



The Day the Lights Went Out on University Sport in Canada

**A Discussion Paper on the
Path Forward**

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Throughout his career Jeff has been involved in many high-profile and controversial restructuring assignments, none bigger than the Canadian Football League. As President, he was instrumental in helping transform the league from near bankruptcy in 1996, back to a vibrant, truly Canadian treasure, that went on to enjoy two decades of relative stability. He later documented the story behind the turnaround and the lessons learned in his best-selling book, “Bigger Balls – The CFL and Overcoming the Canadian Inferiority Complex.”

For the past ten years or more Jeff has been involved in university athletics in Canada. During this time he worked in various roles including five years as Director of Athletics and Recreation at McMaster University and fourteen months as interim Athletic Director at Ryerson University.

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Introduction

The date was Friday March 12th, 2020. It was the first day of the U SPORTS women's national hockey championship. The 7th ranked Mount Royal Cougars had just pulled a major upset, defeating the number two ranked University of Toronto - 2 to 1. The Lady Cougars were still basking in the excitement of their big win when they were informed their coach had just called a meeting. Everyone assumed it was to review the schedule for the rest of the day, so they were shocked when told that due to Covid-19, Hockey Canada was pulling the referees and the tournament was cancelled, effective immediately. As it played out, this was the last Canadian intercollegiate game to be played for the next 18 months as the 2020/21 season was eventually cancelled as well. As we approach the start of the 2021/22 season the question everyone is asking is, will it return, and if it does, will it be different?

For most of the 20,000 student-athletes across the country eagerly anticipating the resumption of university sport, their assumption is that everything will be returning to normal. They really have no reason to believe otherwise. Unfortunately, as they are about to learn, the pandemic has not been kind to their universities. According to a number of reports, Canadian universities over the past year have experienced a decline in revenue of close to \$3 billion. Given the magnitude of this loss, it is almost inconceivable to imagine that things will not be different when the students return, not just for athletics, but for everyone across the university. Given this reality, the question for the 20,000 student-athletes isn't whether they should expect things to be different, but rather how profound should they expect the difference to be?

To be fair, the pandemic isn't entirely to blame for the situation in which varsity sport finds itself. The truth is varsity sport, which for the purposes of this paper I will define as any university sport with a national or regional championship, has been struggling for years. In fact, one could argue that it's been experiencing a slow death through a thousand cuts for a long, long time. Many attempts have been made over the years to implement much needed change, but for various reasons these attempts have failed, in large part because there hasn't been any real sense of urgency. There is now very much a sense of urgency as the pandemic has pushed a system that was already in a very weak, vulnerable and fragile state, much closer to the edge than it's ever been, creating an existential crisis.

I believe this moment in time will serve as a referendum on the future of varsity sport and its place on university campuses. The purpose of this paper is to start a conversation in advance of this referendum around developing a whole new approach designed to secure financial independence; an approach that doesn't involve going "hat in hand" and begging for support based on some outdated and tired premise that athletics serves some greater good that we just can't articulate. Rather, I believe the focus should be on strategies to re-imagine varsity sport; strategies that will create a vibrant, revitalized Canada wide varsity sport program with a

powerful new unified vision and purpose that will inspire the emotional and financial support of all Canadians, including students, alumni, corporate Canada and university administrators.

I certainly don't expect everyone will agree with the positions I take in this paper, starting with my premise that the system is broke and on the edge of irreparable damage. I'm also not naive enough to believe that my proposed strategies and tactics to re-invent varsity athletics are the only ones that may, or may not work. In fact I suspect that there are a few that I've missed, which takes me back to the reason for this paper in the first place; my desire to start a conversation and stir a healthy debate around something that I believe deserves a better fate, and ultimately, more respect than it gets today. To make this happen is going to require more than a few passionate people - it's going to require a grass roots revolution.

There's a famous quote which says: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete". University athletics has been fighting a losing battle for years trying to change its existing reality. It is time for a new model, a new vision, a new reality!

How Bad Is It?

As detailed in one of the best selling leadership and management books of all time “Good To Great”, the journey for good, not-so-good and even desperate organizations looking to become great, starts with an honest and brutal assessment of their current reality. The book goes on to say that when you start with an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of your situation, the right decisions often become self-evident.

Throughout my career as a corporate restructuring and insolvency specialist I’ve come across many situations that support this premise, but just as importantly, I’ve witnessed first-hand the devastating consequences that occur when organizations refuse to accept the reality of their situation. This state of denial has prevented many organizations from seeing the options and strategies that could have not only saved their business, but catapulted them to a whole new level they never imagined possible. This failure to accept reality never ended well for the organization or its people.

This chapter is dedicated to helping you the reader see the brutal and honest facts about the future of varsity sport at Canadian universities. The ultimate goal is to convince you that the situation is indeed dire and that we really have no choice other than to let go of the past, put our egos aside, and forge a new path forward.

To this end I’ll start with a look at the current financial challenges faced by universities in this country with an eye to how these challenges will likely impact the financial support of varsity programs. I will then address the impact the pandemic has had, and will continue to have, on traditional revenue streams that varsity programs have counted on for decades.

For universities across Canada, the financial impact of the pandemic has been shocking and staggering. According to a report in the National Post back in the fall of 2020, Statistics Canada originally estimated that universities in this country could experience a collective loss in revenue as high as \$3.4 billion in the fiscal year ending April 2021. Many at the time suggested that this estimate was far too pessimistic, but in fact it turned out to be pretty accurate. In a recent Toronto Star article the Council of Ontario Universities estimated that their 20 public universities will be short \$1 billion in revenue for the same year. If this figure is extrapolated across all universities in Canada, the total is very close to the \$3.4 billion.

While information at the university level has been tough to come by at the time of writing this, there was an article in Maclean’s Magazine that gives some insight into the components of this shortfall. According to the article, the University of British Columbia (“UBC”) is expecting a \$225 million deficit for the year ending April 30th, 2021 due to a 15% decrease in tuition and another 18% decrease in other revenue, which includes residence fees, food services and conferences. To off-set some of these losses UBC cut back where they could but the cuts didn’t

come close to covering the revenue lost. The same thing happened in Ontario where according to the Toronto Star article, the Council of Ontario Universities reported that their members were able to cut about \$500,000 in expenses which covered only half of the \$1 billion revenue shortfall.

So far the losses and deficits that we've been talking about are for the past fiscal school year which ended April 30th, 2021. What we don't know yet is how the pandemic will affect the school year that starts in September of 2021? Will there be more losses or will things stabilize to some extent. While we all hope to return to some form of normalcy in the fall, it would be naive to think even in the best case that there won't be lingering financial issues. In fact some universities have indicated that their deficits are so significant and systemic, that it may well take up to five years to get back to where they were before.

In the past when universities have encountered tough times they could usually turn to their respective provincial governments for help, but things are clearly different this time. The pandemic has also hit the provincial finances hard and many are not in the position to help. In fact some are doing the opposite of helping: they're making the situation worse. In February of 2021 the Province of Alberta presented a budget for the 2021-2022 year that called for a \$465 million decrease in university funding. For the University of Alberta this means that over a two year span, their funding will have decreased by \$170 million, forcing the elimination of 1,050 jobs. These reductions had similar effects at the University of Calgary.

Something similar happened in Ontario when the Ontario Council of Universities asked the Ontario government to cover their \$500,000 shortfall mentioned earlier. The government responded by giving only \$44 million, all designated to seven of the provinces smaller universities that were hit the hardest. It should be noted here that none of this money went to Laurentian University which was forced in part by the pandemic, to restructure under the Canadian Creditors Arrangement Act. This resulted in dozens of courses being cut and hundreds of professors and staff losing their jobs. The fact that the Ontario Government allowed the Laurentian situation to play out the way it did, speaks to its new approach in supporting, or in this case, not supporting Ontario universities.

Given this sobering reality, it's inevitable that varsity programs will see a reduction in their university funding. For some programs the total reduction in terms of dollars will be significant, while for others it will be less so because of their funding structure. Regardless of how much the reduction will be, when combined with the inevitable declines in other revenue streams which are discussed next, varsity programs will be faced once again with some very tough decisions that are sure to diminish the overall reach and strength of their programs, and ultimately, when taken in totality, weaken the overall Canadian university sport structure.

The following are some of the traditional sources of funding that will also be under tremendous pressure going forward.

Student Fees

For many varsity programs, mandatory student fees are the largest source of revenue. These fees are paid by the general student population and as a result are very sensitive to overall enrolment levels. There is no doubt that varsity programs would have experienced a significant hit to their student fee revenue during the pandemic as every university in Canada experienced declines in enrolment similar to, or worse than UBC's 15%. The hope is that revenue from this source will return to pre-Pandemic levels for the 2021/22 school year, but that is far from certain.

Adding to the pressure on student fee funding is the growing demand from students to reduce their compulsory ancillary fees. Along with this movement has come the demand for full transparency and accountability as to where, and what, these fees are being spent on. This movement resulted in the Ontario government enacting the Ontario Student Choice Initiative a few years ago which stipulated which fees were mandatory and which fees were optional. Initially, the government was going to make varsity sport programs optional, but at the last minute decided to keep it a mandatory fee along with other programs like health services, recreation, counselling, and campus safety. Had varsity sport been left in the optional category it would have been devastating.

While athletics may have won the first battle over student fees, I don't believe the war is over. There will continue to be pressure from a growing number of students who don't feel it should be their responsibility to support what they see as elite, entitled student-athletes. The demand for transparency will allow students to see the costs and funding by sport, which will put a lot of pressure on departments to justify why they spend so much on some sports, and so little on others.

