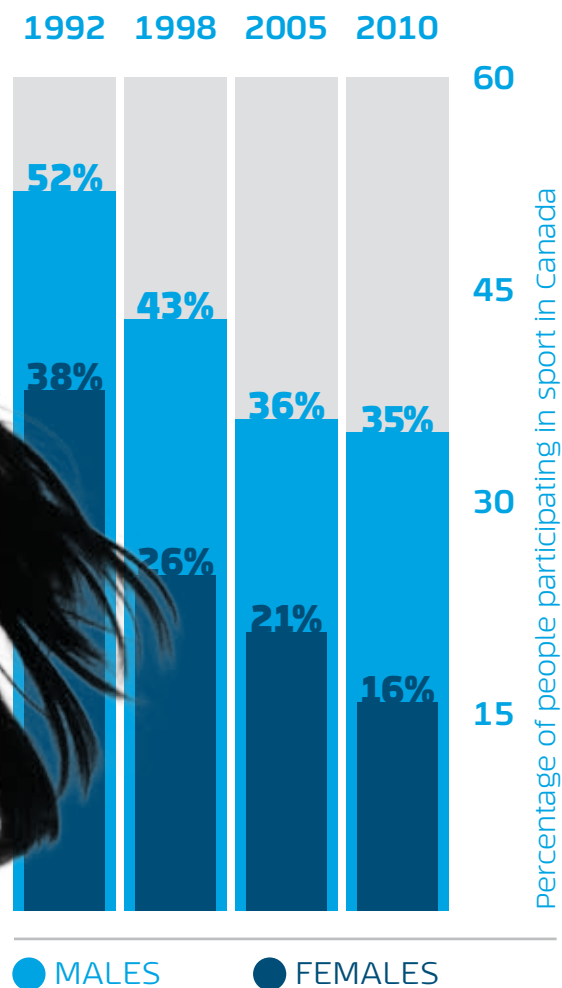


## FACING THE HURDLES: WOMEN'S SPORT PARTICIPATION

Over the past 20 years in Canada, female participation in sport has continued to decline. As girls reach adulthood, more and more stop playing sports with only 16% of adult women reporting sport participation.<sup>2</sup> Both males and females are participating in sport less than in the early 1990s, as depicted in *Figure 1*, but the rate of sport participation among females over 15 years or older has steadily decreased to record lows.<sup>2</sup>

In Canada, the top ten sports played by female adults, detailed in *Figure 2*, include golf (15%), soccer (12%), swimming (10%) and volleyball (9%). Of these sports, female participation rates only exceed that of men in swimming and volleyball.<sup>2</sup>

*Figure 1 - Trends in Sport Participation in Canada by Gender and Year<sup>2</sup>*



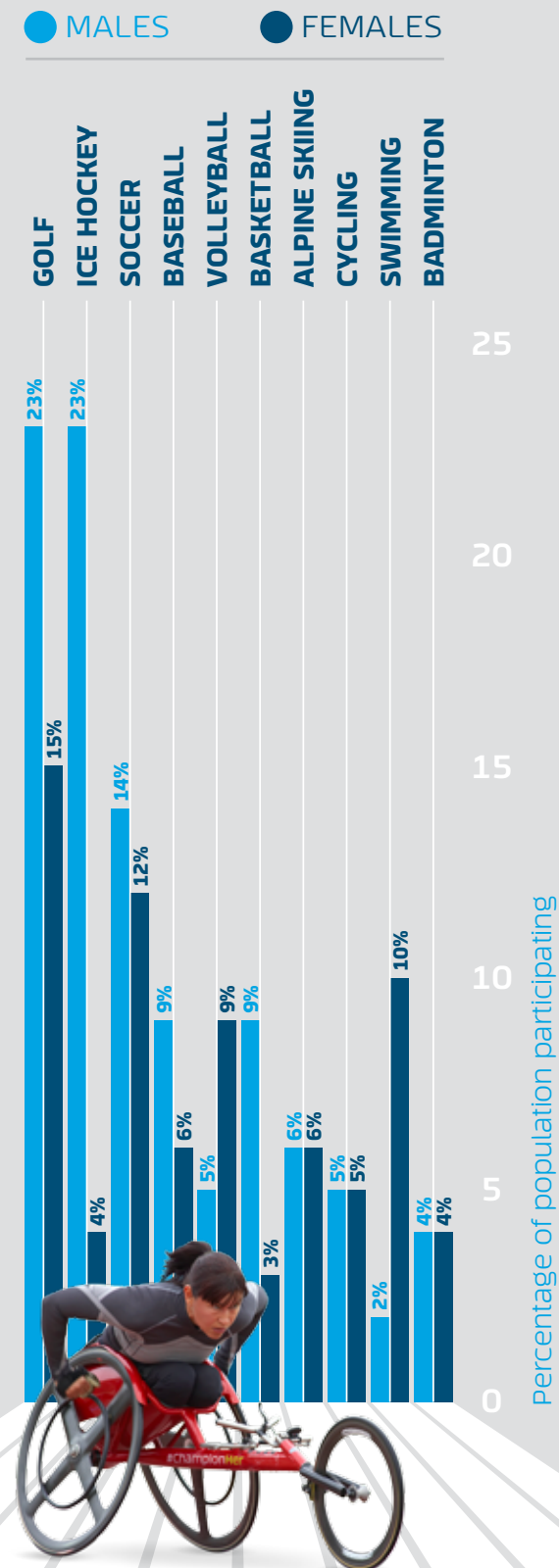
“Most girls & women will be more tempted to join a sport if they see other females involved”

- Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent



## SPORT PARTICIPATION from GIRLS to WOMEN

*Figure 2 - General Participation Rates by Gender for the Top 10 Sports in Canada<sup>2</sup>*



“Sport means balancing a career with sport, family life, having kids, the time commitment, giving up a social life...”

- Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent

The hurdles that females face, starting most often in adolescence, bring a legacy of continued decline in female sport participation. Survey results indicate that the most commonly reported hurdles to sport participation among Canadian women include lack of time (29%), lack of interest (28%) and no particular reason (17%).<sup>2</sup>

As female adults balance multiple roles as partners, mothers, sisters, daughters, caregivers, community and business leaders, volunteers and more, their interest in sport sometimes fades. A female sport leader, also a new mother, identified time and family roles as major hurdles to her participation. She described it this way: “even as a former athlete with strong beliefs about the importance of sport, I have to say I struggle just to find the time, more than my husband... This goes deeper than sport. It’s about women’s roles and responsibilities needing to change.” The stresses of life sometimes get in the way of sport participation, yet paradoxically, participating in sport brings benefits including relieving stress.<sup>41</sup>

# WOMEN AS LEADERS IN SPORT



## BEYOND THE HURDLES: COACHING & OFFICIATING

Many Canadian females hold leadership positions across the sport world as administrators, executives, coaches, officials, volunteers and board members of sport organizations. The number of females holding coaching or officiating/umpiring roles in amateur sport has gradually increased over time, but their rate of involvement has historically been less than one-third that of males, as in Table 3.<sup>2</sup>

Table 3 - Participation in Leadership Roles in Sport by Gender

OFFICIALS (TOTAL)			
	MALE		FEMALE
1992	440,000		100,000
1998	400,000		100,000
2005	330,000		99,000
2010	420,000		140,000

COACHES (%)			
	MALE		FEMALE
1992	6.2%		1.9%
1998	5.5%		2.1%
2005	4.7%		2.0%
2010	6.5%		3.0%

## FEMALE ROLES IN COLLEGIATE, NATIONAL & MULTI-SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

The key components of Canada's sport system include its post-secondary institutions, National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and Multi-Sport Organizations (MSOs).

