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Larry Maguire

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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[English]

• (1105)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): I call to order meeting number 35 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Today we are continuing with our study on Canadian women and girls in sport.

We have witnesses with us this morning who I would like to welcome.

Just to let you know, you'll have 10 minutes to make your presentations. Then there will be rounds of questions, with seven minutes for the first round, and that includes the answers. My colleague, who I am replacing today, is always reminding not just our guests but the questioners as well that it includes the answers.

Excuse me. I am reminded by the clerk that it's five minutes today for opening statements.

I would also like to welcome our colleague Mr. Simms today. He is sitting in for our regular chair, Ms. Fry.

With that, I welcome Ms. Lee, appearing as an individual; Brenda Andress, commissioner of the Canadian Women's Hockey League; and Shannon Donovan, the executive director of Football Canada.

Thank you very much for being here. We look forward to your presentations.

In the order listed here, we'll hear first from Ms. Lee.

Ms. Nancy Lee (As an Individual):

Thank you.

As a point of clarification, is it five minutes for us or five for you?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): It is 10 minutes for you to make your presentation.

Ms. Nancy Lee: It's five minutes for you and 10 minutes for us. Lovely. Thank you. I'll get going. Is it seven and a half minutes...?

A voice: Five.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): It's five minutes for your presentations. I'll get it right yet. It's five minutes for your presentations, and seven minutes for the questions.

[Translation]

Ms. Nancy Lee: Hello and thank you, Mr. Chair, and committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today, and thank you in particular for undertaking this review. I am personally encouraged by it.

By way of introduction, I'm the former head of CBC Sports, where I was responsible for the sports programming, production, and negotiations for the broadcast rights for CBC and Radio-Canada. That included *Hockey Night in Canada*, the Olympics, the Pan-Ams, and a very long list of amateur sports.

Subsequently, I became chief operating officer for Olympic Broadcasting Services. We had a staff of 3,000 people and provided the host broadcaster coverage for the Vancouver Olympics. I now have been engaged by the International Olympic Committee to implement gender equality into the Olympics sports program, so this study is perfect timing for me.

I've been a board member for the Canadian Commonwealth Games association, CAAWS, and Right to Play, on the governing council at the University of Toronto, and the chair of a community sport fund in Toronto.

For my part, I will offer some comments and recommendations regarding the media. In addition, my experience in international sports and governance has given me insight into how the governance of sports organizations impacts gender equality, how the NSOs, the national sports organizations, themselves impact gender equality, and how the evaluation and oversight by Sport Canada also impacts gender equality.

All of that activity, and in some cases non-activity, plays a major role in how the media perceive women's sports and how they report on it. For a moment, let's focus on the media.

I think there are several reasons why the quantity and quality of women's sports coverage is still an issue, and here's a quick list. Budgets are one issue. Media companies don't have enough resources to spread around. Another issue is that reporters don't have easy access to the results, or they don't make an effort to get the results. Another one is that media companies don't see the business case and, by and large, the audience data, at least for television, would back that up. As for sexism, it exists for sure, but I don't believe that the majority of people working in the industry are sexist. However, it is worth noting that just one bad photo can cause a lot of harm and perpetuate coverage based on what an athlete looks like instead of how fast or strong she is.

In spite of all that, I think there is a more basic reason for the lack of attention. Most reporters, producers, and media executives just don't think about it. It's not on their radar screen. The result is that when they're making editorial decisions around what to cover and determining where to allocate resources, they are not applying a gender lens as part of that decision-making. Some of my recommendations will address that.

Last year I was asked to make a similar presentation in Qatar. It was to a group of sports organizations from Africa and the Middle East. They wanted to know why media coverage of women's sports in their countries is still an issue. My message to them was the same as it is to you today: you need to step back and figure out what the sports system is doing to enable the media to ignore women's sports. Until you fix that, you are reinforcing the stigma that women's sport is less credible.

I'm leaving my recommendations with Mr. Lafleur. I have 14, so I don't have time to go over them, but there are two I want to present now because I believe they're really important.

First, the department needs to ensure that the principle that women and girls deserve equal access and opportunities in sports is clearly and formally embedded into the policies and practices of Sport Canada, the NSOs, and the MSOs. Currently it is not.

Second, it's imperative that this principle be activated by the NSOs and MSOs, not with nuanced expectations but instead with explicit requirements matched to tangible outcomes. Plus, the administrations and their boards must be held accountable, with real consequences tied to their funding.

Obligations and real consequences for gender equality in sport are not far-fetched. People know me: I don't operate in la-la land. In fact, this week, the United Kingdom announced that its government funding would be tied to gender equality in all its sports organizations. What this means is that in the governance boards, the administration leadership, its sports program, and hosting international events in the U.K., these organizations must treat women and men and girls and boys equally. It's pretty clear, and I think it's pretty impressive.

In addition to government actions, sports organizations such as the Commonwealth Games Federation and on the international side the International Olympic Committee are putting real gender equality policies into action. The gender equality policy for the Commonwealth Games Federation has a great depth. I know that others have talked about officiating and coaching, and this policy is requiring

organizing committees to have equality plans for coaches, team officials, technical officials, and athlete numbers. By the way, it has been driven by a Canadian by the name of Bruce Robertson.

As for the IOC, as we speak, there are committees that are working on concrete, practical gender equality activations, and part of that is the hiring of me to literally change the competition schedule at the Olympics so that it's equal for all genders.

To sum up, it's all about showing how women can and should play an equal role at all levels of sport and, by extension, in society at large. In closing, thank you very much for undertaking this study and for the efforts that Minister Qualtrough is already making. It's clear that Canada is in a position to lean in. What I'm asking of you is that you make sure we get the job done.

Merci.

• (1110)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Ms. Lee, for that presentation.

We'll move now to Ms. Address.

Ms. Brenda Address (Commissioner, Canadian Women's Hockey League): Thank you, committee members, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Canadian Women's Hockey League.

The Canadian Women's Hockey League is the only professional women's sport league in Canada, and we're the second oldest in North America, next to the WNBA. Our 2016-17 season will mark the league's 10th season. Still existing after 10 years is in itself an accomplishment for any women's professional sport. I'll give you some facts and figures about our league.

When we started this league we had \$100,000 to run the league. Currently we are at \$1.8 million. The revenue completely covers all the costs of the players, but it does not pay any of our players. We have four full-time staff and five part-time general managers. The thing that our league stands for mostly is that our entire league is 80% females in non-traditional jobs.

We're home to 125 of the world's best female athletes and hockey players, and 21 of the 24 current members playing in four nations play in the CWHL. They represent dozens more on the national level that represent teams and development programs for youth playing across Canada and the eastern States. We are also providing homes for several members of the Japanese, French, American, and Russian national women's hockey teams, all playing here in Canada.

Over the last 10 years we've been able to secure a broadcasting deal with Sportsnet, which gives us four games a year. We started out with these games and we received approximately 22,000 viewers for all four games. Last year each one of our games saw between 92,000 and 108,000, which is comparable to a Detroit-Pittsburg game of 160,000 to 180,000. Those are actual viewers. It's a higher number when you look at the people who just blink on and off, so that is close to a half a million now following us.

One of the current problems we have within our league is a lack of resources to continue to hire women. It's difficult for us to get women to coach. It's difficult for us to get women into non-traditional jobs when basically they're volunteer positions, which makes it very difficult for them to get the experience they need in order to move on.

If you take a look at our players who aren't paid—I'll just give you a couple of examples—if we paid a minimum of \$10,000 per player for all our players, it would cost \$1.2 million. In the NHL, 440 players each make that salary, compared to that amount that would be paid for our entire league. If we paid minimum wage to our players, in Ontario, it would be \$23,000 a year. There are 299 NHL players who are making that salary on their own, except that amount would run our entire league.

We're lucky that we have the CWHL, that I, as commissioner, am female, that all of our general managers are females, and our broadcasting staff, as we start to grow our streaming game—we're putting in play-by-play and colour commentating—are females. We met with Sportsnet last week, and they actually said they would start to use us as a template moving forward. They promised that in the next year, beginning with our Clarkson Cup for the year 2018, they would start having an actual play-by-play commentator for our hockey, because that doesn't exist right now in the sports world.

We're very lucky within our league with the non-traditional jobs. Outside of our league—and we are in many different areas in professional sports, such as HR, law, and finance—you will never see women commissioners, scouts, or coaches. You will never see us as GMs, but you see that in our league. We're trying to portray to all the youth in Canada that as women, we have the right to be who we were born to be and to continue doing that. Moving forward, the main difficulty for us—and I have some suggestions about this in my notes, which I'll give you—is that peer influence and media influence are the biggest parts of growing any sport. We need to have a different look, rather than the lack of females in sports leadership, so that young girls will know they can grow up to be a commissioner.

The other thing is policies. We have a lot of policies that say women should be in things, but we need the dollars to back those policies, and we need policies that state that if you're going to run an organization, if you're going to build a facility for sports, that facility

should house professional women's leagues or amateur leagues. It should not be that the money just goes to the NBA, the CFL, the NFL, or the NHL. The dollars provided for building facilities and infrastructure should come with a policy that women must be included.