It should also be noted that this demand for accountability will also put a lot of pressure on the programs that oversee both athletic and recreation to prove that no recreation fees are going to support athletics. This will eventually force programs that mix the two fees to separate them, which is sure to negatively affect athletics. It will also put more pressure on facility operators to ensure that recreation is getting its fair share of facility time.

Alumni and Corporate Donations

Over the years most varsity programs have relied heavily on donations from alumni and others to support specific initiatives such as scholarships, enhanced training and academic support. Going forward, the competition for alumni money will be fierce both within and outside the university. Within the university everyone will be competing with each other for access to the same alumni. This access, which is usually controlled by the development office, will be more difficult to get as university needs are sure to be given priority.

The other issue will be the demands on alumni to support charities in their community versus their alma mater. The pandemic has hit the vulnerable sectors of our society the hardest. Families and children in this sector have been hurt financially and emotionally, and are in desperate need of help to get back on their feet. Varsity sport may well not be a priority at this time.

Sponsorships

I believe sponsorship of university athletics has seen its day. It used to be that sponsorships were a big part of varsity sport funding, but all that changed when sponsorships made the transition from being a glorified donation decided on by a senior person, high up the corporate ladder, with some affinity to the university, to a true business decision based on strategic brand association and a predetermined ROI (return on investment) determined by marketing departments.

The hard cold reality is that varsity sport simply can't deliver the ROI required to secure significant sponsorship revenue. Sure, the ROI is there for small local restaurants and other businesses around campus who rely on the patronage of students and their families to support their business, but beyond that, the return just isn't there for large corporations who have so many other options.

The other issue facing varsity sport programs is the fierce internal competition for limited sponsorship dollars from the surrounding community. Other areas of the university are now very much in the sponsorship game and most of them can deliver business to these local merchants much better than athletics. Included in this group are recreation programs, orientation programs, book stores and student associations.

As varsity sport exists today, traditional sponsorships are not the solution to the financial challenges faced at any level, and this includes the national office. For years U SPORTS, the national governing body, has chased increased corporate sponsorships believing this was the solution to their funding issues. The truth is varsity sport on a national level just doesn't have the reach or support to make this a reality. It's time we quit chasing our tails and wasting money in the pursuit of something we can't justify based on the current structure.

Other Revenue

Included under this heading are things like ticket sales from games, revenue from facility rentals, and profits from fund raising events like dinners, banquets and special events. These sources have all but disappeared during the pandemic. Hopefully, we will get to the point where programs can once again count on the revenue from these sources, but it will take time. The reality is that getting back to pre-pandemic levels may not be possible.

Summary

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, my goal was to help everyone accept the brutal and honest reality of the situation facing varsity sport at Canadian universities. In the years leading up to the pandemic varsity sport was in effect experiencing a slow and steady death as a result of constant, never ending cut backs and declining support from sponsors and alumni. Despite this slow demise, there didn't appear to be any serious movement to try and right the ship.

For all the reasons I've laid out in this chapter, the pandemic has accelerated this slow, steady decline, into a full fledged existential crisis. It is my hope that this crisis will serve as a wake-up call and that leaders will emerge who see that the only option is a complete reinvention.

How Did We Get Here?

So what happened to cause this existential crisis? How did we get to this point where university sport in Canada is fighting for its life?

Some people believe that the blame lies squarely at the feet of the universities themselves. The people in this camp are of the opinion that varsity athletics has been unfairly targeted over the years; that it's been asked to make more than its fair share of cuts to cover deficits and other university priorities. The solution as they see it is quite simple – restore varsity funding back to what it once was.

I'm not in this camp for a number of reasons. First, to suggest that varsity athletics and the people behind it are not responsible to some degree for the mess varsity sport finds itself in is at best naive. In fact I would put most of the blame for the current situation squarely at the feet of the people whose job it was to protect and support university sport. It has been clear for a long time that there are systemic issues that need to be fixed, but they never got addressed because of petty regional differences and competing egos. To put all the blame on "the university" is a cop-out and isn't constructive in any way. Secondly, taking a position like this is the equivalent of giving up because it's naive to believe that universities will one day wake up and say, you know what, even though we're in a financial crisis, let's give more funding to varsity sports. It isn't going to happen. And even if it did, as a business restructuring specialist I would advise against it. My experience has shown that throwing money at an organization that is structurally broken is a waste of time and money.

While there may be a lot of different opinions on what ails varsity sport in Canada, I believe we all agree that it's worth fighting for because when it's at its best, it has the power to change lives, minds, strengthen communities, illicit emotion, and in a world that is often divided, unite people. As Nelson Mandela so eloquently said, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where there is only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination."

Unfortunately, sport also has a dark side. At its worst, sport has the power to exclude, isolate and intimidate; to widen gaps of disagreement and misunderstanding; to accentuate personal inadequacies and insecurities and to turn people green with envy. It can also cause people to act in a destructive, irrational, unethical, and at its worst, an illegal manner; all in the pursuit of being the best and achieving the ultimate goal – winning.

I've experienced the destructive effects of this unhealthy obsession with winning first hand when I joined the CFL. In the years leading up to my appointment there was no salary cap which

allowed a number of wealthy owners who were obsessed with winning to spend whatever it took to lure the top players to their team. The net effect of this strategy was that it drove up the price for all players, forcing the other teams with limited resources to spend more than they could afford, not to win, but just to keep up. In the end this weakened the league overall by creating a situation where there was little or no parity. The same teams were always winning which made the product less interesting. Over time this lack of parity led to fewer fans in the stands, fewer people watching on television, reduced corporate support, and unfortunately, the eventual bankruptcy of over half the teams.

I believe something similar has been happening within university sport in Canada, with pretty much the same results. Schools with the resources and motivation have invested heavily in their varsity programs, creating an almost insurmountable competitive advantage that forces other schools to spend money they don't have, just stay in the game. And similar to the CFL, this has weakened the entire sport in the eyes of supporters, alumni and television networks. Worst of all, it has caused university administrators to question whether the cost is really worth it.

Unlike the CFL, varsity sport in Canada has rules and regulations that limit the maximum amount a program can spend in total on scholarships and other benefits, and the maximum any one student can receive. So theoretically, it's not possible to buy the best student-athletes. Unfortunately this is not the case as these rules and regulations have not been consistently enforced allowing schools to spend without repercussions, creating an unlevel playing field, putting schools that follow the rules at a major disadvantage.

While this disparity around how the rules and regulation for scholarships are interpreted and applied is a real source of aggravation and discord, it's not the main reason why certain schools tend to consistently have a competitive advantage. The main advantage comes from investing heavily in areas that attract the best student-athletes. This includes well paid, nationally recognized head coaches, multiple full-time assistant coaches, world-class training facilities, first-class sports medicine services, year-round training programs and generous apparel programs. The end result is that schools who can afford these enhanced benefits become the destination of choice for the better athletes.

There's an argument to be made that these big spenders aren't spending this money to win, but rather to fulfil the vision and mission of U SPORTS, which is to provide "exceptional experiences" for their student-athletes and to give them every opportunity to achieve their full academic and athletic potential. They will argue that winning is simply a by-product of delivering on this mission better than most.

It's hard to argue with this position. In fact I would suggest that one of the better strategies for securing money for an athletic department is an investment in winning. Winning attracts support, and support attracts money. What's missing from this argument is that when the same teams are

winning all the time, the parity gap becomes wider and wider, and the sport becomes less relevant. When this happens there are no longer any real winners, only losers.

Regardless of why or how, the fact is, when there is no financial or competitive parity in a league, it will struggle to survive. In the short term, those who are struggling to keep up will find ways to stay in the game, but eventually they will hit a wall. The worst part of this is that the need to spend more just to keep up becomes insidious. One team fighting to remain competitive decides to invest a little more in coaching or scholarships, and the next thing you know, every coach in the league is lobbying for the same thing at their school so that they don't fall behind. Once it starts, there's no end to it. It becomes an "arms race" for the middle, where no one wins.

In the introduction I said that the second objective I have after first stabilizing varsity sport is to build off this stable base to create a vibrant, revitalized Canada wide varsity sport program with a powerful new unified vision and purpose that will inspire the emotional and financial support of all Canadians, including alumni and corporations. The key word in that objective is "unified", because as it stands today there is no unified vision. U SPORTS is divided along many lines including scholarship and benefit disputes and a general mistrust between regions, just to name two. This lack of unity and commitment to a strong unified U SPORT partnership has created the environment that has allowed this financial and competitive divide to fester, and to get to the point where it is today – an existential crisis.

Given my goal in writing this paper is to start a conversation and debate that will hopefully lead to a grass roots revolution and the eventual re-invention of varsity sport in Canada, I think it's important to start with a review of its overall structure today. This structure, which is summarized in the next chapter, highlights some of the unique regional nuances and philosophical differences that are contributing to this divide. It also identifies who the real decision makers are - the people who need to get behind this new vision to make it a reality.

The Great National Divide

From the moment Canada became a country in 1867, politicians, pundits and other so-called experts have argued that Canada is just too big and diverse to ever really work. The constant discord and disagreements between the federal government and its provinces and regions certainly gives the impression that we are a country divided, struggling to find our way. Yet despite these tensions and our seemingly insurmountable differences, we have managed to forge what is unarguably one of the greatest countries in the world, and the destination of choice for many around the world looking for peace, stability and a chance to pursue their dreams.

