

## ***PROMISING PRACTICES: WORKING WITH TRANSITIONING/TRANSITIONED ATHLETES IN SPORT PROJECT***

### **SOME THEMES EMERGING FROM CONSULTATION TO DATE**

This is a summary of some ‘themes’ reflected back to us in our discussions with sport leaders and athletes to date. These are not in any particular order but are shared for the purposes of continuing to stimulate discussion:

- Gender diverse people are becoming more and more visible in Canadian society. This issue is in a state of evolution and over time, there will be growing social acceptance of gender-diverse populations, just as there has been growing acceptance of gays and lesbians in society.
- People in sport who respond negatively to this issue tend to frame their response around the notion of ‘competitive advantage’, many of them not acknowledging that the real issue is one of ‘social acceptance’. It is believed by many sport leaders that we can find ways to address the competitive advantage issue through policy, but gaining social acceptance is much more daunting task.
- The concern of competitive advantage applies only to transitioned women (physically born men who become women and then compete against physically born women). There is no comparable concern, from a performance perspective, with transitioned men (physically born women who become men and compete against other men). There are also likely few concerns in the recreational context of sport (i.e. house league activity, intramural sport, etc.).
- Any argument that that there is a competitive advantage must also acknowledge the wide diversity that exists naturally within each sex: athletes excel against others because they have advantages over others, where those advantages can emanate from hereditary features such as body type, size, strength and psychological attributes as well as from environmental features such as skill development, nutrition, training regimes, quality of coaching, and equipment, among others.
- Many sport leaders suggested it may be premature at this time to develop a single national policy for Canadian sport – possibly better to publish the discussion paper and receive feedback and reaction, and to continue discussion with athletes and sport leaders over the ensuing months.
- Any policy that is proposed will likely need to be on a ‘tiered’ basis – with a broadly inclusive policy at the non-competitive levels and a more restrictive policy at competitive levels (for national and international level athletes) to accommodate international sport rules and significant drug-testing considerations.

- It is a given that no Canadian policy will have jurisdiction at the international level, thus no Canadian sport governing body could offer an assurance to a transitioned athlete that they will be eligible to compete at the international level.
- Some sport leaders suggested a 'policy' is too prescriptive and we could start by promoting guidelines (this is consistent with the UK and Australia approach where governments and sport bodies publish 'guidance notes') or agreeing on guiding principles. As well, any policy or guideline should address eligibility and inclusion of coaches, officials and administrators in addition to athletes, as is the case with the policy of Women's Golf Australia.
- The few existing policies that have been developed by sport organizations have typically been developed in response to the threat of a lawsuit (a negative motivation). We should aspire to act upon a positive motivation, which is to develop policy, guidelines or principles to reflect our desire to be inclusive in our sport system.
- Discussion among sport leaders in the USA is that, at the club level at least, gender categories may eventually disappear. The same trend may unfold here in Canada, based on evolving human rights and discrimination laws and the growing acceptance of the LTAD movement.
- Those Canadian sports consulted said that if a policy/guideline was developed and offered, they would, without hesitation, adopt it so as to better position themselves to respond to what is certain to be an issue at some point in the future. All acknowledge that at this time, they lack the knowledge or expertise to develop their own policy.
- The sport leaders consulted largely agreed that the IOC approach through the Stockholm Consensus is restrictive and onerous and should not be presumed to be the model for any Canadian policy framework.
- Given the dearth of research on gender transition and athletic performance, it would be interesting to determine if there was interest among Canadian academics to pursue such unique research.
- Lastly, everyone consulted felt that this is a project that should be ongoing. The publication of the discussion paper and the formulation of a policy approach are first steps only – the longer-term challenge will be to educate and inform.

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May 26, 2009