I know I'm out of time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

Ms. Brenda Andress: I'll give you my notes at the end.

• (1115)

Again, thank you for the time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

We'll move on to our third presenter, Ms. Donovan.

Ms. Shannon Donovan (Executive Director, Football Canada): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to appear today. There aren't many opportunities to talk about women's football in front of a parliamentary committee.

[*English*]

Just as a little bit of background, we are talking about North American football. There are females participating in North American football. We have three disciplines. We have tackle, flag, and touch football. We are a heritage sport, as you are aware. In no way, shape, or form are we involved in or promote the lingerie league that comes and goes in the country.

Personally, I am not a high-performance athlete. I grew up involved in sports. It was just part of who we were as a family.

In terms of work experience, I'm in my 10th year with Football Canada and my fourth year as the executive director of Football Canada. Previous to that, I worked for the Ottawa Senators. I was also with Hockey Canada for five years, three of which I was the manager of female development.

I'm going to speak about what I'm familiar with, which is grassroots and the development of female sports.

Over my time, my observation has been that the keys to participation of females are opportunity and communication to females and to parents. I believe that was a huge part of what took place in the boom in female hockey in the late nineties. Once there were opportunities at the Olympics, as well as Canadian and American scholarships, that contributed to the increase in female hockey participation.

Parents want to put their daughters into the sports where they know they'll have opportunities beyond just maybe going to the pool on Saturday mornings. They want them to be a part of something that could last for the rest of their lives.

We have amazing female athletes in this country, which we have witnessed over the last few Olympic Games.

I think the other part, as far as participation goes, is the number of female coaches on the sidelines and behind the bench, especially in male-dominated sports. I coach hockey and I've had several parents say to me that they're so glad that their daughter has a female coach on the ice. It's the same thing on the football side.

Females not familiar with this sport usually become participants if they feel they are in a safe and comfortable environment. This is not only for the athlete, but also for coaches and administrators. I believe that in coaches clinics you will have better participation if it is an all-female clinic. I have witnessed that with Hockey Canada. In the early 2000s, we had some funds and we ran all-female coaches clinics across the country.

I've sat in on some clinics. You're usually the only female in a room of about 40 men. If you're not familiar with all the terms and lingo, what the five-hole is and top shelf, you're usually not willing to ask those questions.

In the all-female coaches clinics that we used to hold, we had a hockey 101. Females had the opportunity to ask those questions they probably would never have asked if they had been in a regular clinic with men. Women who couldn't find day care would bring their babies with them. We welcomed babies. We ran a two-day coaches clinic, and then after that, they would follow up with us. They provided their experience. They went back into the community and became coaches.

The mandate of female coaches on coaching staff is a large part. In football, we have started on the mentorship side, as we have very few female coaches as of now.

• (1120)

I think communication to athletes age 14 and older is key as far as opportunities in sport beyond being an athlete are concerned. It's a perfect opportunity for them to start coaching, officiating, even being the water girl on the sidelines, timing games, or being a team manager.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): I'm going to ask you to wrap up.

Ms. Shannon Donovan: Sure. Just on the football side, I've put some of the statistics in my notes. These are just from Saskatchewan. In 2011, there were 384 female football players, and currently there are 1,440. The bulk of those are in flag football, but the senior women's contact league has also contributed to that. We see that

growing in all the provinces now. They're starting to work with the high schools and get female flag football involved. We're seeing significant growth. We're looking to host the 2017 women's world championship for tackle football in Vancouver. We're working with Sport Canada right now on that.

• (1125)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you very much.

Before we begin questions, I have some concerns or questions that we want to look at with regard to the analysts and the interim draft report. I'll call an in camera session once we get this session done, just before the athletes come to the table. I'll ask them all to leave the room at that time, just so you're forewarned. We'll deal with that for just a few minutes; I don't think it will take too long. Then we'll come back with our second panel after noon.

With that, I will open up our questions beginning with Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): I want to thank all of you. It's been tremendous to hear about all that you've done and all the contributions you've made to women in sport. I'm really excited. There's a lot to ask, so I'm going to jump in.

Ms. Lee, you said that organizations are undermining women's sport. That's one of the reasons there's less coverage of women in the media. I was wondering if you could provide us with some examples, or give us some of the ideas you're working with there.

Ms. Nancy Lee: I'll give you maybe three.

The simple one, the work that I'm doing now for the IOC, is that on the last day of the Winter Olympics, currently there are no events for women. That's going to change. How can you blame the media for not covering women when there are no events on the best day of the Olympics? That's the simple answer. The IOC said, "Of course".

Back closer to home, it's reported that we as a group gave \$3 million to the Canadian Soccer Association to host that fantastic World Cup FIFA event in 2015. There were no women in leadership positions for the very first time in the history of that event. Twenty years ago, in 1996, in the States, the chair and the CEO were female.

If Sport Canada had policies for international host events, just as the U.K. has introduced, you would be saying that that's not allowed, that events don't get your money unless they do what you say. The specific on the turf, as everyone knows, is that you don't get to treat women as second-class citizens. Here's how the media takes it. Every day the media meet with the organizing committee of an event like this. Who's sitting at the front of the table? Two men. It's the perception.

The second thing, with regard to the whole turf thing, is that essentially it was literally and figuratively a ball going back and forth between CSA and FIFA, but as a government.... At Sport Canada, we could have said that it was a non-starter. The media is sitting there and thinking that we can't even get our own house in order. They know that we're supporting this. It's a public investment.

Concepts like that are a little bit away, sort of like a sidebar, but they lead to the perception that if we don't care, if Sport Canada doesn't care, if we as a country don't care about the women, why should the media care?

I have others, but for the sake of time.... It's a long list.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: One of the issues we've been hearing about is that because there's less media coverage for women, there's less in the way of sponsorships. That has had an economic impact as far as professional opportunities or opportunities to become elite athletes go.

You mentioned that there is a U.K. funding example. Do you have any ideas of other ways in which we could start to implement change on the ground?

Ms. Nancy Lee: It is true. Back in my days at the CBC, the NSOs would be knocking on the door begging for coverage. They needed the coverage so the sponsor would cover their event. There are three recommendations I have on that. We need to deal with the private sector, and I'm focusing on television for now.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the CRTC had a requirement that the private broadcasters—and I know this about television—needed to spend some of their public benefit cash, not in kind, cash, on amateur sports. The reason I'm suggesting amateur sports, sorry, is that's where the catchment of women are playing sport. As a result of that, there was coverage that—and this is really important—the national sports organizations did not have to pay TSN to get on the air. One of my recommendations is just have them have a look at it. There's a reason they took it away. I don't know what it is, but it was a huge impact. What happened after that is they really drew back.

The second thing, and with my dear friends at the CBC, I have some very specifics regarding them to suggest to you. Part of it with the CBC, TSN, and Sportsnet is they require the national sports organizations to pay. Let's just deal with the CBC. They require these sports organizations that are out there trying to get athletes playing and participating to pay to get on the air. The reason, I'm told, because it didn't happen up until 2006 when I left, is they have no money. I think that's the wrong question. It's not a question about how much money you have; it's how you allocate the money.

Again, you will see this in the recommendations, which I hope are concrete and practical for you.

●(1130)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Speaking to CBC and sports coverage of women, when we had Monsieur Lacroix come from the CBC, I suggested that we do have hockey on Saturdays. There's a women's hockey league and maybe that would be a way to bring hockey back to the CBC on Saturday evenings.

You had mentioned, Ms. Address, about infrastructure and infrastructure spending. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about that, about access for professional women's leagues to federally funded infrastructure.

Ms. Brenda Address: We are a professional league, but at the same time, we're a not-for-profit because none of the women are paid, so we're still in there, Nancy, as the amateurs in a lot of different ways.

Things like when the BMO Field was built, things like when NHL teams partner with cities, partner with governments, to build a facility for sports, these are opportunities to consider, here's a ton of money that's going out. How are we including women in that equation? How are we giving professional leagues, football leagues, soccer leagues, hockey leagues the opportunity to play? We do know, based on our Sportsnet numbers, and we do know based on the Olympics, that when the game is put in front of the audience, they love us. They actually love us more than the male sport, because the sport is played, in my opinion, to the true value of a sport.

I think that sometimes you have to mandate policies and mandate dollars that are put towards us as women in sports and women in different types of genders for the different sports in order that young girls can then see what's happening here. We see ourselves playing in this sport. We see ourselves growing up and getting a career in that sport because the dollars are there. I don't believe anybody across Canada would spend a lot of money to be something that they're not going to be paid for. Nobody's going to be a lawyer, nobody's going to be a doctor, nobody's going to be a politician unless they are paid for it.

We have to provide women the access to these facilities, and to mandate those dollars going out is essential, which says we're included in it to begin with.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Okay, thank you.

We have to move on to Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you to all three of you for coming here today.

This is a very interesting and timely study. My approach to things is how we get young girls to stay participating in sport, and especially in rural areas. I come from rural Saskatchewan and I assume it's no different from anywhere else, but as a coach running a double-A team, or whatever it may be, I need to raise funds locally in order to fund that. Oftentimes I found when I was dealing with women's teams and when I was coaching my daughter in soccer, etc., professionally, there was a big challenge to go to that local stationery store, that local gas station and say, "Can you help fund this team?"