Similar to other great democracies, it takes constant work to ensure we stay strong and free. There is no denying that we have a lot of social, political and economic issues in this country that we need to address and fix. There is also no denying the fact that finding solutions to these problems will not be easy given the different regional positions and priorities. While the challenge seems impossible, I'm confident that we will find a way, because despite our differences, we have a lot more in common than we want to admit, and in the end it will be these common shared values that will prevail.

These regional tensions seem to permeate every aspects of our life whether it in politics, economics, our approach to the environment, and even our sports. The CFL is a great example of this. The league is almost a religion in the west, yet it's virtually irrelevant in Ontario. The same holds true, to a lesser extent, for Canadian university sport where there are pockets of support and pockets of disinterest.

I became familiar with some of the regional issues and challenges surrounding the governing of university sport when I was with the CFL, but it wasn't until I joined McMaster University in 2009 that I came to fully understand the nuances of this structure. It became clear very quickly that the relationship between the four regional conferences and the national body was not a positive one. At the heart of this conflict were basic philosophical differences between the regions on how to govern and run university sport. As if that wasn't enough, there also seemed to be some discord among members within each region. When everyone got together the tension in the room was palpable, making it difficult to have open and honest discussions about our differences, and impossible to agree on ways to implement much needed change.

While there has been some organizational change since 2009 including the establishment of new governance models at the national and regional levels, there really hasn't been much headway made in terms of closing the philosophical gap between the different regional positions. Now is the time to either close this gap by finding the common ground that will allow university sport to move forward, or it's time to blow it up and start over.

To help find this common ground it's important to understand the overall structure of university sport in Canada and some of the basic differences between the various governing bodies.

The National Body

At the top of the structural pyramid is the national governing body known today as U SPORTS. Its major responsibility is to develop and implement the policies, rules and regulations that govern the playing of the 12 sports under its umbrella, and the staging of the national championship tournaments for each. In total there are currently 56 universities members that together represent over 20,000 student-athletes and 900 coaches. It is up to each member to determine which of the 12 sports they will participate in.

The current vision and mission of U SPORTS is as follows:

The Vision – To provide exceptional experiences which empower today's student-athletes to be tomorrow's leaders.

The Mission – Through governing, delivering, celebrating and advocating for national university sport, U SPORTS aims to support the provision of outstanding environments and opportunities for student-athletes to achieve their full academic and athletic potential.

These statements were developed with both the input and ultimate approval of all U SPORTS members back in 2010 when U SPORTS was rebranded. On the surface both statements appear to be clear and concise, and in my opinion, very inspiring. The question is: are these statements currently working to unite or divide members?

When you look a little deeper into the U SPORTS strategic plan, it speaks to certain values including a student first focus, the pursuit of excellence and equity, and most interestingly and to the point I made in the previous chapter, the need for competitive balance. The plan further states that the delivery of a healthy university sport system that fosters competitive balance is one of its top four priorities. What's most interesting is that when it gets down to the details, there are no specific strategies to address either the competitive balance or healthy sport system issues. I wonder whether this was an oversight or if none were presented because no one could agree on what they should be. There is also no reference or mention of any effort to try and grow or maintain the number of student-athletes participating in the U SPORTS system, which is strange for an organization looking to grow its brand.

Clearly the U SPORTS mission needs to be revamped to include strategies to ensure a healthy, competitive sport system, but this will never happen until the four regions can put their differences aside and agree on what these strategies should be.

The Regional Conferences

Below the national level are four very powerful regional bodies that deliver regular season schedules, regional play-offs and oversee the rules and regulations for the region, not only for the 12 sports with national championships run by U SPORTS, but also the sports that compete at the regional level only.

On the far-east coast of the country we have Atlantic University Sport conference (AUS) that governs sport across the maritime's for its 11 university members. Like the other regional associations their vision is to be the best region in the country in terms of their support of student-athletes. There is a lot of emphasis in the strategic plan on good governance and ensuring academic success for their students. On the national level they talk about being good partners, but interestingly, compared to other regions, there's no overt commitment to national recognition for their athletes or national championships for their teams. I was also struck by the commitment to creating a sense of belonging, which I found to be unique to the AUS.

As we move east the next region is Quebec which is known as RSEQ, which literally translates as Quebec Student Sports Network. The RSEQ is unique in that the organization represents multiple levels of sport in the province including high school, colleges and universities. Under this umbrella there are 8 universities who are U SPORT members. Due to this structure it was difficult to find information on the region's mission and priorities, so instead I took a look at one of its more dominate members, Laval University. In looking over their website I was struck by two statements that I believe capture the essence of Laval's philosophy on sport. The first was the statement that Laval athletics is an important promotional vehicle for the university. This is not a statement that you will see on many other websites, if any. The second is their sport slogan, which they admit is a bit evocative – GLORY and EXCELLENCE. There aren't many other universities in the country where you will see the word "Glory" in a statement like this.

In the middle of the country is the Ontario Athletic Association (OUA) which has 20 members with 9,000 student-athletes who compete across 23 sports. The OUA's strategic plan is very similar to others across the country with the two exceptions. The first is its commitment to a tiered delivery system where sports receive support from the OUA based on their tier. In the top tier are what they call market driven sports (hockey, basketball and football). They're classified as market driven because they're believed to have the potential to generate significant revenue and generate exposure for OUA sport overall. The second tier, called high performance, includes 9 sports with national or provincial championships, and the third tier, called competitive, covers 11 sports. The OUA is fully responsible for the execution and marketing of the market driven sports, whereas it shares the responsibility of high performance sport with its members. The competitive sports are completely member-led. This tiered structure is also reflected in the level

of financial support that each member provides its teams at the campus level, with a few exceptions.

The other OUA exception is the inclusion of community as one of the regions three priorities along with academics and athletics. This commitment to community isn't spelled out so clearly by any other region that I could see.

The final region is Canada West which has grown significantly in the past few years. It currently has 17 member schools. Similar to the other regions their mission is to be Canada's leading university sport conference. What struck me as different as compared to the other regions is their explicit goal of striving for national recognition for their student-athletes and winning national championships, similar to Laval.

For reasons that will become clearer in the next chapter, it's safe to say that Canada West has been the most progressive in trying to find alternative structures for university sport. Unfortunately, their efforts never really received the consideration they deserved, and were in fact met with tremendous resistance. In the end, these efforts didn't actually result in narrowing the philosophical difference between regions, but in fact solidified them.

The Real Power

In terms of governance, it's important to understand where the real power behind university sport resides - the office of each university president. It is the president who determines both directly and indirectly, based on input from many sources, what sports their school will play, the level of competition in terms of national, regional or club level, and the funding available. While they can and do act independently, they tend to work very closely and collegially with their fellow regional presidents on the development, implementation and policing of the rules and regulations, and usually fall in line with other regional presidents to present a unified position on national issues.

While it won't be easy to get all the presidents to agree on a new vision and structure, I firmly believe there is a solution; a solution to which they will have a hard time saying no too. My hope is that one or two Presidents will get on board and become champions for this new approach.

Summary

Hopefully this overview of the university sport structure in Canada has helped to identify some of the regional issues and challenges that must be overcome to move forward with a unified, national vision. In the pursuit of this common vision it is important that every option is put on the table and discussed in an open and constructive manner. I'm sure some of these options will be distasteful to some, but they need to be explored. It is also my hope that regional associations will make an honest attempt to put past disagreements behind them and work

together to find the common ground that will lead to a bold new vision for university sport in Canada.

Any discussion around finding common ground would be incomplete if it didn't include an overview of the proverbial elephant in the room - the National Collegiate Athletic Association, better known as the NCAA, the governing body of college sport in the United States. This institution and what it stands for has cast a huge shadow over university sport in our country for years. Rightly or wrongly, it has influenced many people's positions in the past, and is likely to cast a shadow over future discussions as well. Given this influence, it's important that we take a closer look at this giant.

In The Shadow of the Giant

One of the downsides to living next to the most powerful country in the world is the temptation to constantly compare our two societies and our respective institutions. I wrote extensively on this topic in my best-selling book “Bigger Balls” which chronicled our behind the scenes efforts to save the CFL from extinction. The book’s subtitle - “The CFL and Overcoming the Canadian Inferiority Complex”, spoke to our propensity as Canadians to underestimate ourselves and blindly assume that everything is much better south of the border. In the book I was asking Canadians to resist the temptation to “Americanize” our institutions and traditions, and instead find a way to make them uniquely ours and to celebrate our differences.

Given this tendency to try and emulate all things American, it’s understandable that many people constantly look to college sports south of the border and compare what we have to the NCAA. And like many cross border comparisons, the differences are often very stark. For the average sport fan in Canada, watching the annual US college basketball championship tournament known as March Madness, or the US college football national championship play-offs, is must watch television. At its highest level, NCAA sport is big business, generating millions of dollars for their schools; millions for their broadcast partners and tremendous coverage for their sponsors. We have nothing in this country that even comes close at the college level, and one could argue, at any level. For example, it was reported by Forbes magazine that the University of Michigan has generated on average \$75 million a year in profit from its football program alone. In fact, there are 24 football programs in the NCAA that generate \$30 million or more in net profit on a yearly basis for their schools. This is BIG business.

What many people don’t appreciate is that there is a lot more to the NCAA than what we see on television. Just like an iceberg, when we watch NCAA football and basketball we’re really only seeing less than 10% of the entire picture. There are in fact 1,098 schools that compete under the NCAA umbrella. These members and their 500,000 student-athletes participate across one of three divisions; divisions that were created in 1973 to align like-minded campuses in the areas of philosophy, competition and opportunity. In other words, divisions that provide each school the opportunity to participate based on the level to which they prioritize sport on their campuses.