In Canada's post-secondary athletic landscape, the majority of Athletic Directors and Presidents of the Canadian Inter-university Sport (CIS), the Canadian Collegiate Athletics Association (CCAA) and their respective affiliate organizations are men, with only 16% of these positions occupied by women. Of all Athletic Directors of all member schools within the CCAA, only 27% of these positions are occupied by women.<sup>10</sup> There is only slightly greater gender equity among Coaches and Athletic Directors in CIS, with female leaders similarly underrepresented.

The leadership gender gap is narrowest when the sport itself is female-oriented or includes females (women's or mixed teams), as in Figure 3; however female leaders come closer to the rates of male leaders only in assistant-level positions (e.g., assistance coaches of female or mixed teams). Females are more likely to be involved in administrative and managerial roles in sport, as in Figure 4. At both NSOs and Multi-Sport Organizations (MSOs), there is a stronger presence of female leaders.<sup>10</sup>



● MALES ● FEMALES

Figure 3 - Percentage Breakdown of CIS Coaches/Leaders by Gender<sup>10</sup>

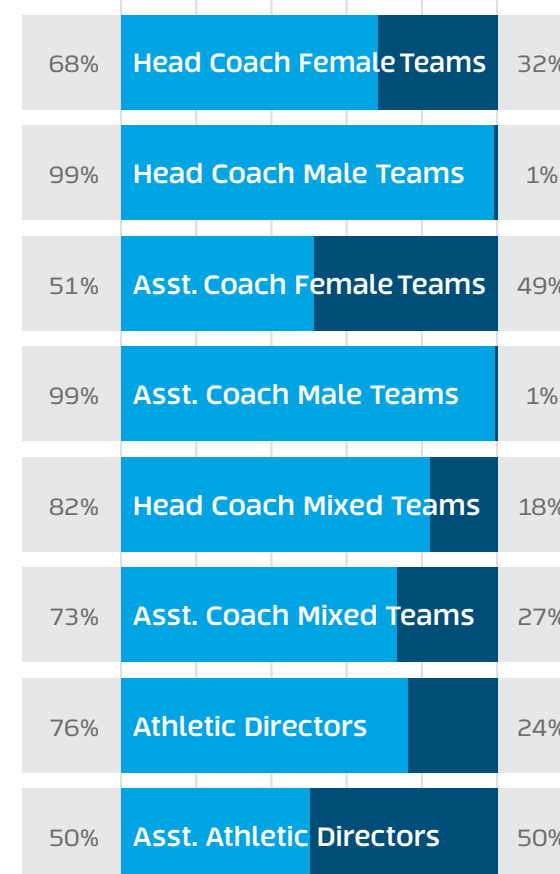
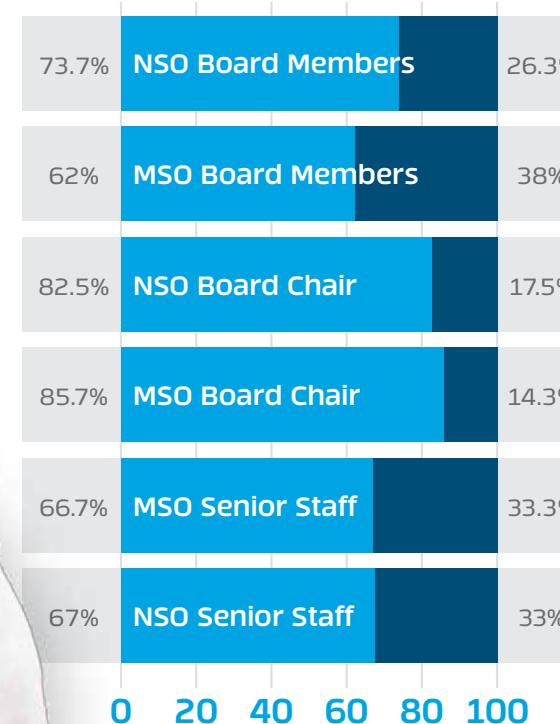


Figure 4 - Percentage Breakdown of NSO and MSO Leaders by Gender<sup>10</sup>





# WOMEN AS LEADERS IN SPORT

## EVIDENCE OF THE CHALLENGES TO FEMALE SPORT LEADERSHIP

The proportion of female leaders in Canadian sport is low, and this small presence in relation to males in comparable roles may impact girls and women's sport participation. A number of studies have addressed the drivers of this gender imbalance in sport leadership, reporting that it is influenced largely by social factors with women facing gender discrimination as they progress in leadership and coaching roles.<sup>13</sup>

Despite many advances in recent decades, a number of structural factors still exist in sport. One survey sport leader was dismayed at the persistence of structural differences in secondary school sports; specifically, the leader pointed to the distance differences in girls' and boys' cross-country running. Having shorter distances for girls' events could contribute to girls being "perceived as weaker and not equal," which, the leader emphasized, showcases the need to address the structural differences that remain in boys' and girls' sports.

Previous research supports that the social culture of sport leadership is often a male-dominated environment.<sup>14</sup> There are both historical and structural reasons for this, but the learning is clear that improvements need to be made. Notably, organizational strategies appear to have a negative effect on women in the sport environment, making it harder for women to move through to elite

levels of coaching.<sup>13</sup> Women also perceive less opportunities for coaching, developing or training in sport compared to their male counterparts,<sup>16</sup> and believe they need to adapt their behaviours in order to succeed.<sup>17</sup>

Further, previous findings suggest that even with more education, training and relative experience than male counterparts, women experience lower recognition of success and slower career progressions than men.<sup>18,19</sup> Previous research faults women's lack of involvement in coaching roles on their previous experiences of harassment and bullying,<sup>14</sup> and the impacts of their family responsibilities.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the many hurdles, there are examples across Canada of women who have "made it" in sport as elite athletes and leaders. These female sport leaders have cleared major hurdles and overcome tough obstacles to continue their own sport participation beyond adolescence, and to become leaders across the sport world. Yet, still few women, relative to men, lead sport organizations or hold elite coaching positions, which limits the level of impact these leaders can have on girls and women in sport in Canada.