It goes all over Canada. We talked a bit about media and oftentimes when we look at the bigger point of media, when we talk about professional hockey, obviously getting those advertisers.... People want eyeballs in order to pay. If they don't get eyeballs, they're not going to give you the money. How do we do that at a smaller level? That also adds to keeping these young girls involved. If, all of a sudden, there's a big challenge, and they have to go out and sell raffle tickets or things like that, they find it difficult, and no more so than boys, but the reality is they do find it difficult because they have a bigger barrier.

Nancy, can you comment on that?

Ms. Nancy Lee: I was going to pitch it, but...

It's not as helpful, but I think those who will help you I call "influencers". These are the people who are in a position to make change happen or recognize that it's an issue. When you're going to the dealerships you're talking to people who don't recognize that it's important to support this.

I'm sure you've been there. I ran into the same problem raising money for elite varsity athletes when I was at U of T. The guys write a cheque. Women don't write cheques. That's just who we are.

The specifics of it is to look at retail companies that are selling to consumers. I'll give my example. It's taking it out of Estevan but it's essentially Bell and Rogers going down to Sportsnet. Bell and Rogers have consumers, women and men who care about this. They have employees who coach. It's the same thing with their shareholders. The conversation with the chairs of both those companies is, "What are you doing in your avenues that you can have an impact on girls and women who are participating in sport?"

Sorry, it's way off topic for you.

• (1135)

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you.

Brenda.

Ms. Brenda Andress: I think the way we've learned, through the research of trying to grow the youth game—and we've just come up with it this year—is that we're hosting the first ever Clarkson Cup peewee championship. We're trying to bring peewee teams from across Canada to Ottawa, because this is where our Clarkson Cup is held this year, and engage them in being involved with our athletes.

They come into town, get an opportunity to see our women play the game, and get to hear our women talk about the challenges and barriers they've overcome to accomplish what they want in their life. We all know at the front of the stats that women quit sports at the age of 13 and 14. That's when they stop exercising, and it's when they stop being involved. It's all about peer pressure, media pressure,

because of whatever they see, and right now social media is not about sports. It's about fashion and different things.

I think we also have a mandate within us as a professional league, and we try to create these opportunities for young girls.

I'll go back to my first point where I still say that if there is a career opportunity, young girls will continue because whether it's as a commissioner or a player, when there is a career there.... Young men will tell you that from the day they were born, when their fathers put them in front of the TV, they were going to grow up to be NHL players and make money and if they couldn't be an NHL player, they were going to be the GM or the scout. It starts at a very young age, and we have to do the same thing for young girls to continue to get them to participate.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you.

Shannon, I'm not going to let you answer this question because I have one for you specifically, but if you want to chip in on that, you're welcome to.

You talked about communicating and in particular, I liked your comment about clinics and having women versus men giving the clinics because then they're going to respond to it and it's a greater environment. They're feeling safe in that environment and they can do that presentation.

What challenges do you see in football to get those coaches, those refs, and those trainers?

Ms. Shannon Donovan: One challenge is purely the number of females who have been involved in the game earlier in their lives. Most don't have the experience. What I saw in hockey was that a lot of them had played the game but were a little hesitant to coach or officiate, but then they did come out, whereas with football, we have very few females who grew up with the sport. That's the biggest challenge.

The second one is...just the number of female facilitators would be another challenge. We now have a group of females. Our first world championship was in 2010, and that has helped significantly in the growth of football in Saskatchewan. Now we have a group of females who we're dedicating time to getting them trained and on the sidelines, as well as in the classroom, and encouraging younger females to participate.

I think the biggest challenge with us is purely that they don't have the history of being on the field, or anywhere involved in the sport, other than probably watching the game on TV with their dad.

Going back to your first question, I think in football we have an opportunity on the female side, because although females do quit at the age of 13, at the same time, a lot of them participate for social reasons. If their friends are doing it, they might do it, and if they were not allowed to play when they were younger, especially male-dominated sports because their parents didn't encourage them or there wasn't the opportunity, they probably have a little more say in what they can do when they get to 13 or 14 years of age.

Football is a huge program in high schools. Students want to be involved in their sports programs, so if we can get female programming on flag football in the high schools, I think there would be an increase in participation, especially by that 13-year-old through 16-year-old age group. This is what we see in Saskatchewan, and what we see starting in Manitoba. B.C. is also starting with the same program, and Nova Scotia is looking into it. It allows them to be a part of the school program and be with their friends, and participate in a sport that they might have always wanted to from a distance, but didn't have the opportunity.

• (1140)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

We'll have to move to Mr. Nantel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I can only sympathize with this reality of semi-pro sports, like the Ottawa Fury team having games with the Club de soccer de Longueuil, in Longueuil, Quebec, and they actually pay to have their games on air.

To me, this is like a decision that's been reversed by the CRTC. Were you saying this was in the mid-eighties or the nineties?

Ms. Nancy Lee: No. The clarification is that they never told them they couldn't ask an organization to pay, but what they did is they—and I'm going to use the word—required the private broadcasters to spend cash on amateur sports coverage.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Okay.

You did say, according to you, that there were two major things, peer influence and media influence. Can you give us some great examples?

[*Translation*]

I think that, in general, we're very hard on women. Just think about the last media frenzy in Quebec.

[*English*]

The big storm in Quebec these days was after Safia Nolin received an award at the last ADISQ gala. People were bashing her about anything, about the way she dressed, about the words she used. If she had been a guy, 80% of that would be out.

[*Translation*]

Regarding Eugenie Bouchard,

[*English*]

people are storming on her like crazy.

Are there any good moments where women have been scoring, and with what event? I'm not very familiar with sports, but the reality is that we need champions. We don't need champions in the sports, but we need champions of that cause to rally around and to say, wow.

I keep thinking about this, and I don't know what you guys think about Danica Patrick, the NASCAR driver. To me, she's doing a marvellous job, because she is just as good as the other guys and she has all this exposure, all these commercial sponsors on her car.

What are great examples to follow?

Ms. Shannon Donovan: One of my best examples is when I was working for Hockey Canada. We used to run the Chev safe and fun program with Cassie Campbell, Bobby Orr, and Mike Bossy. We used to go to these events. The kids had no idea who Bobby Orr was or who Mike Bossy was—it got the parents there—but the players would chant Cassie's name.

Cassie had come off the Olympics and was in the media. She is a promoter, and I know she helps with the Scotiabank HockeyFest, but these were boys, and they were chanting Cassie's name. They had no idea who Bobby Orr was. I realized why they brought Bobby Orr out—to bring the parents.

I could not believe how many of the little boys knew who Cassie was. It was because they had won the Olympic gold, and they were on TV. They knew who she was.

Ms. Nancy Lee: I am going to take it a step further. Again, it's a recommendation.

In New Zealand... This is when they took on the media. When Eugenie Bouchard was in Australia and was asked to twirl, it came out as "Twirlgate". New Zealand has the same situation we do: A lot of women are winning medals, but they are not getting coverage. What they did was couple with universities to do media research. This has been done before. CAAWS did it in the 1990s, looking at it after the Olympics—how it was covered, the portrayal. That's what I mean about the twirl. It's not the quantity, but the quality of it. They looked at all of this in New Zealand, but the difference is that they sat down with the key newspapers and broadcasters, and said, "You know, we looked at this, and this is what you're doing."

It goes back to what I said before. It's not on their radar. They put it on the radar, and it has made a difference. They are doing it every year. It's truly one that I think we can pick up. I don't have to tell you folks, but you can't tell the media what to do. You have to get them onside and influence them. It's a perfect way of doing it, and they have proven that it works.

• (1145)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: We've had a lot of interest to have people like you, Ms. Lee, anchorwomen, head of the news department for sports and stuff.

I can't remember the name of the blonde female reporter for the Canadiens game every night, in French, on Radio-Canada. Still, there is Chantal Machabée at RDS or Marie-José Turcotte at Radio-Canada.

Can this have a positive influence and impel the female audience to get involved more and to see that there is still some space?

Ms. Nancy Lee: I'm not sure they can. It's only if someone wants to actually go into the sports media and say, "There is a woman doing this." I think the influence is really behind the scenes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: A coach....

Ms. Nancy Lee: This isn't good news, but I'm the only woman in the world who has ever done this job at the CBC. I'm the only woman in the world who has ever hosted broadcasting, and no one has done it since. That's not good.

When I was there, I made sure that women were scheduled, that their events were scheduled, and that there was equal sponsorship money. You didn't get on the air, all of that. You need somebody in there.

I would suggest that you need it behind the scenes, and then you need the Cassies, the Wiebes, and that gang in terms of that reference check.

Ms. Brenda Address: What we are seeing right now with these sports broadcasters is that they are doing male sports. We are putting in a female broadcaster, yet we don't have them doing the play-by-play yet—which is coming, they tell me. We are seeing them, but they are not sitting in Ron MacLean's chair. With Sportsnet, TSN, or anybody, if you look at the table of who's talking about hockey at nighttime, you'll see that it's still all male.