Division I is the highest level of competition and the most expensive. In total about 32% of the total NCAA schools participate at this level; the only level at which full-ride, multi-year scholarships are available. While this division tends to be dominated by big schools, there are many small schools in this division as well, most of whom are at this level so they can play basketball. Division II and III schools make up the other 65% of the members with division II offering only partial athletic scholarships, while division III provides no athletic based funding.

It should be noted here that in addition to the NCAA, there is also the lesser known National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), comprised mostly of smaller schools. In total there are about 250 schools in this association with 60,000 student-athletes competing in 25 different sports. In total the NAIA provides about \$500 million in athletic scholarships each year; scholarships that must be renewed annually. Similar to NCAA schools, not all sports and teams are fully funded. In terms of quality of competition, it is generally accepted that NAIA sports are comparable to NCAA Division III schools, with the top programs closer to Division II. Within the NAIA there are two categories of schools – those that hope to become NCAA schools one day, and those that intend to stay at this level. The NAIA has far fewer restrictive recruiting rules making it much easier for prospective student-athletes to access coaches and to thoroughly evaluate the benefits of each program.

This issue of NCAA envy has been a constant presence for decades across Canadian university sport and a shadow that's been tough to escape. The size of this shadow became much bigger in the 90's when both the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Simon Fraser announced they were looking to join the NCAA. Over the next decade very little happened, mostly due to the NCAA's reluctance to entertain the idea, but regardless, the threat continued to hang over the CIS head (U SPORTS name at the time). During this time Simon Fraser was back and forth between the NAIA and the CIS, having been rejected by the NCAA in 1997. UBC was keeping its options open as well by participating in 13 CIS sports and 7 in the NAIA.

Then in 2008 the NCAA announced a ten year pilot project that would allow Canadian schools to apply for membership in Division II, not Division I like everyone had hoped. Regardless, both schools kicked their efforts into high gear. UBC prepared various white papers and documents which they used to conduct a university wide consultation on the opportunity. In these documents they clearly stated that this initiative was driven by the desire to provide their student-athletes with the best possible athletic experience, given what they perceived as a severe decline in the level of competition and quality of CIS sport. In their opinion the main cause of this decline was the dilution of talent caused by the addition of many new, smaller schools to Canada West region. It was also UBC's opinion that this decline was causing more talented students to leave Canada for the NCAA. UBC at the time stated very clearly that the primary reasons for the NCAA move was the opportunity to offer full scholarships which would stem the tide of top talent leaving the country. Additionally, it would also improve the student-athlete experience and improve their sport product for alumni and fans.

In their proposal to the UBC community it was stated that it was their intention to try and raise \$75 million in donations to help fund scholarships and upgrade other sports to NCAA levels. Those who were opposed to the idea wondered if it was appropriate for an "academic" institution to provide athletic scholarships that were larger than academic scholarships and also questioned how many of these scholarships would go to Canadians, versus high profile American players. At the time no one seemed to question the fact that the opportunity was only for

Division II, which many people felt was inferior to the CIS in terms of the quality of competition. The other big issue that was glossed over was the fact that Division II scholarships are far less than Division I, and not all that much different from what was available in the CIS. I'm not sure what the gap was in 2008, but for 2019/20 academic year, the average Division I scholarship was around \$16,000, whereas the average for Division II was about \$6,000, which isn't really much different from what's available in Canada today.

In 2009 Simon Fraser was granted membership in NCAA Division II to compete in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference. For whatever reason it appears that UBC never did make a formal application and in 2012, after years of exploration, decided to abandon their NCAA aspirations. In part this decision was made on what they believed to be willingness by the CIS to entertain a change in governance and the concept of tiering. With the support of a few other large schools in Canada West, UBC turned their attention to completely rethinking varsity sport in Canada.

While it wasn't really clear at the time how UBC and the other schools saw tiering work, the overall intention was very clear. There is no doubt it was designed to relegate schools with smaller programs to a different level of competition; one that would prevent them from attracting top talent and at the same time allow existing rivalries among the original members to continue.

The whole tiering issue became much clearer when the term was discarded in favour of a proposal from Canada West for a 'high performance' division. Each school would have the opportunity to either opt in or out of the high performance division on a sport by sport basis. To participate in this division however, the understanding was that there would need to be a level of commitment to things like full-ride scholarships, full-time head and assistant coaches, sports medicine etc. In other words there was going to be a significant cost to this commitment.

The biggest opposition to this high performance league came from the largest region in the country, the OUA, where collectively, the 20 member schools had a very different view on scholarships. Unlike the AUS and RSEQ, both of whom have fallen in line with the CIS rules around individual scholarships at that time, the OUA set its own set of rules which included a much lower individual maximum than the other regions. At the time of writing this, the OUA continues to limit their scholarships to \$4,500 which is well below the \$6,000 or more available in other regions. At the time of the Canada West proposal I believe the OUA amount was only \$3,500.

More than anything this OUA difference speaks to a very different philosophy around the priority of athletics on the university campus as compared to Canada West, and to a lesser extent, the other two conferences. This difference is at the root of many of the mixed messages and the confusion around the future of university sport.

It's time for everyone in U SPORTS to come out from the shadow of the NCAA and start the process of casting our own shadow. This process starts with acknowledging a few important realities. The first is that the vast majority of universities in our country don't have the appetite or desire to adopt the "big business" approach to varsity sport that we see in Division I of the NCAA. I don't believe it's who we are or who we want to be. Having said that, the second reality, which for some reason we have ignored to this point, is that the quality of our sport programs and the level of athletic financial support we provide our student-athletes, isn't all that different than NCAA Division II, which is really who we should be comparing ourselves to. And in fact, in some ways, we are much better. It's also time we stopped bending over backwards and trying to be something we're not; spending money we don't have, to try and stop the flow of Canadian student-athletes to NCAA Division I programs. As I've mentioned before, if they're good enough to play Division I and they understand all the pros and cons, then we should let them go. It will either be the experience of a life-time, or they'll come back to us in a year or two, much wiser, and a little humbler.

Yes there's a lot to learn and take away from the NCAA, but we shouldn't try to emulate or compete with them. As we move forward on this re-invention journey we should forge our own vision and cast our own shadow.

The Power of Sport

We've talked a lot about what's wrong with varsity sport, but when it's at its best, it has the power to unite a campus unlike anything else. Before we get into the meat of this paper, I would like to share one of these moments that not only united a campus, but highlights why the future of varsity sport is worth fighting for. In large part this experience was my inspiration for writing this paper. Hopefully, it will remind us all of the true power of sport and serve as an inspiration for change.

This moment occurred on a Friday night in November of 2012 at the Roger's Center in Toronto. The McMaster Marauders, the defending national champions, were about to play the Laval Rouge D'Or in the 48th Vanier Cup, the Canadian university football championship. As the Director of Athletics and Recreation at McMaster I had completed most of my official pre-game duties and was standing on the sidelines watching the player introductions. As I took in the scene, I couldn't help but reflect back on the past few weeks and the impact this game had had on our campus.

In the weeks leading up to this game, the environment on our campus was electric. The anticipation of following up on previous year's Vanier Cup victory in Vancouver, the universities first ever national championship, with a rematch against Laval in Toronto where our fans could easily attend in person, was extremely high. To get there, we had to defeat the Calgary Dino's in the Mitchell Bowl, a game that we were fortunate to be hosting. While we were confident, given that our team had gone through the season undefeated, Calgary was going to be our biggest challenge of the year.

In front of a packed stadium of over 5,000 fans our team prevailed over Calgary and the university went crazy. Immediately a call went out across social media for students and staff to be in Toronto the following Friday night for the game; to make it the biggest party McMaster had ever seen. Over the next week we struggled to keep up with the demand for game tickets, Marauder apparel and invites to the pre-game reception. In the end, the demand was so great that we had to rent a large hotel ballroom for the pre-game reception and a private box that could hold over 100 people for the game.

I attended the pre-game reception where I spoke with alumni and supporters from various eras. The sense of pride in the room was palatable and the level of excitement and anticipation through the roof. From there I went to the VIP suite where I got the sense from many that they were surprised by the magnitude of the event. At the time the stadium was starting to fill up and the TSN pre-game show was on the in-suite televisions. As the VIPs looked around it was almost like they couldn't believe this was all about a Canadian university football game. Maybe there was more to this game than they thought.

I was brought back to the present when the national anthem began. As I stood there on the sidelines and looked around, the magnitude of the moment got to me. I was overcome with emotion. I'm not sure whether it was the 37,000 people in the stadium (a Vanier Cup record), the majority of who were wearing maroon and singing their hearts out, or the pride and excitement I had for our players and coaches. No matter the outcome, this would be an experience that would positively shape the rest of their lives. While I wanted to win the game, I knew at that moment we were already winners.

For those who remember, we actually lost the game that night, but as you might have guessed, there was a lot more to that moment in time for me than just the game. It was about the journey we all took to get there and the challenges we had overcome that made it truly special. I was filled with an unbelievable sense of pride and accomplishment, not just for me, but for all the people in our department who worked so hard to overcome both financial and institutional challenges, to show everyone the impact athletics can have on campus life and alumni support when everything comes together.

It's important to note here that we didn't spend our way into two successive Vanier Cup appearances. It was more about all the stars aligning at the right time for us. It was about a group of great coaches working with a very talented and motivated group of student-athletes, all supported by a dedicated team of people, who together create something very special.

