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Summative Evaluation of the Athlete Assistance Program

Final Report

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Submitted to:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iv
RÉSUMÉ	xviii
1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT	1
1.1 Program Description	1
1.2 Program Context and Constraints on the Evaluation	3
2. EVALUATION ISSUES AND METHODOLOGY	5
2.1 Evaluation Issues	5
2.2 Evaluation Methodology	6
2.3 A note on Presentation of the Results	8
3. RATIONALE AND RELEVANCE	9
3.1 Alignment with Public Policy	9
3.2 Rationale for Federal Support of Athletes	10
3.3 Rationale for Government to Address Athletes' Needs	11
3.4 Relevance of Program Objectives	17
3.5 Need to Refine AAP Objectives	19
4. PROGRAM SUCCESS AND IMPACTS	21
4.1 Contribution to Improved Athletic Performance at International Games	22
4.2 Enabling Athletes to Combine Sport and Academic/Working Careers Without Undue Financial Burden, While Training Intensively	27
4.3 Incremental Impact on Training, Competitions, Performance and Education	29
4.4 Complementarity with Other Funding Sources	31
4.5 Identification of (Potential) High-Performance Athletes	32
4.6 Preparation for Post-Athletic Career	32
4.7 Retention of Athletes	34
4.8 Reaching Athletes who Need Assistance the Most	36
4.9 Reaching Athletes at Optimum Time	38
4.10 Attainment of Government-Wide Objectives	38
5. DESIGN AND DELIVERY	39
5.1 Funding Criteria and Level of Funding	39
5.2 AAP Design and Delivery	43
5.3 Adequacy of Performance Measurement Strategy	47
5.4 De-Carding and Re-Carding Athletes	48



6.	COST-EFFECTIVENESS/ALTERNATIVES AND BALANCE OF ATHLETE FUNDING	49
6.1	Cost-effectiveness/Alternatives	49
6.2	Balance Between the AAP and Other Sport Canada Assistance	53
7.	MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	55
7.1	Rationale and Relevance	55
7.2	Impacts/Success	57
7.3	Design/Delivery	59
7.4	Cost Effectiveness/Alternatives and Balance of Athlete Funding	60
7.5	Recommendations	61

Under separate cover:

Appendix A: AAP Context and Description

Appendix B: AAP Evaluation Methodology

Appendix C: Profile of AAP-Funded Athletes and Representativeness of Survey Data



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Program Description

The Athlete Assistance Program (AAP) is administered by Sport Canada, a branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Program provides living and training allowances, tuition and deferred tuition support, and special assistance for child care, relocation and retirement costs to high-performance athletes. It is the only Sport Canada program providing assistance directly to athletes.

The National Sport Federations (NSFs), each representing a sport, work in partnership with Sport Canada to deliver the assistance. The NSFs nominate athletes who meet the carding criteria of their sport. Sport Canada reviews all nominations, in consultation with the NSF, and selects the athletes to receive funding. The NSFs monitor compliance with training and competition requirements of the Athlete/NSF Agreement, which all funded athletes must sign to receive AAP funding.

Two levels of support are provided. Senior Cards are awarded to athletes who finish in the top 16 at Olympic/Paralympic Games and World Championships, and those athletes identified by the NSF as having the potential to achieve a top 16 performance. Development Cards are intended to support the developmental needs of younger athletes who clearly demonstrate the potential to achieve the Senior Card international criteria but are unable to meet the Senior Card criteria.

Development athletes receive \$6,000 per year, while Senior athletes receive \$13,200 per year. This tax-free assistance is paid directly to athletes on a bi-monthly basis. In the 2002/2003 fiscal year, \$15.2 million was dispersed in 77 sport disciplines to about 1,400 high performance athletes, 59 per cent of whom were Senior athletes.

The AAP's main goal is to contribute to enhanced performances of Canadian athletes at international sporting events. Its overall objective is "to enable athletes to combine their sport and academic or working careers without undue financial burden, while training intensively in pursuit of world-class performances". The AAP has five specific sub-objectives, which are:

- Identifying and supporting Canadian athletes achieving or, with the greatest potential to achieve, top 16 results at international events;
- Helping Canada's international-calibre athletes to excel at the highest competitive level, while ensuring they can prepare for a future career, or participate in full or part-time career activities in the present;
- Facilitating the attainment of athletes' long-range goals of excellence in Olympic/Paralympic or world competition;
- Complementing other government and National Sport Organization support programs; and
- Contributing to more general Government of Canada policy objectives.

Methodology and Evaluation Context

Multiple lines of evidence were used to address the evaluation issues, as follows:

- a review of program documentation, including program administrative data;
- a review of sport funding approaches in other countries;
- key informant interviews with representatives of Sport Canada and senior Canadian Heritage managers (5), NSF's (23), non-NSF National Sport Organizations (NSOs) (6), provincial governments (2) and sport experts associated with academic institutions (5); and
- a survey of 554 athletes who are current recipients of assistance under the Program.

Several contextual issues impinge upon the ability to attribute any observed successes specifically to the Program. These include: (1) the array of support services provided to athletes by NSF's, National Sport Centres (NSCs), other sport organizations, and other Sport Canada programs; (2) private sector endorsements, appearance fees and support programs for athletes; (3) the fact that Canadian athletes' performance is dependent on what other countries do in this respect and that sport globally is becoming increasingly commercialized and competitive; and (4) difficulties in obtaining timely and adequate performance data and the lack of expected results specified for the Program.

Rationale and Relevance

High-performance athletes in intensive training for world competitions continue to need income and training support. The AAP is clearly focussed on this need, which is a priority of the federal government. The Program is aligned with current government priorities in sport and with the strategic framework of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Some program objectives were found to be poorly articulated and some lacked measurable performance indicators, while most lacked expected result targets as well as benchmarks.

Rationale for Federal Government Funding of Sport and Athletes. A review of Sport Canada documents identified a number of arguments in favour of government support of high-performance sport. The arguments were typically stated in terms of the benefits that would not accrue to Canada without government funding for sport. Identified benefits included: enhanced world influence and image, enhanced values of respect and inclusion, the social and employment skills imparted to youth who are attracted into sport activities by the accomplishments of high-performance athletes at games, the economic benefits of sport, and the health benefits of participation in sport.

A review of documentation associated with the inception of the AAP in 1973 (as part of Game Plan "76") and its official implementation in 1977 reveals that there was little in the way of concrete evidence to corroborate athletes' unmet need for income support at the time and for governments' role in addressing this need through program support.

In the ensuing years, the chief argument offered for such support was that it was a challenge for athletes to combine training and competing with employment or education, with many athletes living below the poverty line as a result. Without financial assistance, it was argued, many promising high-performance athletes would leave their sport before reaching their peak. Evidence gathered in a 1996 survey conducted for Sport Canada (documented in *Status of the High-*

Performance Athlete in Canada, 1997) lent credence to the claim that high-performance athletes were enduring financial hardship while training.

Evidence from the current evaluation survey of AAP recipients corroborates the perception that athletes in training continue to experience financial difficulties. For most athletes in 2003, the AAP is the principal source of income, followed, to a much lesser extent, by employment, NSO support, and parental support. Many athletes incur net sport expenses (above what is covered by other sport service providers and programs) that consume much of their personal income. Furthermore, the income distribution of athletes is skewed to lower income categories compared to the income distribution of the overall population.

Alignment of Program Objective with Government Priorities. The review of program documents determined that the AAP is aligned with the federal government's policy for sport as articulated in the May 2002 *Canadian Sport Policy* agreed to by the federal government and 13 provincial/territorial governments, along with representatives of the sport community and organizations benefiting from sport.

Specifically, the Program addresses the "Enhanced Excellence" goal of the Policy, which is to expand the number of athletes achieving world-class results in international competitions. Under this goal, one of the government's commitments is to increase high-performance athletes' accessibility to financial support and other services to enable them to successfully compete on the world stage, which corresponds to the aim of the AAP.

Alignment with Strategic Framework of Canadian Heritage. The Program is aligned with the Department of Canadian Heritage strategic framework, specifically with the "Cultural Participation and Engagement" strategic objective. The AAP seeks to defray high-performance athletes' living and training costs to enable them to train and participate in training and athletic competitions, which are viewed as "cultural activities" by senior officials of the Department of Canadian Heritage and Sport Canada. Secondary impacts are observed in terms of athletes' successes in encouraging the wider public to participate in sport.

Clarity of Program Objectives. Many key informants said the Program's objectives lacked clarity. A number said that some objectives needed to be better articulated and required greater precision. One reason identified for the lack of clarity is the overlap between some objectives, for example between the sub-objective of (1) helping Canada's international-calibre athletes to excel at the highest competitive level and (2) facilitating the attainment of athletes' long-range goals of excellence in Olympic/Paralympic or world competition.

Some respondents pointed to the great difficulty in attaining the program objective of helping athletes to excel at the highest competitive level, while ensuring they can prepare for a future career or participate in full- or part-time career activities, particularly *full-time* work. Many key informants contended that the intention of the Program should be articulated simply as the provision of financial support to enable athletes to reduce their need to work or go to school, in order to free up time for training and competitions.

The lack of specified measurable performance indicators for some objectives and the lack of benchmarks and expected results for all objectives contribute to perceptions of imprecision in the Program's objectives and renders the measurement of objective attainment difficult.

Success/Impacts

The Program's precise role in athletes' performance at games could not be identified and athletes continue to experience financial hardship while training. Evidence was mixed or modest with regard to attainment of the Program's sub-objectives and intended impacts.

The evaluation was not able to determine definitively the extent to which the Program attained its objectives and intended impacts, because: (1) there are several other sources of support for athletes, making it difficult to attribute success or failure to the AAP; (2) Canadian athletes' performance is affected by what competing nations are doing in the area of support for high-performance sport; (3) not all objectives are clearly articulated or have measurable indicators associated with them; and (4) no objectives have stated expected results or benchmarks. The latter two reasons were addressed with rationale and relevance issues.

Contribution to Improved Athletes' Performances. Program data indicate that there has been improvement in athletes' performance over time. Since 1992, almost three-quarters of funded athletes in individual sports have improved their finishes at World Championships or Olympic Games, and a third of Development-level athletes progressed to a Senior-level. Key informants indicate that the AAP has contributed to the improved performance. However, it is impossible to attribute improved athlete performance uniquely to AAP assistance owing to the role played by several other forms of support and the lack of benchmarks and specified expected results.

Results for the second performance measure defined for the Program, top 16 finishes, are modest at best. While there have been increases in the number of Canadian athletes' top 16 finishes at the Olympics, controlling for the number of events entered reveals little progress. Over the last three summer Olympics (1992, 1996 and 2000), the number of top 16 finishes per event declined from 0.40 to 0.25. For the winter Olympics, there was also a decline in performance between 1994 and 1998, from 0.80 to 0.70, but an improvement between 1998 and 2002, to 0.90.

Combining Training with School/Work without Financial Hardship. Funded athletes are undergoing financial hardship while they combine training with work or school. The vast majority of AAP recipients attend school or work while they train. Most funded athletes reported being satisfied with current training levels and said that the 2000 increase in AAP assistance levels had a positive impact on their training. However, large numbers experience financial hardship by incurring sport expenses in excess of their total income.

Incremental Impact on Training, Competing, Performance and Education. Over three-quarters of athletes perceive that AAP assistance has had an incremental impact on their training, ability to attend sporting competitions and performance. That is, most athletes believe that, if the Program did not exist, they would be unable to participate in these activities. Athletes were evenly split on the extent to which the Program had an incremental impact on their education, however.

Complementarity: There is no specified measurable outcome indicator for the complementarity objective, which a small number of key informants pointed out. Nevertheless, the perception



among most key informants is that the Program complements other sport funding sources. Many key informants also pointed out that the degree of complementarity varies appreciably by sport, because the availability of funding sources varies by sport as well.

Athlete Identification: The majority of key informants and athletes said the Program has been effective in identifying athletes who will succeed in international competitions.

Preparation for a Post-Athletic Career: Program data indicate that the ratio of users of tuition support to all athletes receiving AAP assistance has remained about the same over the last four years, at 1:3, though the number of athletes receiving such support has increased. Yet, the survey data indicate that the majority (59 per cent) of funded athletes are attending school and, therefore, are preparing themselves for a post-athletic career.

Most key informants thought the Program has been at least somewhat successful in helping athletes prepare for a post-athletic career, in the sense of acquiring a post-secondary education. Preparation in terms of career counselling is provided to carded athletes by National Sport Centres, though the AAP also provides support to retiring athletes but only for four months. There was some confusion on the part of key informants as to what is covered by AAP tuition assistance.

Athlete Retention in Sport and in Canada: The evidence is stronger that the AAP contributes to retention of athletes in their sport than to retention in Canada.

Most athletes said the AAP played an important role in their decision to continue training at all (i.e., in their sport) and that the AAP's deferred tuition support encouraged them to continue. However, very few athletes mentioned, unprompted, the AAP as the reason they refused an offer to train elsewhere. Those who left the country most frequently mentioned better training facilities as the reason for doing so, which are outside the Program's mandate.

Key informants were more likely to say that the Program contributed to athlete retention in their sport than they were to say it kept athletes from leaving Canada. The reason is that, for certain sports, the level of competition necessary to enhance performance is insufficient in Canada, although, again, this has very little to do with the AAP.

Reaching Athletes at Optimal Time. Views were mixed with respect to whether or not AAP assistance was reaching athletes at the optimal time. Most athletes indicated that they had received AAP funding when they needed it the most. The majority of key informants thought that there should be a greater focus on Development-level athletes and that assistance should reach them at earlier stages in their development.

Cost-Effectiveness/Alternatives

The administration of the Program is considered “lean”, with National Sport Federations playing an active role in program delivery. Thus, the federal government would save very little by divesting itself entirely of the distribution of assistance. Moreover, only half the NSF representatives would want to take over delivery of the assistance.

Alternatives were identified more in terms of the coordinated delivery of *all* sport funding (including non-income support). Moreover, it could not be determined if the few alternative approaches that were suggested were in fact more cost-effective. Other countries also provide income support directly to athletes.

Only a fraction (3-4 per cent) of the Program’s expenditures are devoted to overhead (salaries and overhead). This is to a large extent because the NSFs play an active role as partners in delivery of the Program, in terms of assisting athletes with their funding application, nominating athletes for funding, reviewing the nominations, and monitoring their adherence to the funding agreement.

The evidence on the relative cost-effectiveness of the Program was purely perceptual. Representatives of non-Sport Canada organizations were evenly split as to whether or not the AAP’s approach to delivering assistance directly to athletes is the most cost-effective way of doing so. NSF representatives were also evenly split on whether or not the NSFs should take over the delivery of athlete assistance entirely.

Few key informants could provide specific examples of what they thought were more cost-effective ways of delivering assistance to athletes. Most framed their responses in terms of how *all* sport support could be better delivered, not just income support, and no evaluative evidence could be found on the effectiveness of these approaches. Many talked about the need for better coordination of all forms of athlete assistance. Some identified a need for a “one-stop shopping” single organization to deliver all sport funding at arm’s length from the government.

A scan of approaches to delivering assistance to athletes used elsewhere indicates that, in some countries (e.g., Australia), athletes are sequestered in training camps where their living and training costs are covered. Such athletes are also provided with advice and, in some cases, scholarships (e.g., New Zealand) to pursue further education or their future career. Some nations employ their top athletes in public sector jobs while they train. Some countries do have direct income support for athletes (e.g., United Kingdom). In these cases, the level of assistance depends on the “carding” level of the athlete, but in only one case (United Kingdom) could it be determined that the level of assistance depends on athletes’ means.

Program Design/Delivery

The Program's funding criteria were seen as fair. An appropriate performance measurement strategy was seen as being needed. Delivery of the Program was on the whole perceived to be satisfactory, but some gaps in service were observed.

Funding Criteria. Athletes were more amenable than key informants to continuing the two-level carding system. A number of key informants talked about the need to recognize and reward elite athletes. There was support among key informants and athletes for recognizing and rewarding athletes finishing in higher positions than the top 16, i.e., in the top eight or the medals. Others pointed to the need to identify athletes earlier in their careers. At the same time, others pointed to the need to identify athletes earlier in their careers.

NSF Delivery. Sport Canada managers said that the NSFs varied considerably in their scrutiny of athletes' applications for funding, their monitoring of athlete compliance regarding participation in training and competitions, and their discipline and review processes.

Athletes' satisfaction with different delivery elements was wide-ranging. The greatest proportion (74 per cent) reported being satisfied with the NSFs' communications and written materials in the language of their choice. However, only 57 per cent of athletes said the Athlete/NSF agreement adequately describes their (athletes') and the NSFs' obligations and responsibilities. Less than 60 per cent of athletes said they were satisfied with the NSFs' appeal procedures, their review of applications for special assistance and deferred tuition support, and their discipline procedures, even discounting those who had not been exposed to these processes.

Sport Canada Delivery. NSF satisfaction with most aspects of Sport Canada AAP delivery was generally high. Only a minority of NSF representatives, however, were satisfied with Sport Canada's linking of AAP support with other support for athletes, which takes place in the Sport Canada-NSF review of athlete funding nominations.

Among athletes, there was a wide range of satisfaction with different aspects of Sport Canada's delivery of the Program. Satisfaction was highest (70-80 per cent) with Sport Canada's communication in the language of athletes' choice and the timeliness of AAP payments. Much smaller majorities of athletes (55-58 per cent) were satisfied with the timeliness of the approval process and with Sport Canada's advice on AAP matters. A minority were satisfied with Sport Canada's review procedures in funding decisions. However, almost a third of the athletes had either not been exposed to the review procedures or did not respond to the question while an additional 30 per cent indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the procedures.

Performance Measurement Data. The Athlete Assistance Program Management Information System (AAPMIS) maintains much information that can be used to monitor athletes' performance, though it should be noted that the AAPMIS was originally designed as an administrative tool to track biographical and financial information on funded athletes.

The experience in this evaluation raises concerns about the organization of the data and the ability of Sport Canada to use the information to generate timely and clear performance measures. The



lack of benchmarks and specific expected outcomes is a concern in using these data to measure changes in athletes' performance levels over time.

There was a general lack of awareness among NSF representatives regarding the performance measurement strategy *per se*. Sport Canada representatives reported that the NSFs vary considerably in the extent to which they know about the strategy and provide performance data.

Management Response - Overview

Sport Canada notes that the overall conclusions of the evaluation are positive and supportive of the Athlete Assistance Program (AAP). The report concluded that there is a continued need for a program like the AAP to provide income support to high performance athletes in intensive training for world competitions. More specifically, 80 per cent of athletes surveyed rely to a large extent on AAP support and a large majority of athletes reported that the absence of the Program would have a negative impact on their training and ability to participate in competitions. The report also concluded that the AAP is well aligned with the Government of Canada's policy for sport and with the strategic framework of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The evaluation highlights areas in the AAP that require improvement. Most of these areas for improvement relate to performance measurement issues, were known to management, and will be acted upon before June 2005, when the Terms and Conditions and Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) are to be renewed by Treasury Board.

The evaluation also highlights the challenge of determining definitively the extent to which the Program has attained its objectives and intended impacts, as a number of other factors (e.g., the array of support services provided to athletes by National Sport Federations and National Sport Centres; the competitiveness of other countries; and private sector endorsements, appearance fees and support programs for athletes) also have an impact on athletic performance. Sport Canada will work with Corporate Review to develop an evaluation framework that addresses these confounding variables more effectively.

Recommendations

A. Design

1. *Articulation of Objectives:* A lack of clarity was observed in the Program's objectives, arising out of perceived lack of precision in some objectives, overlap between some objectives, and a lack of benchmarks and measurable performance measures for all objectives.

Recommendation: Clearly articulate the rationale and objectives of the Program and specify measurable performance indicators and benchmarks for each objective.

Management Response: Recommendation Accepted

The objectives of the AAP in the Terms and Conditions for the Program, as well as the performance indicators in the Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) will need to be revisited and modified in preparation for the next program evaluation. The RMAF currently in place, was developed in March 2001, when Treasury Board's requirement for RMAFs was relatively new. Since then, a number of other RMAFs have been developed for Sport Canada programs and initiatives (e.g., the Sport Support Program, 2003 Canada Winter Games and 2003 World Road Cycling Championships). The lessons learned from the development of these RMAFs and from the current evaluation will be applied to the revised AAP RMAF, which will be completed by March 2005.

Timing: March 2005**B. Success/Impacts**

2. Measurement of Impact: The experience of this evaluation indicates that it was not possible to disentangle the influence of AAP assistance on athletes' performance from other forms of support available for high-performance athletes in Canada, such as coaching and training assistance available through National Sport Centres and financial support from private sector sources.

Recommendation: Consolidate future evaluations of the AAP with the evaluations of other Sport Canada programs that support high-performance athletes.