Yes, we should put those females in there, but give them a position that's equal, and give them the opportunity to broadcast. When you are doing broadcasting, and you give a percentage—exactly what Nancy is saying.... Have women broadcast women's games so that young girls can see that.

One other thing, in some of your questions.... It's very difficult for women to participate in amateur sport, whether it's swimming, hockey, or anything else, when every time they turn their head the coach they see is a male. The aspect is that this is who should be coaching, the male.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you very much. I hate to cut you off there, but we have to go to Mr. O'Regan.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Nancy, it's nice to work with you again, in a way. I'm sure that at the Olympics in 2010 you had 18,000 screens in front of you, and I'm

proud to say that I occupied one of them at four in the morning, but you probably weren't watching.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: That's fine. It's forgiven.

From my particular point of view, it's great to have you here, because I'm obviously quite interested, as is my colleague, I'm sure, on how women are treated in these broadcasts. We've raised this question several times, but I obviously am very interested in your particular feedback on Rio, because for many people it was seen as a bit of a revelation that suddenly the country seemed to be quite enamoured, more enamoured than usual, with its female athletes and with how successful they were.

What we've heard since, not to colour whatever you're about to say, is that we still have a long way to go. I guess I just wanted both your personal and your professional thoughts on how you feel that Rio was covered from the gender lens.

Ms. Nancy Lee: I was in Rio, so I didn't see what CBC and Radio-Canada were putting on, but I followed them online. My experience—that was my 14th Games in terms of working at them, not competing, but working, unfortunately—is that I have never been inundated with and have never seen so much disgruntlement and frustration with the portrayal of female athletes in those 14 years.

Now, I think a little bit of it is the social media. There's more access, and there's more talk back and forth. Also, there are circumstances where my colleagues at CBC, the commentators—again, I don't know about Radio-Canada—fell down, again, in terms of how you're looking at the women competing. From that perspective, it was absolutely abysmal.

• (1150)

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: What do you mean, Nancy, by falling down?

Ms. Nancy Lee: On falling down, an American newspaper said that this is the day that "Penny and Simone" tied, which is never, of course...and I apologize for not knowing Simone's last name, and that's wrong. On the front page in the newspaper, there was a huge picture of Michael Phelps, and the headline was that Michael Phelps wins silver, and the first African-American to win gold...and what came out of it is that she has a name. That's part of it.

Another one was a shot of a swimmer going up and down the pool, and then a shot to the coach, the male, the husband, in the spectators—

A voice: Yes, the husband.

Ms. Nancy Lee: —and the commentator said, "There's the person responsible for that world medal." No. She's swimming. He's not. He's probably going to have a beer. She's the one who is responsible for the medal. It was like that was time and time again.

My last example of it is in gymnastics with the Dutch gal that beat out the Americans. She got off the beam, went over, and wrote in her book, and the commentator said, “Dear Diary...”. Do you know what she was writing down? She was writing down her scores and all the other scores, because she's following each one of them to know if she's going to win—not “Dear Diary”.

It was abysmal, absolutely abysmal.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: So what do you do? I know you have, what, eight other recommendations, and frankly, I'd like to give you the time.

Ms. Nancy Lee: No, but this one is on the portrayal side of it. I want to talk about the media because I am and we are fixated on television. The media needs to be seen as the entirety of perception, as where we're all seeing all of these points of view.

One, in addition to that review that you can actually take back to the media, I believe you need—and it's pretty simplistic—a style guide. It's not difficult: a style guide, a communications strategy style guide. You give Sport Canada the cause. They can do it. You bring in the media partners, sit down, and come up with the top 10 things that you can or cannot say.

Again, I'll go back and say that I don't think the sports media are generally sexist; they just don't know what to say. I did not let them say “ladies” on air. They said, “Why, Nancy, why?” Because you don't say “gentlemen”, okay? It just has to be equal. It's like just this whole list of here's what to do and here's what not to do, because they're confused, right? That's a practical situation.

Then, because I'm suggesting that it come out of Sport Canada, it goes to the NSOs and the MSOs, because those are your leverage points. You tell them that this is really important and that this is the portrayal they have to give, all the NSOs and MSOs and Sport Canada and the.... I couldn't figure out the ministry where your federal money.... You spend a lot of money, the government does, on sports events, and any media buys that you make need to be tied back to that style guide.

If an NSO getting public money brings in a sponsor that has an outfit and does a commercial spread leading up to the games or whatever, and they show a woman in a position in a photo that is not about her strength or speed but more about what she looks like, no: that has to be part of the contract. That has to be part of the contract with the NSO, so that it's practical, it's in there.... I'm sorry. I could go on forever, and we'd be here until the Christmas break, but it's so

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: I agree. When you're covering sport, it's such mayhem that you don't have the time to do anything other than what's right in front of you. For those of us who have been on air, you're a sucker for a good style guide, if you're told “Here's the style guide”. That to me, is it.

Ms. Shannon Donovan: Talking about the media, and just on my Cassie Campbell example, I think with the increased media and respect for the female athlete, coach, and official that are on TV, for the younger viewers, those males, it will be the norm. In that room with the boys, it was just the norm. Cassie was a superstar, and she played hockey. They were okay with that. If boys are used to seeing

females on TV playing all these various sports, it will just be the norm.

I have two six-year-old girls, and one—I haven't convinced the other one yet—wants to grow up and be—

[*Translation*]

like her mother and be a

[*English*]

sports person. She doesn't know what I am, but I'm a sports person to her, and that's what she wants to do. I coach her hockey. She doesn't want to be a hockey coach. She wants to be a sports person, but it's from seeing me do my day-to-day stuff.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): We'll move on to our second round, and Mr. Waugh, for five minutes.

• (1155)

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm going to take some credit for our province because as a broadcaster for 40 years, we always were equal. We led with Huskies women's. I look at our province right now. I hired a female broadcaster and I watched her develop. Natasha Staniszewski is now at TSN, as you know. It was tough for her at times. I was around a long time and I remember the first practice she went to for the Huskies men's football and the football playing stopped. They all watched her walk. But she came through. Women have to have a thick skin, unfortunately.

I just look at when I left the province as a broadcaster and where we are. I'm proud. Those football numbers don't surprise me because we promoted women's football as much as we promoted men's football. We promoted women's hockey as much as we promoted men's hockey. When you get down to the local media, which is hard right now because everyone sees the Sportsnets, the CBCs, and TSNs, we have to ingrain that in our media, if you don't mind me saying. That's where it has to start, at the bottom.

To sit here today and see who's in Toronto that I've developed over the years, I get more satisfaction out of that than I was back home.

I'm just going to say, in our province we have Hayley Wickenheiser and Catriona Le May Doan doing advertising. Isn't that great, because not a lot of women can get the extra benefits after a sport. Perhaps you could talk about that angle of it, because you guys are all right. You've seen it, but in our province, I think we've done a very good job. We brought back our local athletes and put them on the air, on radio and TV. They are spokesmen for companies right now. Perhaps you could comment on that, if you don't mind.

Ms. Brenda Andres: One of the greatest things for any female sport and male sport, and more important than being a professional, earning money at the NHL and everything else, is hometown heroes. You can live forever in your community as a hometown hero, whether you're playing on the local baseball team, hockey team, or football team, and you make a difference. Usually in the past those individuals grew up to be the mayor, or those individuals grew up to hold an influential position at some point.

What we try to do is instill in our athletes and in the message we're sending that the importance of being who you are and the skill that you have is then brought back to your community, because when you bring it back to the community, you have an ability to make the difference, which is what Wick and everybody else is doing out there.

For us, as all sports organizations, when you talk about media and different things, it's essential for us that when we try to promote each woman as they come through our league, it's not just about their hockey career. It's about the career after the hockey and what they can do in that, whether it's in broadcasting or supporting or going back and doing sessions or clinics. The importance is in continuing, and women do that very well, by the way, in all sports. They give back. That's not to say that men don't, because I'm sure they do also. But the difference for us is to get those women to go back to the community and do exactly what you're doing in order to grow the amateur sports.

Ms. Shannon Donovan: Saskatchewan is definitely a unique situation as far as football is concerned. Even with hockey, it was always positive when I was there and very strong.

Football Saskatchewan is a great example for a lot of NSOs as well as PSOs. The CFL fifty-fifty money that they get from the Roughriders is split among all their high-performance programs, including the Huskies, the Rams, the Thunder, and the Hilltops, as well as the two senior women's tackle teams that are a high-performance female program. The money is split among them all.

If they have a provincial female team going to a national championship, they're treated just like any of their provincial teams, male or female. That doesn't happen very often in many places. I think the females in that province feel they are on equal ground and are treated with respect. It's gone a long way. These numbers are going to continue to increase because I know that the female league is very competitive and always does very well at our national championships. Even with just their exposure in the newspapers, they are recognized like the Huskies would be, say, in Saskatoon. So I think they are a model that we can work from.

The other thing I was going to say is that it's important that participation be made automatic, in getting people in to help build the infrastructure. For every midget team or high school female flag player, it should just be an automatic part of the curriculum that they're taking a coaching or officiating clinic within the school. Give them the tools so that when they're done playing, they already have this tool and can become an official or a coach. However, we have to provide them with the resources.