I firmly believe that every sport program across the country, no matter how big or how small, deserves an opportunity to live this experience. The only way to make this a reality is to create a fair and equitable varsity sport system based on a self-sustaining economic structure to which every member is committed.

The Road Back

While this chapter is titled “The Road Back”, the big question is - the road back to where? The answer can’t be back to pre-pandemic levels because as I laid out in the introduction, varsity sport was experiencing a slow death through a thousand cuts well before the pandemic hit. It was in all honesty a shadow of what it once was. I certainly hope we can do better than that! We simply must.

One thing is very clear; there is no road back without a radical new approach to how varsity sport is funded. To hang on to the belief that some way, somehow, traditional funding sources will miraculously come back, is naive and dangerous. This kind of thinking is sure to lead to one thing only - more cost cutting and the relegating of more varsity sports to the club level. This would inevitably be a death sentence for the whole sport system in Canada. No, we need a dramatic new approach that I know many traditionalists will question and find hard to accept. But given the reality that there’s just not enough money to sustain high performance university sport today, and in the absence of any other viable option, what are the choices?

I very much view this challenge as I would any other restructuring assignment. The first step is to stop the bleeding which means cutting back as fast and as deep as possible without too badly affecting the integrity of the organization. This will provide much needed time to implement permanent change. The second step is to strengthen the foundation of the business on which future growth will be built. This involves dealing with the structural issues that are getting in the way of progress and change. The last step is to re-position and boost the value proposition for the product. This can involve a number of tactics including new product development, the addition of complimentary products, re-vamping the pricing structure and re-branding initiatives. This last step is dealt with in detail in the last two chapters.

There will be those who will argue that we shouldn’t overreact; that this is only a temporary set-back. They will acknowledge that there may well be some short-term effects at first including shorter competitive seasons, restricted travel and reduced training programs, but are convinced everything will return to normal soon. I believe the opposite will happen because once the dust settles and the true financial impact of the pandemic is revealed, significant additional change will be required. As I’ve mentioned, some believe it will take smaller universities five years or more to recover from the pandemic’s effects. Give this reality, I urge everyone to resist the temptation to bury their heads in the sand and rather attack the challenge head-on by starting the process of implementing much needed structural change now. From experience, I know that trying to rebuild on a structurally unsound foundation is a waste of time.

With regards to the first step - stop the bleeding, my assumption is athletic programs across the country are currently going through their operations with a fine tooth comb to identify opportunities to cut costs wherever they can for the upcoming season. I’m not going to try and

detail all the possible operational savings that can be made. This is up to each program to deal with based on their unique situation.

When it comes to step 2- structural change, it is my hope that this isn't put on the back shelf, but is addressed now, in advance of when things eventually return to normal. If we wait until then we'll be right back where we were before the pandemic – struggling to survive. Ideally this process should be driven at the national level, but if that's not possible, then one or more regions should drive it, with the hope that others will follow.

To start the ball rolling, I've got four suggestions that are sure to be controversial, but I believe very necessary.

1. Harmonization and Reduction of AFA's across Canada

In the interest of what's best for varsity sport across this country, it's critical that every U SPORTS member is playing by the same rules when it comes to how much can be paid in athletic scholarships (AFAs), the rules around eligibility and the issue of providing additional benefits like housing and meals. This process will level the playing field from a recruiting perspective, contribute to competitive balance and parity, and in the end, ensure a healthy sport system for everyone.

In light of the severe financial challenges, I believe we should also seriously consider reducing the maximum amount payable to individual students and the total available per team. To this end, I would suggest that the AFA maximum that any one individual can receive per year is limited to tuition, or \$4,000, whichever is less, for all U SPORTS members. To qualify out of high school student must have an 80% average or better, and to maintain the AFA, a 70% average or better. These new rules, which would be strictly enforced, would apply to all new first year students, with existing commitments to current students being honoured for the balance of their university career.

I can hear people screaming as I write these words for a couple of reasons. First, the maximum amount that I'm proposing is substantially less than what's available now for every region across Canada except for Ontario, where the reduction is minimal. Many will be concerned that this will put too much financial stress on students. And second, many will argue that this will result in more Canadian student-athletes going to the NCAA.

Let me deal with the second concern first. It is my contention that Canadian universities have spent far too much time and money trying to keep a handful of students in Canada at the expense of many other very deserving students. I believe that money has

little or no impact on a student's decision to attend an NCAA school versus a Canadian school. Going to school in the US is about the competition and the prestige. Trying to entice students to stay in Canada with a few extra thousand dollars has been proven unsuccessful. In the end, all its done is increased the amount paid to students who were staying in Canada regardless; money that could have been used to support other students and other sports.

A perfect example of this is the women's hockey pilot project which was designed to try and keep more players in this country. To this end the pilot increased the scholarship amount that any one student could receive to NCAA Division 1 levels, and the overall amount available to the team. After five years there was no evidence that this pilot kept more students in Canada. What it did accomplish was to pay players who had no choice but to stay in Canada more money that they would have gotten otherwise. Very simply, money was spent that didn't need to be spent. This has to stop.

In the interest of fairness, fiscal control and the future of university sport, I believe that if a student has their heart set on attending a school in the NCAA; let them go. Let's not break the bank trying to keep them.

The other argument against reducing the amount is that it will put student-athletes under more financial stress. First off, as stated, this plan would guarantee that existing agreements would be honoured for the balance of the student's university career. Secondly, incoming students would be made aware of this change well in advance so they can plan accordingly. The big question is will students decide not to attend university if the AFA is reduced? I believe the answer can be found in the OUA experience where the AFA maximum is currently only \$4,500. Despite the lower threshold, Ontario schools have no problem attracting more than their fair share of high performance student-athletes and there is no evidence that the lower amount is stopping students from attending university in Ontario.

While I would prefer not to reduce AFAs, I recognize that some tough decisions have to be made given the dire financial situation varsity sport is in. Not only will reducing the AFA and enforcing the rules directly and indirectly save millions, but it will also allow programs across the country to keep programs that might have otherwise been on the chopping block, providing more students with the opportunity to compete.

2. Spending Caps on Basketball, Hockey and Football (The Market Driven Sports?)

I've witnessed first-hand the irrational escalation in costs across athletic departments over the past decade. There is no doubt in my mind that this self-destructive behaviour, which

for some reason has gone unchallenged for years, is at the core of varsity sport's existential crisis today. The only way back is a unified approach to controlling costs and the creation of a level playing field so that every program has a chance at winning, not just the ones with the most money.

I'm suggesting that we start with spending caps on the three so-called market driven sports, for two reasons. First, the budgets for these sports tend to be much larger meaning the opportunity for significant savings is much higher. Secondly, in the view of many, these sports have received unwarranted, preferential treatment for years. Starting here will send a strong message that things are changing and that no one is exempt.

While it would be nice to try and implement an overall spending cap, realistically I understand that would be next to impossible given the complexities of each institution. So I am proposing we start with caps in two areas.

Coaching Costs

As they exist today, coaching costs are out of control. I believe it all started with a couple of head coaches who convinced their athletic directors that full-time assistant coaches would give them a competitive advantage. And as is the nature of sport, it didn't take long for other coaches across Canada to plead for the same benefit because they were now at a competitive disadvantage. From there it further expanded to more part-time coaches to support the full-time coaches, and over time, pay increases for part-time coaches, so they could support their families in jobs that were never intended to pay wages sufficient to support families.

Then as the number of coaches grew so did the pressure to pay head coaches more because now they were overseeing a team of coaches. This started first in football where some high profile head coaches got contracts earning as much as \$200,000 a year, including bonuses. This then spread to basketball and hockey coaches who demanded more and eventually made its way down to other sports as well. It's now not uncommon for sports like soccer and volleyball for example, to have total coaching costs (head coach plus assistants) well over \$200,000 a year.

I'm not going to try and come up with a maximum coaching envelope per sport in this paper, that's for regional and national leaders to research, coordinate and negotiate. My only advice is not to fall into the trap of trying to justify existing spending levels on these sports based on the misguided belief that they will eventually generate the revenue to cover the cost. In the present format these sports have little or no chance of growing revenue. In fact, it is very likely that they will continue to decline. For those who will

argue that fewer full-time coaches will negatively affect the high performance experience for students, it is my contention that we have gone way beyond what is required and what we can afford in this area. Until things turnaround, the cap should be determined on some base level of support for students, well below where it is today.

I recognize that it may take a few years to implement this proposed cap given existing contracts and unions, so clearly it will have to be phased in, but it has to be done. On the positive side, I'm convinced that if the cap is set properly, it will open up more volunteer positions for young coaches giving them much needed experience.

Training and Equipment Costs

When I talk about training costs I'm referring to the growing trend of holding expensive training camps, often in locations like Florida or half-way across the country, combined with exhibitions games and/or tournaments in far off locations, sometimes on the other side of the world, all in the interest of better competition and improved preparation for the regular season. This trend has become a major recruiting tool, which is once again unfair to those schools that can't afford these experiences.

Under this heading I would also limit the number of practices a week to both off-set practice costs and provide the students with more down-time. Far too many coaches believe their getting paid on a per practice basis, burning out their students. Some control needs to be put in place to control this. If possible, there also needs to be some control put on equipment and apparel.

I can hear many coaches and others arguing that they raise their own money to pay for these trips, equipment and added apparel. To this I reply, given the financial situation faced by varsity sport overall, I believe the money raised by teams should be used to help fund critical programs like academic support and mental health counselling for student-athletes, not on trips to California, third jerseys or more apparel. These are luxuries no one can afford at this point.