Management Response: Recommendation Accepted

The AAP is one of several Sport Canada programs designed to assist in the development of high-performance sport. It is not intended to meet all the needs of Canada's high performance athletes. Other Sport Canada funding – for example, funding for national team training and competition available through the Sport Support Program – addresses other needs of these athletes. Since AAP support is intended to complement other support provided by Sport Canada, the Branch recognizes the importance of consolidating future evaluations of the AAP with other Sport Canada programs in the context of the contribution that the combination of all programs have on athletic performance at major international competitions. Sport Canada will work closely with Corporate Review to examine the possibility of developing such a model. The consolidated evaluation would be conducted in 2006-07 when the next Sport Support Program evaluation is scheduled to take place.

Timing: 2006-07



C. Delivery

3. Awareness of what Tuition Assistance Covers: There appeared to be a lack of awareness of what the tuition assistance covers.

Recommendation: Increase awareness of the types of education that are covered by AAP tuition support.

Management Response: Recommendation Accepted

Sport Canada will continue to take steps to increase awareness among athletes of the types of education that are covered by tuition support. Sport Canada has developed an AAP Handbook, which summarizes the AAP Policies, Procedures and Guidelines pertinent to athletes including tuition support, which is mailed each year to all carded athletes and their coaches. In addition, the Program's Policies, Procedures and Guidelines are distributed to all National Sport Federations and are available on Sport Canada's website.

Timing: Ongoing

4. Performance Measurement Data/Indicators: Sport Canada appeared to have difficulty in generating timely information from the Athlete Assistance Program Management Information System to measure athlete progression. There appeared to be a lack of awareness of a performance measurement strategy among some National Sport Federations. Some objectives did not have clear, measurable performance indicators and none had benchmarks against which progress could be tracked, nor had expected results targets been specified.

Recommendation: Implement an adequate performance measurement strategy, including measurable performance indicators linked to each objective's expected results, for which data are collected and appropriately organized to enable the generation of timely and usable outcome data. Ensure that National Sport Federations are made aware of the performance measurement strategy. Specify benchmarks and measurable expected results for all objectives and indicators.

Management Response: Recommendation Accepted

Sport Canada recognizes the need to revise the performance measurement strategy contained in the AAP Results-based Management and Accountability Framework in preparation for the next program evaluation. A revised RMAF will be completed by March 2005. Once Treasury Board has approved the performance measurement strategy in the revised RMAF, Sport Canada will take steps to communicate the strategy with National Sport Federations via annual review meetings.

Timing: March 2005



Sport Canada used the Athlete Assistance Program Management Information System (AAPMIS), a database used to assist with the administration of the program, to generate the majority of the performance data required for this evaluation. In order to improve the timeliness and utility of data for future AAP evaluations, the lessons learned from generating performance data through the AAPMIS will be applied to the revised performance measurement strategy.

Timing: March 2005

5. Athlete/NSF Agreement: A small majority of athletes stated that the Athlete/NSF Agreement inadequately described the obligations of the NSFs and the athletes.

Recommendation: Review the Athlete/NSF Agreement and ensure that the responsibilities of the parties are clearly specified.

Management Response - Recommendation Accepted

Fundamental to the program is a contract between the athlete and the sport (Athlete/NSF Agreement). The AAP Policies, Procedures and Guidelines, which are distributed to all NSFs each year, provide guidelines for the Athlete/NSF Agreement. Each year, AAP staff meet with each NSF to review athletes nominated for carding. During this meeting, AAP staff also review Athlete/NSF Agreements to ensure the responsibilities of the parties are clearly specified. AAP staff will continue to make recommendations and provide direction to NSFs to improve the Athlete/NSF Agreement.

Timing: Ongoing

6. NSF Delivery: National Sport Federations were said to exhibit inconsistency in their application of the carding criteria, scrutiny of athletes' applications, monitoring of athletes' compliance, and discipline and review processes. Only a minority or small majority of athletes expressed satisfaction the NSFs' appeals and disciplinary procedures, and their review of requests for special needs and tuition assistance.

Recommendation: Encourage National Sport Federations to consider improvements in many of their activities under the Program, including their monitoring of athletes' compliance and the review procedures in regards to tuition and special assistance, and appeals and discipline procedures.

Management Response - Recommendation Accepted

Sport Canada will continue to work closely with the National Sport Federations to ensure that the program is delivered effectively. Each year, AAP staff meet with each NSF to review athletes nominated for carding. These meetings are spread throughout the year and are generally planned to coincide with the start of each sport's annual carding cycle. The review meeting deals primarily with nominees for carding, athletes not being re-nominated for carding, confirmation of carding criteria, review of



Athlete/NSF Agreements, and any other issues affecting the delivery of the AAP. When necessary, Sport Canada will make recommendations or provide direction to the NSF during the annual review meeting in order to improve the delivery of the program.

Timing: Annually

The ADR-sport-RED program, which was implemented in January 2002, is expected to contribute to improvements in the appeals and discipline areas. The Program offers arbitration and mediation services as well as resources, such as: model policies for internal rules regarding appeals for sport organizations and models of arbitration and mediation clauses.

Timing: Ongoing

7. Sport Canada Delivery: A minority of NSF representatives expressed satisfaction with, and many were uncertain about, Sport Canada's linkage of AAP support with other support for athletes during the review process. A small majority of athletes were satisfied with the timeliness of Sport Canada's funding decisions and with the advice provided to athletes on AAP matters. A minority of athletes were satisfied with Sport Canada's review procedures in funding decisions, even discounting the third of athletes who did not answer the question and recognizing that an additional 30 per cent indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Recommendation: Sport Canada should consider improvements in the linkage of AAP support with other support for athletes, the timeliness of funding decisions, the advice it provides athletes on AAP matters, and its review procedures in AAP decisions.

Management Response - Recommendation Accepted

Sport Canada is currently taking steps to realign its funding programs, including the AAP, with the Canadian Sport Policy through the development of a Strategy for Excellence Programming. It is expected that the Strategy will more effectively link Sport Canada's programs for high performance athletes.

Timing: Fall 2004

Oftentimes, the approval process is delayed because the annual meeting between AAP staff and each NSF to review the eligibility of athletes nominated for carding is not held prior to the commencement of the sport's carding cycle. This was identified as a key risk when Sport Canada developed the Risk Based Audit Framework for the program in 2002-03 and Sport Canada is taking measures to address this issue. For example, AAP staff send out a reminder letter and application forms to NSFs two to three months before the review meeting and Program Officers who liaise with the NSFs remind them of deadlines. In addition, AAP staff review the carding cycle of NSFs that are frequently late in scheduling review meetings to determine if a new carding cycle should be negotiated between the NSF and Sport Canada.



Timing: Ongoing

Only a very small minority of athletes expressed dissatisfaction with the advice Sport Canada provides to them on AAP matters (nine per cent) and its review procedures in AAP decisions (six per cent). Nevertheless, Sport Canada believes that efforts should be made to eliminate all dissatisfaction if possible. Additional positions have recently been staffed within the AAP Unit, which will help ensure that the Program is administered more efficiently and effectively. Sport Canada management will communicate the findings of the evaluation with AAP staff so they are aware that there is some dissatisfaction with the advice provided to them, and will ensure that accurate and timely advice is provided to athletes who request it.

Timing: Ongoing



RÉSUMÉ

Description du Programme

Le Programme d'aide aux athlètes (PAA) est administré par Sport Canada, une direction générale du ministère du Patrimoine canadien. Il offre aux athlètes de haut niveau des allocations de subsistance et d'entraînement, un soutien pour les frais de scolarité ainsi que des crédits différés pour frais de scolarité, et une aide pour les besoins spéciaux comme les frais de garde d'enfants, les frais de réinstallation et une aide pour la retraite. Le PAA est le seul programme de Sport Canada qui fournit une aide financière directe aux athlètes.

Les fédérations nationales de sport (FNS), qui représentent chacune un sport, travaillent en partenariat avec Sport Canada pour distribuer les fonds. Les FNS recommandent des athlètes qui satisfont aux critères d'octroi des brevets dans leur sport. Sport Canada examine toutes les candidatures, en consultation avec la FNS en question, et choisit les athlètes qui recevront une aide financière. La FNS surveille le respect des exigences d'entraînement et de compétition prévues dans l'entente la liant avec l'athlète, celle-ci devant être signée par tout athlète souhaitant bénéficier du PAA.

Il y a deux niveaux d'aide. Les brevets seniors sont attribués aux athlètes qui se classent parmi les 16 meilleurs aux Jeux olympiques et paralympiques et aux championnats du monde, ainsi qu'aux athlètes désignés par la FNS comme ayant le potentiel de réaliser une telle performance. Les brevets de développement visent à appuyer le développement des jeunes athlètes qui ont nettement prouvé qu'ils ont le potentiel d'atteindre le niveau du brevet senior international, mais qui sont incapables de répondre aux critères d'octroi des brevets seniors.

L'allocation annuelle s'élève à 6 000 \$ dans le cas des brevets de développement et à 13 200 \$ dans le cas des brevets seniors. Elle est non imposable et est versée directement aux athlètes tous les deux mois. En 2002-2003, un montant de 15,2 millions de dollars a été réparti entre environ 1 400 athlètes de 77 disciplines sportives, dont 59 % étaient des athlètes seniors.

Le PAA vise surtout à aider les athlètes canadiens à améliorer leurs performances aux manifestations sportives internationales. Globalement, il s'agit de « permettre aux athlètes de poursuivre leur carrière sportive en même temps que leurs études ou leur carrière professionnelle sans fardeau financier excessif, tout en s'entraînant de façon intensive afin de réaliser des performances de calibre mondial ». Le PAA a cinq objectifs précis :

- identifier et appuyer les athlètes canadiens figurant parmi les 16 premiers à des manifestations internationales ou ayant le potentiel d'y parvenir;
- aider les athlètes canadiens de calibre international à exceller au plus haut échelon de la compétition tout en leur permettant de préparer leur carrière ou d'entreprendre des activités professionnelles à temps plein ou partiel;

- aider les athlètes à atteindre leurs objectifs d'excellence à long terme aux Jeux olympiques/paralympiques ou aux compétitions internationales;
- bonifier d'autres programmes de soutien du gouvernement et des organismes nationaux de sport;
- contribuer aux grands objectifs stratégiques du gouvernement.

Méthodologie et contexte de l'évaluation

Nous avons eu recours à de multiples modes de collecte de données pour nous attaquer aux divers points à évaluer, notamment :

- un examen de la documentation du Programme, y compris les données administratives;
- un examen des mécanismes de financement du sport adoptés dans d'autres pays;
- des entrevues auprès de répondants clés au sein de Sport Canada et de la haute direction de Patrimoine canadien (5), de FNS (23), d'organismes nationaux de sport (ONS) autres que des FNS (6) et de gouvernements provinciaux (2), ainsi que d'experts du sport rattachés à des établissements d'enseignement (5);
- une enquête auprès de 554 athlètes subventionnés actuellement par le PAA.

Il est difficile d'attribuer au Programme tout succès observé en raison de plusieurs problèmes d'ordre contextuel, entre autres : 1) la gamme de services de soutien dispensés aux athlètes par les FNS, les centres canadiens du sport (CCS), d'autres organismes de sport et d'autres programmes de Sport Canada; 2) les commandites du secteur privé, les cachets de présence et les programmes de soutien qui sont offerts aux athlètes; 3) le fait que la performance des athlètes canadiens est tributaire de ce que les autres pays font à ce chapitre et que le sport à l'échelle de la planète devient de plus en plus commercialisé et compétitif; 4) le fait qu'il soit difficile d'obtenir des données suffisantes et opportunes sur les performances et que des résultats attendus n'aient pas été précisés pour le Programme.

Justification et pertinence

Les athlètes de haut niveau qui s'entraînent de manière intensive en vue de compétitions internationales continuent d'avoir besoin d'un soutien pour le revenu et l'entraînement. Le PAA est de toute évidence axé sur ce besoin, qui constitue une priorité du gouvernement fédéral. Le Programme est aligné sur les priorités actuelles du gouvernement en matière de sport et sur le cadre stratégique du ministère du Patrimoine canadien. Nous avons trouvé qu'il y avait des objectifs du Programme mal formulés et que certains n'avaient pas d'indicateurs de rendement mesurables, tandis que la plupart n'étaient pas assortis de résultats attendus ni de points de référence.

Justification de l'aide financière que le gouvernement fédéral accorde au sport et aux athlètes. Un examen des documents de Sport Canada a permis de dégager un certain nombre d'arguments en faveur du financement du sport de haut niveau par l'État. Ces arguments concernent surtout les avantages dont ne bénéficierait pas le Canada si le gouvernement n'investissait pas dans le sport. Parmi les avantages relevés, citons l'amélioration de l'image et



de l'influence du pays dans le monde, le renforcement du respect et de l'inclusion en tant que valeurs, la transmission de compétences sociales et professionnelles aux jeunes qui sont attirés par les activités sportives grâce aux réalisations d'athlètes de haut niveau dans le cadre de Jeux, la croissance économique et l'amélioration de la santé découlant de la pratique du sport.

Selon un examen de la documentation liée à la création du PAA en 1973 (qui s'inscrivait dans le Plan des Jeux de 1976) et à sa mise en œuvre officielle en 1977, il y avait à l'époque peu de preuves concrètes de l'insatisfaction des besoins des athlètes en matière de soutien du revenu et du rôle du gouvernement pour ce qui est de répondre à ces besoins par le biais de programmes.

Au cours des années suivantes, le principal argument en faveur d'un appui du sport était que les athlètes avaient du mal à combiner l'entraînement et la compétition avec le travail ou les études, ce qui faisait que de nombreux athlètes vivaient sous le seuil de la pauvreté. Certains ont soutenu que sans aide financière, nombre d'athlètes de haut niveau prometteurs abandonneraient la pratique de leur sport avant d'avoir atteint le point culminant de leur carrière. Les éléments probants réunis dans une enquête menée en 1996 pour Sport Canada (cités dans le document intitulé *Situation de l'athlète de haute performance au Canada* (1997)) accréditaient le fait que les athlètes éprouvaient des difficultés financières alors qu'ils s'entraînaient.

Les résultats de l'enquête que nous avons menée auprès des bénéficiaires du PAA dans le cadre de la présente évaluation confirment la perception que les athlètes qui s'entraînent éprouvent encore des difficultés financières. Pour la plupart des athlètes en 2003, la principale source de revenu est le PAA, suivi, dans une mesure beaucoup moindre, de l'emploi, du soutien accordé par un ONS et de l'aide des parents. Beaucoup d'athlètes engagent des dépenses nettes liées au sport (autres que celles assumées par d'autres programmes et fournisseurs de services de sport), ce qui gruge une grande portion de leur revenus personnels. En outre, la répartition du revenu des athlètes est déviée vers les catégories de faible revenu comparativement à la répartition du revenu de l'ensemble de la population.

Alignement des objectifs du Programme sur les priorités du gouvernement. Notre analyse des documents du Programme révèle que le PAA est aligné sur la *Politique canadienne du sport* adoptée en mai 2002 par le gouvernement fédéral et les 13 gouvernements provinciaux et territoriaux, ainsi que par les représentants de la communauté sportive et des organismes tirant profit du sport.

Plus précisément, le PAA s'attaque à l'objectif d'« excellence accrue » de la *Politique*, qui vise à augmenter le nombre d'athlètes obtenant des résultats de calibre mondial dans des compétitions internationales. Selon cet objectif, l'un des engagements du gouvernement est de rendre plus accessibles aux athlètes de haut niveau le soutien financier et d'autres services de sorte qu'ils puissent connaître du succès sur la scène mondiale, ce qui correspond au but du PAA.

Alignement sur le cadre stratégique de Patrimoine canadien. Le Programme est aligné sur le cadre stratégique du ministère du Patrimoine canadien, en particulier l'objectif « participation et engagement dans le domaine culturel ». Entre autres, il vise à aider les athlètes de haut niveau à assumer leurs frais de subsistance et d'entraînement afin qu'ils puissent s'entraîner et



participer à des compétitions sportives, lesquelles sont considérées comme des « activités culturelles » par la haute direction du ministère du Patrimoine canadien et de Sport Canada. Les succès remportés par les athlètes entraînent des répercussions indirectes en ce sens que le grand public est encouragé à participer au sport.

Clarté des objectifs du Programme. Les répondants clés ont été nombreux à affirmer que les objectifs du Programme n'étaient pas clairs. Certains ont dit que quelques objectifs devraient être mieux articulés et davantage précisés. L'une des raisons citées quant au manque de clarté est le chevauchement entre des objectifs en particulier, par exemple celui 1) d'aider les athlètes canadiens de calibre international à exceller au plus haut échelon de la compétition et 2) d'aider les athlètes à atteindre leurs objectifs d'excellence à long terme aux Jeux olympiques/paralympiques ou aux compétitions internationales.

Certains répondants ont souligné la grande difficulté de réaliser l'objectif consistant à aider les athlètes à exceller au plus haut niveau de la compétition tout en veillant à ce qu'ils puissent se préparer à une future carrière ou entreprendre des activités professionnelles à temps partiel et plus particulièrement à temps *plein*. Beaucoup des répondants clés ont soutenu que l'intention du Programme devrait être formulée simplement, soit celle de fournir une aide financière aux athlètes pour que ceux-ci aient moins besoin de travailler ou de poursuivre leurs études, disant ainsi de plus de temps pour s'entraîner et participer à des compétitions.

Comme il n'y a pas d'indicateurs de rendement mesurables précis pour certains objectifs et qu'aucun des objectifs n'est assorti de points de référence et de résultats attendus, cela accentue la perception que les objectifs du Programme sont imprécis et rend difficile la mesure de la réalisation des objectifs.

Succès et répercussions

Le rôle exact que joue le Programme dans la performance des athlètes aux Jeux n'a pu être cerné, et les athlètes qui consacrent beaucoup de temps à l'entraînement continuent d'éprouver des difficultés financières. Les preuves quant à la réalisation des objectifs et des répercussions escomptées du Programme étaient mixtes ou modestes.

Dans le cadre de l'évaluation, nous n'avons pu déterminer avec certitude la mesure dans laquelle le Programme a réalisé ses objectifs et ses répercussions escomptées, pour les raisons suivantes : 1) il y a plusieurs autres sources de soutien qui s'offrent aux athlètes, ce qui rend difficile d'affirmer que le PAA a réussi ou non; 2) la performance des athlètes canadiens est tributaire de ce que les pays concurrents font dans le domaine du soutien du sport de haut niveau; 3) ce ne sont pas tous les objectifs qui sont clairement articulés ou sont accompagnés d'indicateurs mesurables; 4) enfin, aucun des objectifs n'est assorti de résultats attendus et de points de référence. Les deux dernières raisons ont été abordées dans la section sur la justification et la pertinence.

Contribution à l'amélioration de la performance des athlètes. Selon les données du Programme, la performance des athlètes s'est améliorée au fil des années. Depuis 1992, près des trois quarts des athlètes financés dans des sports individuels se sont mieux classés aux championnats du monde ou aux Jeux olympiques, tandis que le tiers des athlètes en développement ont accédé au niveau senior. Les répondants clés ont déclaré que le PAA a



contribué à l'amélioration de la performance. Cependant, il est impossible d'attribuer cette amélioration uniquement au PAA, étant donné le rôle que jouent plusieurs autres formes de soutien et l'absence de points de référence et de résultats attendus précis.

Les résultats concernant la deuxième mesure de rendement énoncée pour le Programme, soit les classements parmi les 16 premiers, sont au mieux modestes. Alors que le nombre d'athlètes canadiens terminant parmi les 16 premiers aux Jeux olympiques s'est accru, on constate peu de progrès une fois que l'on vérifie le nombre d'épreuves auxquelles sont inscrits des athlètes. Au cours des trois derniers Jeux olympiques d'été (1992, 1996 et 2000), le nombre de classements parmi les 16 premiers par épreuve a baissé, passant de 0,40 à 0,25. Dans le cas des Jeux olympiques d'hiver, on note une baisse de la performance entre 1994 et 1998, soit de 0,80 à 0,79, puis une remontée entre 1998 et 2002, qui atteint 0,90.

Possibilité de s'entraîner tout en étudiant ou en travaillant sans éprouver de difficultés financières. Les athlètes subventionnés éprouvent des difficultés financières lorsqu'ils combinent entraînement et études ou emploi. La grande majorité des bénéficiaires du PAA vont à l'école ou travaillent tout en s'entraînant. La plupart des athlètes financés ont dit être satisfaits du temps qu'ils consacraient actuellement à l'entraînement, précisant que la majoration des niveaux d'aide du PAA en 2000 avait positivement influé sur leur entraînement. Cependant, un bon nombre ont peine à arriver en raison des dépenses liées au sport qu'ils doivent engager et qui dépassent leur revenu total.

Incidence additionnelle sur l'entraînement, la compétition, la performance et les études. Plus des trois quarts des athlètes estiment que l'aide du PAA a eu une incidence additionnelle sur leur entraînement, leur capacité de participer à des compétitions sportives et leur performance. Autrement dit, la plupart des athlètes croient que sans le Programme, ils ne pourraient participer à ces activités. Par contre, les athlètes étaient également partagés quant à la mesure dans laquelle le Programme avait influé davantage sur leurs études.