# PERSPECTIVES FROM FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT

## HURDLES WOMEN EXPERIENCE BECOMING LEADERS IN SPORT FROM THE LITERATURE

Throughout the report, quotes and input from Canadian female sport leaders help emphasize some of the important findings of this research. The quotes and insights were drawn from a large survey of Canadian female athletes, executives, coaches, volunteers, officials and administrators who were invited to share their perceptions of the challenges to female sport participation and leadership, and actionable solutions.

“We are a multicultural country... but many cultures do not understand or value women in sport, the benefits that are provided or understand how to become involved. We need to promote benefits of all sports for women. We need to say girls need sport!”

– Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent

## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey data collection resulted in the following sample:

- 657 female respondents (55% English and 45% French as primary language)
- 18 to 65+ years old (Mean age = 40.5 years old)
- 61% had more than 20 years of experience in sport (Mean experience length = 17 years)

Female leaders identified as follows:

- Athletes (33%)
- Coaches (20%)
- Managers/Administrators (18%)
- Other, including officials, board members and academics (18%)

Sport involvement types:

- Non-contact, individual sport (33%)
- Multiple sports of different types (29%)
- Developmental sport (43%)
- Grassroots - youth (38%)
- Grassroots - adult (37%)
- High performance - Olympic/amateur (32%)

“If you can keep girls in sport, between the ages of 10 & 16 some amazing things can happen.”

– Leanne Nicolle, Advisory Group Contributor



# PERSPECTIVES FROM FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT

## PRIMARY SURVEY RESULTS: IDENTIFYING THE HURDLES

The female sport leaders' perspectives carry much weight in identifying the presence and level of challenges that Canadian girls and women face in sport.

Specifically, female leader respondents were asked to identify challenges to women's sport participation from a list of hurdles and asked to prioritize where future resources should be allocated. On a scale of 1 (little/no impact) to 5 (extreme hindrance), female leaders identified the perceived impact of each hurdle on girls and women's sport participation.

Overall, the hurdles identified by the sport leader respondents were compared against those identified in an online survey undertaken by Research Management Group of a representative sample of 400 regionally diverse Canadian 25- to 54-year-old women commissioned by Canada's dairy farmers in April 2015. The women in the latter group responded yes or no when asked if they perceived the listed hurdles as impactful to the participation of females in sport.

The comparative results are very illustrative of the leading hurdles facing female sport participation. Most importantly, the perceptions of female sport leaders and the perceptions of the female public each positioned insufficient funding as the top challenge to female sport participation, with funding ranked as the number-one priority area.

Table 4 - Identifying Hurdles

HURDLE	IDENTIFY ONE AREA TO FOCUS		AVERAGE RESPONSE (ON 1-5 SCALE)		PUBLIC PERCEIVES AS A HURDLE	
	Score (%)	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Insufficient funding	19.7%	1	3.47	3	49%	1
Lack of female-led instruction and refereeing	10.6%	2	3.16	8	25%	8
Lack of media interest/coverage	9.1%	3	3.48	2	37%	4
Lack of exposure to women's/girls' sport	7.8%	4	3.44	4	39%	3
Lack of awareness among the public	7.6%	5	-	-	28%	6
Not enough quality facilities for staging events	6.2%	6	2.83	13	19%	11
Other (please specify)	6%	7	-	-	-	-
Lack of opportunity to participate	6%	8	3.05	9	27%	7
Lack of knowledge of how to get involved	6%	9	3.25	6	23%	9
Lack of social acceptance of women/girls in sport	5.7%	10	2.84	12	23%	9
Lack of financial incentive to pursue a career in sport	4%	11	3.69	1	46%	2
Lack of interest among the public	3.2%	12	3.24	7	36%	5
Fear of social criticism	3%	13	2.82	14	17%	12
Lack of inspirational role models	2.8%	14	2.98	11	16%	13
Sexism/Discrimination against women	2.3%	15	2.65	15	-	-
Friends Do not Participate in sport	-	-	3.32	5	-	-
It is not fun	-	-	2.16	16	-	-
There are many sedentary alternatives	-	-	3.02	10	-	-

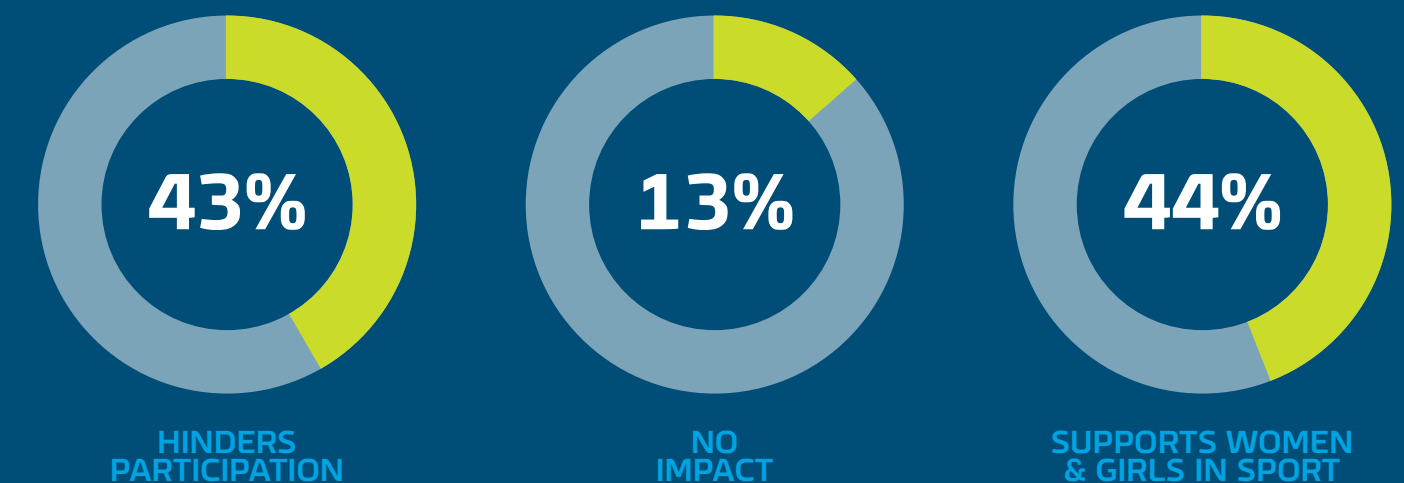
## THE CHALLENGE OF EXPOSURE

Female sport leaders and the female public have both pointed to media interest and exposure of women's sport as key priority areas to promote girls and women's sport participation.