• (1200)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): We'll go to Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): The first question is for Brenda Address.

The Canadian Women's Hockey League has been around for how long?

Ms. Brenda Address: Ten years.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I noted you said it takes almost \$2 million to run the league.

Ms. Brenda Address: That's correct.

Mr. Dan Vandal: And the players don't get paid.

Ms. Brenda Address: The players are not paid.

Mr. Dan Vandal: It would fall under the amateur category. Where does that money come from?

Ms. Brenda Address: We started by raising it through sponsorship. That was 95% of the entire revenue coming in. We now have it split. We bring in donations and do fundraisers, but the gates are the biggest part of it. We've now started to build the community where each team is, and in that community we have started to build the fans. For instance, in the last two years we started to sell merchandise. Whereas we might once have sold maybe \$1,000 for the whole year, we're now selling \$10,000 per year in each community. It's all about going into the community and then building that base within the community to get the fans to recognize, one, that we're here, and two, that we are a family game to come to see.

There's a big difference coming and seeing our game where our women are very much about playing the sport and there's no violence or fighting. It's absolutely not allowed in the league. I'm sure you know this if you watch the Olympics, because it's also phenomenal watching the men at the Olympics, because they actually play the game.

For us, it's about getting people to understand through media, through youth groups, through many different things that there's a product out there that you can come to watch and support by buying our \$15 ticket. That's what it costs to watch an Olympic player play in your backyard.

Our funding has changed because our gates are changing, and that's what's making the difference for us in our revenue.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What percentage of your revenue comes from the gates, meaning the turnstiles, concessions, and the merchandise?

Ms. Brenda Address: Currently with all of those added in, it's about 25% of the entire \$1.8 million in revenue that we bring in. For us to continue, it has to go a lot higher than that, for sure, for the revenue.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I'm curious as to what sort of attendance you would get. I have a little note in front of me here that says you have teams in Boston, Brampton, Montreal.

Ms. Brenda Address: And Calgary and Toronto.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Wow. What sort of attendance would you get in Montreal?

Ms. Brenda Address: Ten years ago, we used to get me, all my friends and relatives, and anybody you could drag in through the door.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Brenda Address: One of the greatest things this year—actually, last year was when it really started—I walked into Toronto's opening game, which had almost 1,000 people at it. I didn't know anybody, and I was bloody happy. In Montreal last year, at the playoffs, Montreal played Toronto in Montreal. Our partnerships are with NHL teams now. I've been able to secure four NHL partnerships with those teams. When you walked into the facility, there were anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 fans at each one of their two playoff games, but they all had their faces painted in the Montreal colours.

As each of the Montreal players came on, for Julie Chu it was “choo-choo-choo”. When Caroline Ouelette came on, it was “ollie-ollie-ollie”. Then when Marie-Philip Poulin came on, well, it went crazy at that point. It was like, for the very first time we started to see fans who were actual fans. That's based on these women who are the general managers, the women who are the coaches, who continually run clinics. They say, “We're here, go out.” These are all volunteers, and they just keep building that community. I can only imagine, if we mandated policies for media, if we mandated policies for anybody who was involved in sports to bring coaches and fans to it, the growth of our game, not just in hockey but women's sports everywhere, would explode.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Shannon, give us your one recommendation on what we should do to increase women's participation at all levels of the sport industry.

• (1205)

Ms. Shannon Donovan: I think it's the infrastructure. I think it's having the coaches, the officials, the administrators, the females around the game as far as getting increasing participation. They're the voices, the champions who will go out there and get the younger girls involved. As I said earlier, if it becomes the norm on TV and the boys recognize females as elite athletes, just like those NHL players, I think they'll be willing to be involved.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Nancy, I would ask you the same question.

Ms. Nancy Lee: My number one is to address the harassment.

Mr. Dan Vandal: The harassment?

Ms. Nancy Lee: The harassment, the sexual harassment, the discrimination, the bullying—it may be out of the headlines now, but it's still there. I don't think the oversight's there, happening inside the organizations at the governance level and the senior management level. It's been said before: if you create an environment where it's safe and you're welcome to go play there, you're not bullied. Girls bully just as well as the boys bully. You have to do that, address the harassment. That's number one. You'll change an awful lot if you do that.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

I just want to thank you three witnesses. You've been very informative with your recommendations for our committee. I look forward to reading the rest of your recommendations, Ms. Lee, as well. I've mentioned the synchronized skating my daughter was involved in. I just want to say that it was women coaches who really helped the 21 girls who were skating together.

I had the opportunity to see the women's and the men's championships at the Olympic games in Vancouver, and I will say, Ms. Address, that the men do play the game when it's there as well.

The Westman Wildcats in Hartney, Manitoba get 400 fans to a hockey game. They're a midget girls' hockey team that ended up winning the Esso Cup, the first one that they had, in Calgary. Hartney is the little town I grew up in and where I graduated from high school, much before they played. That's my point: if you can get 400 fans to a midget girls' hockey game in a little town of 400 people in Manitoba, the game is growing.

Those are tremendous recommendations you've put forward to us. Thank you very much for being here today.

We will now take a bit of a break. I'll have to ask everyone who's not on the committee to leave the room, while we do a few things we have to do here in camera. Then we'll call our Paralympic athletes back in to have our second session.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1220)

[Public proceedings resume]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thanks, everyone, for being here. I'd like to get your attention again for a second.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here. Welcome to our friendly forum. We are really interested in your ideas and comments on how we can get more women involved in sport. You are all Paralympians who have excelled in their sports, and we certainly want to hear clearly from you.

We'll give you each five minutes. You don't have to go to five, and I'm kind of lenient if you go over by a few seconds, so don't worry about that.

Welcome to Mr. Martin Richard, executive director of communications and marketing for Paralympic athletes in Canada. He is with the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

Just so our witnesses know, we'll give them five minutes each to speak, and then we will have a round of seven minutes each for the first four questioners. We'll follow that up with what we have left for time.

Because we had an in camera meeting here that took a bit of time, I am going to extend this to try to give us the full hour. The room is empty afterwards.

With that, I will open it up to Ms. Ferguson. I think you are the first one on the list, so we'll go in the order we have there. Thank you very much for being here.

Ms. Tracey Ferguson (Paralympic Athlete, As an Individual): Thank you very much. My name is Tracey Ferguson. I am a member of the Canadian women's wheelchair basketball team. I am a seven-time Paralympian. Yes, I'm really old, I apologize, but I'm experienced. I have spent a lot of time in the system.

I just want to open by saying, on the experience in the House yesterday for the Olympic and Paralympic athletes, it's not my first time having that experience, but I am reminded each and every time that it is incredibly special to be recognized in the House by our Government of Canada. On behalf of the athletes, it was an incredible moment for us, so thank you for providing us with that opportunity.

It is our pleasure and our pride to represent Canada at each and every moment. When we're abroad, we're all proud to wear the Canadian maple leaf on our chests. We do this because we're passionate and we love what we do. Thank you for providing us with that opportunity. It was a great day. I know that my fellow athletes were all talking about it last night. Thank you for that. We're really appreciative of that warm welcome.

Now, a little about me. I started out playing wheelchair basketball, but that wasn't my dream. I grew up the youngest of six in a suburb of Toronto. I just wanted to be out there doing sports. I have four older brothers and an older sister who are all active. I think the big thing for me and my family was that I just wanted to be out there, whether it was street hockey, swimming races in the pool, my sister's baseball and softball games, or my t-ball. I just wanted to be active and social and competing. I love the competition.

I remember distinctly—this is dating myself, and maybe some of you in the room might remember it—in 1984, during the summer Olympic Games, watching Alex Baumann win his gold medal. I remember standing and jumping on the couch, for which I got in trouble, and cheering and leaping up and down and screaming this man to the finish. I was so excited.

With the pride I felt watching him win a gold medal, I said to my mom, "This is what I am going to do. I want to win a gold medal for Canada. I am going to be an Olympic swimmer. This is my dream." It was never: "This is impossible." It was: "Okay, how are we going to do it?" That's one of the really fortunate things I grew up with in my family. I didn't know that anything was impossible. Everything was possible. It was: "How are you going to achieve it?"

It was a few short months after that, due to complications during surgery, relatively routine surgery, that I was paralyzed, so that dream seemed to disappear.

It took about two years. I still had a competitive drive, and I still wanted to be out there playing sports. I just didn't know what existed for me. We're talking, and I'm dating myself again, about the 1980s. Paralympic sport just wasn't on television. It wasn't in the community. I was the only person now in a wheelchair in my community of Markham. I was the girl in the wheelchair.

The dream of being the Olympian or the gold medalist just seemed so far out of reach. I was very fortunate to find a wheelchair sports program in Scarborough, Ontario, at Variety Village, a facility that really is all about integration. All their programs are integrated. Whether it's a karate class or taekwon do, whether people are visual impaired, in wheelchairs, or whatever their impairment is, the instructor must instruct for all people in the same class.

