

Northern Sport Development Strategy Report – Overview for Smithers

Introduction

On September 17th 2010, the City of Prince George was selected to host the 13th Canada Winter Games (CWG) in 2015. Hosting the CWG is a great opportunity for the people of the North to celebrate sport as never before. Winter sport is an integral part of the culture of Northern BC and with a strong commitment from the communities of the North, it is possible to develop a strong team of athletes who will be very competitive and on the Podium in 2015.

In a recent report by the Independent Sport Review Panel to the PacificSport Northern BC, it was shown that Northern BC athletes represent approximately 8% of Team BC at the winter and 2% at the summer Canada Games. With improved training methods, more technical expertise and knowledge, and a better understanding of qualification criteria, these numbers could improve significantly.

Following a roundtable consultation in March 2011, it was determined that a goal of 20% representation from the North on Team BC was possible. Team BC would include 40-50 athletes from the North with a goal to win 18 medals. A report was then commissioned to assess Northern athletes, facilities and support in relation to the 2015 objective. There was also a focus on the potential legacy of the 2015 Games in the Northern communities.

The report includes an analysis of the current conditions of CWG sports in Northern BC and recommendations of specific programs and activities needed to achieve performance objectives. The following were areas of discussion with the sports and their communities:

1. A clear understanding of qualification criteria by sport
2. Athletes – quantity and quality of elite athletes in each region
3. Coaching – quality of coaching
4. Training/Competition – Canada Winter Games (CWG) levels
5. Facilities – CWG requirements
6. Equipment and Technology – quality of sport specific equipment
7. Athlete support – through PacificSport Northern BC and Municipalities
8. Home Field Advantage (HFA) - the plan to develop advantages for the home team in 2015
9. Team Northern BC – a specific Northern approach to CWG performances

It is critical that all areas above be addressed together to optimize performance by 2015.

Assessment by Community – Smithers

The Director of Recreation, Parks & Culture was very interested in a Northern Sport Strategy approach to 2015. He expressed interest in XploreSportZ and IGNITE/Youth Strength & Conditioning collaborative programs as well as supporting local CWG camps. A possibility is to use the Smithers recreation brochure for promoting CWG activities.

The town of Smithers has great facilities for alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and biathlon. As well, they have a great history in winter sports.

It was observed that many sports and athletes from Smithers do not have the necessary year round programs to compete against other athletes of the Province. They are often at a disadvantage due to a seasonal approach to training and/or a lack of adequate facilities.

Snowboard

Smithers has a great snowboard program supported by local businesses. They are well organized with the Alpine Club and have many possible CWG candidates. The program includes athletes from Burns Lake. At this point they mainly do slope style disciplines with some snowboard cross races. However, right now, slope style disciplines are not part of the CWG. Some of these athletes have been using the local Gymnastics facility for off snow training.

Cross-Country Skiing/Biathlon

The local biathlon range and adjacent cross-country trails are excellent and certified to host BC cup races. They have glacier summer camp possibilities, an excellent opportunity to create a Northern advantage, but the glacier has not been used in recent years.

Most of their athletes train year round, using roller skiing for summer training. They have 4-8 possible candidates in each sport for 2015. They are looking for collaborative approach with other clubs in the north.

Gymnastics

They have a strong gymnastics program with some provincial champions on the girls' team. It is estimated that they could have a few athletes capable of competing for a 2015 team position.

Hockey

They have a great tradition with excellent goalie camps. It was suggested that CWG skills camps would be well received in the community and that special attention should be paid to goalies.

Facilities – Smithers

Smithers contribution to the Northern Strategy could start by including CWG promotion material in their recreation newsletter. Access to extra ice months and city facilities such as gym and strength room would also be requested.

How Can Northern Municipalities Participate?

The ownership of a Northern strategy must rest in the North. All municipalities that were visited and consulted expressed interest in helping local and regional participants who could compete in 2015 and beyond. Basic training and facility requirements associated with CWG

were mainly unknown by local officials and it was suggested that a Northern inventory and strategy be developed.

In most cases, it was found that improved access to facilities and program support were the main areas where municipal involvement could have a significant impact on opportunities given to young Northern athletes.

The idea of a Northern Sport Trust, similar to the Northern Medical Trust, aimed at supporting regional camps is an ideal solution. The fund would support the organization and costs of bringing in outside experts as well as the expenses related to CWG camps for Northern athletes. This will be critical to the success of a truly Northern strategy. We suggest that PacificSport Northern BC be responsible for administration of this fund.

Home Field Advantage

Games are often much more successful when local and provincial athletes compete for medals. Home Field Advantage (HFA) does not come automatically with hosting a Games. However, a targeted HFA program can make a significant difference as we witnessed at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

A HFA program will be accomplished through a close relationship between the Hosting Committee, the City of Prince George and all BC Provincial Sport Organizations that are interested. This is necessary to ensure adequate planning and access to facilities as well as setting up knowledge-based projects in each venue. It requires as much practice as possible on the actual 2015 courses and equipment, and an accumulation of knowledge related to each venue such as snow and wax, weather, training facilities, sport medicine etc.

Legacy

The Legacy of the Games is often thought of as the sport facilities and venues. The proposed Northern Strategy includes a legacy of sports development for the North that would be supported by up to date facilities.

It was observed that often facilities and programs available in the North were lagging behind what is available in other parts of BC. The Legacy of 2015 must be to upgrade local/regional sport opportunities for all communities and ensure, through a Northern Sports Fund, a mechanism for long-term operation of facilities and programs.

We recommend that Prince George and the Host Society participate in the Northern Sport Trust at a level matching the total contribution of all other Northern communities combined.

Recommendations

1. The Town of Smithers host at least two **'Watch for Me in 2015' Sport Development Camp each year** in at least two of the following sports:
 - Cross Country Skiing/Biathlon
 - Snowboard

- Alpine/Para Alpine
- Gymnastics
- Hockey

As a host, the Town would be responsible for covering the facility fee and assisting with the coordination needed with the local sport organization to host northern athletes and coaches for 1-4 days in your community.

2. The Town of Smithers provides an annual contribution to the **Northern Sport Trust** (suggested \$5,000/year).
3. Grow sport awareness, participation and healthy physical activity opportunities for children and youth through the implementation of XploreSportZ camps and IGNITE/Youth Strength & Conditioning program opportunities in partnership with PacificSport Northern BC.

Sport Council

It is strongly recommended that the Town of Smithers creates a Sport Council to lead a sport strategy that maps out a clear direction. This will lead to improved opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in a range of sport programs, events and facilities.

Working within the framework of the Canadian Sport for Life Model, a Sport Council would lead a coordinated approach to sport development in Smithers. Many communities (18) throughout British Columbia have established Sport Councils (sometimes referred to in a different name) and they are proving to be very effective.

It is recommended that the Sport Council develop a comprehensive infrastructure and facility strategy. It is difficult to make decisions on solutions for facility improvements and new facilities without a strategic plan.

It is recognized that there are far more demands and needs for sport and recreation facilities than can be met and a process through the Sport Council should be put in place to address this challenge. The Sport Council would be responsible for allocating time and determining schedules for sport and recreation facilities to the users.

This has proven to be very successful in other communities and offers a collaborative solution to something that is sometimes very difficult to resolve.