Based on the current type of coverage that women's sport receives, Canadian female leaders in sport are divided on whether current media coverage hinders (43%) or helps (44%) support sport participation, as shown in Figure 5. Only a small percentage of respondents reported that media exposure has no impact on sport participation (13%).<sup>4</sup>

Current coverage, which does not always frame women's sports in the best light, draws mixed reviews from sport leaders. However, 96% of female sport leaders report that an increase in quality media exposure, which does not trivialize athletic achievement of women, could contribute to an increase in participation levels among females in sport.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 5 - Leaders' Perspective: The Impact of Current Media Coverage of Female Sport on Sport Participation





# PERSPECTIVES FROM FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT

The impact of quality media exposure can also help female athletes attract more sponsorship and endorsement from the corporate sector. As one female sport leader noted, “the lack of media coverage/exposure plays a key role in finding new corporate and private-sector sources of funding.” However, the importance of quality in media coverage needs to be stressed; media exposure or sponsorships/endorsements that perpetuate existing female stereotypes are as harmful, or more harmful, than a lack of media exposure.

With the rise in social media, athletes and their messages have the opportunity to reach millions of followers through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other platforms. There is tremendous opportunity for the media to improve in both the quantity and quality of female coverage. With quality coverage, the media can help position female athletes as positive role models and help champion female sport in Canada.

## THE LEADERS' PERSPECTIVE

In the survey, a series of open-ended questions provided deeper insight into the perspectives of female sport leaders. A theme analysis of more than 22,000 words uncovered eight core themes related to the greatest hurdles to sport participation among girls and women, as identified by the female sport leaders.

The eight themes of challenges to female sport participation and leadership, as detailed in Table 5, included the following:

1. Predominant culture of sport (23.1%)
2. Financial implications (20.4%)
3. Access to sport on their terms (18.1%)
4. Alternate demands on time (14.3%)
5. Sharing the sport experience (11.6%)
6. Public perception (5.9%)
7. Peer/parental influence (3.8%)
8. The media (2.9%)

The theme analysis further positioned “the culture of sport” and “financial implications” as the top two overarching hurdles. The culture of sport, especially female sport, does not convey an overall public interest in female sports. Further, financial implications are a continued pressure for female sport participation.

“Financial costs - sport is expensive. Time costs - sport requires time for training. The perception is that sport is not important and that it distracts from work/academics”

- Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent

THEME	EXPLAINED	% of Responses
Predominant Culture of Sport	There is a prominent culture of sport that is male dominated and highly competitive, which contributes to female athletes not recognizing sport as a socially accepted practice and to viewing sport as hyper-competitive and not a fun part of everyday life. This culture leads girls to have low self confidence, a fear of failure, and body image issues. “The types of activities offered are not suited to women’s needs and interests. Sports are often associated with men. Not enough emphasis is put on having fun. There is a gender gap in sports education.”	23.1%
Financial Implications	The high cost to participate in sport combined with little or no perceived opportunity to future earning potential. “The lack of compensation because it’s hard to justify the enormous time commitment, the sacrifices, etc., for no money.” “The cost (because families aren’t willing to spend as much as they are on a boy who plays hockey, for example.”	20.4%
Access to Sport on Their Terms	Particularly for younger girls, athletes benefit from organized sport opportunities with other female athletes, properly designed and fit equipment and available facilities to play. “Access to sport - ability to join a league/sport at their level of ability/skill” “People need to ask girls what they want (not every girl wants to wear pink and hang with only other girls). The fact that women/girls are often segregated and mixed play is not always available.” “Rigid unadaptive programming”	18.1%
Alternate Demands on Time	In the 21st century there are myriad alternate demands for personal time (i.e. for women - family obligations, for girls - screen time, etc.) that are occupying more time and drawing girls and women away from sport. “Managing household/family responsibilities seem to fall on women more than men, causing the women to drop out of sporting activities”	14.3%
Sharing the Sport Experience	Girls and women value the opportunity to participate in sport led by women, and to see strong female athletes as role models as motivation to continue involvement. “Role models... we need to fund and encourage high performance athletes to get back out there and fire girls up at the development levels”	11.6%
Public Perception	Women’s sport is too often overshadowed by men’s sport and is subsequently pitted one to one against men’s sport, often leading to an under appreciation of women’s sport for its own unique attributes. Diminishing women’s sport compared to men’s also contributes to this dichotomy. “Old school mentality. I can’t believe in high school xcountrry the girls run shorter distances than the boys... still! Until this changes, girls will always be perceived as weaker and not equal.”	5.9%
Peer/Parental Influence	The time and energy that is required on behalf of busy parents to support their daughters’ sport experience, and also the value the parents or peers place on the power of sport heavily influences the involvement and connection to sport. “Parents not supporting participation in sport in terms of: - commitment of the time required to get girls in sport - because of low enrollment travel for girls sports is extensive - not learning the sport so not applying value to what a team sport provides in terms of life and work skills”	3.8%
The Media	The quantity and quality of women’s sport coverage in popular media shapes the collective perception of women athletes to the public. “Imbalance of sponsor and media support of male sport”	2.9%



# THE EXPOSURE & ATTENTION FOR WOMEN'S SPORT

## MEDIA ANALYSIS RESULTS

### Drivers of Female Sport Coverage

Women's sports receive lower levels of attention and exposure relative to men's sports, but as concerning is the type of coverage that female athletes and events receive. The representation of women in sport in the media commonly centres on femininity trivializing and underrepresenting female athletes, rather than honouring their athletic abilities.<sup>20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25</sup>

Women's sports are more frequently featured in media when they are considered "socially acceptable" for women, including diving, gymnastics and swimming, but coverage excluded women sports that prioritized strength or physical contact.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, factors often unrelated to sport performance, such as mental or physical weakness during competition, physical appearance and attractiveness, are consistent predictors of the amount and type of coverage female sport receives.<sup>27, 28</sup>

### Implications of Low Coverage of Female Sport

The lack of exposure and of media coverage of women's sport contributes to the absence of awareness about women's triumphs and a concerning lack of role models for young female athletes. Lower levels of exposure also result in low perceived sport competence and a high level of gender role conflict, which can contribute to higher levels of withdrawal from sport by females.<sup>35</sup>

When female athletes and events are continuously put on the sidelines in the type of media coverage they received, and as the media continues to embrace a "woman first, athlete second" attitude, female athletes' achievements and esteem are questioned, which can lead to discouragement in future sport participation.<sup>36</sup>