I walked into this environment to see sport wheelchairs for the first time in my life. I got to try tennis. I got to try wheelchair basketball and wheelchair racing, and it opened my eyes to a new

world of possibilities. I fell in love with basketball. Probably for my physiology and size, it was not the right sport for me. I'm a little bit small, but I'm feisty. I got out there, and I started playing, and I loved the social aspect of it.

I got in the car after my first day, and my mom said, "What do you want to do? Tennis? Racing?" I said, "Basketball. This is my passion. This is my dream." My mom looked at me and said, "You know you're short, right?" I said, "I do. Thanks for pointing that out, Mom." My brothers are all well over six feet tall. They got the height. My mom asked me why. Did I get a basket? I said, "I didn't, but there's nowhere to go but up. I can get better."

Then she asked if I noticed anything else out there. I was the only girl. There were about 20 young boys out there playing, and I didn't even notice. It wasn't a big deal to the coaches. I was welcomed. I was really fortunate to have coaches who didn't make that distinction. They didn't say that they didn't have a girls' team. They said, "You want to play basketball. Let's find a way to include you," and I was there.

I'm grateful for that opportunity. I have experienced the Paralympics. I play internationally now, in Europe, on a co-ed but predominantly men's team. I have been able to not only go to university on a scholarship to play wheelchair basketball in the U.S. but have been recognized for playing for Canada. I worked for Sport Canada for a number of years as well, so I have worked for the federal government. I understand the mechanisms.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk about sport and my experience and to answer any questions you may have about my experiences as a female athlete in sport.

● (1225)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you very much.

That feistiness is good.

We'll move on to Ms. Gavel.

Ms. Erica Gavel (Paralympic Athlete, As an Individual): I'm Erica Gavel. I also play wheelchair basketball with Tracey.

Rio was my first Paralympic Games. It was just so amazing. Kind of like yesterday, it was a unique experience that you can't replicate with anything else, and it was like what she alluded to a few minutes ago. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to come here yesterday and today, to see the House of Commons and how things operate.

I'm originally from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I was born and raised there, fortunately. At the time, I didn't realize how amazing that city and that province are. From the time I was six years old and doing organized sport, I always had female coaches and mentors.

To be completely honest, I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for Lisa Thomaidis from the University of Saskatchewan. Basketball is not a very common sport in Saskatchewan—now it is, but when I was in high school, my city didn't have a club team. She took the time out of her day to come to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She's coaching the national team, and I'm pretty sure that is the last place on her agenda to go to recruit basketball players.

She and Sarah Crooks came to my school and put on a basketball camp. I was 14 at the time. They told the whole group that if we worked really hard, we could play for the University of Saskatchewan.

So, I took that to heart and I worked really hard for three years. Both she and Sarah Crooks stayed in contact with me.

By the beginning of Grade 12, I was offered an opportunity to go there. I went to the University of Saskatchewan and for the first couple of years, everything went according to plan. And then I ended up wrecking my knee really badly. I tore the articular cartilage off my femur and tibia, which means if I were 45, I would go in for a knee replacement tomorrow, but I'm not, so.... I have arthritis. That being said, that's why I'm eligible to do Paralympic sport.

I wrecked my knee in August 2012, and it was actually during the Olympics when Lisa and also Allison McNeill were coaching the senior women's national team to their first Olympic Games. I wasn't directly affiliated with them, but because she was my coach in university, I'd say the university really got behind that Olympic buzz. And when I wrecked my knee a few months later, she kind of just sat me down and explained that these were the experiences from London, and that I could also potentially have those experiences.

At the same time, she got me involved with coaching, and Bruce Craven, from Saskatchewan, who was training me at the time, also got me involved in the exercise physiology component.

In the careers I'm pursuing right now, both of which are high-performance and sport-related, I'm never seen being female as an obstacle. It's just a norm, too, and it's all right to pursue that.

That's kind of my sporting background and how I'm here today.

• (1230)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, then.

We'll move on to Whitney Bogart.

Ms. Whitney Bogart (Paralympic Athlete, As an Individual): My story is a little different. I'm visually impaired. I have albinism, so I was born with it. I am from a small town in northwest Ontario and my family were basically the only ones there with visual impairments, but we grew up playing sports. My parents put me in anything that I wanted to do. Often it was co-ed and often I was one of the only girls. It could be because it was a small town, but all of my friends were guys and we were friends just because of sport.

When I was getting to high-school age, my parents sat me down and talked to me, because my older brothers were already attending a provincial school for the blind in Brantford. It's a residential school, so I was only going to be home on weekends. I wasn't too keen on going but they told me my opportunities for sport would pretty much

end at high school if I chose to stay home. I didn't realize just how badly I could see; apparently it was pretty badly.

I ended up attending the school and I was introduced to any sport available to the visually impaired. There's swimming, track, whatever. I started with swimming, and then I found goalball. Goalball opened up a whole new world for me. I learned about the Paralympics when I was in grade 9. I didn't even know about it. I learned that I can play for Ontario. Then I learned that I can play for Canada. I thought, "This is pretty cool". I started with goalball and from day one I had to kind of always push for the spots that I wanted, and to get where I wanted. I made the national team after Athens, and I've been on the team every year since except the Beijing team. I was not selected for it.

I have lots of experience internationally with goalball and I've been to two Paralympic Games. It has just been amazing, the opportunities that are given to us, as the others have already said, with the stuff we got to do. Even yesterday, there were opportunities that the average person doesn't get. I have so many people who are jealous about me getting to do my selfie with Mr. Trudeau. It was pretty amazing.

My sporting history is pretty simple. I found the sport I wanted to do and I just pushed for it. That's my history.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

We'll move on to Ms. Gauthier.

Ms. Shelley Gauthier (Paralympic Athlete, As an Individual): I have it written out because part of my disability is memory problems. I'm going to read it, if that's okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): That's perfectly fine.

Ms. Shelley Gauthier: I have physical education and physiotherapy degrees, just for you to get an idea of my background. I participated at the University of Western Ontario in ice hockey and then I did a physiotherapy degree at the University of Toronto, where I participated in soccer and ice hockey. I now compete in the individual sport of para-cycling because post-head injury, team sports would not work for me.

I have tried basketball in a wheelchair and sledge hockey. There are only elite opportunities to play, and there's very little female opportunity in sledge hockey, so there is no grassroots or educational opportunities that exist for those.

There are three points that I'd like to make about female disabled sports. That's a little different from able-bodied sport.

First of all, sports are different for a person with a disability. City accessibility committees seem to worry about physical structures such as curbs and ramps. Little thought is given to sport mobility devices that disabled women use for fitness and what assistance they need to use the mobility device to successfully do a workout or sport. No grassroots programs are in existence to allow for the disabled woman to set goals to become involved in elite sports, so basically in the beginning, disabled people sit in their houses and don't know how to get involved. There aren't any opportunities to get involved in many places across our country.

Second, active supervision and leadership are lacking for disabled female athletes. Often there are facilities such as pools adapted for disabled athletes. Coaches and activity partners are required at the grassroots recreational level to provide a program for female disabled youth and adults. This needs to be provided. Cities boast about having accessible pools where you can use a ramp to get in, but they don't have any programs to accept disabled people. Females and males can go to the pool, but then how do they get in? How do they swim? They need either an activity buddy or someone, a staff member, there to walk with them or get them into the water and get them moving.

• (1235)

Third, in elite disabled women's sport, few females are coaches and are providing leadership. In my para-cycling team, there are no female coaches or managers. No form of leadership at the elite level is female.

Thirdly, what about facilities and time given by cities, schools, or universities to female disabled sports? It doesn't seem to exist. There are no grassroots or recreational programs for female disabled sports. If somebody at U of T wants to go into a program or wants to play inner tube water polo and they're disabled, there are no opportunities for them yet.

Disabled women are taxpayers too, so we need to get facilities and cities involved, because 16% of Canadians are disabled, and that number is just going to go up.

• (1240)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you. I think we're getting close to our time there, so I'm going to have to move to the questions.

First, we'll go to Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much. I appreciate what you all shared very much.

If you felt that yesterday was powerful for you, I have to say, as an elected MP, it was extremely powerful for me as well. It made me so proud of what you've done, what you do, and how we need to do more to help.

Listening to all of you speaking, it's extremely touching. You talked about your experience with the wheelchair and beginning to choose a sport. I just finished reading a biography of Terry Fox, and that's what he did. He was playing wheelchair basketball for awhile and trying to learn the game as well, but the challenges that you've all been through are just amazing. The outlook that you have is something we could all learn from. This is the first piece, which is so important.

I thank you very much for everything you've done and everything you do, but we need to do more. I was not aware that 16% of Canadians are disabled. That's a very high number. We talk about lenses. We'd better put this lens on and we'd better put it on quickly because we need to do more.

I have a couple of quick questions that I'd like to ask. First, realizing that there are really positive movements for paralympians in Canada and the world, what do you believe we should do to continue to inspire female participation in sports, as you people are

doing? You shared some examples, but if any of you would like to tell us what else we could do as a government to try to get more women and girls participating in sports?

Ms. Tracey Ferguson: I think because I've been involved in the sports system for so long, I've seen it evolve. There are a number of policies that have been enacted by government, including women and sport policies, and policies for athletes with disabilities, that encourage inclusion and promote dedicated funding for those avenues and for promoting opportunities for people with disabilities.