Complémentarité. Il n'y a aucun indicateur de résultat mesurable précisé pour l'objectif de la complémentarité, ce qu'un petit nombre de répondants clés ont signalé. Néanmoins, la plupart des répondants clés trouvent que le Programme bonifie d'autres sources de financement du sport. Il sont beaucoup à avoir souligné que le degré de complémentarité varie grandement d'un sport à l'autre, parce que la disponibilité des sources de financement varie également d'un sport à l'autre.

Dépistage des athlètes. La majorité des répondants clés et des athlètes ont affirmé que le Programme avait permis de dépister les athlètes susceptibles de connaître du succès sur la scène internationale.

Préparation à l'après-carrière sportive. Selon les données du Programme, la proportion d'utilisateurs du soutien pour les frais de scolarité qui est offert à tous les athlètes bénéficiant du PAA est demeurée à peu près la même ces quatre dernières années, soit 1 sur 3, bien que le nombre d'athlètes se prévalant de ce soutien ait augmenté. Pourtant, les données de l'enquête révèlent que la majorité (59 %) des athlètes financés fréquentent l'école et, par conséquent, se préparent à l'après-carrière sportive.

La plupart des répondants clés trouvent que le Programme a dans une certaine mesure réussi à aider les athlètes à se préparer à l'après-carrière sportive, sous la forme d'études postsecondaires. Des services d'orientation professionnelle sont dispensés aux athlètes brevetés par les centres canadiens du sport (CCS), quoique le PAA offre aussi un soutien aux athlètes prenant leur retraite, mais seulement pour quatre mois. Les répondants clés ne savent pas au juste ce qui est couvert par le soutien pour les frais de scolarité du PAA.

Maintien des athlètes dans le sport et au Canada. Les preuves selon lesquelles le PAA contribue au maintien des athlètes dans leur sport et au Canada sont plus solides.

La plupart des athlètes estiment que le PAA a grandement influé sur leur décision de poursuivre leur entraînement (dans leur sport) et que les crédits différés pour frais de scolarité les ont encouragés à continuer. Cependant, très peu ont mentionné, spontanément, que le PAA était la raison pour laquelle ils avaient refusé de s'entraîner à l'étranger. Ceux qui ont quitté le pays ont le plus souvent donné comme motif de meilleures installations d'entraînement, un élément qui ne relève pas du mandat du Programme.

Les répondants clés ont plus tendance à dire que le Programme a favorisé le maintien des athlètes dans leur sport qu'à dire qu'il avait permis d'éviter que les athlètes ne quittent le Canada. La raison est que dans certains sports, le niveau de compétition exigé pour rehausser la performance n'est pas suffisant au Canada, et c'est encore une fois un élément sur lequel le PAA n'a aucun pouvoir.

Moment opportun d'aider les athlètes. Les opinions étaient partagées quant à affirmer que le PAA avait atteint les athlètes au moment le plus opportun. La plupart des athlètes ont indiqué qu'ils avaient bénéficié du PAA lorsqu'ils en avaient le plus besoin. La majorité des répondants clés croient qu'il faudrait miser davantage sur les athlètes en développement et que l'aide devrait leur parvenir plus tôt dans le processus de développement.

Rentabilité et solutions de rechange

L'administration du Programme est considérée comme « mince », alors que les fédérations nationales de sport jouent un rôle actif dans l'exécution du Programme. Par conséquent, le gouvernement fédéral économiserait très peu en se départant entièrement de la distribution de l'aide, d'autant plus que seulement la moitié des représentants des FNS seraient intéressés à prendre la relève.

Les solutions de rechange trouvées concernent davantage un mécanisme concerté pour *tout* le financement du sport (y compris le soutien autre que pour le revenu). En outre, il a été impossible de déterminer si les quelques autres approches recommandées étaient bel et bien plus rentables. Il y a aussi d'autres pays qui versent directement un soutien du revenu à leurs athlètes.

Il n'y a qu'une fraction (3 à 4 %) des dépenses du Programme qui sont consacrées aux frais généraux (rémunération et frais indirects). C'est en grande partie dû au fait que les FNS participent énormément à l'exécution du Programme, c'est-à-dire qu'elles aident les athlètes à



remplir leur demande d'aide, elles les recommandent, elles examinent les candidatures et elles surveillent le respect de l'accord de financement.

La preuve de la rentabilité relative du Programme est purement perceptuelle. Les représentants d'organismes autres que Sport Canada étaient d'avis uniformément partagés pour ce qui est d'affirmer que le PAA est la façon la plus rentable de fournir une aide directe aux athlètes, tout comme les représentants des FNS relativement à l'idée que les FNS devraient assumer entièrement la prestation de l'aide aux athlètes.

Quelques répondants clés ont pu fournir des exemples précis des moyens qu'ils estimaient plus rentables de donner l'aide aux athlètes. La plupart ont répondu en fonction de *tout* le soutien du sport, et non seulement du revenu, et nous n'avons trouvé aucune preuve d'évaluation de l'efficacité de ces approches. Beaucoup ont parlé de la nécessité de mieux coordonner toutes les formes d'aide aux athlètes. Certains ont soulevé le besoin de créer un seul organisme, qui tiendrait lieu de guichet unique et serait indépendant du gouvernement, pour s'occuper de tout le financement du sport.

Selon une analyse des approches adoptées ailleurs pour aider les athlètes, certains pays (p. ex., l'Australie) cantonnent les athlètes dans des camps d'entraînement où leurs coûts de subsistance et d'entraînement sont couverts. Ces athlètes bénéficient également de services de conseils et, parfois, de bourses (p. ex., en Nouvelle-Zélande) pour poursuivre leurs études ou se préparer à une future carrière. Certains pays embauchent leurs athlètes d'élite dans la fonction publique pendant que ceux-ci s'entraînent. D'autres encore offrent un soutien du revenu direct aux athlètes (p. ex., le Royaume-Uni). Dans certains cas, le niveau d'aide dépend du « brevet » détenu par l'athlète, mais ce n'est que dans un cas (au Royaume-Uni) que nous avons constaté que le niveau d'aide est calculé selon les moyens de l'athlète.

Conception et exécution du Programme

Les critères de financement du Programme semblent justes. Une stratégie appropriée de mesure du rendement s'imposerait. Dans l'ensemble, nous jugeons satisfaisante l'exécution du Programme, mais avons constaté certaines lacunes dans les services.

Critères de financement. Les athlètes sont plus disposés que les répondants clés à continuer le système de brevets à deux niveaux. Plusieurs répondants clés ont parlé de la nécessité de reconnaître et de récompenser les athlètes d'élite. Tant les répondants clés que les athlètes sont en faveur de reconnaître et de récompenser les athlètes se classant mieux que parmi les 16 premiers, par exemple, dans les 8 premiers ou sur le podium. D'autres ont souligné la nécessité de dépister les athlètes plus tôt dans leur carrière.

Exécution par les FNS. Les gestionnaires de Sport Canada ont dit qu'il y avait beaucoup de différence entre les FNS pour ce qui est de la profondeur de l'examen des demandes d'aide des athlètes, du suivi du respect par les athlètes des exigences de participation aux activités d'entraînement et aux compétitions et des processus de discipline et d'examen.

Quant aux divers éléments de l'exécution, le degré de satisfaction chez les athlètes variait passablement. La plus grande proportion (74 %) s'est dite satisfaite des communications et de la documentation écrite des FNS dans la langue privilégiée. Cependant, ils n'ont été que 57 % à trouver que l'entente les liant à leur FNS décrivait adéquatement leurs obligations et responsabilités et celles de leur FNS. Moins de 60 % des athlètes ont par ailleurs déclaré leur satisfaction relativement aux procédures d'appel et de discipline de leur FNS, ainsi qu'à l'examen par celles-ci des demandes d'aide spéciale et de crédits différés pour frais de scolarité, même en écartant ceux qui n'ont pas été exposés à ces processus.

Exécution par Sport Canada. En général, les FNS sont très satisfaites de la plupart des aspects de l'exécution du PAA par Sport Canada. Seule une minorité de représentants de FNS étaient cependant satisfaits du lien que Sport Canada établit, dans le cadre de l'examen des candidatures pour les brevets, entre le soutien du PAA et les autres formes de soutien que reçoivent les athlètes.

Chez les athlètes, le degré de satisfaction varie grandement relativement à différents aspects de l'exécution du Programme par Sport Canada. Ils étaient les plus nombreux à être satisfaits (de 70 à 80 %) de la communication de Sport Canada dans la langue privilégiée par les athlètes et de la rapidité avec laquelle sont versées les allocations du PAA. Ils étaient aussi une majorité, mais beaucoup moindre (de 55 à 58 %), à être satisfaits de l'opportunité du processus d'approbation et des conseils de Sport Canada sur les questions du PAA. Une minorité est satisfaite des procédures d'examen de Sport Canada débouchant sur des décisions en matière de financement. Cependant, près du tiers des athlètes ne connaissaient pas les procédures d'examen ou n'ont pas répondu à la question, et 30 % ont dit être ni satisfaits ni insatisfaits des procédures.

Données sur la mesure du rendement. Le Système d'information sur la gestion du Programme d'aide aux athlètes (SIGPAA) contient beaucoup d'information qui peut servir à surveiller la performance des athlètes, mais il convient de noter qu'il a été conçu à l'origine en tant qu'outil administratif pour conserver les données biographiques et financières sur les athlètes subventionnés.

La présente évaluation nous amène à nous inquiéter de l'organisation des données et de la capacité de Sport Canada à utiliser l'information pour générer des mesures de rendement opportunes et claires.

Dans l'ensemble, les représentants des FNS n'étaient pas au courant de la stratégie de mesure du rendement. Les représentants de Sport Canada ont signalé que le degré de connaissance de la stratégie et la mesure dans laquelle les données sur le rendement étaient fournies variaient considérablement d'une FNS à l'autre.

Réponse de la direction - Aperçu

Sport Canada remarque que les conclusions générales de l'évaluation sont positives et qu'elles sont en faveur du Programme d'aide aux athlètes (PAA). Le rapport conclut qu'un programme comme le PAA demeure nécessaire pour fournir un soutien du revenu aux athlètes de haut niveau s'entraînant intensivement pour des compétitions



mondiales. Plus précisément, 80 % des athlètes sondés comptent beaucoup sur le PAA et une forte majorité ont déclaré que s'il n'y avait pas le Programme, leur entraînement et leur capacité à participer aux compétitions en souffriraient. Le rapport conclut aussi que le PAA est bien aligné sur la politique du gouvernement du Canada en matière de sport et sur le cadre stratégique du ministère du Patrimoine canadien.

L'évaluation fait ressortir des aspects du PAA nécessitant des améliorations. La plupart ont trait à la mesure du rendement, étaient connus de la direction et feront l'objet de mesures correctives avant juin 2005 lorsque les modalités du Programme et le Cadre de gestion et de responsabilisation axé sur les résultats (CGRR) connexe seront renouvelés par le Conseil du Trésor.

L'évaluation souligne par ailleurs la difficulté de déterminer avec certitude la mesure dans laquelle le Programme a atteint ses objectifs et a produit les répercussions escomptées, car d'autres facteurs (p. ex., la gamme des services de soutien fournis aux athlètes par les fédérations nationales de sport et les centres canadiens du sport; la compétitivité des autres pays; les commandites du secteur privé, les cachets de présence et les programmes de soutien des athlètes) influent également sur la performance sportive. Sport Canada travaillera avec la Direction générale des examens ministériels afin d'élaborer un cadre d'évaluation qui s'attaque plus efficacement à ces variables complexes.

Recommandations

A. Conception

1. Formulation des objectifs : La formulation des objectifs du Programme manque de clarté, certains objectifs semblent ne pas être assez précis, d'autres se chevauchent, et il n'y a pas de points de référence ni d'indicateurs de rendement mesurables pour tous les objectifs.

Recommandation : Formuler clairement la raison d'être et les objectifs du Programme et préciser pour chacun des objectifs des indicateurs de rendement mesurables ainsi que des points de référence.

Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

Les objectifs du PAA énoncés dans les modalités du Programme ainsi que les indicateurs de rendement contenus dans le Cadre de gestion et de responsabilisation axé sur les résultats (CGRR) devront être examinés et modifiés en prévision de la prochaine évaluation du Programme. Le CGRR actuellement en vigueur a été dressé en mars 2001 lorsque l'exigence du Conseil du Trésor d'établir des CGRR était relativement récente. Depuis, un certain nombre d'autres CGRR ont été conçus pour des programmes et initiatives de Sport Canada (p. ex., le Programme de soutien au sport, les Jeux d'hiver du Canada de 2003 et les Championnats du monde de cyclisme sur route de 2003). Les leçons tirées de l'élaboration de ces CGRR et de l'évaluation actuelle seront appliquées au CGRR révisé du PAA, lequel sera terminé d'ici mars 2005.

Période cible : mars 2005

B. Succès et répercussions

2. Mesure des répercussions : Selon l'évaluation, il est impossible de dissocier les effets de l'aide du PAA sur la performance des athlètes des effets des autres formes de soutien offertes aux athlètes de haut niveau au Canada, comme les services d'entraîneurs et l'aide en entraînement que dispensent les centres canadiens du sport et l'aide financière du secteur privé.

Recommandation : Fusionner les futures évaluations du PAA aux évaluations des autres programmes de Sport Canada qui appuient les athlètes de haut niveau.

Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

Le PAA figure parmi plusieurs programmes de Sport Canada conçus pour stimuler le développement du sport de haute performance. Il ne vise pas à répondre à tous les besoins des athlètes canadiens de haut niveau. Les autres sources de financement de Sport Canada – par exemple, le Programme de soutien au sport qui finance l'entraînement et les compétitions des équipes nationales – répondent aux autres besoins de ces athlètes. Puisque le soutien du PAA vise à compléter les autres sources de soutien de Sport Canada, la Direction générale reconnaît l'importance de fusionner les futures évaluations du PAA à celles des autres programmes de Sport Canada dans le contexte de la contribution que tous les programmes combinés apportent à la performance sportive aux grandes compétitions internationales. Sport Canada collaborera étroitement avec la Direction générale des examens ministériels afin d'examiner la possibilité d'élaborer un tel modèle. L'évaluation intégrée aurait lieu en 2006-2007, moment où est prévue la prochaine évaluation du Programme de soutien au sport.

Période cible : 2006-2007

C. Exécution

3. Connaissance de ce que couvre le soutien pour les frais de scolarité : Il semble qu'on ne sache pas très bien ce que couvre le soutien pour les frais de scolarité.

Recommandation : Mieux faire connaître les types d'études auxquelles peut s'appliquer le soutien pour les frais de scolarité du PAA.

Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

Sport Canada sensibilisera davantage les athlètes aux types d'études auxquelles peut s'appliquer le soutien pour les frais de scolarité. Chaque année, Sport Canada envoie par la poste à tous les athlètes brevetés et à leurs entraîneurs le Guide du PAA, qui résume les politiques, les procédures et les lignes directrices pertinentes concernant ce



qui est offert aux athlètes, y compris le soutien pour les frais de scolarité. Le document est également distribué à toutes les fédérations nationales de sport et est publié sur le site Web de Sport Canada.

Période cible : en permanence

4. Données et indicateurs de mesure du rendement : Sport Canada semble avoir de la difficulté à tirer de son Système d'information sur la gestion du Programme d'aide aux athlètes des renseignements opportuns pour mesurer la progression des athlètes. Des fédérations nationales de sport apparaissent ne pas être au courant d'une stratégie de mesure du rendement. Certains objectifs ne sont pas assortis d'indicateurs de rendement clairs et mesurables et aucun n'a de points de référence permettant de suivre les progrès, tout comme aucun résultat attendu n'est précisé.

Recommandation : Mettre en œuvre une stratégie appropriée de mesure du rendement, comportant des indicateurs de rendement mesurables liés aux résultats attendus pour chacun des objectifs et pour lesquels des données sont recueillies et organisées de manière à permettre la production de données opportunes et utilisables sur les résultats. Veiller à sensibiliser les fédérations nationales de sport à la stratégie de mesure du rendement. Préciser des points de référence et des résultats attendus mesurables pour tous les objectifs et indicateurs.

Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

Sport Canada reconnaît la nécessité de réviser la stratégie de mesure du rendement contenue dans le CGRR du PAA pour la prochaine évaluation du Programme. Un CGRR révisé sera terminé d'ici mars 2005. Lorsque le Conseil du Trésor aura approuvé la stratégie de mesure du rendement du CGRR révisé, Sport Canada communiquera la stratégie aux fédérations nationales de sport à l'occasion des réunions annuelles d'examen.

Période cible : mars 2005

Sport Canada a utilisé le Système d'information sur la gestion du Programme d'aide aux athlètes (SIGPAA), une base de données qui aide à l'administration du Programme, pour produire la majorité des données sur le rendement exigées pour la présente évaluation. Afin d'améliorer le délai de production et l'utilité des données pour les évaluations futures du PAA, les leçons tirées de la production de données sur le rendement au moyen du SIGPAA seront appliquées à la stratégie révisée de mesure du rendement.

Période cible : mars 2005

5. Entente entre l'athlète et la FNS : Une faible majorité d'athlètes ont dit que l'entente liant à leur FNS ne décrivait pas adéquatement leurs obligations et celles de leur FNS.

Recommandation : Revoir l'entente entre l'athlète et la FNS et faire en sorte que les responsabilités des parties y soient clairement précisées.



Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

L'existence d'un contrat entre l'athlète et l'organisme de sport (entente entre l'athlète et la FNS) est un élément fondamental du Programme. Les politiques, procédures et lignes directrices du PAA, qui sont distribuées chaque année à toutes les FNS, fournissent des directives concernant l'entente entre l'athlète et la FNS. Chaque année, le personnel du PAA rencontre chaque FNS pour étudier la candidature des athlètes à l'obtention de brevets. À cette occasion, il examine aussi les ententes entre les athlètes et leur FNS pour s'assurer que les responsabilités des parties y sont clairement précisées. Il continuera de fournir des recommandations et une orientation aux FNS pour que celles-ci améliorent leur entente avec l'athlète.

Période cible : en permanence

6. Exécution par les FNS : Il semble que les fédérations nationales de sport ne soient pas uniformes pour ce qui est de l'application des critères d'attribution des brevets, de la profondeur de l'examen des demandes d'aide des athlètes, du suivi du respect par les athlètes et des processus d'examen et de discipline. Une minorité ou une faible majorité d'athlètes ont dit être satisfaits des procédures d'appel et de discipline des FNS ainsi que de la façon dont celles-ci examinent les demandes d'aide spéciale ou de soutien pour les frais de scolarité.

Recommandation : Encourager les fédérations nationales de sport à envisager d'apporter des améliorations à bon nombre de leurs activités s'inscrivant dans le Programme, y compris la surveillance du respect des exigences par les athlètes, les procédures d'examen concernant le soutien pour les frais de scolarité et l'aide pour les besoins spéciaux ainsi que les procédures d'appel et de discipline.

Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

Sport Canada continuera à collaborer étroitement avec les fédérations nationales de sport pour assurer l'exécution efficace du Programme. Chaque année, le personnel du PAA rencontre chaque FNS pour examiner les candidatures des athlètes à l'obtention de brevets. Ces réunions sont réparties sur toute l'année et on essaie généralement de les faire coïncider avec le début du cycle annuel d'octroi des brevets de chaque sport. La réunion d'examen porte principalement sur les athlètes recommandés pour les brevets, les athlètes qui ne sont plus recommandés, la confirmation des critères d'octroi des brevets, l'examen des ententes entre les athlètes et leur FNS et toute autre question influant sur l'exécution du PAA. Au besoin, Sport Canada fournira des recommandations ou une orientation aux FNS au cours de la réunion annuelle d'examen afin d'améliorer l'exécution du Programme.

Période cible : chaque année

Le programme ADR-sport-RED, instauré en janvier 2002, devrait contribuer à améliorer des aspects tels que les procédures d'appel et les mesures disciplinaires. Il offre des services d'arbitrage et de médiation ainsi que des ressources telles que des



modèles de règles internes concernant les appels pour les organismes de sport ainsi que des clauses types d'arbitrage et de médiation.

Période cible : en permanence

7. Exécution par Sport Canada : Une minorité de représentants des FNS ont dit être satisfaits du lien que Sport Canada établit, dans le cadre de l'examen, entre le soutien du PAA et les autres formes de soutien que reçoivent les athlètes, et beaucoup ont exprimé une incertitude à ce propos. Par ailleurs, une petite majorité d'athlètes était satisfaite du délai de communication des décisions de Sport Canada en matière de financement ainsi que des conseils sur les questions du PAA. Une minorité d'athlètes était satisfaite des procédures d'examen de Sport Canada débouchant sur les décisions en matière de financement, même en retranchant le tiers des athlètes qui n'ont pas répondu à la question et en reconnaissant que 30 % n'ont pas précisé s'ils étaient satisfaits ou non.