## Canadian Coverage of Female Sport

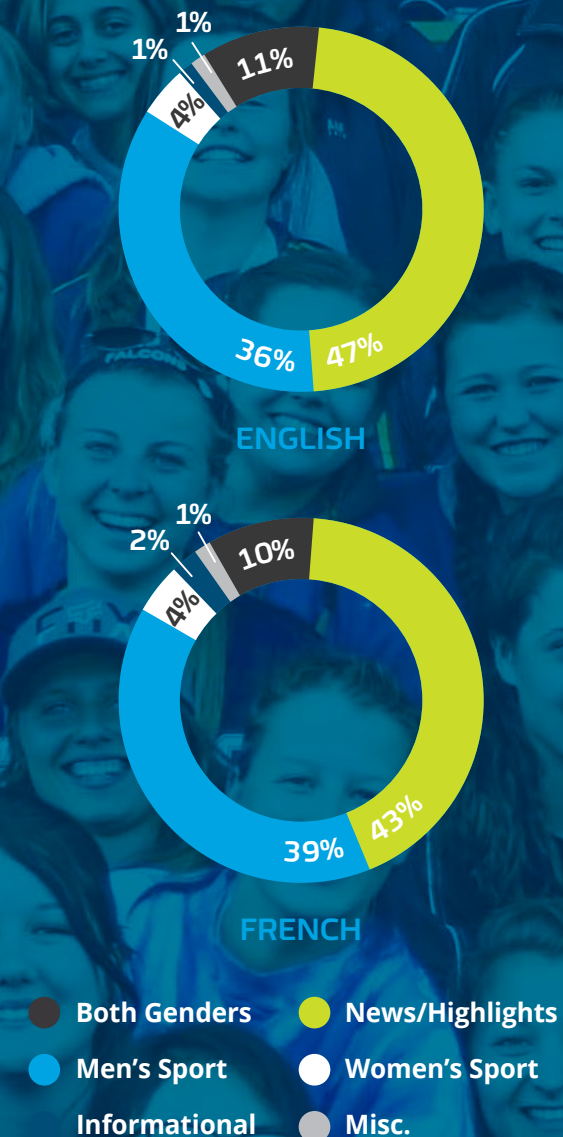
An analysis of Canada's primary national sport networks in 2014, in both French and English, showed that men's sport coverage significantly outweighed that of women's coverage. Of approximately 35,000 hours of sports programming, only 4% featured women's sports, with approximately 11% of the coverage devoted to sport that featured both genders. Of note, over half of the 4%, illustrated in Figure 7, was coverage of women's events at the Sochi Winter Olympics or women's tennis events, as the two dominant sources of women's-only programming.<sup>32</sup>

The media analysis also assessed the coverage of female sport on US television. Results from the US analysis were congruent with the low rates of Canadian media exposure of female sport, with only 24% of American sports media coverage being dedicated to women's sport, despite that 40% of American (registered youth) athletes are female.<sup>29</sup>

## Print Media

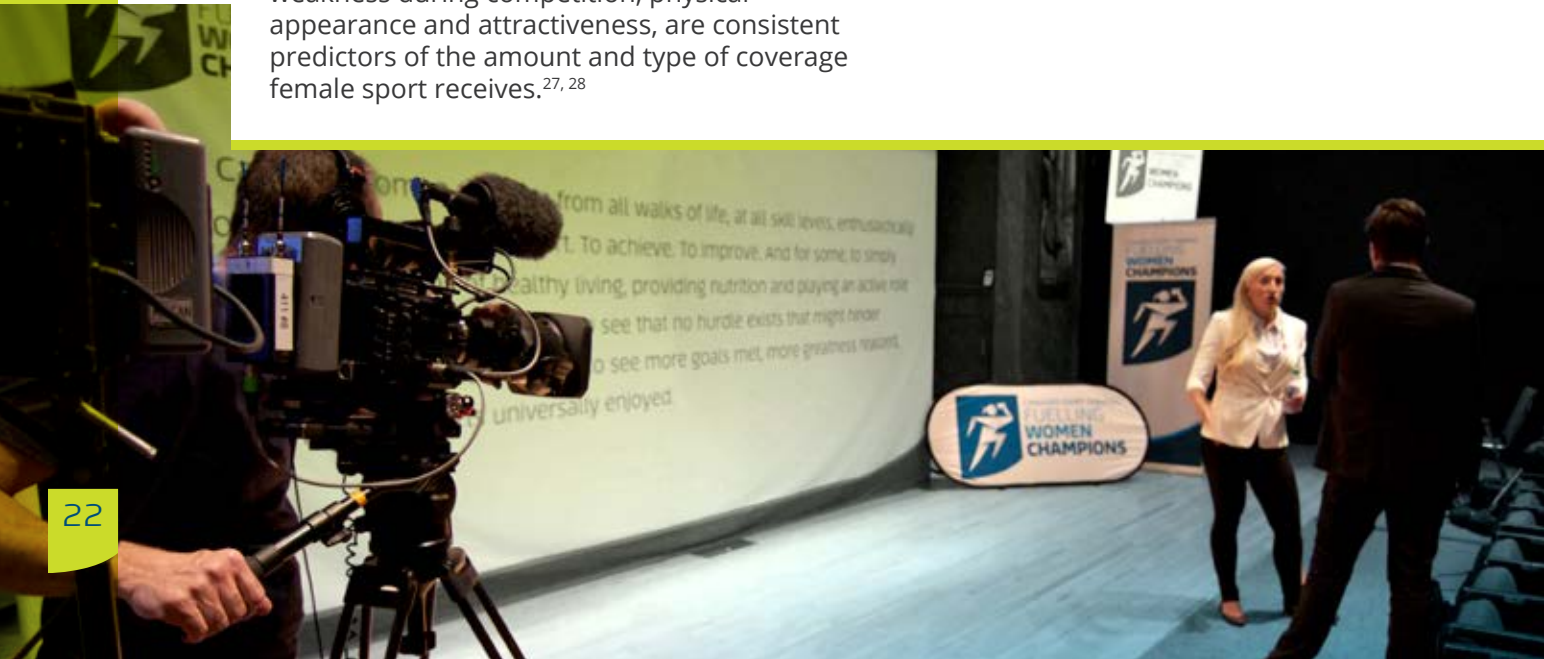
A review of Canadian national print media coverage of women's sports was conducted via an analysis of the front pages of the Saturday Sport section in two of Canada's highest-circulation national newspapers. The results revealed significantly low media attention to women in sport. Notably, in the periods from June 2008 to May 2010, and June 2013 to May 2015, there were infrequent instances of coverage of women's sport (24%) and an overall small portion of total coverage dedicated to women's sport (5.1%).<sup>33,34</sup> The percentage of total page area dedicated to women's sport increased slightly from 4.85% to 5.3% from the first review period (2008 to 2010) to the next (2013 to 2015); however, the percentage of pages featuring at least one piece of female sport content decreased from 27.8% to 20.1% over the same two time periods.<sup>33,34</sup> The coverage that female sport received was low, with the majority of coverage focused on tennis and golf, followed by soccer, figure skating and curling.

Figure 7 - Canadian National TV Sport Networks Programming Breakdown (2014)<sup>32</sup>



“There is not enough celebrating great [female] athletics to the masses. I have to go looking for it”

- Female Leader in Sport, survey respondent



# THE EXPOSURE & ATTENTION FOR WOMEN'S SPORT

## Public Attention - Attendance

Concerns that women's sport is not engrained in the Canadian culture of sports are not unwarranted. For the most part, female athletes and female sport do not capture the interest of the mass population to the same extent as male counterparts.