Through some of the sport programs of the Canadian Paralympic Committee and our national sport organizations, such as Canada Basketball with Wheelchair Basketball Canada as a parallel organization, they go out to communities and inform small towns. If there's one kid in a wheelchair, how can that school get involved? We can bring in other wheelchairs, if they want to play wheelchair basketball. How do they pursue avenues to access equipment funds? Whether it's through CPC or the NSOs, those programs need support. The legislation that created them has advanced the movement, but it needs to go further. I think that's a really strong one; we've made some steps, but we can't just rest on those laurels. We need to advance them.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Would anyone else like to touch on that?

Ms. Erica Gavel: I agree with Tracey that we're moving forward, including with the partnership between Canada Basketball and Wheelchair Basketball Canada. Even in the school system, we need to incorporate wheelchair sport as part of the curriculum. In Saskatchewan, we have the Saskatchewan Wheelchair Sports Association, and they have a bunch of chairs. Schools are reaching out to it, but it's not mandated. The way the chairs are, anyone can play. I think that would be a step in the right direction.

• (1245)

Ms. Shelley Gautier: I think it's educating people about what's happening. In Ontario, the law says that everyone is equal, and so technically they have to provide disabled sport for people in schools, universities, and communities. Nobody has gone to court to test it, and because of that, it hasn't been said that you have to do this. We have this law in Ontario, and I think it's by educating.... I'm trying to educate them at U of T. I met with the president and informed him that we have to get something in here so people can get active and not only study.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Those are exceptional suggestions. In education the curriculum needs to reflect that aspect, which is crucial.

I love the point you brought forward, Shelley, about challenging. Are municipalities, communities, and school systems truly doing as much as they can? That's the question. That's the challenge. Your point of going to the swimming pool, how you would get in, and what programs are there to help you, is totally amazing.

I'm emotionally caught up, because you allowed me to better understand this, and hopefully I'm a better person today.

I'll leave my comments at that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): That's not just because he's a former school principal as well. Those are very good points.

If it's fine, we'll move to Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: I thank all of you for coming today. It was a pleasure meeting some of you yesterday at the luncheon, then on the floor of the House, as well as at the reception afterward. It was a great time.

Yes, Tracey, you and I had that conversation, and you definitely are feisty.

I want to ask a number of question and try to get through as many as I can.

Goalball is a great sport. It's great to watch. During the Paralympics, it was one of the ones that was shown the most. I believe there should have been more Paralympic sports shown in Canada.

Are there programs in Canada that do this in the schools so they can educate Canadians?

Ms. Whitney Bogart: From my understanding, as Shelley was saying, they were trying to put disabled sport in the school system in Ontario.

There's a whole package you can buy to have the kids learn goalball, and it comes with everything you need. Goalball is a little more complicated, because you need to tape the floor, you have eyeshades, and a specific ball. It's not like any other sport and people don't understand it, and so it's not as easy to bring in. But it's supposed to be brought into school gym class as a sport taught to the kids.

Usually it's only taught when there is a visually impaired student in the class. If that student is no longer in the class, they no longer do goalball. I've done so many demos with kids, and they love the sport, but then they never play it again.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: They forget about it, and they never see it again unless—

Ms. Whitney Bogart: Until we come back again.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: That's right. Okay, great. Thank you.

You're all on the Paralympic team, and this study is on women in sport. From your own experiences—and if you feel this question might be putting you in jeopardy with the powers above, feel free not to answer it—do you see any discrepancy between the male and female versions of AAP funding?

• (1250)

Ms. Whitney Bogart: At least in goalball, it's actually equal. I can say for women and men, our national teams, money-wise it's always been equal, and our AAP is equal. We're lucky in that way.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Does anyone else want to...?

Ms. Shelley Gauthier: Do men get more than women?

Ms. Whitney Bogart: No.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: I'm just wondering if you've ever seen or come across any of these issues, just so we can make sure we're not seeing that treated differently. My assumption is that it isn't; I just want clarification that you're not seeing or hearing about it. The reality is that when we're dealing with other sports, some get sponsors, etc., and that's a challenge.

Ms. Tracey Ferguson: I think the government support has elevated the visibility of Paralympic sport and sport for athletes with disabilities. Without that federal support, we wouldn't have the ability we now have to seek out sponsors. Because we had no visibility, what could we market to them? Once the federal government raised it to the status of "Here's your funding; here's your baseline", and we got some coverage of the Paralympics, whether on CBC online or elsewhere, the visibility of our sport increased. As you said, when people see it on TV... I got emails from strangers during the games asking me a million questions. They would say, "It's a tremendous sport. You're a role model for my children". Their children aren't disabled, but they just really had a passion for wheelchair basketball and an enthusiasm. If we're not visible, that doesn't happen. We can't tap other marketing sources.

We've been very fortunate with the policy that existed to ensure there's baseline funding and some equality between men and women in sports at the federal level.

Now, in the public realm, the funding that's available and the access to sponsorship are slightly different.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you.

Erica, you mentioned how big an influence your coaches and your role models have had on you over the years, in particular, Lisa, and what she's done for you.

Have you all had the same experience that Erica has in having female coaches as you've gone through?

Ms. Whitney Bogart: In my career, I've had one female coach who was a national level coach, and I had a female provincial coach, but it's been mostly male coaches.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Tracey.

Ms. Tracey Ferguson: I've had very few female coaches, but some assistant female coaches that the head coach was trying to groom into a coaching position. That's definitely an area we need to improve upon so that we will see female leadership and support the development of female athletes transitioning into coaching, or we provide avenues for female coaches to have more experience and exposure so they can step into those head coaching positions. But opportunity needs to be provided for that to happen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Shelley.

Ms. Shelley Gauthier: From my opportunity in elite sport, I've always had a male coach, except for in the four years at U of T, when I played ice hockey, and Niki Nicolaou was my coach.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: We talked a bit about coaching, but how do you see our getting more women involved in coaching, providing them with that training background so we can continue to have those coaches for you? Do you foresee yourselves becoming coaches once you decide your career is done?

Ms. Erica Gavel: Currently, I'm pursuing a career in coaching. It starts from the top down. From what I've heard, people are more likely to hire people similar to themselves. The people at the top right now are generally males. There are fewer coaching jobs for women in Canada. Another problem is that you don't want to separate the two, but there are a lot of men coaching women's sports, getting those coaching jobs, and there aren't a lot of women getting those men's coaching jobs. Girls are different from guys. They operate differently. From my experience, from a mentorship standpoint it's harder to work with a male coach than it is with a female, just based on gender. That can push people away from pursuing those mentorship opportunities.

●(1255)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Ms. Gavel.

I'll go to Mr. Nantel.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

In French we say that you are *inspirant*, that you're very inspiring for us. Clearly, it's outstanding, and we did have a very nice moment yesterday. Again, it was a very good opportunity for us to encounter all the challenges you've been facing.

Mrs. Gauthier, you have a very active foundation, and you're very active in spreading the word about the issues you are facing and trying, if I am not mistaken, to propel and to stimulate the activity and make it better known. I'm looking at your bio and I notice that when you said you were stuck in your living room watching TV wondering if you could do something like this, you are actually pointing at a very important detail. Most of the time here we've been talking about giving access to sports, making sports more appealing to young girls, but you are referring to an adult situation.

Is it much different for a Paralympic athlete? You're not in a Paralympic sport if you're stuck at home and you look at this and say, "What can I do?" How can we reach out to you? How did you get in touch with the Paralympic competition spirit?

Ms. Shelley Gauthier: I think the idea of getting a bigger grassroots level is really important. It's like hockey. Kids go and play and they say, "Oh, I want to be like that person". Then there's a pool to grab them from.

With disabled people, get them to get out and, for example, to ride a bicycle, or to ride a tandem with somebody, if they have a visual impairment. You can get them out of their house. You can get them socializing with an individual, and they can go for a beer or they go for an ice cream afterward. Then they think, "I kind of like this. Maybe I'm going to try to be elite". My foundation is trying to get adults involved, and we do go to the school in Brampton and get high school students involved. We're doing that. I'd love to get kids involved, because that way they can have dreams and hopes to do more later, and get that working.

I think, right now, just getting people involved is very important. I have played sports all my life. I started playing soccer when I was six years old and I went to the Ontario Cup, and I went to Canada Cup. I went all over the country playing, and that was really important. I stayed in Canada to go to university. I was a goalie, so I could have gotten a scholarship in the United States and maybe stayed there. But I'm proud to be Canadian and I'm happy I'm here.

Getting hopes and dreams in disabled people's lives and getting them involved in recreation is way more important than saying, "Let's go find the elites". I think by getting young people and young adults involved, we can get more elites that way.

●(1300)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I can clearly see the passion you have in sharing the fun of doing sports. We had testimony in that range, too, with someone trying to tell us.... He was not actually relating it to women in sports, but saying that there were competitive sports and also leisure sports. The fact that we stigmatize it with performance and competition may turn some people away.

I have to ask you, and anyone else on the panel here, are there more men than women getting interested in Paralympic sports? If so, why would that be?