Recommandation : Sport Canada devrait envisager d'apporter des améliorations aux aspects suivants : le lien entre le soutien du PAA et celui d'autres sources, le délai des prises de décisions en matière de financement, les conseils dispensés aux athlètes concernant le PAA et les procédures d'examen rattachées aux décisions du PAA.

Réponse de la direction : Recommandation acceptée

Sport Canada travaille actuellement à aligner ses programmes de financement, y compris le PAA, sur la *Politique canadienne du sport*, notamment au moyen d'une stratégie en matière de programmes d'excellence. Celle-ci devrait permettre de relier plus efficacement les programmes de Sport Canada s'adressant aux athlètes de haut niveau.

Période cible : automne 2004

Souvent, le processus d'approbation est retardé parce que la réunion annuelle d'examen des candidatures à l'obtention de brevets entre le personnel du PAA et chacune des FNS n'est pas tenue avant le début du cycle d'octroi des brevets. Cette situation a été reconnue comme risque important lorsque Sport Canada a élaboré le Cadre de vérification fondé sur les risques pour le Programme en 2002-2003; Sport Canada s'efforce d'ailleurs de corriger ce problème. Par exemple, le personnel du PAA expédie une lettre de rappel et des formulaires de demande aux FNS deux ou trois mois avant la réunion d'examen et les agents de programme qui traitent avec les FNS leur rappellent les échéances. De plus, le personnel du PAA examine le cycle d'octroi des brevets des FNS qui fixent souvent en retard la date des réunions pour déterminer si un nouveau cycle d'octroi des brevets devrait être négocié entre la FNS et Sport Canada.

Période cible : en permanence

Seule une très petite minorité d'athlètes s'est dite insatisfaite des conseils offerts par Sport Canada sur le PAA (9 %) et de ses procédures d'examen rattachées aux décisions du PAA (6 %). Cependant, Sport Canada est d'avis qu'il faut faire des efforts pour



Canadian Heritage
Patrimoine canadien

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éliminer, si possible, toute insatisfaction. Des postes additionnels ont été pourvus au sein de l'Unité du PAA, ce qui aidera à faire en sorte que le Programme soit administré de manière plus efficace et plus efficiente. La direction de Sport Canada communiquera les résultats de l'évaluation au personnel du PAA pour que celui-ci sache qu'il existe une certaine insatisfaction quant aux conseils offerts et veillera à ce que des conseils exacts et opportuns soient transmis aux athlètes qui les demandent.

Période cible : en permanence



1. Program Description and Context

In this chapter, a brief description of the Program is presented, along with a discussion of contextual issues that have a bearing on Program success and the evaluation. Appendix A presents a more detailed description of the Program and issues in its environment.

The next chapter presents a list of the evaluation issues and the methodology used to address them. The following four chapters present findings from each the main evaluation issues: relevance (Chapter 3), impacts/success (Chapter 4), design/delivery (Chapter 5), and cost-effectiveness/alternatives (Chapter 6). The final chapter presents the main evaluation findings.

1.1 Program Description

The Athlete Assistance Program (AAP) has been in existence in its present form since 1977. It is administered by Sport Canada, under the direction of Canadian Heritage (PCH) since 1993. It is one of three Sport Canada funding programs, the other two being the Sport Support Program (SSP) and the Hosting Program¹. The AAP is the only Sport Canada program in which funding assistance is delivered directly to athletes, with other Sport Canada assistance being provided to athletes indirectly through National Sport Organizations (NSOs). Sport Canada and National Sport Federations (NSFs) work in partnership to deliver the Program. The Program delivers grants (as opposed to contributions, which are delivered by the other Sport Canada programs).

The main goal of the AAP is to contribute to enhanced performances of Canadian athletes at international sporting events. Its main objective is “to enable athletes to combine their sport and academic or working careers without undue financial burden, while training intensively in pursuit of world-class performances”. The AAP has five specific sub-objectives, as follows:

- Identifying and supporting Canadian athletes achieving or, with the greatest potential to achieve top 16 results at international events;
- Helping Canada’s international-calibre athletes to excel at the highest competitive level, while ensuring they can prepare for a future career, or participate in full or part-time career activities in the present;

1. The *SSP*, formerly the National Sport Organization (NSO) Support Program up to 2002, provides support to NSOs, such as National Sport Federations, National Sport Centres, and games associations, targeted to priority areas such as national team programming and the development of coaches and officials, benefiting high-performance and developing athletes. Assistance is also provided for staff and coach salaries along with general National Sport Organization operations. The *Hosting Program* assists sport organizations to host international single sport events in Canada and is aimed at enhancing high-performance sport development and the international profile of sport organizations.

- Facilitating the attainment of athletes' long-range goals of excellence in Olympic/Paralympic or world competition;
- Complementing other government and National Sport Organization support programs (now the SSP); and
- Contributing to more general Department of Canadian Heritage and Government of Canada policy objectives.

Two levels of support are provided to athletes. Senior Cards are awarded to athletes who finish in the top 16 at Olympic/Paralympic Games and World Championships, and those athletes identified by the NSF as having the potential to achieve a top 16 performance. Development Cards are intended to support the developmental needs of younger athletes who clearly demonstrate the potential to achieve the Senior Card international criteria but are unable to meet the Senior Card criteria. AAP assistance is not income-tested, but carded athletes may voluntarily return their assistance so that it may be re-directed to other athletes within their sport who may need it more.

The sport in which the athlete participates typically has to be financially supported by Sport Canada through the Sport Funding Accountability Framework (SFAF)², though athletes from other sports are eligible if their performance and sport meet certain criteria. Athletes must meet the carding criteria of their sport as a member of a Canadian team, through training and participation at international, domestic, or NSO-sanctioned events, as articulated in their agreement with their NSF regarding participation in training and competitions.

The Program provides high-performance athletes with three forms of tax-free financial assistance:

- living and training allowances (\$14.5 million in 2002/3) for Development-level athletes (\$6,000 annually per athlete) or Senior-level athletes³ (\$13,200 annually per athlete), paid on a bi-monthly basis;
- tuition and deferred tuition support/credits (\$1.46 million in 2002/3; a maximum of \$10,000 per athlete annually); and
- "special needs" assistance for child care, relocation and retirement (\$40,000 in 2002/3; a maximum of \$5,000 per athlete).

For the athlete to receive AAP funding, the following process is followed:

- the NSF nominates athletes for funding based on NSF carding criteria;

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2. The SFAF is an objective program management tool to ensure that federal funds are allocated to NSOs that contribute directly to federal sport objectives and priorities. It encompasses four main components: eligibility, assessment, funding and accountability.
 3. Within the Senior-level, there three levels: SR-1, SR-2, for those finishing in the top 16, and SR.

- Sport Canada reviews the nominations, in consultation with the NSFs, and approves funding for athletes who meet carding criteria;
- the NSFs ensure selected athletes sign their Athlete/NSF Agreement;
- Sport Canada provides AAP assistance directly to athletes;
- athletes participate in training and competitions as per the Agreement; and
- the NSFs monitor athletes' compliance to the Agreement, particularly with respect to training and competition requirements.

Finally, it should be noted that certain outcome indicators have been specified for the Program. The Results-based Management Framework (RMAF) indicates a number of indicators in a number of areas (e.g., top 16 finishes over time, athlete progression over time, athlete retention, athletes receiving tuition assistance, athletes declining support), with 1988 taken as the base year for tracking change over time. Similarly, the AAP Terms and Conditions⁴ associated with increased funding for the AAP and other initiatives in 2000, indicated that expected performance results and outcomes in two areas (athletes' top 16 finishes at international sporting events and athletes progression) will be compared to the performance results for the 2000/2001 fiscal year.

In the 2002/2003 fiscal year, \$15.2 million was dispersed in 77 sport disciplines to about 1,400 high-performance athletes, 59 per cent of whom were Senior athletes. The Program has grown since its implementation in 1977 when it provided \$1.3 million (current dollars) in assistance to 564 athletes. Administration of the Program requires six full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and, approximately 10-15 per cent of the time, 10 other FTE staff members (equivalent to 1.5 FTE positions) to liaise with NSFs during the review of nominations for AAP funding⁵. In 2002/2003, salary costs amounted to about \$422,000.

1.2 Program Context and Constraints on the Evaluation

Constraints outside the immediate Program affect Canadian performance at high-profile international sporting events and impact on the evaluation and the ability to measure impacts. Examples of constraints or issues related to the AAP's environment and its measured success are as follows.

- The AAP is but one factor contributing to the performance of Canadian athletes in high-performance sport. Besides not having to worry about living, training and education costs, which are covered under the Program, success factors for athletes include continued availability of quality coaching, access to sufficient training and sport science/medical facilities, and the ability to make use of appropriate and adequate opportunities to train and compete on a domestic and/or international scale. As well, other Sport Canada

4 "Class Grant by the Department of Canadian Heritage under the Athlete Assistance Program, Terms and Conditions", unpublished, July 2000.

5. The information on human resources was obtained from Strategic Planning and Analysis Unit of Sport Canada (November, 2002), "Athlete Assistance Program: Risk-Management Framework".



initiatives have a direct bearing on athletes' performance, such as the SSP which provides support to National Sport Centres, NSFs and games associations. Moreover, athletes have access to sources of funding outside Sport Canada, including assistance from the provinces and territories, funding and endorsements from major corporations, and prize money.

- ❑ Funding has a lagged effect on performance. Impacts of increased funding to the Program might not be visible/measurable in performance measures in the short-term (such as movement into the Top Eight or Top 16), because of a long "gestation" period for athletes, particularly those at the Development-level.
- ❑ Funding decisions made at all levels of government, currently and in the past, affect the current and future performance of AAP-funded athletes and role the AAP can play in improving athlete performance. In this respect, cuts in overall Sport Canada funding in the 1990s likely have had a bearing on athletes' performance.
- ❑ NSFs play an important partnership role in the delivery of the Program and, thus, how they implement carding criteria and monitor athletes affects the Program's delivery and effectiveness.
- ❑ Completely outside the control of Sport Canada is the growing competitiveness, professionalization and commercialization of sport globally, as well as the choices competing countries make with respect to the funding of sport and support of high-performance athletes, the sports on which resources are focused, and the development of their sport system, not to mention the geographical and historical factors as they affect physical activity and sport in general in these countries.



2. Evaluation Issues and Methodology

The evaluation issues and a description of the methodology used to address them are presented in this chapter. Appendix B presents a more detailed description of the methodology. Appendix C provides a detailed profile of survey respondents, with comparisons to the population of funded athletes where administrative data are available.

2.1 Evaluation Issues

In the evaluation, 20 issues were addressed, as follows:

(a) Rationale and Relevance

- Is the rationale for the AAP still consistent with the Department's and public policy priorities?
- Does it continue to address an identified need?
- Are the AAP's objectives relevant and should they be modified?

(b) Success

- To what extent has the AAP contributed to the achievement of its ultimate expected impact? What is the relationship between AAP assistance and improved athletic performance?
- What have been the impacts on athletic performance and training of increased living and training allowances in 2000?
- To what extent is AAP assistance adequate to allow athletes to combine their sport and academic careers without undue financial burden while training? To what degree is AAP assistance adequate to help athletes prepare for and excel at the highest levels of international competition? Are there inherent differences among sports and athlete levels in this regard?
- What is the incremental impact of the Program? What does AAP funding allow athletes to do with respect to training and competing, as well as performance at games and participation in education, that they otherwise could not do?
- In what manner and to what extent does the AAP complement financial assistance available to athletes from other sources, including other Sport Canada programs, National Sport Organizations, other governments and the private sector?
- Is the Program effectively identifying athletes who have potential to succeed in international competition?
- Is the Program helping athletes to prepare for a post-athletic careers?



- Is the Program helping to retain athletes in their sport and in Canada?
- Is the AAP reaching those athletes who need financial assistance the most, given both their financial and sport-related situations?
- Are athletes being reached by the AAP at the optimum time in their athletic careers, i.e., when they can benefit most from support?
- Do the existing sport-specific eligibility criteria effectively identify athletes with the greatest potential to progress to the highest levels of international competition?

(c) Design/Delivery

- What are the views on AAP funding criteria and the level of funding?
- How satisfied are athletes and NSFs with the delivery of the Program?
- Is the AAP's administrative data system adequate for measuring program performance?
- What are the views on the de-carding and re-carding of athletes?

(d) Cost-Effectiveness/Alternatives

- Is the current AAP design the most effective way to support Canada's high-performance athletes? Do findings from the other evaluation questions suggest alternative ways to provide effective support to Canadian high-performance athletes?
- Does the current balance between AAP assistance and other forms of federal assistance (e.g., SSP support to NSFs and National Sport Centres) optimize athlete development and performances in international competitions?

2.2 Evaluation Methodology

The methodologies used to collect data to address the above evaluation issues are described below. Documentation review, a review of literature, key informant interviews and a survey of athletes were the methods used. Each is described in turn.

(a) Documentation and Data Review

A review and analysis of existing Program-based sources of evidence was conducted in order to familiarize the researchers with the Program and its operational environment. Program-specific documentation and evaluation/review reports were included in this review. This information was supplemented with administrative data produced by Sport Canada through its Athlete Assistance Program Management Information System (AAPMIS⁶). These two sources were used to construct a descriptive and statistical profile of the AAP (e.g., objectives, eligibility criteria, governance, profile of clientele) and a baseline understanding of

6. The AAPMIS provides a great deal of other information on training, coaches, clubs, competitions, etc. that was less relevant for this evaluation.

the program context (contributing to assessing the complementarity of the AAP with other financial assistance programs).

As well, financial information was canvassed to examine the administrative costs of delivering the AAP (resource allocation by category of assistance, mean costs). In addition, the AAPMIS data provided evidence addressing the evaluation issue of improved performance in competitions, as an outcome indicator.

(b) Literature Review

A web-based review of the literature provided information on other forms of athlete support used in other countries, to supplement the discussion on alternative forms of program delivery.

(c) Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews provided information regarding all the evaluation issues: rationale and relevance; achievement of objectives; and cost-effectiveness/alternatives. The interview process enabled the evaluators to learn about the perceptions, opinions and the knowledge of those individuals who have had an important role/experience in the design and delivery of the AAP, who have had a key stake in or whose organizations are expected to benefit from the AAP, or who have overall knowledge of the Program and/or the high-performance sport system.

A total of 41 interviews were conducted by telephone with project officials and knowledge stakeholders to solicit their opinions on the evaluation issues. In these interviews, representatives of six groups were consulted, as follows:

- Senior departmental and program managers (e.g., Assistant Deputy Minister, International and Intergovernmental Affairs; Director General, Sport Canada; Director, high-performance and program managers) (five interviews);
- A representative sample (considering winter/summer, individual/team, able-bodied/Paralympic National Sport Federation (NSF) officials and staff (i.e., coaches, high-performance sport directors and sport administrators) (23 interviews);
- Representatives (senior officials) of non-NSF National Sport Organizations (six interviews);
- Sports experts from academic institutions (five interviews); and
- Representatives (senior officials) of provincial governments (two interviews).

(d) Athletes Survey

A combined telephone and web-based survey of current recipients of AAP assistance was conducted in February, 2003. The sampling frame was provided by Sport Canada from the AAP Management Information System. It was decided that a census of all athletes was to be undertaken to increase chances of reaching the target of 500 completed interviews. As some athletes would

be unavailable due to training exercises and/or competitions, a web-based version of the survey was offered as an alternative to survey completion by telephone.

A total of 554 athletes from a possible pool of 1,279 carded athletes⁷ participated in the survey, either by telephone (225 completions) or via the Internet (329 completions). Considering a population of 1,400 athletes, the sampling error for this survey dataset is ± 3.1 per cent, indicating a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the results. A comparison of the profile of athletes in the survey sample to that of the population of funded athletes indicates that the survey respondents are fairly representative and, therefore, it was decided that there was no need to weight the survey data (see Appendix C).

2.3 A Note on Presentation of the Results

Several issues regarding the survey results need to be raised. First, only statistically significant differences⁸ across cross-classification variables are referred to in the text. Second, results are presented in tables typically in the form of percentage distributions that may not always add up to 100 per cent due to rounding. Finally, the manner in which the results for scaled questions are presented in the tables of this report differs by the type of scale:

- For questions where the seven-point response scale ranges from *negative to positive* with a distinct mid-point (e.g., 1=extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied, with the mid-point 4=neither dissatisfied nor satisfied), the responses are aggregated and reported in three groups as follows: 1-3 (=dissatisfied), 4 (=neither), and 5-7 (=satisfied).
- Where the seven-point scale ranges from *low to high* and there is an indistinct mid-point (e.g., where 1=to no extent, 7=to a great extent, and 4=to a moderate extent), the results are aggregated and reported somewhat differently, as follows: 1-2 (=little/no extent), 3-5 (=moderate extent), and 6-7 (=large extent).

3. Rationale and Relevance

The issue of relevance was addressed from the perspective of, first, the alignment of the Program with public policy; second, the continued need for federal government involvement in sport funding; and, third, the need for government direct delivery of assistance to address athletes' needs. Also addressed in this chapter is the relevance and clarity of the Program's objectives.

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7. The discrepancy between the number of athletes receiving AAP assistance (1,400) and the pool of AAP athletes available for inclusion into the sampling frame for the survey (1,279) reflects the fact that some athletes approved for funding had not yet turned in their application forms or signed their NSF/Athlete agreement by the time the survey began. Furthermore, there was a small group of athletes who would not be reflected in the sampling frame because they were receiving AAP assistance for a period of less than 12 months.
 8. A statistically significant difference is one where the difference between the percentage for a particular characteristic (say, among athletes with a college education) and the overall percentage is such that the chance that the difference is random is five per cent or less.



3.1 Alignment with Public Policy and Canadian Heritage's Strategic Framework

The review of program documents determined that the Program is well aligned with the federal government's policy for sport as articulated in the new *Canadian Sport Policy*. Formulated in May 2002, the new sport policy was agreed to by the federal government and 13 provincial/territorial governments, along with representatives of the sport community and organizations that benefit from sport. Specifically, to the extent that the AAP aims to enable athletes to excel in world sport competitions, the Program directly addresses Goal II of the sport policy, that of "Enhanced Excellence", which states that "by 2012, the pool of talented athletes has expanded and Canadian athletes and teams are systematically achieving world-class results at the highest levels of international competition through fair and ethical means⁹". Under this goal, one of the government's commitments is to increase accessibility for high-performance athletes to financial support and other services to enable them to successfully compete on the world stage, which corresponds to the aim of the AAP.

Moreover, the Program fits within the mandate of Sport Canada. The latter's mandate is to support the achievement of high-performance results in order to strengthen the unique contribution sport makes to Canadian identity, culture and society. Clearly, the AAP is aligned with this objective, as it aims to improve Canadian athletic achievement at major international sporting events.

Finally, the Program is aligned indirectly to the strategic framework of Canadian Heritage by virtue of its fit within Sport Canada. The Department's strategic objectives are in four areas: Canadian Content, Cultural Participation and Engagement, Connections among Canadians, and Active Citizenship and Civic Participation¹⁰. Canadian Heritage's *2002/03 Estimates* reveal that Sport Canada is seen by the Department as fitting within the Cultural Participation and Engagement strategic objective, which is to "foster... access to and participation in Canada's cultural life¹¹". The Department of Canadian Heritage's *Performance Report* (for the period ending March 31, 2002)¹² corroborates the place of Sport Canada within the Department:

- "Involvement in the cultural life of the country — whether through visiting a museum or cheering on an athlete representing Canada on the world stage — builds citizenship, nurtures our view of ourselves, strengthens our communities and enhances our quality of life. The Department promotes these activities by fostering access to, and participation in, Canada's cultural life, in all its many forms" (page 11).

9. See the Sport Canada website: http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/sc/prog/index_e.cfm, Goal II of the Canadian Sport Policy (page 19). Note as well, that one of the principles of the new sport policy is "Sport champions excellence, which affirms that attaining world-class excellence is worthy of support as it is a source of community pride and inspires others to perform better" (page 16 of the Canadian Sport Policy).

10. See: <http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca>

11. Treasury Board Secretariat (2002). *Performance Report for the period ending March 31, 2002 and Part III – Report on Plans and Priorities, 2002-2003 Estimates*.

12. Treasury Board Secretariat (2002). *Performance Report for the period ending March 31, 2002 and Part III – Report on Plans and Priorities, 2002-2003 Estimates*.



- "Sport is an important cultural activity. ... Sport Canada contributed to high-performance athletes, national sport organizations, and ... major activities. ... Canada had its best-ever performance at the 2002 Olympic Winter and Paralympic Games. Team Canada helped build pride in Canada and promoted sport participation. ..." (page 13).