To further articulate this point, the attendance relative to venue capacity at recent major sporting events hosted in Canada was measured. Male competitions consistently attracted higher rates of attendance than comparable female events, as in Figure 8. The notable exception was attendance at Canada's national women's curling event, the Scotties Tournament of Hearts, which surpassed the attendance (relative to venue capacity) at the men's Tim Horton's Brier.<sup>10</sup>

## Public Attention - Viewership

Major women's sporting events, like the Scotties Tournament of Hearts, draw huge numbers of spectators to their venues, and can also attract high levels of viewers who tune in to watch the competitions on Canadian televisions. In Canada, as noted in Figure 9, curling events draw similar levels of viewership for both women's and men's events, while the women's international basketball championship drew even more viewership than the men's basketball event.<sup>10, 37</sup>

Notably, of Canada's highest-viewed sporting events in recent years, female events claimed spots as the third and fourth most watched (i.e., FIFA Women's World Cup Quarter Final Match Canada versus England: 3,200,000; and Sochi Women's Hockey Final Canada versus USA: 3,079,700). These events were only surpassed by the men's gold medal hockey game in Sochi (8,500,000) and the men's 2014 FIFA World Cup Final (4,930,000).<sup>10, 37</sup>

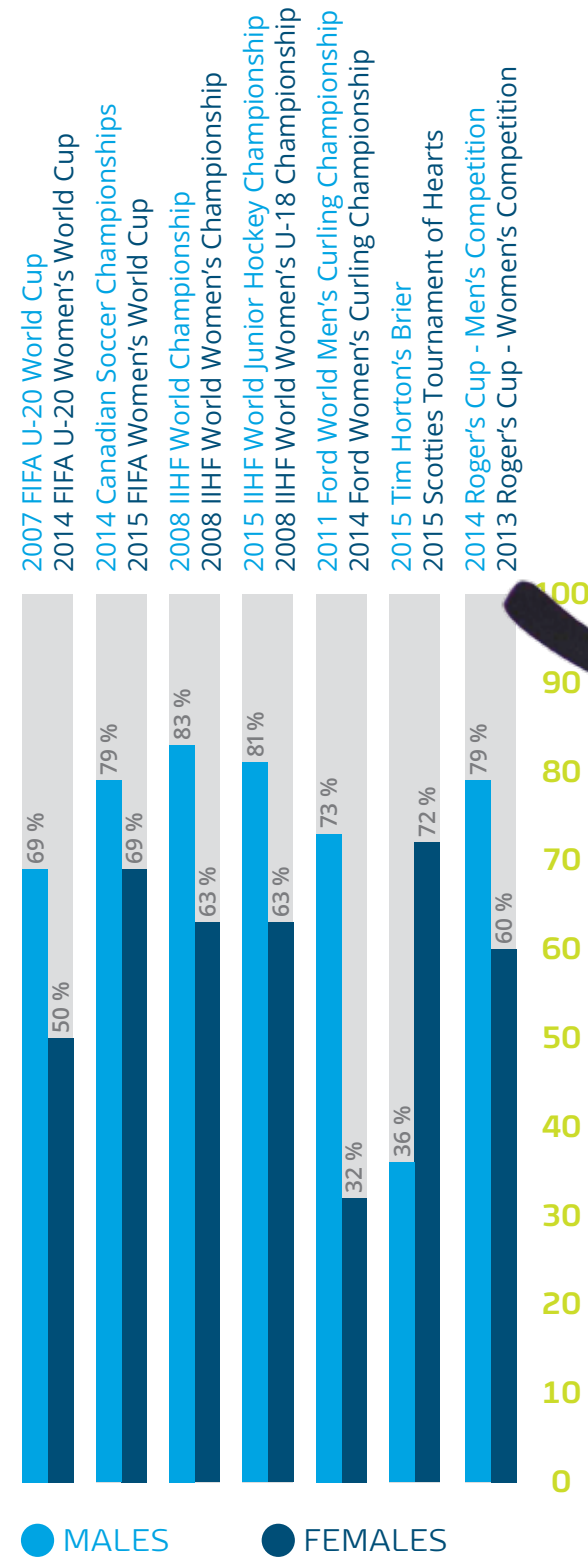


Figure 8 - % Attendance vs Capacity of Venue<sup>10</sup>



## Impact of Media Exposure: Case Study on Women's Hockey in Canada

Coverage of women's hockey in Canada is a good example of the impact of showcasing elite women's sport on participation rates. In the case of women's hockey in Canada, an elevated profile of the game through broadly distributed women's hockey events results in significant increases in grassroots hockey registrations in the year following each of the covered events, as in Figure 10.<sup>10</sup>

After the 1990 broadcast of the first-ever IIHF Women's Hockey Championships, female hockey registration grew by 39%. Additionally, media coverage of the 1998 inclusion of women's hockey in the Olympic Games in Nagano resulted in a 30% increase in Canadian girls and women's hockey registration.

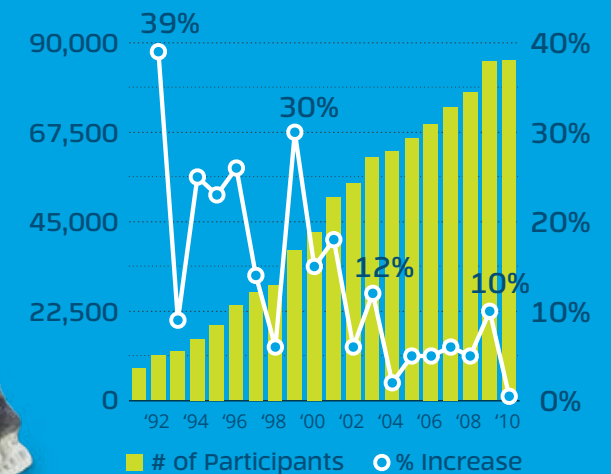
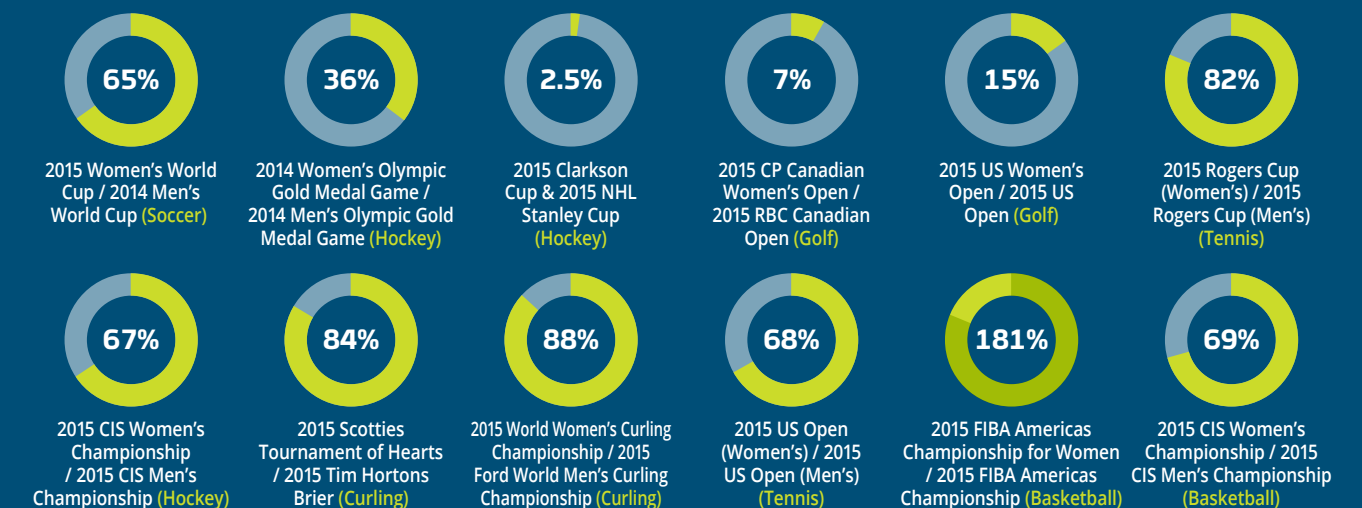