Mr. Martin Richard (Executive Director, Communications and Marketing, Canadian Paralympic Committee): Maybe I can jump in here.

It's interesting, because if we look at our Rio team, we had 50% from both genders. Men and women were represented equally on the athletes' side of things.

Where the difference was, as mentioned earlier, was in the coaching. There were fewer female coaches. We had 20% female coaches versus 80% on the male side. I think that's where there's an opportunity to potentially bring more female coaches into the system to access the elite level, such as the Paralympic team.

But as far as the participation base is concerned, it's equal at both levels. That's a statistic we're very proud of, because we're taking the right steps to encourage women to be an equal part of our sport with men.

I think overall we need to make the sport more accessible and more visible to all Canadians, whether it's through programs, as Whitney mentioned earlier—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: [Inaudible] like Mrs. Ferguson said, they were mostly guys.

Mr. Martin Richard: Yes. Exactly.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Is it the case in all disciplines? Is it mostly guys? For you in goalball?

Ms. Whitney Bogart: Yes. We're lucky at our nationals to have four women's teams, but usually a couple of provinces have to combine. The men are easily there with six or more teams.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: So this is depriving women of that satisfaction of doing this activity. Coaches, again, in this situation will help out.

Ms. Gauthier, what can trigger somebody, let's say you, in your living room, watching TV, to say, I want to get involved again in sports? What makes this situation more productive for a man so they respond better and say, well, I'm going to go and do sports? Why do more men than women respond, according to you?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): There's time for a very quick answer.

Ms. Shelley Gauthier: I don't understand the question.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It's okay. I'll get to you later.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Okay. Mr. Breton.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know we've already mentioned it, but I want to say again how impressed we were with the athletes who visited us yesterday. We're proud to have you as Canadian athletes in your respective sports. We know that you've worked extremely hard for many years. We were all very proud and honoured by your presence in the House of Commons. Thank you for representing Canada so well.

I'll follow up on the subject raised by Mr. Kitchen and Mr. Nantel. We spoke a great deal about coaching, and I think it's an important factor. Feel free to respond. Perhaps your male coaches are here. I have no idea.

Would you have been more comfortable or successful and would you have liked the sport more if you had had female coaches in your respective sports? You can speak for yourselves or for other people you know. Some women have said that they are more comfortable with a female coach. Would you have been even more successful if you had had female coaches instead of male coaches?

• (1305)

[*English*]

Ms. Erica Gavel: I can go first. It doesn't make a difference so much at the games, but it's the whole relationship piece in the process leading up to the games, and it also depends on the individual as well.

In general, from my personal experiences, in terms of communication, it's easier to communicate with and relate to a female coach. There's also a lot of stress at this level, from a female perspective. Long term, I want to have a family and kids. I know at the beginning, it stressed me out in thinking that if I pursue this, this is my time frame. After talking to female coaches who have gone through the whole process, I found it really nice to be able to relate to people who have been in the same situation and are successful with those things that might come across as barriers.

From a performance standpoint, I don't see a difference in terms of systematic decision-making. I can't say that males are more qualified than females in understanding the sport systems and situations that

happen in a game. It's more that it influences the process and your development as an athlete, just by decreasing the stressors.

Ms. Shelley Gauthier: I'd like to say that I agree with Erica.

Ms. Whitney Bogart: My experience is the opposite of Erica's. I've had much better experiences with my male coaches than I did with my female coach.

She referred to wanting to have a family and stuff. In my case, after London, my plan was to take the year off to have my first child. I didn't feel comfortable speaking to my female coach about this. I did end up taking the year off. I actually have a three-year-old daughter. I was able to come back and make the Rio team, which was my goal.

Then I had a full-male coaching staff, high-performance staff for Rio. I was more comfortable with them and speaking with them about my goals for the next four years, which also included another year off to have another child.

I know it's an individual thing, and I do agree that we need to see more female coaches, but my personal experience is that my male coaches have been better for me, personally and competitively.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Tracey, did you want to comment on this?

Ms. Tracey Ferguson: In my experience as a high-performance athlete, what I want is the best person for the job. I don't care. I'm going to be 100% honest. I want the best-trained coach: male, female, Canadian, or international. I just want the best person for the job, flat out.

What I do want is the opportunity for women to be coaches, for a system to support their development. I think currently there are some barriers, whether patriarchal attitudes or history, that prevent them. I think they have to fight harder, honestly. I think it's harder for a woman to advance as a coach. I think Erica alluded to it.

As we've said before, you have to have a tough skin, whether it is in media or whatever. Women coaches have to. Unfortunately, that's the reality. It would be nice to see some of those barriers removed. Whether that's through policy development, I don't know, honestly.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: In any case, I hope you become coaches because you're inspiring women, as Mr. Nantel said earlier. You're also caring women. I think that, for young girls, for other athletes and for our country, you're extremely good people.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Okay. We will go to Mr. Waugh then, for five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's a very emotional day. Thanks, Erica.

My son coached one of the Paralympians at the club level. We had a great moment yesterday in our household. Let's start there. He's with a swimming club, or was, in Saskatoon, and one of the swimmers certainly had a great opportunity in our province. Samantha Ryan is her name. They treated her like gold. I have to say this. She was one of them. Coaching-wise, they did a very good job, but they were lacking in women's high-performance coaching and swimming. I don't see that in our province.

I have my 26-year-old son who has gone through the competition, and he seemed to latch onto her. Man, the stress she went through in July. I was lucky enough, because I've been in sports all my life. I talked to my son. She had a very tough time in July, as you guys know, going to the Olympics—the stress, the time, the training. Can you talk about that?

We don't often see that, but I did because I had my son dealing with it, and he needed help. You guys are so high performance, and yet I just remember a meltdown incident that happened in July prior to the Paralympics. I'm not sure he was totally capable of handling it, but obviously he did fairly well.

Do you have any thoughts, Erica, or anybody?

Ms. Erica Gavel: It's a very interesting thing that you sign up for when you decide to pursue an Olympic or Paralympic experience. One way I've described it to people is to imagine saving for your entire life to buy a house and you go to the real estate agency and give him all your money and you don't get the house.

As athletes, we work 24 hours a day. Every decision we make throughout that day is based on performance, and it's incredibly stressful. We're expected to train five to six hours a day. Most of us don't have time to work part-time or full-time jobs in big years, but then we're usually expected to centralize and pay rent and expenses. It's stressful from the financial aspect. Mentally it's tough, because we have to leave our friends and family most of the year. Physically, it's very demanding. You're tired a lot of the time, and being physically tired affects you emotionally.

Honestly, I didn't realize how stressed I was the last four years until I made the team and I cried for two hours. I didn't realize how stressed I was, and I didn't even know why I was crying—I was just crying. I think that's when I learned it is pretty stressful trying to make Olympic or Paralympic teams.

I always think about the people who didn't make the team, and I have a lot of compassion for them because they did everything we did. It just didn't fall in their favour.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's a good comment because four years is a long time.

Ms. Erica Gavel: It is. It's a lot of sacrifice.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What are your thoughts, Whitney?

I just remember the goalball, and the team from Saskatchewan won the world's a number of years ago in Korea, I think it was. They came back. We had them on a pedestal for a full year. They were the sports team of the year in our city, Amy Alsop and all those people—

Ms. Whitney Bogart: I didn't play with Amy too much, actually. She was a bit before my time. Four years is a long time, but it goes by really quickly.

When I think of what happened, when I look back at the time between London and Rio, at what we did... I had to take what would be my maternity leave while I was pregnant, because I couldn't physically play goalball. You can't get hit with a ball. It's not ideal for the baby growing. Then I had to come back. She was born at the end of May, and I was back on the court training in the summer, and I was back into the full season in September or October. I was bringing my three- or four-month-old with me on trips and to tournaments and practices.

I added the extra tiredness and stress of being an elite athlete to that of having a baby. I'd never change it, but I had all this on top of it, and then being visually impaired and having to train, as we do, about 20 or so hours a week. We don't drive, so we're busing everywhere, so I'm spending a couple of hours a day on a bus on top of training. I don't have time to work and raise my daughter. People don't realize the mental drain that you get from being an elite athlete, especially one with a disability. You have extra challenges on top of it.

Then you get to the Paralympics; you meet your goal of making the team. Then you go and you don't meet your goal there, and you're instantly.... I remember, we lost our quarter-final in Rio and that night I was planning my next four years. What am I going to do? Am I going to take the next year off? Am I going to have another baby? Am I going to wait until after Tokyo? Do I want to go to Tokyo? Do I want to make this commitment? It was literally six hours after we lost our game and I was already planning the next four years of my life.

● (1315)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): I just want to say thank you to all of you for being here today.

This has been so inspirational for us all as well, as my colleagues have already mentioned. I just want to reiterate it as the person who happens to be in the chair today.

You all said, as Mr. Samson indicated, that you're proud to be able to be here. I have to reiterate what he said. We are very, very proud of your being here and giving us your recommendations and thoughts on education processes and other areas that we can expand on in our report here to try to make sure that we get more women involved in sport, and particularly on the Paralympic side as well.

I want to commend all of you for being here and being such great role models for us as well.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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