Interviews with senior government officials (PCH and Sport Canada) confirm that the AAP is aligned with the strategic framework of the Department. Primarily, the Program is seen as addressing the Department's Cultural Participation objective, not only directly by facilitating athletes' participation in international competitions but also indirectly by attracting others into sports through the accomplishments of funded athletes. The fact that athletes' achievements lead to the construction of inspirational Canadian stories and the raising of the Canadian flag suggests to senior officials that the Program also addresses the Canadian Content strategic objective. They see "culture" as embracing not only "high" cultural activities but also activity in the realm of sports.

To the extent that the AAP seeks to defray high-performance athletes' living and training costs to enable them to train and participate in training and athletic competitions, and to the extent that participation in such competitions may be seen as a "cultural" activity, then the AAP can be viewed as fitting within the strategic framework of the Department.

3.2 Rationale for Federal Support of Athletes

Official Cabinet documents identified a large number of arguments in favour of the Canadian government's support of sport and increased funding for high-performance sport. Arguments in favour of federal sport funding were typically couched in terms of the benefits of sport accruing to Canada, and not necessarily within the framework of a market failure (i.e., the necessary investments would not be made if government did not make them). The overall view was that, without government support of athletes, the identified benefits of sport for Canada would not be realized.

Arguments for federal support of high-performance athletes include the following: high-performance athletic excellence stimulates pride in Canada and promotes Canadian identity; Canadian athletes serve as good international ambassadors for the nation while international successes enhance Canada's image and influence; Canada's high-performance athletes are excellent role models who encourage youth to participate in sport, which in turn provides opportunities for the development of employment and teamwork skills as well as teaching the value of perseverance; participation in sport enhances health and reduces pressure on the health care system; sport provides economic benefits; sport has the ability to instil values such as respect and tolerance; increased funding would make up for declines experienced in the mid-1990s and prevent compromising advances over the previous 10 years; costs of living and developing athletes are rising and other countries are increasing their support for their athletes; and the increasing number of competitive sports globally. Several key informants shared the opinion that athletic accomplishments instil pride and that continued funding for sport was needed to keep up with Canada's competitors.



Past polling research likely served as the basis for some of the preceding arguments and indicates that funding high-performance sport is supported by the Canadian public. A poll of over 2,000 Canadians in the summer of 2001 indicated that 65 per cent of Canadians strongly endorse federal government provision of financial support to amateur sport, and 59 per cent strongly agreed the government should increase its support to athletes training for international amateur sports events¹³. This research also indicated that most Canadians believe that participation in major sporting events builds national pride and that participation in sport builds lifelong skills for youth. Other research sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, based on the responses to a survey of over 2,000 Canadians in the summer of 2002, indicates that 92 per cent of Canadians believe that Olympic sports have a positive influence on youth¹⁴.

3.3 Rationale for Government to Address Athletes' Needs

While the preceding section suggests the rationale for government involvement in funding sport in general, the case for government provision of income support to high-performance athletes still must be made. In this section, qualitative and partial quantitative evidence from the documents review and evaluation survey was used to address the issue of athletes' need for assistance and the government's need to provide it¹⁵. The review of program documents and past research indicates that there was little in the way of quantitative proof on file corroborating anecdotal evidence that high-performance athletes in training face financial hardship and that government support was necessary to address athletes' needs.

What athletes "need" cannot be definitively measured in this evaluation. There are several things athletes require to succeed besides help with living and training costs, which is provided by the AAP. As pointed out in Chapter One and Appendix A, access to adequate coaching, sport medicine and science services, training facilities and competition opportunities are important to athletes' performance. Indeed, as the profile of athletes shows in Appendix C (based on survey responses), most funded athletes identify high-quality training and coaching, and to a lesser degree international competitions and high-quality facilities and sport medicine services, as important factors in their success. Moreover, there are a large number of sources of support available to athletes that play a role in their development, training and success. Without a comprehensive assessment of athletes' resources and expenses, which is outside the scope of this study, it is impossible to definitively establish athletes' needs.

The review of documentation around the AAP's early incarnations indicates that there was little in the way of evidence offered to corroborate athletes' unmet needs and the government's need to address them through programming. Under the Game Plan "76" program, a joint effort of the federal and provincial governments and the Canadian Olympic Association begun in March 1973 in preparation for the 1976 Olympic Games, talented

13. Decima Research (September 28, 2001). "Public Awareness of the 2001 World Championships in Athletics and Canada's Participation in Major International Games. Post-Event Analysis". Executive Summary, for Sport Canada.
14. Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (July 2002). "2002 Canadian Public Opinion Survey on Youth and Sport". Final Report. The CCES receives some funding from Sport Canada.
15. The extent to which the AAP is reaching those who need assistance the most given their financial and sport-related situations is considered in the next chapter under program success.

athletes were identified and given training and living support, along with access to expanded opportunities for training and competitions “to provide them with the best possible opportunity to attain excellence in Olympic sports¹⁶”. According to the 1976/77 *Annual Report of Sport Canada*, Game Plan was seen as successful, as it provided 600 athletes with living and training support and was viewed as significantly increasing Canada’s rank in Olympic standings between 1972 and 1976. Note, however, that such success cannot all be attributed to the living and training support delivered under Game Plan, as other support was also provided under this program.

The AAP was born in 1977 out of an evaluation of the 28 Olympic sports targeted by Game Plan “76”. The stated purpose of the AAP at that time was similar to that of the current program: “to provide basic financial assistance to A, B, and C card athletes to enable them to pursue their athletic careers without financial hardship¹⁷”. It should be noted, however, that the evaluation report in question could not be found, though the results of a review of assistance provided to athletes under Game Plan “76” did conclude that “the basic system of allowances was soundly devised and succeeded in responding to areas of greatest need for a high proportion of the athletes”.¹⁸ On the other hand, a 1985 evaluation of the AAP found that about one-third of assisted athletes were falling into debt at the time, and perceived income inadequacies likely contributed to early program drop-out¹⁹.

Official government documents (1977, 1998-2001) reveal few specific mentions of the need for the AAP and increased funding to it. The review of the documents indicated that the Government of Canada felt it was difficult to encourage talented athletes to stay in their sport long enough to reach their full potential. The AAP was seen as contributing to the retention of athletes by helping them overcome challenges in integrating sport training and competing with education and employment. It was also said that there was a need to significantly increase direct financial support (via the AAP) to redress problems identified throughout the 1990s that the majority of Canada’s high-performance athletes in receipt of AAP assistance were living below the poverty line.

A 1997 report also pointed to the necessity of income-support assistance for athletes in training²⁰. This was the finding of a thorough review of the total cost and time to produce a high-performance athlete, conducted on the basis of interviews with NSF representatives and a review of data and the literature. One of the report’s major conclusions was “that keeping athletes in the sport long enough to reach their high-performance potential remains a major challenge for many sports. Means must be found to provide more support for athletes in these sports so that they stay in the competitive programs long enough to reach their peak. This may

16. 1976/77 *Annual Report of Sport Canada*.

17. 1977/78 *Annual Report of Sport Canada*.

18. Peter Mumford (July 1978), “Review of Assistance Provided to Carded Athletes under the Game Plan Athlete Assistance Program”, for the Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch of Health and Welfare Canada.

19. Social Program Evaluation Group, Queen’s University (July 1985), “An Evaluation of the Athlete Assistance Program”, Executive Summary of the Preliminary Oral Report, presented to Sport Canada.

20. T*MAC*W Management and Communications Services, Inc. (February 1997), “Analysis of High Performance Athlete Development, Costs and Time”, the Business Plan for Sport, Report for Sport Canada.

mean increasing AAP” assistance, among other means indicated. Another conclusion was that it took 6-8 years to produce a high-performance athlete.

Coming into this evaluation, much of the existing knowledge on athletes’ needs was derived from a 1996 study of high-performance athletes commissioned by Sport Canada.²¹ The study, based on a survey of about 600 high-performance athletes, indicated that financial support was the area of the sport system athletes identified as in the greatest need of improvement. Only about a third agreed that the sport system *as a whole* provided them with support they needed to reach their potential. As well, athletes’ mean personal gross income at the time (\$19,710) was well below the mean amount considered by athletes to be necessary to cover their living and training and competition costs (\$24,300).

Evidence from the current survey of AAP recipients lends support to the continued need for a program, such as the AAP, to provide assistance to athletes. First, as Table 3.1 indicates, most funded athletes (72-75 per cent) stated that relying on employment and/or family/friends to meet financial obligations while training was a large problem for them (29 per cent) or some problem (42-45 per cent)²². Relying on work and family/friends for support while training are particularly problematic (high proportions saying it is a large problem) for those with annual sport expenses of over \$10,000 (38 per cent) and/or who are dissatisfied with their training (49 per cent). The proportion feeling this way varies by other traits as well, as the following indicates:

- Having to work to meet financial needs is a particular problem for those athletes who are: currently employed (32 per cent), paying for rent and/or living expenses (32 per cent), most dependent on the AAP²³ (31 per cent) and for those in individual sports (32 per cent).
- Having to rely on family/friends for financial support is a particular problem for athletes who are: students (49 per cent), at the Development-level (35 per cent), athletes receiving AAP support for the first time (36 per cent), and those earning under \$10,000 annually (35 per cent).

TABLE 3.1
Percentage Distribution of Athletes According to Perceived Extent to which Reliance on Work and Family/Friends for Financial Support are Problematic* while Training

Item	Small/No Problem (1-2)	Some Problem (3-5)	Large Problem (6-7)	DK/NR**
<i>How problematic is ...?</i>				
	Per cent			

21. Sport Canada, “The 1996 Status of the High Performance Athlete Survey (SAS), Summary”, on the Sport Canada website: http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/sc/prog/index_e.cfm

22. Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=no problem and 7=a great problem. Responses were grouped and reported here as no/small problem (1-2), some problem (3-5), and large problem (6-7).

23. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

Having to work to meet financial needs	15	45	29	1
Being dependent upon financial support from family or friends	23	42	29	6

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=no problem and 7=great problem.

n=554

** DK/NR refers to Don't Know/No Response

Source: Athletes Survey

Second, athletes rely to the greatest extent, by far, on the AAP among possible sources of financial or material support while training (Table 3.2). Eighty (80) per cent of athletes rely to a large extent on AAP support²⁴, which is the highest proportion indicated. Moreover, 75 per cent rated the AAP as the most important source (not shown in the table)²⁵. To a much lesser extent (30-38 per cent) athletes rely on employment, NSO support, and parents. A small minority of athletes rely on other government assistance, business and prize money (14-16 per cent) or on appearance fees or a spouse (7-9 per cent).

Third, the survey evidence indicates that a high proportion of athletes are incurring high sport expenses (Table 3.3). About a third of athletes (31 per cent) incur annual sport costs in excess of \$10,000, with Senior-level athletes incurring higher costs than Development-level athletes. Even among the latter (column 3 of the table), 24 per cent incur sport expenses of \$10,000 or greater and a likely greater proportion have sport expenses in excess of their AAP assistance (\$6,000 annually).

TABLE 3.2
Athletes' Sources of Financial/Material Support while Training,
Percentage Distribution According to Perceived Extent of Dependence*

Source	Little Extent (1-2)	Some Extent (3-5)	Large Extent (6-7)	DK/NR
<i>As a source of financial-material support while training, to what extent do you depend on ...?</i>				
	Per cent			
AAP assistance	3	17	80	0
Parents	35	27	38	0
NSO assistance	33	32	31	1
Employment	38	27	30	5
Other government assistance	60	18	16	6
Business (endorsements/sponsorships)	60	22	14	4
Prize money	61	21	14	4
Spouse	69	9	9	13

24. Reporting 6 or 7, on a 7-point scale, where 1=to no extent and 7=to a great extent.

25. This is the number of athletes who gave the highest rating to the AAP among various sources of support, as a proportion of all athletes surveyed. Throughout the following results, responses to different survey questions are examined according to whether or not athletes are most dependent on the AAP, to identify differences in responses according to AAP dependency.



Appearance fees	71	11	7	11
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* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=no extent and 7=great extent.

n=554

Source: Athletes Survey

TABLE 3.3
Annual Sport Expenses Incurred by Carding Level,
Percentage Distribution by Level of Expenses

Sport Expenses (over last 12 months)	Overall (n=554)	Carding Level	
		Dev. (n=230)	Senior (n=324)
<i>Please estimate the total expense for sport-related activities (e.g., equipment, competition entry fees, coaching fees, facility user fees, etc.) you personally incurred in the past 12 months.</i>			
		Per cent	
Less than \$2,000	16	21*	13*
\$2,000 to \$4,999	23	24	23
\$5,000 to \$9,999	27	28	27
\$10,000 to \$14,999	14	14	15
\$15,000 to \$19,999	7	6	8
\$20,000 or more	10	4*	14*
DK/NR	1	2	1

*Significant differences at 0.05 level or less.

Source: Athletes Survey

Moreover, athletes are incurring sport expenses that consume a large part or all of their incomes (Table 3.4). At least 20 per cent of athletes with a gross annual income of less than \$10,000 (representing a third of athletes) have sport expenses in excess of their income (i.e., \$10,000 and over), while another third (32 per cent) have expenses of \$5,000-\$9,999²⁶. The proportion of athletes spending more on sport than they take in is likely even higher because athletes were asked to respond in terms of the broad categories indicated in the table.

TABLE 3.4
Annual Sport Expenses by Gross Annual Income Level,
Percentage Distribution by Level of Sport Expenses

Annual Sport Expenses	Gross Annual Income (from All Sources)				
	Total (n=554)	Less than \$10,000 (n=191)	\$10,000 - \$19,999 (n=172)	\$20,000 - \$39,999 (n=112)	\$40,000 and Over (n=59)

26. Two points should be made about these results. First, these figures under-estimate actual amounts in the sense that athletes were likely thinking about only out-of-pocket expenses and monies received in their hands. Responses would likely have excluded costs incurred by a NSF or National Sport Centre for training and coaching as well as other monies subsidizing travel and competitions abroad. Second, for those athletes whose sport expenses exceed gross income, it would have been instructive to ask how they were coping with this shortfall.

Please estimate the total expenses for sport-related activities (e.g., equipment, competition entry fees, coaching fees, facility user fees, etc.) you personally incurred in the last 12 months.

	Per cent				
Less than \$2,000	16	18	15	14	14
\$2,000 to \$4,999	23	28	27	17	12
\$5,000 to \$9,999	27	32	24	25	27
\$10,000 to \$14,999	14	12	16	16	14
\$15,000 to \$19,999	7	4	9	11	8
\$20,000 or more	10	4	7	17	25
DK/NR	1	2	1	0	0

Source: Athletes Survey

Fourth, evidence from the evaluation survey and Statistics Canada sources suggest that funded athletes' incomes are below the national average. Almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of athletes receiving AAP assistance have gross pre-tax incomes of less than \$20,000. National income distribution figures from Statistics Canada indicate that, in 2000, 47 per cent of individuals had total pre-tax income of under \$20,000²⁷. Moreover, a comparison of athletes' incomes with Statistics Canada low-income measures suggests that a good proportion of athletes are living in low-income brackets. For example, the 2000 pre-tax Low-Income Measure (LIM) for a one-adult family unit is \$14,734, while the 2001 pre-tax Low-Income Cut-off (LICO) for a one-person family unit is in the \$13,000-18,850 range depending on the size of the community²⁸.

There are two other pieces of survey evidence pointing to athletes' continued need for the Program:

- Only five athletes have declined AAP assistance since the inception of the voluntary aspect of the Program in 1999/2000 suggesting that most athletes do need the assistance. Funded athletes who feel they do not need the assistance (suggested to be those earning over \$50,000 annually) may return it to Sport Canada.
- As the results on *incrementality* presented in the next chapter will demonstrate, a large majority of athletes report that the absence of the Program would have a negative impact on their training and ability to participate in competitions.

Key informants almost unanimously felt that there was a continued need for a program like the AAP to provide financial assistance directly to athletes. Many respondents stated that government support was necessary for athletes, with some even remarking that it would not be

27. Statistics Canada, *Income Trends in Canada, 1988-2000*, Statistics Canada CD-ROM, 2002, based on data from the Survey of Labour Income Dynamics.

28. The LIM is set at 50 per cent of the median family income adjusted for the size of the family unit and the age of its members. The LICO is the income threshold below which a family will likely devote an above-average share of its income on food, shelter and clothing, adjusted for the size of the family and the community in which the family lives. For more details, see Bernard Paquet (November 2002), "Low Income Cutoffs from 1992 to 2001 and Low Income Measures from 1991 to 2000," Research Paper, Statistics Canada Cat. No. 750002MIE – No. 005.

possible for them to compete without it. Some key informants cited a number of examples specific to their sport that illustrated the need for federal funding, including:

- there are very few domestic opportunities for competition, thus increasing the costs of competing for athletes;
- there are no other sources of funding besides the AAP;
- the equipment is very expensive; and
- athletes need a great deal of calories and, therefore, have unusually large grocery costs.

3.4 Relevance of Program Objectives

Overall, most key informants see the Program objectives as relevant²⁹. Nine of ten key informants (93 per cent) agreed the AAP's overall objective is relevant: "to enable athletes to combine their sport and academic/working careers without undue financial burden, while training intensively in pursuit of world-class performances". Representatives of non-NSF NSOs were somewhat less likely to agree the objectives are relevant.

The qualitative responses provided around the relevance ratings suggest that key informants feel that it is very difficult to combine school or work with the kind of training needed to compete at the world level, which is how the main objective of the Program is articulated. Many key informants contended that the intention of the Program should simply be the provision of support to enable athletes to reduce the need to work or go to school, which would free up more time for training for international competitions. Articulating the objective this way, some key informants maintain, renders it more credible and feasible.

While a majority of key informants judged all individual program objectives as relevant, views varied somewhat (Table 3.5). Specifically, the highest mean relevance ratings (on the 7-point scale) were provided for the objectives of: facilitating the attainment of athletes' long-range goals of excellence in Olympic/Paralympic or World Competitions, and identifying and supporting Canadian athletes at, or having the potential to achieve, international top 16 level performances. Somewhat lower ratings were provided for the objectives of: complementing other support, and helping athletes excel in competition while enabling them to prepare for a post-academic career. The lowest relevance scores were given to the relevance of federal government goals.

TABLE 3.5
Relevance of AAP Objectives on Basis of Current Identified Need,
Mean Score on Relevance Scale* by Key Informant Type

29. Results in this section are based on a series of questions in which key informants were asked to indicate whether or not they agree, and to what extent, that the overall program objective and each of the individual sub-objectives are relevant, using a 7-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. Typically, proportions cited in the text refer to the proportion of key informants responding with 6 or 7 on the scale, meaning they agree the particular objective is relevant. Proportions excluded those not knowing the response or failing to provide one at all (DK/NR).

Program Objective	Overall	Sport Canada	NSF	Non-NSF**
To enable athletes to combine their sport and academic or working careers without undue financial burden, while training intensively in pursuit of world class performance (n=40)	6.3	7	6.2	6.3
To identify and support Canadian athletes performing at or having the greatest potential to achieve top sixteen level at international sporting events (n=40)	6.1	6.8	5.9	6
To facilitate the attainment of athletes' long-range goals of <i>excellence</i> in Olympic/Paralympic or World Championships (n=38)	6.3	6.9	6.1	6.5
To help Canada's international calibre athletes excel at the highest level of competition while enabling them to prepare for a future career by engaging in full-or part-time work or post-secondary education activities (n=38)	5.8	6.9	5.4	6
To complement support provided through other government and National Sport Organization (NSO) programs (n=38)	5.9	6.8	5.3	6.6
To contribute toward broad Government policy objectives, such as enhancing individuals' ability to participate in society, and promoting partnership and collaboration (n=34)	5.6	7	5.5	5.3

* Athletes asked to respond on a 7-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree, and 7=strongly agree.

** Includes representatives of non-NSF NSOs, provincial governments and academic institutions.

Results considerably different from the results of other organization types are **in bold**.

Source: Key Informant Interviews

Sport Canada personnel rated all objectives more highly in terms of relevance than representatives of NSF and non-NSF organizations. Non-NSF NSOs tended to provide lower relevance ratings than representatives of provincial governments and academic institutions.

3.5 Need to Refine AAP Objectives

In the course of soliciting views on the relevance of the perceived relevance of AAP objectives, concerns were raised by key informants about the lack of clarity of the objectives and the fact that some overlap with each other. These perceptions are presented in this chapter, which is on relevance, though the clarity of the objectives is in fact a design issue.

Most often it was pointed out that the overall AAP objective was very similar to many of the sub-objectives and that two objectives contained the concept of “excelling”. A few key informants said some objectives contained more than one concept and that there is overlap between some of them. These points are demonstrated in the following:

- ❑ The objective “to identify and support Canadian athletes performing at, or having the potential to reach, top-16 performance levels” combines the concept of *identification* and *support*. Some key informants said that the objective should indicate only identification because other objectives imply support.
- ❑ Another program objective also combines two concepts: (1) helping Canada’s international calibre athletes to excel at the highest level of competition, while (2) enabling them to prepare for a future career, by engaging in full- or part-time work or post-secondary education activities. The first part of this objective is already covered



under the objective of “facilitating the attainment of athletes’ goal of excellence in international competition”.

