

## Building a Stronger British Columbia

Written Submission to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia's Budget 2010 Consultation

BC Athlete Voice represents more than 3,000 high performance athletes from over 70 diverse communities in more than 50 different sports throughout British Columbia. Our members include school, varsity, provincial, national and international level athletes, who have in many instances experienced sport from "playground to podium". Our members are the athletes the public see down the street, in our schools, clubs and community centres, striving to achieve their personal best for their province and for Canada. British Columbians cheer on our home-grown athletes like Alexa Loo, Richard Peter and Steve Omischl at the Olympic and Paralympic Games, World Championships, and other international events. Athletes inspire us all as they pursue their dreams, model the quest for excellence and demonstrate the spirit that makes our Province great.

As the collective voice for these athletes in British Columbia, BC Athlete Voice is pleased to submit the following information for consideration through the 2010 budgetary consultation process.

The benefits of sport have been well documented. Sport improves population health, reduces youth crime, stimulates the economy, unifies communities, and helps to define personal and societal identity. BC Athlete Voice believes that the Province's high performance athletes play a critical role in attaining these benefits. Athletes drive this through the actions they take and the contributions they, their families and supporters make beyond the field of play. With support from the BC sport system, our athletes bring pride to British Columbia, but more importantly, these athletes go on to become long time community leaders, role-models and advocates for healthy lifestyles.

The effectiveness of athletes both on and off the field of play is due largely to the strong support that they receive. The support from Provincial Government sport funding enables clubs, provincial sports organizations (PSOs), regional PacificSport Centres, the Canadian Sports Centre Pacific and other sport organizations to provide high performance athletes the coaching, athlete services and opportunities they need to succeed. We have seen the results of supporting athletes not only on the scoreboard and podium, but through the positive impact in our communities around the province. The success of BC Athletes and return on investment can be seen in all corners of the Province. Examples include:

- The economic stimulus of an athlete centred, community orientated event like the BC Games in Kelowna which had a direct economic impact of more than \$3.1 million. The 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics are projected to generate \$10 billion in local economic activity.
- The overwhelming sense of pride and excitement that is generated in communities like Fort St John and Hazelton when hometown heroes Denny Morrison and Carol Huynh inspire a whole province to live healthy, active lifestyles and achieve their dreams.
- The facilities and infrastructure investment that is fueled by athletes and the organizations that support them – clubs, leagues, sport and coach programming, provincial sport organizations and national sport organizations. With the sustained support of athletes and coaches, whole communities can enjoy the world class facilities in their own backyard. Sporting events based around facilities provide a catalyst for all parts of the community to come together in true social cohesion.
- The difference that one athlete can make to inspire us beyond sport. Whether it's Steve Nash establishing charities to make a difference for children, Dave Calder's innovative work to protect the environment, Steve Podborski advocating for the voice of athletes or Silken Laumann or Simon Whitfield showing us that there are no limits to the human spirit.
- The ability for the whole province to come together to support Team BC. A partnership between the Provincial Government, over 35 sport organizations and 358 athletes. This partnership culminating in a 36% increase in Gold medals, 75% of sports improving on their performance from 2005 Canada Summer Games and a life experience that Team BC Athletes will always carry with them.

In a few short months, British Columbia will host the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. It will inspire a generation of youth to pursue their dreams and to become the next Josh Dueck, Nancy Greene or Ryan Cochrane. The stories of British Columbia's Olympic and Paralympic athletes will birth dreams for our youth; dreams that will rely on the continued support of the Provincial Government.

Mindful of the difficult economic times in which the Province now finds itself, BC Athlete Voice would encourage our Government to continue its investment in high performance athletes. Now is not the time to shrink back on the support for sport or for our athletes, but rather the time to seize the opportunities to build on the excitement and successes of the 2010 Games. Now is a time to ensure that the "children of 2010" have all the opportunities we can provide to achieve their sporting dreams and play leadership roles within their communities.

The development of a high performance athlete follows a fairly predictable path. There are key ages where athletes must be exposed to higher quality training and competitive opportunities. If funding is not present to take advantage of these opportunities, then athletes will not reach their full potential. If funding can only reappear a few years later (i.e., when the global economy emerges from the current recession), our current athletes will not be able to make up for lost time. In other words, a restoration of funding cuts may benefit the next cohort of athletes, but it would not benefit today's athletes who require and rely on this funding and support to continue to develop. Funding decisions made now will affect the sporting dreams of our BC athletes working and striving to compete in London in 2012, Sochi in 2014 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

As a result, BC Athlete Voice respectfully requests that the Finance Committee consider the following actions:

1. Restoring the BC Athlete Assistance Program to the 2008/09 funding level of \$1.4 million for the 2010/11 fiscal and increasing this level of support over the next two years to match the support offered by other large provinces.

Currently the BC Athlete Assistance Program is the only direct source of provincial financial assistance provided to provincial level athletes in British Columbia. This vital source of funding support enables our developing high performance athletes to make the leap to international levels. It helps pay for the coaching, travel, equipment, club fees, facility rentals and performance services that are required to be competitive. It ensures that our top amateur athletes can stay in BC to train, study and compete. It means that athletes from lower and middle class families are not shut out of reaching their dreams because of funding.

2. Ensure that BC Athlete Assistance Program funding continues to extend to athletes competing at BC Post-Secondary Institutes.

A strong Post-Secondary athletics program is an integral part of British Columbia's sport system. The provision of Athlete Assistance to varsity athletes keeps many of the Province's best athletes in BC where they can continue to contribute to their communities.

3. Restore previous levels of Gaming Funds to the sports system.

Gaming Funds reduce the cost of travel and competition for athletes. They support the vital programs provided by clubs and provincial sport organizations and subsidize the costs that otherwise might make support services beyond the reach of many aspiring high performance athletes.

4. Create or fund an endowment to make high performance sport more economically accessible to all British Columbians.

The costs of high performance sport are out of reach for many families. Through the development of a 2010 Legacy endowment fund, sport could be made more accessible for those with the talent and drive to pursue excellence at higher levels.

5. Benchmark provincial funding commitment for sport at 2008 – 2009 levels.

Ensuring continued sporting success for British Columbia through Government investment in the Team BC Program and the Integrated Performance System that is maintained at a level no lower than 2008-2009 levels.

Only a few years ago, the Provincial Government had the courage to set for itself Five Great Goals and to dream of a Golden Decade. It had the audacity to believe that British Columbia could lead the world. The Province's athletes have that same optimism, boldness, and determination. They too dream of being more than good; they dream of standing on top of the world, bringing home a gold medal, and inspiring the next generation to follow in their footsteps. However, they cannot attain their dreams without the continued support of their Provincial Government.

BC Athlete Voice appeals to Government to provide the direct and indirect funding to athletes to ensure that the "children of 2010" will have the financial means to follow in the sporting footsteps of those who they see competing in 2010. We look forward to working with the provincial government to invest in our athletes who will be our leaders in sport and the community in 2010 and beyond.

Sincerely,

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