

OTP EVALUATION 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kevin Lawrie and Rachel Corbett
Sport Law & Strategy Group

September 5, 2011

Overview

The OTP Evaluation 2011 was conducted for Own the Podium (OTP) by independent consultants with the Sport Law & Strategy Group. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine external stakeholders' perspectives on the impact, effectiveness, and progress of OTP since its inception in 2004.

To that end, surveys were sent to all currently and formally targeted National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and, through the NSOs, to currently and formally affected athletes and coaches. Multi-Sport Organizations (MSOs) were also contacted. In addition to surveys, selected interviews were conducted with interested organizations and individuals. Finally, existing data (provided by OTP) related to medal counts, statistics, projections, and funding was compiled and included in the analysis.

The Full Report on the evaluation is arranged into seven sections. The first two sections of the report outline participants' views of the mission, vision, and goals of OTP as well as respondents' understanding of OTP's role in the sport system. The final five sections correspond to each part of OTP's strategic plan – coaching and technical excellence; athlete and team excellence; sport science, medicine, and innovation excellence; NSO and CSC (Canadian Sport Centre) excellence; and operational excellence.

The main findings of the evaluation are summarized below.

Mission, Vision and Goals of OTP

Individuals and organizations surveyed are confident that OTP can remain committed to its current vision and mission. Most organizations (69%) felt that OTP was regularly achieving its podium performance and system development goals –and a slightly higher percentage of individuals (77%) felt similarly. In the survey comments and interviews, some individuals and organizations had questions about OTP's system development goals. Particularly, one concern was that a focus on short-term podium success may have a negative effect on long-term system development.

Role of OTP

Organizations understood OTP's role better than individuals. Organizations generally understood that OTP helps with funding while also providing technical expertise to support the broader goal of improved high performance results. A greater proportion of individuals, on the other hand, perceived that OTP's main role was as a funding agency. There was also a significant difference in the opinion that OTP's role in the sport system should be expanded – with individuals strongly favouring an expansion and organizations only moderately supporting an expansion. In the comments and interviews, one prevailing concern was that there was a lack of role clarity, some redundancy, and some overlap among OTP, the Canadian Olympic Committee/Canadian Paralympic Committee, Canadian Sport Centres and Sport Canada.

Coaching and Technical Excellence

Coaching and technical excellence was ranked by both organizations and individuals as OTP's second most important strategic priority. Individuals identified the qualities of 'international experience' and 'technical and/or tactical knowledge' as the most important for coaches to possess. When asked to identify the qualities that coaches lack, individuals ranked these two qualities at the bottom – signaling that coaches already possess the most important qualities. Individuals and organizations generally spoke positively about coaches in the survey comments and interviews. One criticism that occurred more than once was the perception that OTP was biased toward international coaches who are presumed to be superior to Canadian coaches.

Athlete and Team Excellence

Athlete and team excellence was ranked by both organizations and individuals as OTP's most important strategic priority. Individuals (81%) felt that Canada needed to improve its funding levels in order to catch up to other countries. A small majority of organizations (62%) and individuals (57%) felt that Canadian athletes competed on an equal basis with athletes from other countries. Winter Olympic Games results have steadily improved since OTP's inception – with Winter Olympic gold medals and total medal count climbing to an all-time high in 2010. Canada's total medal count ranking at the Summer Olympic Games has improved from 19th to 15th. The concern about OTP's focus on high performance at the apparent expense of system development was repeated in this section's survey comments and interviews.

Sport Science, Medicine and Innovation Excellence

The Top Secret program, initially funded by Bell Canada, provided applied sport research to select winter sports leading up to the Vancouver Olympics and Paralympics. Understandably, such research did not affect all sports, coaches or athletes completing this survey, and impact scores were relatively low. As well, the survey questions emphasized innovation and research over sport science and medicine, with the result that less information was gathered about the impact of sport science and medicine on athlete performance. However, both organizations and individuals ranked the importance of continuing work on innovation and research with the highest scores in the study (8.5).

Although the total budget for sport innovation and research has declined since the Games, this work has expanded and now affects 49 sports. A slim majority (51%) of individuals believed that Canadian sport science developments were equal to, or better than, other nations. One repeated concern from the survey and interview comments in this area of innovation and research was the lack of role clarity between NSOs and CSCs – some NSOs and CSCs appear to work collaboratively, while other NSOs apparently prefer to not be engaged with CSCs.

NSO and CSC Excellence

NSO and CSC excellence was ranked by organizations as OTP's third most important strategic priority and by individuals as OTP's fourth most important strategic priority. NSOs were nearly equally divided when they were asked to identify their level of integration with CSCs – with 36% claiming moderate integration, 25% claiming limited integration, 21% claiming no integration, and 18% claiming full integration. Individual responses were similarly divided – but with 23% of individuals saying they did not know the integration level of their NSO with CSCs. Two concerns from the survey and interview comments related to the lack of standardized services across CSCs, and weaknesses within NSO governance structures.

Operational Excellence

Operational excellence was ranked by organizations as OTP's fourth most important strategic priority and by individuals as OTP's third most important strategic priority. Both organizations and individuals recognized that OTP is the leading agency for high performance sport in Canada but had reservations about declaring OTP as the leading agency in high performance sport around the world. Survey and interview comments praised OTP personnel but concerns were expressed about apparent growing bureaucracy within the organization.

Summary

This survey represents the first formal, independent evaluation of OTP. Since the inception of OTP, Olympic Games results have steadily improved, and there is a high degree of confidence among stakeholders in OTP's commitment to its mission and vision. OTP personnel are well-respected and OTP is perceived by NSOs as a valuable partner in their high performance programs. Respondents generally spoke positively about coaches, and individual athletes are satisfied with the coaching they receive.

At the same time, however, stakeholders expressed valid concerns about the lack of role clarity among OTP and other national funding partners - the Canadian Olympic Committee/Canadian Paralympic Committee and Sport Canada. NSO governance structures are perceived to be the weak link in the sport delivery system, and CSCs must do much more to align and harmonize their approaches to collaborating with NSOs to better serve athletes and coaches. As well, the benefits of sport science, medicine and innovation are not being maximized.

The questions in the survey instruments used in this evaluation were carefully designed so that they can serve as firm benchmarks going forward. By using similar questions and a similar methodology in a future evaluation, OTP can determine if stakeholders' perceptions of impact and effectiveness have improved or diminished over time.