On this note, many key informants pointed out that more emphasis should be placed on facilitating training than school or *full-time* work. The reality for athletes in most sports is that world-class competition demands full-time training, and it is almost impossible to participate both in the required intensive training and in school or work at the same time. At the very least, according to some key informants, the Program should seek to enable the combining of training and *part-time* work. Moreover, key informants noted that deferred-tuition credits were a vital component of the Program, which is another reason for not having an objective of combining training and school, since, in these cases, school is being delayed until *after* training. There was some uncertainty about what the term “undue financial burden” actually means.

Also, some objectives were seen as difficult to quantify, thereby contributing to their perceived lack of clarity. In fact, three or four key informants said that an objective should not be an objective unless a measurable outcome indicator can be specified for it. This was particularly true of the objective of complementing other support for athletes: how does one measure complementarity? This is also true for objective of contribution to the attainment of government-wide objectives. In addition, it was pointed out that, in some sports, the AAP is the only source, or one of the only sources of support for athletes, which means the objective of complementarity in these cases is not applicable. However, it should be pointed out that, technically speaking, all athletes are eligible for National Sport Centre assistance, though accessibility to this for some athletes remains an issue.

On this note, some key informants re-iterated that the AAP is merely *contributing* to the attainment of certain program objectives, and cannot solely enable their attainment. The reason is that athletes need and use other support in order to train for and participate in world competitions. Thus, their success can not be attributed just to the Program, just as declining performance should not be blamed solely on it.

Some key informants thought that, in general, the Program should be clearer about its objectives and that greater precision was needed. Key concepts that should be clearly articulated in objectives are the following: (1) identification of high-potential athletes; (2) enabling enhanced training by offsetting some training, living and schooling costs (and reducing the need to work full-time); (3) enabling preparation for a post-athletic career (by enabling part-time work, current or delayed schooling); and (4) ultimately, contributing to enhanced world-class performance.

Finally, it was pointed out that the broader objectives of meeting federal government priorities should not necessarily be explicit objectives of the Program. These were considered too broad and altruistic to be the objectives of a funding program like the AAP.



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4. PROGRAM IMPACTS AND SUCCESS

In this chapter, evidence from the Program's administrative data, key informant interviews, and the survey of athletes will be presented to address the issue of Program success and impacts, focusing on attainment of the goal and objectives of the Program. Findings will first be presented with respect to the attainment of the Program's main goal and objective relating to performance and training, and then preparation for a post-athletic career and athlete identification. This will be followed by consideration of issues relating to outcomes not explicitly related to program objectives, including athlete retention, reaching athletes who need assistance the most and when they need it the most; and finally, attainment of Department- and government-wide objectives.

From the outset, it should be recognized that it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the Program's unique contribution to the attainment of many of its objectives, particularly the ultimate goal of improving athletes' performance at international games. The review of program documentation indicates that AAP assistance is but one element in a vast array of support – both financial and otherwise as well as from within Sport Canada and outside – that athletes have access to and which may be expected to affect their performance. Indeed, the AAP was designed to be complementary to other forms of assistance and to contribute to enhanced performance. Moreover, the potential contribution the AAP could make to improved athlete training and performance varies considerably across sports because of wide inter-sport variation in funding and support. As well, current performance in international games is a product of *past* Canadian sport policy decisions with respect to not only the AAP and other programs focused on high-performance athletes but also developing young athletes and fostering participation in physical activity and sport in general.

For these reasons, it is suggested that the AAP's contribution to enhanced athlete performance cannot be definitively measured without an examination of all athletes' support, both from within Sport Canada and outside, across all sports, and over time. Without such a comprehensive examination of all assistance available to athletes, being able to attribute improved athlete performance to the AAP was deemed impossible.

Moreover, there are other broader, confounding factors affecting Canadian athletic performance. First, the overall success of Canadian athletes is a product of what sports are designated as Olympic or World Championship sports and the extent to which those sports are ones in which Canada excels (e.g., the designation of curling as a new Olympic sport increased the chances of medals for Canada). A second related factor affecting Canadian performance is what other countries are doing in this respect. Countries vary considerably in terms of population size and density, the amount of resources and the proportion devoted to sports, the amount devoted to sport development as opposed to high-performance sport, how many and what sports they emphasize, how many athletes they choose to send to games, the number of professional leagues, and the way sport is funded. The greater commercialization and professionalization of sport worldwide has also played a role.

Furthermore, a country's advantage derived from Olympic designation of a new sport in which it excels is often short lived. As pointed out in the program description, Canada tends to fund a wide range of sports whereas many other countries choose to concentrate on particular

sports. This confers on Canada an initial advantage when a new sport is placed on the program, an advantage which is soon dissipated as other countries put resources into the newly recognized sport.

These latter factors, which are effectively outside the scope of Sport Canada, let alone the AAP, influence how well other countries do in particular sports, which, in turn, affects how well Canadian athletes perform. They, therefore, complicate the link between AAP assistance and athlete performance.

Finally, it should be noted that the previously mentioned issues around the lack of clarity and quantification of program objectives further limits the ability to measure the attainment of these objectives. The fact that some objectives embrace more than one concept, that some do not have measurable indicators attached to them, and that none have benchmarks or expected results specified suggests it is difficult to determine if such objectives have been reached.

4.1 Contribution to Improved Athletic Performance at International Games

The ultimate goal of the Program is to contribute to improved Canadian athletic performances at major international sporting events. The extent to which this goal has been attained was measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, evidence is presented on athletes' performance using two measures as specified in the RMAF: progression over time, and Canadian athletes' top 16 Olympic finishes. Qualitative evidence is presented on the extent to which key informants believe the objective has been attained, funded athletes are satisfied with their performance (as a measure of success) and the perceived effect of the 2000 increase in AAP per-athlete assistance levels on performance.

(a) Attainment of Program's Main Goal

The program data provided by Sport Canada indicate the extent to which funded athletes have improved their performance over time, the first RMAF performance measure. Noting again that there are numerous factors other than the AAP contributing to athlete performance, the results, based on information provided by Sport Canada based on administrative data from the AAPMIS³⁰, are:

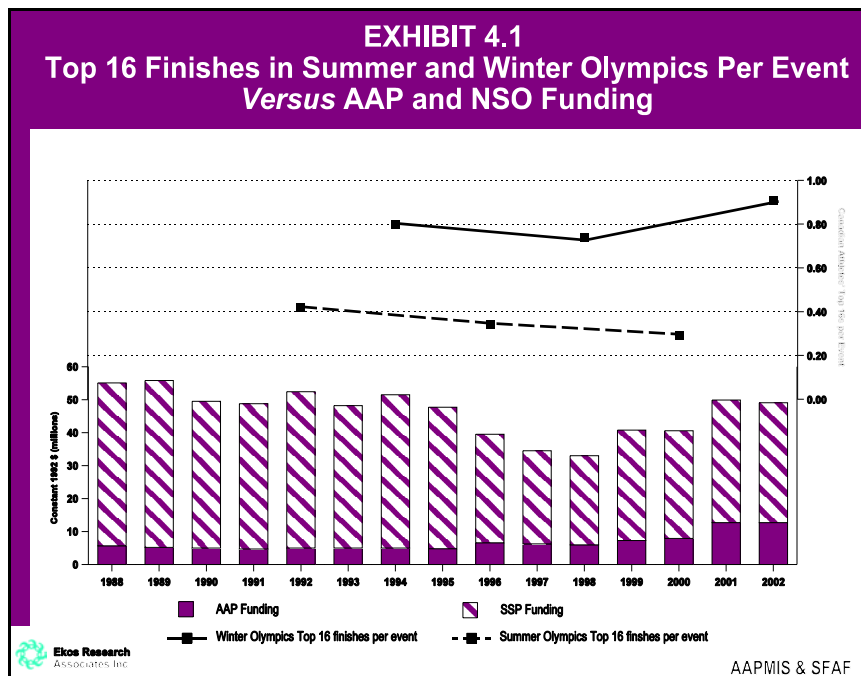
- Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of the 519 funded athletes in individual sports who competed in two or more World Championships or Olympics Games since 1992 demonstrated improved results over time in terms of higher finishes³¹.
- One-third (33 per cent) of the 986 athletes who, since January 1, 1995, were carded at a development level for the first time progressed to a senior level.
- Two thirds (67 per cent) of the 1,221 athletes who, since January 1, 1995, were carded at a senior level for the first time progressed to a higher level by January 1, 2002.

30. Note that among more newly funded athletes, the potential for progress remains.

31. The computation excludes athletes whose first international result was exceptional (e.g., a gold medal) and, therefore, for whom improvement would be technically impossible.

Program data can also be used to portray, in very basic terms, performance in terms of top 16 Olympic finishes (the second RMAF performance measures) linked to AAP funding over time (Exhibit 4.1). Included in the analysis is funding to the Sport Canada Sport Support Program (SSP), which provides assistance via NSOs to high-performance athletes through coaching, sport science and medicine services, competitions and other ways. The bars represent funding to the AAP and SSP, converted to constant 1992 dollars, to control for the rising cost of living, particularly relevant for an income-support program like the AAP. The lines in the exhibit represent the Top 16 finishes for Canadian athletes in the Summer and Winter Olympics, scaled by the number of events entered (since the number changes from year to year).

Four points should be made about the exhibit before discussing the results. First, the results do not control for external factors affecting performance (including new sports being placed on the Olympic program and sport funding choices made by competing countries). Second, funding of athletes has a gestation period of 6-8 years, with longer periods for junior athletes, which means funding in any year cannot be linked to performance until at least six years hence. Third, performance is affected by all Sport Canada funding. In particular, as indicated in Exhibit 4.1, combined AAP and SSP expenditure levels are currently, in constant 1992 dollar terms, less than they were in the late 1980s, despite recent funding increases, particularly to the AAP. Fourth, performance depicted in the exhibit reflects previous funding decisions made by provincial/territorial governments affecting junior athletes, the feeder system for the high-performance system. This has and will have repercussions for athletes' performance further in the future and the ostensible impact of current sport funding levels.



The results in the exhibit reveal, first, that SSP funding far exceeds AAP funding but the gap is closing. Between 1987/88 and 1994/95, SSP expenditures were about nine times AAP



expenditures. During that time, funding generally fell in both programs in constant dollar terms. The SSP/AAP ratio fell to about 5:1 between 1995/96 and 1996/97, when funding to the SSP declined steeply while AAP funding rose. In the next year, funding to both programs fell but proportionately more for the former, translating into a further decline in the SSP/AAP ratio to 4.5 to 1. This is where the ratio stood until 2000/01 when it fell again, to 2.9 to 1, reflecting the greater proportionate increases in AAP funding between 2000/01 and 2001/02. It should be noted that, despite recent increases in SSP funding, SSP expenditures are currently, in constant dollar terms, below what they were in 1987/88. Over the period, AAP funding doubled in size with the major increases occurring in 1995/96 and 2000/01 (25 and 60 per cent increase in stipends, respectively) and in 1998/99 (the addition of 300 new AAP cards: 200 for able-bodied athletes and 100 for athletes with a disability).

Second, bearing in mind the qualifiers indicated above, there does appear to be a relationship between funding and performance, considering the effect of a lag (Exhibit 4.1). The dashed line indicates that performance at the summer Olympic games, as measured by the top 16 finishes per event, fell somewhat from 1992 to 1996 and again from 1996 to 2000. As for the Winter Olympics (solid line), there also was a decline in performance between 1994 and 1998. During the preceding years (most years between 1988 and 1998) combined AAP/SSP funding to sport decreased in constant dollar terms (despite increases in AAP funding). Given the observed lagged effect of funding, it is possible that funding cuts between 1994 and 1998 may continue to be felt in the 2004 Summer Olympic games.

There was a reversal in fortunes between the 1998 and 2002 Winter Olympics. This might be associated with the hike in AAP funding between 1995 and 1996 (increased stipends), and, to a lesser extent, increases in total sport funding between 1998 and 2001, particularly to the AAP (increased stipends and number of cards). The full effect of these increases, however, will not likely be realized until the 2006 Winter Olympics, and possibly as early as the 2004 Olympics, though this would depend on what other countries are doing in this respect.

Qualitatively, the consensus among key informants was that the AAP has contributed to improved athletic performance, with several emphasizing that the Program is only *helping* to improve standings. Key informants representing organizations not directly involved in the Program (i.e., non-NSF NSOs, provincial governments and universities) were as positive about the Program's meeting this objective as those representing Sport Canada and the NSFs. Several key informants expressed uncertainty about the Program's true role in light of the fact that there were other factors affecting athletes' performance, including particularly coaching and sport medicine services.

Key informants' views were similar with regard to the attainment of the Program's sub-objective of facilitating attainment of athletes' long-range goals of excellence in Olympic/Paralympic or world competition, which is similar to the AAP's overall goal³². Almost all athletes

32. Results in this chapter are based on a series of questions in which key informants were asked to indicate whether or not, and to what extent, they believe that the Program was successful in attaining its overall objective and each of the individual sub-objectives, using a 7-point scale, where 1=not at all successful, and 7=extremely successful. Proportions cited in the text refer to the proportion of key informants responding with 6 or 7 on the scale, meaning they believe the Program was very successful in attaining the particular objective; 3, 4 or 5=moderately successful; and 1 or 2 = to no/little extent



said the Program has been at least somewhat successful in attaining this objective: 51 per cent said the Program was very successful and another 46 per cent said it was somewhat successful. Only three per cent said it was to no/little extent successful. Sport experts from academia were less inclined to say the Program has been successful in this respect (20 per cent) than representatives of other groups.

(b) Athletes' Satisfaction with Performance Levels

In the survey of athletes, because of concerns over bias, respondents were not directly asked if the Program had contributed to the attainment of the program objective of improved performance. Instead, indirect survey evidence was used to address the issue of AAP impacts on performance. The evidence is the degree to which funded athletes were satisfied with their performance levels and how this satisfaction varied between athletes who were particularly dependent on AAP assistance for training and those who were not. Note again that AAP assistance does not contribute *alone* to performances at games.

AAP recipients are highly satisfied with their performance levels, but the extent of their dependence on the AAP is not a factor. The survey evidence indicates that four in five funded athletes (80 per cent) are satisfied with their current level of achievement at games³³. Only 10 per cent indicated dissatisfaction. Athletes who are very dependent on the AAP³⁴ are no more or less satisfied with their performance than those who are less dependent.

Athletes' satisfaction with their performance varied according to certain characteristics. Satisfaction levels were significantly higher for young athletes (89 per cent) and those with a disability (96 per cent) and significantly lower for athletes with high sport costs (\$10,000 or more annually) (75 per cent).

(c) Perceived Impact of Increased AAP Funding on Athletes' Performance

In May of 2000, per-athlete AAP assistance levels were increased, presenting a unique opportunity to identify the AAP's contribution to performance, which is an issue for this evaluation. It was shown above in Exhibit 4.1 that Canadian athletes realized performance gains between the 1998 and 2002 Winter Olympics. This can only be partly attributed to the AAP funding increases because of the lag effect (Section 1.2). The impact of this increase cannot really be observed until the 2004 Summer Olympics or, more likely, the 2006 Winter Olympics. Moreover, other changes to the sport system affecting high-performance athletes occurred before and at the same time as the increase in AAP funding, which could also have affected performance. Thus, AAP's role in this outcome is not certain. Further, sport funding and participation choices made by other countries around the same time, as well as prior decisions made by governments in Canada, may have a bearing on Canadian athletes' relative performance.

successful.

33. That is, reporting 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1=extremely dissatisfied to 7=extremely satisfied. The proportion "dissatisfied" represents those responding with 1, 2 or 3 on the scale, while the proportion with a neutral opinion (neither dissatisfied or satisfied) represents those reporting 4 on the scale.

34. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

The qualitative evidence indicates that most key informants who responded to the question believe the increase had a positive impact on athletes' performance at games. Several qualified their response, however, by saying that it is difficult to say for certain because there are other factors that contribute to performance at games. To illustrate, if coaching support had been declining in past years, then the increase might not necessarily be manifested in improved performance but could have served to prevent deterioration in performance; in this case, no change in performance is in fact a positive outcome of the Program. In fact, the review of program data indicated that there had been declines in SSP funding in years prior to the AAP increase in 2000. The fact that the AAP's role cannot be isolated from other factors was also a reason given by some key informants for why they did not provide a response to the question. A smaller group of key informants said it was too early to tell if the increase has had an impact on performance.

4.2 Enabling Athletes to Combine Sport and Academic/Working Careers without Undue Financial Burden, While Training Intensively

Evidence is presented in this section on the attainment of the overall objective of the Program, which is concerned with offsetting the costs of, and thereby facilitating, participation in training and competitions. Evidence is also presented in this section on the two issues directly related to training: athletes' satisfaction with their training and the perceived impact of AAP funding increase on training. Note again that there is other Sport Canada support for athletes' training and participation in competition, which complicates attribution of outcomes to the AAP.

The athletes survey evidence underlines the importance of training to performing well. Athletes satisfied with their training are significantly more likely to be satisfied (reporting 5, 6 or 7 on a satisfaction scale) with their performance at games (87 per cent) than those who were dissatisfied (1, 2 or 3 on the scale) or neutral (reporting 4) (51 and 47 per cent, respectively) with/about their training.

(a) Attainment of Program's Main Objective

The vast majority of key informants said the Program has been at least somewhat successful in attaining AAP's overall objective. The largest proportion, 71 per cent, said it has been somewhat successful (reporting 3, 4 or 5 on the 7-point scale) and 24 per cent said it was very successful (i.e., 6 or 7). Representatives of non-NSF NSOs were much less likely to say that the Program successfully attained this objective (17 per cent), when compared particularly to other Sport Canada representatives (50 per cent).

A factor frequently cited by key informants as working against the attainment of this objective is, as observed, the sheer difficulty in being able to participate in educational or employment activities (particularly on a full-time basis, which one objective mentions), *at the same time* as having to train intensively for world competitions, particularly without experiencing financial hardship. Several said AAP assistance levels are not sufficient to prevent financial hardship among athletes training for world games, or that some athletes still must supplement AAP support by working and/or relying on family and friends. At least three key informants said that attaining the Program's objective was an unrealistic expectation.



Others re-iterated that, since AAP assistance *alone* cannot enable the attainment of the objective because the AAP is but one element in the training support array, measurement of objective attainment is very difficult. AAP's contribution to increased training was thought to be difficult to separate from that of other support received by athletes in this regard. One key informant suggested that measuring the impact of the Program on training could be carried out only if the experiences of recipients were compared to a control group of similar athletes who had not received AAP assistance (this would also apply to measurement of the Program's impact on athlete performance).

A number of key informants pointed out that the Program's tuition support contributed greatly to allowing athletes to combine intensive training and their academic careers. This is particularly true of the deferred tuition support, which means that athletes can delay their academic careers until after their sport career – though technically speaking such support does not enable training/competing and education *at the same time*.

Athletes were fairly modest in their views on the attainment of this objective. When queried, only a fifth (21 per cent) said that the current AAP assistance level was adequate to allow them to combine their sport and academic/working careers without undue financial burden (reporting 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale). Another 62 per cent said it was moderately adequate (i.e., 3, 4 or 5) and 14 per cent said it was inadequate (i.e., 1 or 2). This is corroborated by evidence presented in the previous chapter in the discussion of athletes' need, which indicated that AAP-funded athletes continue to bear a financial burden: large numbers have low incomes and incur sport expenses that consume much of their income. Still, the vast majority of funded athletes (86 per cent) did participate in work and/or school while training.

There were some interesting differences in views on funding adequacy among athletes according to their characteristics. Not surprisingly, athletes incurring sport expenses of \$10,000 or more, or who are greatly dependent upon AAP funding³⁵, were much less likely to say that the assistance is adequate (15 and 14 per cent, respectively). Similarly, those having to pay rent/living expenses were more likely to say AAP assistance is inadequate (15 per cent), while young athletes (less than 20 years of age) are more likely to say the AAP assistance is adequate (33 per cent). Athletes from team sports were much more likely than those from individual sports to say the AAP is adequate (28 *versus* 18 per cent).

(b) Athletes' Satisfaction with Training Levels

The survey evidence indicates a high level of satisfaction with current training levels among AAP recipients³⁶. Four in five (80 per cent) are satisfied with their current level of training (reporting 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1=extremely dissatisfied to 7=extremely satisfied). Only 10 per cent indicated dissatisfaction (1, 2 or 3 on the scale). These results are very similar to the results presented above with respect to athletes' satisfaction with their performance.

35. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

36. Note that this is only a partial measure of attainment of the objective of facilitating the combining of sport and athletic/working careers while training. Also note again that several factors besides the AAP affect training levels.