Figure 10 - Female Hockey Registration in Canada

Figure 9 - Major Women's Sports Events' Canadian TV Viewership, as a Percentage of the Equivalent Men's Event<sup>10, 37</sup>



# CLEARING THE HURDLES

## A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE ACTION

Girls and women of all ages and backgrounds face prolific structural and behavioural hurdles to maintaining roles as sport participants and sport leaders. Across all demographics, there is a substantial volume of evidence that points to concerning declines in girls and women's participation in sport in Canada.

Quite simply, from a sport participation point of view, we're nearing crisis mode.

And this is why Canada's dairy farmers, CAAWS and our advisory group have embarked on this research, aiming to identify the hurdles and, most importantly, provide a roadmap in the form of recommendations for future action. This report aims to inspire actions that support every girl and woman in Canada in getting and staying active in sport!

## Priorities to Increase Female Sport Participation & Leadership

The challenges that girls and women face in sport participation are organized in three areas, distinct in the level of the challenge, stakeholders and regional responsibility.

First, system-wide hurdles are identified at the structural or cultural level, with challenges that exist across the country and beyond. Second, hurdles are identified at the team, organization and community level with responsibility residing locally and opportunity to directly connect with sport participants. Finally, individual challenges consider hurdles that could be faced by individual girls and women in Canada. The challenges, of course, are interrelated, with structural challenges impacting teams, local initiatives and decisions to participate in sport.

## Structural /Cultural Hurdles:

Many structural and cultural forces impede girls and women's sport participation and leadership, including the following:

- A predominate culture and history of sport that is male dominated
- Negative perceptions and stereotyping of girls and women in sport
- The quality and quantity of media coverage of women's sport
- The exposure of female sport via all sources of media

## Sports Team, Organization & Community Hurdles

As teams, organizations and communities are faced with declining participation of girls and women, they may cease to offer opportunities. With fewer opportunities comes even fewer participants and even fewer sport leadership opportunities for women. The hurdles that teams, organizations and communities face are interrelated, including:

- Declining rates of girls and women participating in sports
- Limited female-specific sports and opportunities which meet the needs or interests of girls and women
- Limited access to coaching, training, equipment and facilities which embrace girls and women's specific abilities and skill levels
- Lack of opportunity to share the sport experience with positive female role models
- Lack of opportunity to celebrate female athletes and women's sport driven by low levels of quality media coverage

## Individual Hurdles:

Four particular hurdles are individual or personal in nature, including the following:

- Competing demands on time<sup>2</sup>
- Lack of interest in sport among girls and women<sup>2</sup>
- Lack of parental and peer support and encouragement<sup>4,8,9</sup>
- Lack of financial resources<sup>4</sup>



# CLEARING THE HURDLES

## FACING THE HURDLES: PROFILES OF CANADIAN GIRLS & WOMEN

Canada is a diverse nation and women are a diverse group, with varying needs, wants and orientations, living in different situations and representing many demographic profiles. The hurdles that girls and women face are as unique as they are, based on a myriad of personal factors and influences. Consider the following fictional “profiles” to illustrate the nature of the identified hurdles in the lives of girls and women across Canada.



### Persona 1 – Geneviève

Geneviève is a 12-year old girl who resides on a farm in rural Quebec, taking the bus 45 minutes each way to attend school. She speaks only French and lives with both of her parents who work full time on the family farm and also care for her three younger siblings (two boys and one girl). Her family is able to pay for summer camps, membership to clubs/teams and purchase equipment/fund travel. Yet last year, Geneviève quit the volleyball team at school when she didn't get a lot of playing time (she said it was “boring”).

### Persona 2 – Simone

Simone is a working mother of three kids (ages 8, 10 and 12) who lives in a large home in Calgary. Each morning she commutes downtown with her husband, who works in the oil industry. The trip takes about 55 minutes and is a combination of driving to a nearby bus depot, parking and taking the bus downtown. They repeat the commutes home each night, usually arriving after 7pm, then try to keep the next few hours open for family time. They have a nanny who takes care of the kids after school, drives them to activities and does laundry. Simone used to be an active runner and ran a half-marathon about five years ago, but no longer finds enough time in the day to add running to her schedule.

### Persona 3 – Veena

Veena, nine, lives in downtown Mississauga in a comfortable and safe neighbourhood. She and her mom (her dad left when she was little) live on the 34th floor of a condo not far from a large mall and busy streets. Although she lives just a few minutes' walk from her school and a local community centre, due to the safety concerns of her mom, Veena can only go to the community center, to school or to play outside when her mom is with her. Her mom is quite worried about her being outside alone. She played girls' hockey last year but quit this year as her mom didn't want to travel to tournaments for nearly 15 weekends during the season. She also overheard her mom complaining about the costs of hockey. Typically, Veena spends her evenings watching TV and playing video games until her mom gets home (around 6pm), then does homework and hangs out with her mom until bedtime.

### Persona 4 – Anka

Anka is a 31-year-old woman living in St. John's. She used to be very active, playing basketball right through until college. She recently stopped playing sports as there were no active women's basketball leagues in her area. She tried playing in the men's league, but didn't feel welcome and lacked confidence to go back. Her life is busy and she hasn't found the time or energy to start considering other sports.

### Persona 5 – Tana

Tana is a 16-year-old living in Winnipeg. Her mom runs her own business and is very successful, but has little extra time (she works 60+ hours/week) so Tana usually goes to her grandparents after school and hangs out there. Tana's mom and grandmother encourage her to focus on her studies and do not consider sport important.