My suggestion is that the regional and national leaders get together and create spending limits on these two areas with the goal of saving as much as possible.

3. Coaching Caps On Other Varsity Sports

Following the implementation of a coaching cap for football, basketball and hockey, the next step should be to implement something similar for all the other varsity sports. Again, it would be ideal if this was developed and implemented at the national level, but if this proves to be too difficult, at a minimum it should be put in place at the regional level.

I fully anticipate that this will be an emotional and contentious issue, but once again, these are unusual times that demand bold aggressive actions. Like the other caps, they should be phased in over 2-3 years, which should give those coaches whose might be affected, the time to plan and implement alternative options.

4. Cost Controls on Men's Hockey

This may well be one of the most controversial suggestions and may seem odd in that I'm the father of a son who played varsity hockey after playing major junior A in the OHL, but as a former AD of one university that had varsity hockey, and another that played at the club level, I think it makes complete sense given the current situation.

Men's hockey is a very unique program within U SPORTS in that the students-athletes are at a very different place in their sport pathway than all the others. The majority of players have played three to four years of major junior hockey in the Canadian Hockey League where they received room and board, a small weekly allowance, a funding package towards post-secondary education that can be as high as \$10,000 a year, and the best training and equipment that money can buy. In exchanged they are promised an opportunity to further hone their hockey skills in one of the best development leagues in the world in front of thousands of people every night. For all intents and purposes, CHL hockey is a semi-professional sport.

At the end of their CHL career, the majority of the players come to the realization that professional hockey is not in their future and it's time to focus on their education. For many of these twenty year olds this means attending university and playing varsity hockey where they can use the use the money from their CHL education packages along with team AFAs, to basically attend school at no cost.

The reality is that Canadian university hockey has evolved over the years into what is essentially a continuation of the CHL experience which I believe was never the intent of university hockey. The result is one of the most expensive, if not the most expensive sport to operate on a per student-athlete basis. (the cost of ice time is a big contributor of this) But unlike the CHL, the revenue just isn't there to support this level of spending.

It's time to reel in the cost of men's hockey. I don't believe it's a market driven sport at the university level and therefore should be taken down at least one level on the sport hierarchy. The question is should it be relegated to a club sport where it thrives on many

campuses across the country? I suspect many of the same players would continue to participate if this was the case, because there would be no other option.

Should it continue to be a varsity sport then I would suggest a dramatic reduction in the AFAs available to students with CHL packages, a limit on equipment costs, a cap on the number of practices per week and limits on pre-season travel. When combined with the proposed reduction in coaching costs outlined earlier, the savings would be significant. The money saved could be used in part to support other student-athletes who deserve as much attention and support as these hockey players have gotten over their careers, including the very deserving women's hockey community.

Conclusion

I firmly believe that there are a number of other structural changes that need to be addressed. The point in specifically discussing these few is to make the point that these changes won't be easy, but given the state of varsity sport, very necessary.

Before we leave this chapter I'd like to address the idea of an elite division for sports like basketball and football, not because I think it's a smart idea, but because it's sure to come up. I anticipate that some schools will balk at the idea of limiting their spending on sports and threaten to start their own elite league. For these universities, sports like football and basketball are so closely linked to their history, culture and identity, that they would have a difficult time considering anything less than what they have today. The question is whether there are enough universities who feel this way to make an elite division a reality?

Based on where university sport is today on the national radar, and its level of relevance, I believe that any effort to try and create an elite league for any sport would be a waste of time, energy and money. The brutal reality is that without a national television deal, there just isn't enough sponsorship revenue available to make it feasible. And based on past experience, the support from broadcasters is just not there right now for university sport in Canada.

A New Funding Model – Part 1

When people learn of my involvement in sport they automatically assume working in the area was something I always wanted to do. Not True. Yes, I played a lot of sports in both high school and university and have always considered myself an avid sports fan, but a career in sport was never a consideration early in my career. After becoming a CPA,CA, I decided to specialize in the highly volatile world of corporate bankruptcy and insolvency, eventually moving on to restructuring and turnarounds, all laced with a great deal of uncertainty and risk.

All that changed one morning in 1994. At the time I was just finishing up my latest restructuring assignment, where over two years we had taken a large retailer from the brink of bankruptcy to profitability, when a co-worker walked into my office with an ad torn out of the Globe and Mail. He threw it on my desk and, with just a hint of sarcasm in his voice said: “Here’s the next job for you!”

After scanning the ad for the chief operating officer/chief financial officer for the Canadian Football League, I looked up and said, “You have to be kidding.” It was widely known at the time that the state of the CFL was precarious at best. The general perception among those who followed sports in Canada was that it was a lost cause - a dinosaur on the edge of extinction. In my quick read of the advertisement I was surprised to see how closely the requirements match my experience and strengths. The opportunity intrigued me. But I didn’t want to risk embarrassment by letting on, so I pretended to dismiss the idea outright.

Later, alone in my office, I read the ad again, this time in a little more detail. I found myself starting to play the “what if?” game in my head. This was quite possibly the ultimate turnaround challenge that was sure to play out in a very public way. If I could help pull it off, it could be a career defining assignment. On the other hand, it could also be a career killer. After a few minutes of thought, during which I came up with far more reasons for not doing it, I put the ad in my desk drawer, where it would be out of sight but certainly not out of mind.

To make a long story short, against the advice of many, including my father, I applied and got the job. It didn’t take long before all my initial fears were realized. I discovered in my first week that the league had almost no cash and no prospects for any in the short-term. What it did have was a lot of unpaid bills. The situation was so dire that we only had enough money to make one more payroll. I remember going home and sharing this with my wife who was totally shocked. I knew the situation was going to be difficult, but I had no idea the organization was actually on the verge of bankruptcy. Eventually I got passed my shock and set out to do what I was trained to do; to first stabilize the organization and then start the process of creating a new vision and personality for the league that we all hoped would generate much needed new revenue, and lead us to a much brighter future.

I'm proud to say that we did in fact stabilize the league and by the time I left six years later as President, had transformed the league into a vibrant, relatively stable enterprise, with a very lucrative television contract, millions in additional corporate support and a healthy, growing fan base. We achieved this by transforming the league from what most viewed as a struggling, irrelevant, mistake ridden organization, where everyone had their own agenda and spending was out of control, to a professionally run league with strict cost controls. Most importantly, we stopped apologizing for being Canadian. We decided to embrace and celebrated it with lots of attitude and irreverence with an in-your-face marketing campaign.

Does this situation sound familiar? It does to me because the challenges faced by the CFL at the time were very similar to those faced today by university sport. Like the CFL, U Sport is also viewed as an organization that has lost its way and has become less and less relevant over the years. Costs are out of control, revenue has been declining, and there are far too many agendas among its members to allow for any meaningful change. The good news is that the solution for U SPORTS is very much the same as it was for the CFL; a commitment to working together, a focus on matching costs with revenue, and finally, and most importantly, the development of a new personality and vision for the future; a vision that people can rally around and get excited about.

As you might have guessed, I'm a big fan of the power of a clear, powerful vision. In large part it's because I'm a very visual person. I need to see where I'm going before I start the process of figuring out how to get there. It's also because I believe emotion sells, and the best sales tool is a vision that stirs people's emotions. For this reason people were often surprised by how much time I would spend at the beginning of each restructuring assignment on creating the vision, rather than getting to work on what they considered more important priorities. To tell you the truth, I often struggled to explain the importance of this process, and then one day I came across a book that put it all into perspective. The book was titled "Good to Great."

Through extensive research the author and his team were able to identify the characteristics and strategies used by good companies, mediocre companies, and even bad companies, to transform into great companies. Based on this research the book was able to lay out in a very clear and concise manner, an easy to follow road map to greatness. This road map leads to one single destination; a profound and simple insight or vision that drives all future success. The book sold millions of copies and became a business classic. I can honestly say it was the most impactful book that I have ever read, significantly influencing in a very positive way my career.

I have used the principles and strategies in this book many times to help guide troubled and struggling organizations find their way back, and to explain the power of a clear, insightful vision in this process. In particular, there is one aspect of this journey that I would like to focus on in this paper that I believe will help university sport identify its much needed new vision. It's called the hedgehog concept.

The author of “Good to Great” got the hedgehog name for this concept from an essay by philosopher Isaiah Berlin in which he suggested there were two types of people in the world; foxes and hedgehogs. Foxes are animals that pursue many ends at the same time and see the world with all its complexities. As a result their thinking is scattered, diffused and unfocused. Hedgehogs on the other hand are able to take what looks like a very complex world and focus in on a simple, single organizing idea that pulls everything together. Hedgehogs see what is essential and ignore everything else. As a result they are capable of profound insights, which are effective because they are so simple.

Based on the research, the book comes to the conclusion that great organizations are like hedgehogs. At the core of their success is a very simple profound insight, or vision, that allows them to focus on what’s really important and allows them to ignore all the other noise and distractions.

While all these insights into greatness are really valuable, what makes this book so special is the easy to follow process or road map that organizations and individuals can follow to arrive at their own profound insight.

This process starts with answering three simple questions;

1. What is your organization deeply passionate about?
2. What can your organization be the best in the world at?
3. What drives your organizations economic engine?

I know what you’re thinking. On their own, these questions look too simple to really lead to anything meaningful, but as you will see, there’s a lot more to them than meets the eye.