Few statistically significant differences in training satisfaction by athletes' characteristics emerged. Dependence on the AAP was not a factor in athletes' satisfaction with their training, nor was Senior/Development status. Employed athletes were significantly less likely than those not employed to say they are satisfied with their training (76 *versus* 83 per cent), suggesting that work may be a factor in their dissatisfaction. Training satisfaction levels were significantly higher for young athletes, i.e., less than 20 years of age (89 per cent).

The 52 athletes who were dissatisfied with their current training level were asked to indicate what was missing from their current training and competition plan. The predominant responses were coaching and training facilities (each reported by 29 per cent of athletes). Another fifth (19 per cent) indicated sport science. These are not necessarily covered by AAP assistance.

(c) Perceived Impact of AAP Funding Increase on Training

Most key informants said the increase in athlete assistance levels in 2000 had a positive impact on athletes' training. Some observed that the increase meant athletes would not have to go into debt to train for international games. A few alluded to inter-sport differences in overall training support, however, and how these can affect the degree to which the funding increase impacted training levels.

Several key informants confused the question on the impacts of the 2000 increase with the impact of the other change to the Program implemented at the same time, which was the consolidation of carding levels into two categories: Development and Senior. A number of key informants said that the change sent the wrong message to the higher performing athletes in that there is now not a strong enough differential inducement for them to train and strive harder. Several other key informants remarked on the need to provide graduated incentives for the elite to excel and not have the same level of assistance for all Senior-level athletes. This issue is discussed in the previous chapter with regard to views on how funding is awarded.

Most athletes believe the increased allowances positively affected their ability to train and prepare for international competitions without undue financial burden. Three in five (59 per cent)³⁷ indicated that the increase had a great impact on training and preparation (reporting 6 or 7 on the 7-point impact scale). Only eight per cent said it had no/low impact (i.e., 1 or 2 on the scale) and 28 per cent indicated that it had a moderate impact (i.e., 3, 4 or 5).

Interestingly, in light of key informants' comments above, Senior-level athletes were significantly *more* likely than Development ones to say the increase affected their ability to combine their sport and non-sport careers without financial distress (63 *versus* 38 per cent). As well, those who had received assistance for more than five years were more likely to say the increase positively affected their training (68 per cent). Also, summer and team athletes (63 and 70 per cent, respectively) were much more likely to say this than winter and individual athletes (47 and 55 per cent, respectively).

37. This is the proportion of the 253 athletes who received funding before and/or during the increase in AAP funding in 2000 and who recalled the increase.



4.3 Incremental Impact on Training, Competitions, Performance and Education

Incrementality captures the concept of what would have occurred in the absence of the Program. Activities that would have not occurred if the Program did not exist represent the “true” effects of the Program. The ideal way to measure incremental impacts would be to compare the experiences of funded athletes to a group of similar athletes who did *not* receive AAP assistance. Any differences in athlete results between the two groups represent the incremental impacts of the Program. However, this was not an option as finding a comparable group of high-performance athletes was not possible. Thus, this question could be addressed on the basis of only key informants’ and athletes’ *perceptions* of incrementality.

First, key informants most frequently mentioned that the Program enables athletes to participate in more training and competitions than they would be able to participate in if the Program did not exist. A few respondents reported that the assistance allows athletes to relocate for training purposes which is something they would not have been able to do otherwise. A few others said there are more athletes in the country than there would have been in the absence of the Program.

Second, the athletes survey responses suggest the AAP is having an incremental impact on training, performance, attendance at competitions, and, to a lesser degree, on education. It should be emphasized, however, that the supporting evidence is qualitative. Table 4.1 indicates that a strong majority of athletes (84 per cent) think the absence of the Program would have a negative impact (reporting 1, 2 or 3 on a 7-point impact scale) on training, on performance (80 per cent), and on entering competitions (77 per cent). Just over half (55 per cent), however, say this would have a negative impact on their education.

Certain characteristics are strongly associated with perceptions of incrementality. Athletes most dependent on the AAP³⁸ are more likely to believe that the absence of the Program would have a negative impact on training, the ability to enter competitions, and performance, and education, compared to athletes who are not most dependent on the AAP. Also, Senior-level athletes and those who have to cover living and food costs are significantly more likely to have said the AAP is having an incremental impact on training, participation in competitions, and their education.

Other athlete characteristics associated with perceptions of positive incremental program impacts are: being in an individual sport (competitions – 82 per cent), having high sport expenses (competitions – 84 per cent), being a non-student or being 25-29 years of age (training – 88 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively and performance – 84 per cent and 87 per cent, respectively), being employed (performance – 85 per cent), being in a winter sport (performance – 88 per cent and education – 65 per cent), being 20-24 years of age (education – 71 per cent), being an able-bodied athlete (education – 56 per cent), and having annual income of less than \$10,000 annually (education – 63 per cent). Understandably, athletes 30 years and older were significantly less likely to say the absence of the Program would have a negative impact on their education (29 per cent).

38. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

TABLE 4.1
Incremental Impact of AAP Funding on
Athletes' Training, Ability to Enter Competitions, Performance and Education,
Percentage Distribution According to Perceived Degree of Impact in Each Area*

Activity Impacted On	Negative (1-3)	No Impact (4)	Positive (5-7)
<i>In the absence of funding, what would be the impact on your ... ?</i>			
	Per Cent		
Training	84	11	4
Ability to enter competitions	77	18	5
Performance	80	14	5
Education	54	33	4

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=extremely negative impact and 7=extremely positive impact.

Source: Athletes Survey

The 463 athletes who reported a negative impact (1, 2 or 3 on the scale) in at least one area were asked to elaborate on what the impact would be. Unprompted, almost half (44 per cent) reported that there would be less time and money to train. Other responses included: having to work more (19 per cent); having less time and money for education (17 per cent); having less money for living expenses (15 per cent); and having less/no opportunity for international travel (14 per cent). NSF representatives were under the impression that the NSFs effectively identify the athletes, though it should be noted it is Sport Canada that sets the funding criteria that identify them.

These results on incrementality further underline the need for the Program as discussed in the previous chapter. That is, the fact that the absence of AAP funding would have a negative impact on a strong majority of athletes' training and ability to compete in competitions indicates the importance of the Program.

4.4 Complementarity with Other Funding Sources

An important objective of the Program is to complement other sources of assistance available to athletes. This objective, in effect, recognizes that the AAP alone cannot bring about improved performance at major international sporting events, which is the main goal of the Program. It should be noted that at least two key informants observed that there is no outcome indicator specified to enable measurement of the degree to which this objective has been attained. Given this, the extent to which key informants believe the Program attained its complementarity objective would not be valid. However, their qualitative elaboration around their responses does add value to the evaluation.

The majority of key informants said the Program has been very successful (43 per cent) or somewhat successful (46 per cent) is attaining the complementarity objective. Most were of the view that the degree of complementarity depends crucially on the sport. For several sports, the AAP is the sole source of support for athletes; they do not have access to any other sources, so



there is nothing to complement AAP assistance with. At the other end of the spectrum, there are athletes who attract a lot funding and in fact do not need AAP assistance. On this note, another frequently heard view from key informants was that there should be better coordination of athlete funding across all sources (Sport Canada, provincial and territorial governments and the private sector) to prevent concentration of funding.

It was also pointed out by seven key informants that the AAP is really the sole source of *economic* support for athletes, whereas most other financial assistance for athletes focuses on or depends on performance. Many key informants reported that AAP funding should be considered the foundational element of support for athletes. Other sources complement AAP funding, rather than AAP assistance complementing other sport funding.

4.5 Identification of (Potential) High-Performance Athletes

Most key informants said the Program has been at least somewhat successful in identifying high-performance athletes. Half (49 per cent) said the Program has been very successful in this respect (reporting 6 or 7 on the 7-point success scale) and 41 per cent said somewhat successful (3, 4 or 5 on the scale). Sport academics were much less likely to say the Program has been very successful in this regard (25 per cent).

Two thirds (68 per cent) of athletes agreed with the statement that AAP criteria effectively identify athletes with the greatest potential for success (reporting 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point agreement scale). Eighteen per cent disagreed (1, 2 or 3 on the scale). Interestingly, young athletes, i.e., those less than 20 years of age, were more likely to agree (79 per cent).

4.6 Preparation for Post-Athletic Career

An important sub-objective of the Program is to ensure athletes can prepare for a post-athletic career (or participate in career activities) while training. This assistance comes in the form of tuition assistance (deferred or otherwise), which prepares athletes for their life after competition in the sense of equipping them with employment skills. The AAP also provides “special needs” assistance for retiring athletes but for only an additional four months of financial support after retirement. Note that National Sport Centres provide retirement counselling to athletes.

First, the survey data indicate that most funded athletes are students and, therefore, are scholastically preparing for their post-athletic career. Fifty-nine per cent of athletes are attending school, with 43 per cent participating on a full-time basis; 39 per cent are working.

Second, program data obtained from Sport Canada indicate little change in the proportion of athletes receiving tuition support during the last four fiscal years. From 1999/2000 to 2002/2003, the number of athletes receiving AAP tuition support (deferred or otherwise) as a ratio of all athletes receiving AAP assistance remained the same, at 1:3. Over the period, during which 300 cards were added as a result of increased program funding, the number of athletes receiving tuition assistance rose (from 465 to 540), but so did the total number of assisted athletes. The amount paid in tuition support rose from a little over \$900,000 to about \$1.3 million. About 40 per

cent of currently funded athletes receiving tuition support attend post-secondary education on a full-time basis, and about 20 per cent of retired athletes do so³⁹.

Third, key informants believe the Program has been at least somewhat successful in enabling athletes to excel while preparing for a future career or working. Forty-two per cent said the Program has been very successful in this respect, and another 44 per cent said it has been somewhat successful (3, 4 or 5 on the scale).

Non-Sport Canada key informants, particularly non-NSF NSO representatives, were less likely than Sport Canada officials to think it has been successful in preparing athletes for a post-athletic career. Many of the non-NSF NSO representatives stated that the Program allows athletes only to complete a degree or certificate, without necessarily preparing them for life after sport. These key informants suggested that retiring athletes needed more than education to enter the world of work once their athletic career is over. However, as noted, National Sport Centres provide counselling support to retiring athletes.

Some key informants talked about deferred tuition credits. For those firmly ensconced in a career, e.g., athletes in curling and yachting, this provision was seen as not being applicable, nor for those in early high school. There may be a communications problem about what the deferred tuition credits will cover, as a few key informants said that the credits should apply to college certification and a masters university program – both of which are covered (the latter under special circumstances). Some key informants believe that the credits should apply to a second or an analogous under-graduate degree or certificate (and perhaps employment counselling/assistance) for those who have been intensively training for competition and been out of the workforce for some time. Such monies, it was suggested, could be used to upgrade rusty skills.

Fourth, 68 per cent of athletes said that AAP funding allowed them to prepare for a post-athletic career, by allowing them to pursue their sport and work and/or educational activities without undue financial burden (reporting 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point agreement scale). Views on this issue varied widely according to the following athlete characteristics:

- age*: agreement that this objective was attained declined with age, from 68 per cent for athletes under 20 years of age, to 58 per cent for those 30 years and older;
- employment/student status*: students were significantly more likely to agree while those employed were significantly less likely;
- sport type*: winter and/or team sports were more likely to agree; and
- AAP dependence*: athletes most dependent on the AAP⁴⁰ were more likely to agree the Program prepares them for a post-athletic career, while those who were not were less likely to agree (72 versus 55 per cent).

39. In the 2001/2002 fiscal year, tuition was being paid for 535 athletes receiving funding, while 1,429 athletes were approved for AAP assistance and 1,777 received assistance in that year. Of these, 232 received support for full-time participation in post-secondary education (PSE). In the same year, 98 retired athletes accessed deferred tuition support under the Program, of whom 20 were attending PSE full-time.

40. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.



4.7 Retention of Athletes

Athlete retention embodies two concepts -- in the sport, and in Canada -- both of which are considered in this evaluation. Note that retention of athletes is not an *explicit* objective of the Program, though government documents indicate that financial assistance should be provided to promising athletes to prevent them from abandoning their sport.

Most key informants said the Program has been successful in retaining athletes in their sport and in Canada to train. Two in five (42 per cent) felt that the Program has been very successful in this regard, and another 42 per cent said it has been somewhat successful.

Key informants were more likely to say that the Program has contributed to athlete retention *in the sport* rather than in the country. The reason provided is that, for certain sports, the level of competition necessary to enhance performance is insufficient in Canada. Indeed, some NSF representatives and one Sport Canada manager indicated that, in some sports, going to train outside Canada was preferable for the athlete, the sport, and Canada overall and athletes were encouraged to do so. However, this has very little to do with the AAP and indicates that, as more than one key informant pointed out regarding other outcomes, there are several factors other than the AAP contributing to the decision to stay in Canada, including better coaching and competitions. Some key informants also said that athletes are not being retained in the country because funding levels are not as generous as what some Canadian athletes are being offered by such countries as the US.

Athletes were also queried on the question of leaving Canada to compete and train. First, 40 per cent of athletes had been offered the opportunity to relocate to live and train outside Canada within the last three years. Athletes who were more likely to have been offered an opportunity to relocate were those who: were carded at the Senior level (43 per cent), were receiving AAP assistance for five or more years (48 per cent), and participated in summer sports (43 per cent) and/or were part of a team sport (49 per cent).

Survey evidence further indicates that, of the 223 athletes who were offered the chance to leave the country to train, 100 (45 per cent) accepted the offer. As well, athletes who were not working or going to school (73 per cent), as well as those participating in team sports (61 per cent) as opposed to individual sports (38 per cent), were more likely to accept the offer. Interestingly, athletes with annual sport expenses of under \$5,000 were more likely to have accepted the offer (about 64 per cent), while those with expenses of over \$10,000 were more likely to have refused it (only 32 per cent accepted it).

The most frequently (unprompted) reasons for accepting the offer to leave Canada to train⁴¹ were: better training facilities (24 per cent), an athletic scholarship (22 per cent), the quality of the competition (20 per cent), better coaching (14 per cent) and more/better competitive opportunities (12 per cent). Characteristics of athletes associated with significant differences in the reasons cited include:

- offered an athletic scholarship*: not surprisingly, being 20 to 24 years of age (40 per cent), being a student (30 per cent), and/or being carded at a Development level (33 per cent);

41. Athletes were asked to provide their two most important reasons for accepting the offer.

- ❑ *better coaching*: being 25 to 29 years of age, and being an athlete in an individual sport as opposed to a team sport; and
- ❑ *higher quantity and quality of competitive opportunities*: being an athlete in team sports.

Few of the 115 athletes who refused the offer to train elsewhere mentioned the AAP as an influence on their decision (unprompted) to remain in Canada. Only three per cent mentioned the AAP⁴². Interestingly, Canadian training and sport medicine facilities, coaching and competitive opportunities were hardly mentioned at all as a reason for rejecting the offer. The most frequently cited (unprompted) reasons for staying⁴³ were: wanting to remain close to family and friends (30 per cent), followed by money issues (17 per cent) and wanting to finish their education in Canada (10 per cent).

Finally, when prompted, the majority of athletes said that the AAP has been a factor in their remaining in their sport, which is the other aspect of athlete retention. First, two-thirds of athletes (68 per cent) indicated that receiving AAP assistance played an important role in their decision to continue training and competing (reporting 6 or 7 on the 7-point scale). Second, three-quarters (77 per cent) reported that deferred tuition credits offered under the Program encouraged them to continue training in their sport to a great extent (reporting 6 or 7 on the 7-point scale).

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42. It should be noted, however, that when athletes were asked *directly* about whether or not the AAP encouraged them to stay in Canada to train, they indicated a somewhat larger role for the AAP than the unsolicited responses would suggest. One-quarter (25 per cent) of athletes indicated that their AAP carding status influenced their decision to turn down the offer to train outside Canada to a great extent (reporting 6 or 7 on a 7-point extent scale), and another 36 per cent said it affected their decision to a moderate extent (3, 4 or 5 on the scale). *However, the unprompted responses on the AAP's role were considered to more accurately reflect athletes' views on this question than the direct question, which was thought to lead the athlete.*
43. Athletes were asked to provide their two most important reasons for refusing the offer.



4.8 Reaching Athletes who Need Assistance the Most

Reaching athletes who need assistance the most is not an explicit objective of the Program. Indeed, the receipt of AAP assistance is not based on need but on potential or performance⁴⁴. Nevertheless, the extent to which assistance was paid to those who needed it the most was a question posed for this evaluation.

However, it is recognized that this issue cannot be addressed with the current evaluation methodology. Ideally, to properly address this issue, the incomes and expenses of recipients of AAP assistance would be compared to those who do not receive such assistance. If the incomes of non-recipients were significantly higher and expenses lower than recipients, then it could be said that AAP assistance is reaching those who most in need.

Survey evidence can be used only to tangentially address the issue of whether or not AAP assistance is being paid to those who most need it. It was indicated above that 80 per cent of athletes said that they relied on AAP assistance to a great extent (reporting 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale) and only three per cent said to little or no extent (1 or 2 on the scale). Moreover, for 75 per cent of athletes, AAP assistance received the highest rating among several other sources of assistance, including employment, family/friends, prize money and appearance fees, other NSO and government support.

This evaluation issue can be further examined by observing how AAP-dependence varies with athletes' income level and sport expenses. First, the survey evidence indicates that athletes who rely on AAP assistance the most tend to have lower personal incomes than those who do not (Table 4.2). Seventy per cent of athletes who are most AAP-dependent⁴⁵ have average annual personal incomes of under \$20,000 compared to 53 per cent of those who rely on all other sources together to a greater extent than the AAP. Furthermore, 20 per cent of the latter group have incomes over \$40,000 compared to just seven (7) per cent of those who rely on the AAP the most.

Sport expenses are higher for those who are most dependent on AAP assistance. As indicated in Table 4.3, athletes with low sport expenses (less than \$2,000) represent a significantly lower proportion of those most dependent on the AAP than those who are not (23 *versus* 14 per cent).

44. As pointed out in the program description, it is only *suggested* to athletes earning \$50,000 or more in income to return their AAP assistance. Means- or income-testing AAP assistance was considered in the late 1990s but was not implemented because of the expected high costs of administering such a program in concert with the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency.

45. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

TABLE 4.2
Percentage Distribution of Athletes' Reported Annual Gross Income,
By Degree of Dependence on the AAP

Gross Income Level (over last 12 months)	Overall (n=554)	AAP Most Dependant**	
		Yes (n=415)	No (n=139)
<i>Approximately, what is your gross income (before taxes) in the past 12 months from all sources? Gross income refers to income from all sources, before any deductions or taxes are removed.</i>			
		Per cent	
Less than \$10,000	34	34	36
\$10,000 to \$19,999	31	36*	17*
\$20,000 to \$39,999	20	20	19
\$40,000 and over	11	7*	20*
Don't know	2	1	3
Refuse to answer	2	1	4

* Significant differences at 0.05 level.

** "Yes" indicates the proportion of athletes who reported the AAP is the most important source or one of the most important source of financial/material support while training.

Source: Athletes Survey

TABLE 4.3
Percentage Distribution of Annual Sport Expenses Incurred,
by Degree of Dependence on the AAP

Sport Expenses (over last 12 months)	Overall (n=554)	AAP Most Dependant**	
		Yes (n=415)	No (n=139)
<i>Please estimate the total expense for sport-related activities (e.g., equipment, competition entry fees, coaching fees, facility user fees, etc.) you personally incurred in the past 12 months.</i>			
		Per cent	
<\$2,000	16	14*	23*
\$2,000 to \$4,999	23	24	22
\$5,000 to \$9,999	27	27	28
\$10,000 to \$14,999	14	17*	8*
\$15,000 to \$19,999	7	8	6
\$20,000 or more	10	9	12
DK/NR	1	1	1

*Significant differences at 0.05 level.

** "Yes" indicates the proportion of athletes who said the AAP is the most important source or one of the most important source of financial/material support while training.

Source: Athletes Survey



4.9 Reaching Athletes at Optimum Time

Key informants said the degree to which AAP assistance reaches athletes at the optimal point in their careers depends on the athlete's age and stage of development, as well as the sport. For example, in some sports, athletes need funding when they are just about to qualify for "development" funding or display potential but lack the resources to do so – such athletes may not qualify in some sports and so are forced to quit. Some key informants suggest that if "optimum time" means "at/near the peak of athletes' careers" then the Program has done well, but if it means "when it is needed the most", then it has not done as well.

About three quarters of key informants focused on development-level athletes. Several said many developing athletes have difficulty attaining high performance levels due to a lack of core skills training, quality coaching, and/or experience, which AAP assistance would help cover if granted very early in an individual's career. Many said that reaching athletes earlier would allow them to develop faster and prevent them from withdrawing from the sport before reaching their potential. Some key informants indicated that, while supporting developing athletes in their basic training and living needs is traditionally a provincial responsibility, the onus, in the last several years, has been on the federal government to provide funding to help these younger athletes reach their potential.