### Persona 6 – Chenguang

Chenguang is an 11-year old girl living in Burnaby, a suburb of Vancouver. Both of her parents work but neither is overly active. Chenguang played soccer and swam until a couple of years ago when she didn't think she would make the high school teams. She switched her focus to guitar and singing lessons, inspired by her role model Taylor Swift. Chenguang and her friends are very active on social media and are huge music fans, but none have much interest in sport at all.



# CLEARING THE HURDLES

## TIME FOR ACTION!

From coast to coast, including Northern regions, Canadian girls and women are incredibly diverse, representing unique regions, cultures, linguistics, sexual orientations, skills and abilities. Diversity is a strength as we look for creative solutions to help clear the hurdles for all girls and women across the country.

Based on our survey results, nearly 65% of female leaders agree that the landscape of female sport is better now than in their earliest involvement in sports. The landscape is getting better; some leaders even report observing remarkable improvement in the level of participation, exposure and awareness of female sport.

The sport landscape for girls and women in Canada is improving, but work still needs to be done. And the time for action is now.

## SETTING PRIORITIES: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

To advance Canadian girls and women in sport, we need broad participation from stakeholders to help clear the hurdles. Due to the immensity of the hurdles, we need to prioritize and consider what can be done to directly support women and girls in sport in Canada.

## A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE ACTION

The following section provides a series of specific recommendations to increase girls and women's sport participation in Canada. The identified hurdles must be addressed through multi-level, national and individual efforts, championed by organizations like CAAWS and Canada's dairy farmers who are committed to seeing more girls and women actively engaged in sport.

The recommendations are pointed, based on the evidence shared, and seek to inspire actions system-wide; at the team, organization and community level; and in individuals.

## System-Wide Action

Across the Canadian sport system, we need to inspire a positive culture for girls and women in sport, which includes the actions below.

### TO DO:

- Champion female elite athletes as spokespersons and ambassadors in corporate Canada
- Highlight and value more female athletes' achievements and women's sports by increasing the percentage of media content (e.g., television, radio and online) devoted to female sport, by establishing CRTC rules and guidelines for women's sport representation
- Create incentives for sport clubs and facilities to balance their allocations of time available for both boys' and girls' sports, and incentives for longer-term sponsorships, endorsements and/or funding of female sport
- Re-assess government funding for sport participation to support women-specific sport programming targeted to underserved and high-need populations
- Establish a recognition platform to incentivize corporate Canada's support of women in sport with financial contributions, promotion and in-kind donations
- Advance women's equal participation as decision makers by encouraging diversity in Board of Directors and other sport leadership roles, aiming for approximately 50/50 gender parity on boards and eliminating the "glass ceiling"
- Support women in transitions to coaching and officiating roles through female-specific training opportunities and inclusive interviewing processes
- Encourage the "next generation" of female enthusiasts by supporting a sport environment that is diverse, welcoming and fun





# CLEARING THE HURDLES

## A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE ACTION

### Sports Team, Organization & Community Actions

Teams, organizations and community associations need to take a role in efforts to improve female sport participation in Canadian sport, including the actions below.

#### TO DO:

- Embrace diversity by consulting with girls and women to understand local realities that may hinder participation, and to develop programming that meet their needs, interests and experiences
- Provide training and mentorship opportunities for women to advance in leadership roles
- Educate organizations and communities to view diversity as an asset in the selection of coaches for representative teams, professional positions and related roles
- Expand and enhance policy and programming to support quality coaching of female athletes by both women and men with attention to creating safe and inclusive spaces and reducing bullying
- Launch and promote free and low-cost community female-only sport opportunities such as open houses or try-it days to expose diverse females to new sports in a safe and supportive environment
- Implement equitable rules for female and male sports (e.g., distances, duration, depth of field, prize money, etc.)
- Focus on fun, pleasure and challenge of participation, considering the age and abilities of participants
- Encourage the “next generation” of female enthusiasts by supporting a sport environment that is diverse, welcoming and fun

### Individual Actions

At the individual level, we encourage girls and women to prioritize sport in their own lives, but we advocate that individual responsibility for advancing female sport in Canada resides with all of us. We all have roles to play in recognizing and celebrating the diversity and uniqueness in girls and women in sport, including the actions below.

#### TO DO:

- Schedule time for sport, recognizing the importance of sport participation for physical, mental and social health
- Help build girls’ confidence in sport by focusing on fundamental movement skills such as kicking, running, jumping, catching and throwing, before introducing fundamental sport-specific skills
- Prioritize financial resources to start and continue personal and family commitment to sport, taking advantage of free and low-cost community sport opportunities and national fitness tax credits
- Encourage girls to join and continue to play, coach and officiate a variety of sports from youth into their teens and adulthood
- Support elite female athletes by attending and watching events, and following athletes on social media
- Promote and share female sport news stories that focus on athletic skills, healthy living champions, accomplishments and profiles of positive role models
- Encourage the “next generation” of female enthusiasts by supporting a sport environment that is diverse, welcoming and fun

## A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE ACTION

Across the country, as individuals, teams, organizations, local and national communities, and as females and males, we all have a role to play in the advancement of the girls and women in the Canadian sport landscape.

As the rates of girls and women who participate in sport continue to decline, we need actions to improve the landscape. Many structural, social and demographic hurdles still impede participation and women’s transitions to sport leadership roles. Together, across the country, we need to start tackling these hurdles, through the specific actions we provide, to help girls and women on their path to healthy living.

By embracing the diversity of Canadian girls and women and supporting this project, Canada’s dairy farmers and the research team aim to tackle the challenges that females face to inspire them to get active and stay active in sport to help all girls and women reap the benefits of sport.<sup>1</sup>

We can help females clear the hurdles and inspire a lifelong commitment to sport. When we fuel female sport, we fuel a healthy and active Canada.

## A MESSAGE FROM CANADA'S DAIRY FARMERS

Through our Fuelling Women Champions program, Canada’s dairy farmers are committed to investing in the advancement of women and girls’ sport for years to come. In 2015, we took action by

- Providing financial support to national sport organizations’ women’s programs (Rugby Canada, Swimming Canada), women’s professional hockey (CWHL) and CAAWS
- Purchasing and distributing thousands of tickets to major women’s sporting events, allowing more Canadians to witness the talent and intensity of elite women’s sport



- Creating events and opportunities that allowed young girls across Canada to meet, interact with and be inspired by their role models (Jennifer Jones, Kaillie Humphries, Chantal Petitclerc, Desiree Scott and Natalie Spooner)

In 2016 and beyond, Canada’s dairy farmers will continue to financially support women’s sports organizations across Canada. We take the findings of this report very seriously, and based on these findings, we will direct additional efforts toward addressing some of these key priorities as identified by the authors, the advisory group and CAAWS so our collective efforts are most effectively targeting the greatest areas of opportunity for impact.

We look forward to continuing to support girls and women in sport in Canada, to see more greatness realized and the benefits of sport universally enjoyed!

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