Normally when I’m working with an organization in search of a new vision I would organize a workshop for employees and others interested parties where the questions would be presented and there would be an opportunity to debate and argue over the possible answers. Hopefully, at some point in the near future this process will take place. For now, think of me as the workshop facilitator as I guide and direct you through these questions. My end goal is to help you think through the answers and hopefully come up with your own profound insight for university sport. Whatever you come up with may not be the same as the one I’m suggesting, which is fine. Remember, the purpose of this paper is to start a conversation, not to provide definitive answers.

Before we start there is one very important point made in the “Good to Great” book that I believe should give us a lot of encouragement. This point is that great companies identified in the book were not the best at anything, and showed no prospects of becoming so, before they started the process. In other words, this process revealed a path that no one had seen before, which I think is very exciting.

The balance of this chapter is dedicated to a general overview and discussion of the three questions. You will note that I have re-phrased the questions in this chapter to focus on how they can help individuals versus organizations. I did this because I believe it's easier to fully appreciate the nuances and interdependence of these questions when we try and relate them to our own lives. In the next chapter we will focus exclusively on how these questions apply to varsity athletics.

Question #1 What Are You Deeply Passionate About?

I have found over the years that it's not easy for most people to clearly explain what they're passionate about, and why. As the book details, passion is innate; it's deep-seeded and ingrained in who you are, and for this reason, it's not always that easy to put into words. For many, truly understanding their innate passion takes time – it's a journey. To help explain what I mean, I'd like to share my own journey, which I'm sure many of you will easily relate to.

Like most of you, as a kid I was always involved in some game or sport. And like most kids, if you were to have asked me at the time why I enjoyed games and sport so much, the answer would have been - "I don't know, I just do." As I got older and become involved in organized sport, the answer to the question wouldn't have changed much, except I may have added: "I like being with my friends." Even in university, when I had to write about my passion, which at the time I said was sport, I still couldn't adequately explain why it was so important to me?

It was only when I was forced to put competitive sport behind me and start the process of finding a job and a meaningful career after graduation, that I was able to start putting things into perspective. It was at this point that I realize that sport wasn't really my passion. Sport was simply a vehicle that helped me nurture my true passion. As I discovered in time, my true passion revolved around the need for constant personal development; the drive to make the most of my potential; and the need to measure my progress against others through competition. With this insight I was able to move on from sport and to find a new vehicle to nurture my passion – my career. To this end I got serious about my education; becoming a CPA, reading just about every book I could get my hands on around management and leadership, and taking calculated risks to accelerate my development. My need to compete was very much front and center in this process, although much of it was about competing with myself versus others.

I share this journey of self-discovery with you not because I think it's unique, but because I think it's very typical of most people's journey that have competed in sport. I also shared it because it helps to illustrate something I believed to be true - sport on its own isn't a passion, it's a vehicle used to pursue and nurture one's true passion, much like music, dance or the arts are.

At first my passions were very focused on my own personal development. But as this journey continued, I became just as passionate about helping others in their career and personal development, as my own. For many, this need to help others is clear right from the beginning.

In essence your passion lies in not what you do, but rather why you do it. It's not sport in itself; it's about why you play sport. With this background and insight, I encourage you to honestly answer the question: what are you deeply passionate about and why?

Question #2 What Can You Be Great At?

This question is as much about eliminating the things you can't be the best at, than it is about what you can be. It also about understanding that just because you're good at something doesn't mean you can be great at it. On the other hand, it's also about opening your mind up to the reality that perhaps you can be the best at something that you're currently not even doing, or haven't thought of.

The goal of this question is to develop a clear understanding of what you can be really great at - not what you want to be great at. As the book continually reinforces, the genesis of greatness is a simple profound insight. It's about that proverbial aha moment when the stars align and everything becomes clear.

To answer this question you'll need to do an inventory of the things you're good at; the things that come naturally to you. Are you good with numbers, are you a great communicator, are you good with people, are you detailed oriented, are you a great planner, do you excel under pressure, are you creative? If you're not sure, start asking people what they think. Ask friends, family, coaches and others what their opinion is. They may well reinforce what you thinking, or even better, come up with something you hadn't even considered.

Chances are there are a number of things that you're good at. Recognizing what they are and how they can work together, is the key to determining what you can be great at. For example, if you're good with numbers, you have the potential to be a good accountant. If you also happen to be a good communicator with a creative side, then you have what it takes to be a great accountant.

You also need to be really honest with yourself about the things you're not good at, and the things you don't like to do. As stated, this process is as much about eliminating things that you can't be great than what you can. It can take time, but eventually you will hit on that aha moment; that moment where your passion and your strengths come together. I firmly believe there is something we can all be great at; we just have to find it.

Question #3 What Drives Your Economic Engine?

It's very difficult to answer this question in isolation from the first two because this question isn't about doing what makes you the most money. It's about making enough money to support what you're really passionate about and what you want to be great at.

For example, you could be passionate about making pottery, but if people don't appreciate your work enough to actually pay for it, you will never be a great potter. At best it will be a hobby, meaning you'll have to find another way to pay the bills. This principle also applies to organizations that are trying to sell a product or service. If you can't get enough people to pay for your product or service, you don't have a business.

For a more positive example, let's say that your passion is all about helping at-risk kids in your community; kids who don't have enough to eat and have no role models to pattern themselves after. Your dream is eventually establish an organization that would help these kids, and you know in your heart you'd be great at it because it matches your skill set. The big question is do you think there's enough financial support in the community to make this a reality. If you do, then you have the economic engine to drive your dream.

So the point here is that whatever you decide to focus on, make sure there's a market for it so it can be sustained. Don't become something, or build something that no one other than you really values.

Conclusion

The previous example about wanting to help kids highlights the interdependence between the three questions. To make the leap from good to great requires a deep understanding of where these three questions come together to create what I call the "sweet spot". Your sweet spot is the that place where you're doing what you're really great at (born to do), getting paid fairly (I can't believe they pay me to do this) and it doesn't feel like a job, because it's your passion. That intersection point is where that simple, profound insight lives; the insight that helps you focus on what is essential, and what isn't.

A New Funding Model – Part 2

The purpose of the last chapter was to illustrate how the hedgehog approach helps to bring order to what looks like a very complicated and complex problem, by focusing on one simple organizing idea or insight. With this background, it's now time to find the simple, profound insight that will hopefully propel varsity sport to an exciting new future.

In this case I'm going to start off by addressing the "what can varsity sport be great at" question, first. Hopefully the reason for this will be self-evident by the time we finish.

What Can Varsity Sport Be Great At?

If we were in a workshop setting this is where we would break out into groups and have each group come up with their own list of ideas, and then come together to compare. Usually I don't put any limits or parameters on these ideas so as to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. While there have been some wild ideas presented at this stage over the years, generally speaking, the ideas generated are pretty similar between groups. In the case of an athletics workshop, the ideas usually revolve around two main themes; developing the leaders of tomorrow or providing exceptional experiences that support academic and athletic excellence. Other ideas that might be mentioned include the contribution athletics makes to school spirit, the positive effect on the school's reputation when the program is successful, and the role varsity sport plays in the promotion of an active, healthy life. In recent years, the idea of being leaders in diversity, inclusivity and equity has been mentioned more often.

Before you read on, I encourage you to come up with your own list of ideas.

Once we have the list, we then need to ask ourselves, are these aspirations a priority to the university? This is important because varsity athletics isn't a standalone organization or enterprise. It exists as part of a much larger organization. As such, like any other department or program, its primary purpose is to contribute to the mission and mandate of the university. In this context, there's no point in trying to be great at something the university doesn't consider important. For example, do you think the university really values the contribution to school spirit as much as we think? When it comes time to make funding decisions, where do you think school spirit ranks compare to say mental health and academic support programs for the general student population? The answer is not high.

So given this reality, the options for what athletic programs should strive to be the best at are not unlimited. In fact, they are very restricted; just like they are for every other department, by university priorities; priorities that are laid out in the mission statement. At this point, ideas that don't directly support the university mission should be eliminated.

Now that we've reduced our list of aspirations, the next question is, which one of these aspirations can varsity sport deliver on better than anyone else on campus? Is there one that athletics can be great at? To help with this question, let's consider the ever popular - developing the leaders of tomorrow. Can we honestly say that no one else on campus does it better than athletics? I believe athletics contributes to this mandate, but I would argue that many other departments and faculties contribute just as much, if not more. And when it comes time to make funding decisions, is this something that varsity sport does so much better than anyone else, that it's funding is prioritized? My guess is no.

The ideal approach to answering, "what can varsity sport be great at," starts with isolating something that the university has determined it wants to be the best at, and then being able deliver on it better than anyone else on campus. Based on this insight, are there any ideas on your list that you would like to eliminate at this time? Do you have any ideas left?

On the surface, this focus on being the best at something on each campus seems to be at odds with this paper's goal of developing a unified national vision. After all, every university has its own unique mission. How do we find common ground? The answer I believe lies in the common thread that runs through each mission, whether it's explicitly stated or not. It is this thread that binds us all.

To explain what this common thread is, I refer to a statement made by the former president of McMaster University and the current president of Queen's University, Patrick Deane, that I believe captures this common theme. I came across this statement when reading an article covering a speech made by Dr. Deane back in 2005. The author of this article wrote the following;

Deane cautioned against several trends that are "fundamentally at odds" with universities' longstanding mandate to develop human potential, foster intellectual curiosity and provide academic freedom.

In the interest of full transparency, I should state here that I first came across this statement while at McMaster. At the time I felt as though we were fighting elements within the university who were questioning the place and cost of athletics in an academic institution, and was looking for a way to fight back. Just like we are trying to do now, I thought if we could find a clear and concise way to communicate how athletics contributes to the overall school mission in a unique and special way, that we might be able to change a few minds.

The moment I saw this article and in particular the phrase – "to develop human potential," I knew we had found what we were looking for. It was a simple and profound insight, and I was confident that no one on campus was contributing more to the development of human potential than we were, for reasons that will become clear later. Just as importantly, I felt we were in a position to expand on this advantage and dominate it. We just had to execute and communicate.

In the absence of any other idea, I believe that a focus on the development of human potential is the simple and profound insight that university sport in Canada is looking for. It's the common thread that we all have in common. I believe this because it's at the heart of our passion for sport, it's something we already do very well, and with the right strategy, it's something we can dominate and own on our campuses. And most importantly, as you will see, when positioned and communicated effectively, it has been proven to drive the economic engine to the level required for ultimate greatness. I'm not sure any other option can do that.

The Economic Engine

So how does a focus on developing human potential drive the economic engine? Before I get to this, let's review what's been driving varsity sport's economic engine to this point in time. As discussed in some detail earlier, it's been some combination of student fees, university funding, donations, sponsorships, and ancillary revenue from sources like gate revenue, facility rentals and merchandise sales. As we have discussed, every one of these sources was under tremendous downward pressure well before the pandemic hit. The pandemic has simply taken a serious problem and made it untenable.

Varsity sport and athletic departments across the country are now in a position where they don't really control their own future. In the short term the only option is to make do with whatever level of support they can get, but there is no future in this approach. The only way to achieve financial independence is to restructure and focus on creating a new, vibrant economic engine.

To explain how this focus on the development of human potential can drive varsity sport's economic engine, I'd like to start by taking you back a few years to a meeting I had with a couple of students at McMaster that I will remember forever. The two young ladies had been involved with the department for years in various volunteer roles, and were very active in the Hamilton area with a number of kids programs. They were both passionate, caring people, with lots of energy and enthusiasm, so when they asked to meet with me to discuss an idea they had, I jumped at it.

Their idea was to organize an Amazing Race type event, similar to the television show, for at-risk kids in our community that would give them a chance to see more of their city and ultimately expand their horizons. The idea came to them after realizing that most of these kids had never been outside their community. They had no idea where City Hall or McMaster University was for example. As far as they were concerned, they were on the other side of the moon.

The idea was to work with the Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton to coordinate the selection of the kids and oversee their supervision on race day. In that first meeting they outlined how they saw race day unfolding and how they would use McMaster student-athletes as team captains and

guides for each team. They also had a plan for the approaching potential corporate partners. Their presentation was well organized but there were still a lot of logistics to work out to make the event a reality. At the end of the meeting they asked if the department would provide the seed capital they needed to get started, and without hesitation, I said we would. Their passion and enthusiasm was infectious and I was very excited to see where this could go.

In the end, the event was a resounding success. On race day there were about 25 teams of five kids or more, each lead by 2-3 McMaster student-athletes, that took the city of Hamilton by storm. Thanks to the city, the teams traveled for free across Hamilton on city buses, searching out historic sites and points of interest. One of these locations was a local radio station who agreed to come on board as a media partner, promoting the events for weeks in advance and broadcasting live from various locations on race day.

What really took us by surprise was the level of support the event got from corporations and individuals across the city. There were food sponsors who fed the kids, and other companies that contributed t-shirts and items for the gift bags. As word of the event spread, individuals in the city came forward, unsolicited, to financially sponsor teams. While this wasn't something that had been planned on, recognizing the opportunity, the organizing team let it be known that we were open to team sponsors, and the response was overwhelming.

Following the event we all got together to review the day. And while we were all pleased with the support and coverage, what we all couldn't stop talking about was the effect it had on the kids and our students. The smile on kid's faces and the excitement level around being a part of a team with McMaster students was priceless. The way they looked up to the student-athletes and hung on their every word was so moving and emotional. For the students it was an incredibly rewarding and emotional experience as well. They just couldn't stop talking about it. We knew then that this was the start of something very special.

The success of the Amazing Race, and in particular the level of support we got from people in the community, corporations and media, got me thinking about our funding challenges and our overall approach. Like most varsity programs, we were having a difficult time securing sponsorships and donations. Sponsorships in particular were getting more difficult as we just weren't providing the value sponsors were now looking for. As I thought about it, I wondered if we could incorporate our community outreach initiatives with our varsity programming to offer something very unique and different to potential partners.

After some discussion we decided to start what we called the McMaster Athletes Care program. Our vision for the program was to create a well organized, highly coordinated army of volunteer student-athlete mentors, who would go out into the community and work with kids through partner agencies like the Boys and Girls Club, to inspire, motivate and be role models for kids in need. By the end of the first year, the program was connecting with hundreds of kids every week through after-school programs.

To support the program we sought out partners and sponsors who were told up-front that a portion of their funding would be used to support the student-athletes who were giving of their time to make the program a success. In other words, the money was to be used to both execute the community program, and support the student-athletes in their academic and athletic pursuits.

In a very short period of time the McMaster Athletes Care program became a major driver of the department's economic engine. Our first major success story was a six figure partnership with RBC, where half of the money came from the regional office, and the other half from their philanthropic group, to be the named partner for the Athletes Care program. From there we got major donations from a number of charities and foundations including Jays Care and the Kiwanis Club. It got to the point where all our traditional sponsors wanted to be involved in the program as well, which increased our revenue from these sponsors.

These success stories highlight how this new approach opened up two new sources of funding for the department. The first was support from foundations and charities in Canada that support kids - and there are a lot of them. Prior to this program, we didn't qualify for support from these sources, but with this new focus, a whole new world of opportunity opened up for us. The second was the discovery that corporate sponsors were open to working with their internal philanthropic group to expand and enhance partnerships, providing greater reach and additional financial support.

I should mention that Ryerson Athletics experienced something very similar to McMaster when they re-branded their community engagement program around the Rams Cares name. They too secured a major naming partner for their camp program and a number of large donations from foundations across the country.

With the success of the Athletes Care program, we re-focused our marketing and communications strategies around on our new-found mission – The Cultivation of Human Potential. We were already doing a pretty good job of developing human potential through our athletics and recreation program, but with the addition of the Athlete's Care program, we took this commitment to a whole new level. After a few years, the program became the face of McMaster's community engagement efforts and we took over ownership, in my opinion, of the development of human potential title on campus.

I firmly believe that the success enjoyed by McMaster and Ryerson was only the tip of the iceberg. The potential is huge, both in terms of making a difference in our communities and garnering the financial support needed to sustain a vibrant, successful university sport system in Canada. As we enter the post-pandemic era I encourage programs across the country with community initiatives to refocus on a single objective, and to kick their efforts into high gear. For those without a program, what a great opportunity to start something from scratch and to make a real difference for both your community and your students.

The Passion Question

Some people will point out that we have yet to answer the passion question. I would argue that we have, because I believe the developing of human potential is at the core of why people get involved in athletics. I believe it's an innate passion that we all share to some extent because it's about developing potential in both ourselves and in others.

The Path Forward

As I lay out, there are two parts to the reinvention of university sport in Canada. The first is the implementation of much needed structural change that promotes a financially healthy university sport system, fostering competitive balance. The second is the creation of a new vision focused around the development of human potential on our campuses and in our communities.

With regards to structural change, my hope is that the situation is so different this time; that the need for change is so clear and urgent, that a national solution is possible. To this end, I would urge university presidents to get together and develop a clear mandate for U SPORTS to develop and implement the structural changes required to stabilize the university sport system as soon as possible.

I believe that structural change is so important and so urgent that the goal should be to have the new rules in place by September of 2022. If this isn't possible, then I would encourage the regions to forge ahead and implement their own changes by this date. In the worse case, it may be necessary for regions to temporarily pull out of national competitions should the disparity between regions after these changes, be so great, as to cause a competitive unbalance. This may seem extreme, but necessary. I'm confident that it won't last long.

As for the new vision, I'm proposing U SPORTS and its members embrace the idea that we are in the business of developing human potential, and to expand this focus to include what Nelson Mandela so eloquently described as the inherent power of sport – “the ability to speak to youth in a language they understand, and to create hope where there is only despair.”

In truth this isn't a radical change; in fact it's a simple change, as athletic and recreation programs on our campuses have always been focused on the development of human potential, we just haven't positioned and communicated it this way. This proposal simply takes what we are already doing well and expands its reach to include children in our communities in need of inspiration and hope.

As for the path forward, there is only one option; a grass roots revolution that starts on each campus and in each community, that grows over time into a national movement. Ideally this revolution will be lead by at a group of like-minded schools who will show the way for everyone else. Together they will help others through sharing their experiences and the drafting of tool kits that others can follow to establish their own community engagement programs. Eventually, my hope is that university sport in Canada becomes synonymous with the development of human potential both on campuses and in their communities.

For this new vision to be successful we can't be shy about telling people about it. We need to boldly and aggressively shout it out to anyone who will listen, and even those who won't. This

vision has to be front and centre in all marketing and communications plans and a key part of all development initiatives. To this end, it needs to have its own marketing and communication strategies which include fund raising events, merchandise and social media presence.

I see this approach as a very Canadian solution to creating a solid and stable future for varsity sport, and at the same time, addressing a real need in our communities that our students are uniquely qualified to fill. My hope is that every athletic program in Canada will one day have a vibrant and robust Community Care program that is the face of their university's community efforts.