Four in five athletes (82 per cent) indicated that they had received AAP funding when they needed it the most. Thirteen per cent of athletes said it did not come at the right time. Responses to this question varied greatly with the characteristics of the athletes. Not surprisingly, the proportion saying the assistance came at the right time rose steeply with the age of the athlete, from nine per cent of those under 20 years of age, to 44 per cent for those 20-24 years old, to about 80 per cent for those over 24 years of age. However, the proportion is the same for senior and development athletes, and for athletes satisfied and not satisfied with their training or performance. The proportion is higher for those most dependent upon the AAP⁴⁶ (85 per cent) than those who are not (73 per cent) and rises with the number of times the athlete has received AAP assistance.

Athletes who indicated that they had *not* received AAP funding at the right time (n=74) reported that it was mainly because of poor performances on their part (41 per cent).

4.10 Attainment of Government-Wide Objectives

A third (33 per cent) of key informants said the Program has been successful in contributing to the attainment of government-wide objectives. There was some confusion surrounding this issue, however, with many key informants unsure as to how these objectives were linked to that of the overall AAP objective. Some indicated that the attainment of government-wide objectives should not even be an explicit AAP objective.

5. DESIGN AND DELIVERY

46. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

5.1 Funding Criteria and Level of Funding

As observed above, athletes are awarded AAP assistance on the basis of actual or potential performance in regard to attaining top 16 finishes at Olympics, Paralympics and World Championships. There are two funding levels under the Program, Development and Senior. Key informants and athletes were asked to comment on the fairness of these criteria and alternative ways of awarding assistance.

(a) *Perceived Fairness of Funding Criteria*

Most NSF key informants and athletes believe the criteria to be fair. First, two thirds of key informants (65 per cent) are satisfied with the fairness of the funding criteria (responding with 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point satisfaction scale⁴⁷).

Second, four in five athletes (78 per cent) feel the funding criteria are reasonable and fair (responding with 5, 6, or 7 on a seven-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree). Only 12 per cent of athletes disagree (responding with 1, 2, or 3). The proportion agreeing was significantly higher among athletes receiving funding five or more times, athletes in summer sport, and those satisfied with their training. Disagreement was higher for athletes aged 25-29 years of age, athletes not working or going to school, athletes in team sports, and athletes dissatisfied with their training.

(b) *The Two-Level Carding System*

Athletes were more amenable than key informants to continuing the two-level carding system. Eighty-four (84) per cent of athletes agreed that it should be continued (Table 5.1, row 1), compared to 65 per cent of key informants (responding with 5, 6 or 7 on the 7-point agreement scale⁴⁸). Athletes who were satisfied with their performance were significantly more likely to agree that the two-level system should be continued (87 per cent).

Among key informants there were differences in opinion on this issue. Sport Canada officials were much more likely to disagree that the two-level system should be continued than non-Sport Canada key informants. Sport Canada officials reported that they preferred the previous multi-level system of funding athletes. They said this should be reinstated and, if not, then at the very least another level of funding only for elite athletes should be introduced. They believe that the current system no longer recognized the level of effort and performance elite athletes display and that “incentives” to work hard in order to achieve the highest level of performance are lost with the implementation of the two-level carding system. This was also the view of a few other key informants representing NSFs, who said a third level of funding for elite athletes should be instituted.

TABLE 5.1

47. Satisfaction measured on a scale from 1=extremely dissatisfied to 7=extremely satisfied.

48. Agreement measured on a scale from 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree.



**Athletes' Agreement with Statements on APP Funding Items,
Percentage Distribution According to Level of Agreement***

Funding Item	Disagree (1-3)	Neither (4)	Agree (5-7)	DK/NR
<i>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the AAP?</i>				
	Per cent			
1. The AAP should continue with a two level carding system (Senior and Development cards)	7	7	84	1
2. In addition to providing basic living and training allowances, the AAP should recognize and financially reward performance based on being in the <i>top eight</i>	10	12	76	1
3. In addition to providing basic living and training allowances, the AAP should recognize and reward performance based on <i>podium (medal) results</i>	18	12	69	1
4. Personal income level of athletes should be a consideration in provision of AAP support	28	17	55	1

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree.
n=554

Source: Athletes Survey

(b) The Number of Senior/Development Cards

As background to this issue, Senior cards currently account for 59 per cent of all cards, with "Top 16" Senior-level cards (SR1 and SR2) accounting for 27 per cent of the total. The proportion with Senior-level cards has hovered between 57 and 66 per cent since 1993, while the proportion in the "Top 16" Senior categories has ranged between 26 and 33 per cent since 1999. Before then, the proportion was somewhat lower.

Views on the number of athletes who should be carded at each of the two levels were solicited from athletes and similar proportions thought more Development and Senior cards should be a high priority (responding with 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale⁴⁹) (Table 5.2, rows 1 and 2). *Note that athletes were told that any changes made would lead to trade-offs.* Forty-one (41) per cent said the addition of more Senior cards should be a high priority, while 36 per cent indicated that the addition of more Development cards should be. About half (49 and 52 per cent, respectively) thought more Senior and Development cards should be a moderate priority (a 3, 4, or 5 response). Not surprisingly, Development-level athletes were significantly more likely to say there should be more Development cards, while Senior-level athletes were more likely to say there should be more Senior cards.

49. Athletes were asked to respond a 7-point scale, where 1=an extremely low priority, and 7=an extremely high priority.

TABLE 5.2
Athletes' Identified Priorities for Change to the AAP,
Percentage Distribution According to Level of Priority*

Potential Change	Low Priority (1-2)	Moderate Priority (3-5)	High Priority (6-7)	DK/NR
<i>Indicate the extent to which each of the following possible design changes to the AAP should be given high priority by the government. Please keep in mind that no change in Sport Canada's budget is being considered and that, therefore, any changes would involve tradeoffs.</i>				
	Per cent			
1. More senior cards	8	49	41	3
2. More development cards	10	52	36	2
3. Bonus system based on performance	11	36	51	1
4. Basing amount of AAP support on financial needs	19	44	36	2
5. Higher support for carded athletes who <i>must</i> relocate to a high performance centre	16	40	42	1
6. Additional special needs coverage	15	48	31	6

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=low priority, and 7=high priority.
 n=554
 Source: Athletes Survey

Several key informants said that there are insufficient development cards in some sports. Some comments in this regard included:

- Some potential athletes drop out before they qualify for Development cards owing to insufficient funding — more funding needs to reach younger athletes before they abandon the sport (which is really outside the scope of the AAP).
- Conversely, athletes in some high-endurance sports do not reach their peak until beyond 30 years of age — funding should be maintained so as to keep them in the sport until then.
- Senior and development athletes have vastly different needs and therefore, should not be in same program (e.g., senior athletes would typically have greater access to support than development athletes often do).

(c) The Basis for Awarding Assistance

There was support among key informants and athletes for focusing funding on athletes finishing in *higher positions than the top 16*. A majority of athletes and key informants agreed that, in addition to providing basic training and living allowances, the AAP should recognize and reward performance based on the *top eight finishes* (76 and 63 per cent, respectively) or, to a lesser extent, *podium results* (69 and 61 per cent, respectively) (Table 5.1, rows 2 and 3 for the athlete results). Note that this view is somewhat contradictory to the finding reported above that 85 per

cent of athletes agreed that the two-level carding system should be continued.

Agreement with the idea that AAP funding should be based on top eight finishes and podium (medal) results tended to be higher among senior athletes (80 and 73, respectively) and athletes in individual sports (80 and 73 per cent, respectively). Agreement with rewarding top eight finishes was also higher among athletes who had received assistance five or more times (85 per cent) and who were satisfied with their current level of performance (79 per cent).

Implementation of a *bonus system based on performance* was identified by the greatest proportion of athletes (51 per cent) as a high priority for change (responding with 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale), even after being told that any changes would lead to trade-offs, and another 36 per cent thought it should be a moderate priority (3, 4, or 5 on the scale) (Table 5.2, row 3).

Male athletes were more likely to say a performance-based bonus system should be a high priority (57 per cent), as were those who were neither working or going to school (63 per cent), Senior-level athletes (57 per cent), those in individual sports (55 per cent), recipients of AAP assistance for five or more times (60 per cent), and those with \$20,000 or more in gross income (59 per cent).

Key informants were somewhat more likely than athletes to support the idea that funding should take into account the *income* of the athlete.⁵⁰ Sixty-nine per cent of key informants and just over half of athletes (55 per cent) agreed that the personal income level of the athletes should be a consideration in the provision of AAP support (responding with 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale) (see Table 5.1, row 4 for athletes results). One-fifth of key informants (19 per cent) and 28 per cent of athletes disagreed with this idea (responding with 1, 2 or 3 on the scale).

Disagreement with this idea varied significantly among athletes. The proportion disagreeing was significantly higher among older athletes, i.e., 30 years and older (42 per cent), those with a disability (55 per cent), employed athletes (39 per cent, as opposed to 62 per cent of students who were not employed), Senior-level athletes (32 per cent, as opposed to 62 per cent of Development-level athletes who disagreed), and higher income athletes, with gross income of \$20,000 or more (30 per cent).

Similarly, only 36 per cent of athletes believe that basing the amount of AAP support on *financial needs* should be a high priority (responding with 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale) (Table 5.2, row 4). Recall again that athletes were first told that increased funding would lead to trade-offs. Forty-four per cent thought it should be a moderate priority (responding with 3, 4 or 5 on the scale).

Athletes who were more inclined to agree with this idea included those who both went to school and worked (52 per cent), athletes with less than \$10,000 in gross annual income (42 per cent, compared to only 25 per cent of those with \$20,000 or more income), those who had received assistance for two years (44 per cent, compared to those receiving for five or more years).

50. As noted earlier, the idea of tying assistance to income has been considered by Sport Canada and rejected as too expensive to administer; see Canadian Heritage (September 1997). *Study of the Introduction of Financial Eligibility Criteria for the Athlete Assistance Program*.

Interestingly, athletes with a disability were more inclined to assign a low priority to basing assistance on financial needs (29 per cent). Older athletes, i.e., 30 years and older, were also less inclined to give this a high priority (27 per cent) than athletes overall.

(d) Level of Funding and Other Issues

Two in three key informants (65 per cent) said that the level of AAP support should be equal to the *personal income of the average Canadian* (responded with 6 or 7 on a 7-point agreement scale). A few key informants believed that athletes' needs were greater than the average Canadian and that they should not be treated as such. Some also suggested that what is important about AAP assistance is its stability and predictability: athletes know that every two months they will be receiving a certain amount of money for their living and training expenses.

Other areas that athletes considered a high priority for change (responding with 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, where 1=a low priority, and 7=a high priority) included: giving more funding to cover *relocation costs* (42 per cent) and for *special needs* (31 per cent) (Table 5.2, rows 5 and 6, respectively). (It should be noted that relocation is considered a "special need"). Support for increased funds in these areas being a high priority was higher among: those less than 20 years of age (56 per cent – relocation); Development-level athletes (50 per cent – relocation); those with gross income of less than \$10,000 (51 per cent – relocation); athletes receiving AAP support for the first time (50 per cent – relocation); as well as athletes participating in individual sports (35 per cent – special needs).

5.2 AAP Design and Delivery

Key informants and athletes were asked to comment on various design and delivery aspects of the Program. Views were solicited on the levels of satisfaction with the role played by both the NSFs and Sport Canada in delivering the AAP. Recall that Sport Canada works in partnership with the NSFs to deliver the Program, but it is Sport Canada's responsibility to distribute AAP monies directly to athletes.

(a) NSF Delivery of the AAP

Both Sport Canada managers and athletes were asked for their views on the role played by NSFs in the delivery of AAP assistance. First, Sport Canada representatives reported that their satisfaction with NSF delivery of the AAP varied by sport (or more precisely the respective NSF). Items where satisfaction was said to vary by sport included: funding applications provided by the NSFs and the extent to which the athlete information is accurate; the NSFs' monitoring procedures for continued funding eligibility; and the NSFs' discipline and appeals procedure. Overall, these areas received modest satisfaction levels. The observation by Sport Canada officials that NSFs are inconsistent in their application of the funding criteria was noted as one reason contributing to this low level of satisfaction.

Second, athletes were first asked about the NSF/Athlete Agreement and a modest majority agreed that it adequately describes their (athletes') and the NSFs' obligations and responsibilities

(57 per cent responded to both questions with 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point agreement scale). Agreement that the NSF/Athlete Agreement adequately explained athletes' responsibilities was higher among: athletes with a disability (73 per cent), those satisfied with their training and/or performance (61 per cent), and athletes most dependent on the AAP⁵¹ (60 per cent).

There was a wide range in athletes' satisfaction ratings with other aspects of NSF delivery. The greatest proportion of athletes (74 per cent) reported being satisfied with NSFs' communications and written materials in the language of their choice (reporting 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point scale, where 1=extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied) (Table 5.3, row 1).

TABLE 5.3
Athletes' Satisfaction with NSF Delivery of the AAP,
Percentage Distribution According to Degree of Satisfaction*

Question	Dissatisfied (1-3)	Neither (4)	Satisfied (5-7)	DK/NA
<i>How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with ...?</i>				
	Per cent			
1. NSFs' communications and written materials in official language of choice	5	15	74	6
2. Fairness with which NSF applied criteria	12	17	66	5
3. Information NSF provided regarding AAP carding, funding policies and due process	17	17	63	3
4. Clarity with which NSF communicated AAP funding criteria	15	19	62	3
5. NSFs' assistance in completing AAP application form	9	21	60	10
6. NSFs' discipline procedures	10	21	43	26
7. NSFs' review of requests for special needs assistance and deferred tuition	11	20	37	32
8. NSFs' appeal procedure	12	24	29	36

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied.
n=554

Source: Athletes Survey

A modest majority of athletes (60-66 per cent, rows 2-5 of Table 5.3) reported that they were satisfied with the fairness of NSF application of funding criteria, the information provided, the clarity with which the funding criteria were communicated, and the NSF assistance in completing the application form. Interestingly, satisfaction with these aspects of NSF service delivery was significantly higher for athletes who received AAP assistance five or more times, those who were satisfied with their training and/or performance, and athletes in team sports.

51. These are athletes who, when asked to indicate the degree of dependence on various sources of support while training, gave the highest rating to the AAP.

A minority of athletes said they were satisfied with NSF's appeal procedures (29 per cent), their review of special needs assistance and deferred tuition support (37 per cent), and their discipline procedures (43 per cent) (rows 6-8 of Table 5.3). It must be noted, however, that the proportions are low partly because there were a large number of athletes indicating that these statements were not applicable to them, having not been exposed to these procedures. However, even after re-computing the proportions excluding those who did not respond to this question for whatever reason, the proportions of athletes expressing satisfaction with NSF's appeal procedures, their reviews of requests for special assistance and NSF's discipline procedures are still lower (45, 54, and 58 per cent, respectively) than with other aspects of NSF delivery (67-79 per cent, discounting non-respondents to the question). Younger athletes tended to be satisfied with these three processes. Athletes with a disability are more likely to be satisfied with the appeal procedures.

A review of program data confirms that the number of appeals is low. Over the last five years, there have been fewer than 10 appeals a year, a ratio of less than one appeal for every 100 athletes approved for AAP funding. No more than three appeals have been approved in a year.

(b) Sport Canada Delivery of the AAP

Views on satisfaction with Sport Canada's role in delivering the AAP were solicited from NSF personnel as well as athletes. NSF key informants' satisfaction with various aspects of Sport Canada AAP delivery was generally high. Almost all NSF key informants (91 per cent) were satisfied with the overall delivery (responding with 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, where 1=extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied).

NSF satisfaction was high for most individual aspects of Sport Canada delivery of the Program as well. In particular, high proportions were satisfied with: Sport Canada's review of AAP funding applications endorsed by the NSF (100 per cent); the turnaround time in funding decisions (96 per cent); advice provided on AAP matters (91 per cent); and Sport Canada's working relationship with the NSF in ensuring due process is followed with respect to selection, disciplinary, and appeal processes (86 per cent). Satisfaction among NSF key informants was lowest (47 per cent) for Sport Canada's linking of AAP support with other support for athletes⁵². A number felt there should be greater coordination between the AAP and other sources of funding, though this should not be the exclusive responsibility of the Program.

As for athletes, there was a wide range of satisfaction ratings with Sport Canada delivery of the Program. Satisfaction was highest (70-80 per cent reported that they were satisfied, i.e., responding with 5, 6 or 7 on the 7-point scale) with Sport Canada communication in the language of their choice and the timeliness of AAP payments (Table 5.4, rows 1 and 2). Satisfaction with the timeliness of payments tended to be higher among younger athletes, those who do not pay for food and rent, and those receiving AAP assistance for the first time.

52. As noted in the program description, in reviewing NSF nominations for AAP assistance, Sport Canada officials work with NSFs to consider all other assistance NSOs are making available to high-performance athletes. This linking of support is based on personal communications with a Sport Canada official but this could not be substantiated in the program documentation.



TABLE 5.4
Athletes' Satisfaction with Sport Canada's Delivery of the AAP,
Percentage Distribution According to Degree of Satisfaction*

Delivery Item	Dissatisfied (1-3)	Neither (4)	Satisfied (5-7)	DK/NR
<i>How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with ...?</i>				
	Per cent			
1. Sport Canada's communication in the language of choice	2	12	80	6
2. Timeliness of AAP payments	17	12	70	1
3. Timeliness of AAP approval process	20	19	58	3
4. Sport Canada's advice on aspects of AAP assistance, that is, the carding criteria, the agreement, appeals, etc.	9	25	55	11
5. Sport Canada's review procedures in AAP decisions	6	30	33	31

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1 = extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied. n=554

Source: Athletes Survey

Athlete satisfaction with the timeliness of the approval process and Sport Canada advice on AAP matters was decidedly lower: 58 and 55 per cent, respectively were satisfied with these elements (rows 3 and 4 of Table 5.4). Dissatisfaction with the timeliness of the approval process tended to be higher for athletes who were both students and worked, who had to pay for food and rent and who were Senior-level athletes. Satisfaction with Sport Canada advice tended to be higher for younger athletes, those with a disability and those who had to pay for food and rent.

Only one-third of athletes (33 per cent) were satisfied with Sport Canada's review procedures (row 5 of Table 5.4). Even discounting the 31 per cent of athletes who could not respond to the question or did not because they had not experienced any Sport Canada reviews, only 48 per cent were satisfied. This stands in marked contrast to the results above which indicated that 100 per cent of NSF representative were satisfied with Sport Canada review procedures. Younger athletes tended to be more satisfied with this aspect of Sport Canada program delivery than athletes overall.

Finally, a majority of athletes believe the current AAP payment schedule should be maintained. Specifically, most agree (reporting 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point agreement scale) that AAP payments should continue to be paid in advance (85 per cent) and every two months (74 per cent) (Table 5.5). Athletes who had received assistance for five or more years and who were satisfied with their performance were more likely to agree that payments should continue to be paid in advance. Athletes with a disability (87 per cent) and those who pay room and



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board (81 per cent) were more likely to agree that AAP payments should continue to be every two months.

TABLE 5.5
Athletes Views on Timing of AAP Payments
Percentage Distribution According to Degree of Agreement*

Timing of AAP Payments	Disagree (1-3)	Neither (4)	Agree (5-7)	DK/NR
<i>To what extent do you agree that AAP assistance should continue to be paid to athletes ...</i>				
	Per cent			
In advance?	3	9	85	3
Every two months?	13	11	74	1

* Athletes responded on a 7-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree.
n=554
Source: Athletes Survey

5.3 Adequacy of Performance Measurement Strategy

This evaluation used information from the performance measurement system (the AAPMIS). Note that, while the system was used to measure performance under the Program for this evaluation, it was originally designed as an administrative tool to track biographical and financial information on all funded athletes, as well as their results in competitions.

In using AAPMIS information, a number of problems were encountered. First, performance data were provided to enable the consultant to form the survey sample. The data were provided in four separate files (name, address, funding, and performance) which had to be merged for purposes of the survey. The fact data were spread out over four files (within the AAPMIS) raises concerns about the organization of the data. Second, performance data were needed to help address some evaluation issues. Again, the experience indicated that the data were not well organized and that it was difficult to obtain the required data and in a timely fashion. Third, though the RMAF has specified measurable indicators for some of the program objectives that data can be generated for, there have been no benchmarks or expected outcomes against which results could be compared in order to measure/track performance over time.

There was a general lack of awareness of the performance measurement strategy *per se* among NSFs. The responses indicated that there is some confusion about a “performance measurement strategy.” Many reported that they are not aware of a strategy *per se*, mainly because the NSFs they represent are involved in only providing annual reports to Sport Canada; reciprocal reports to the NSFs from Sport Canada are almost non-existent. If there was one, several key informants suggested it be better promoted.

A small number of NSF key informants reported that they were aware of and quite satisfied with the strategy currently being implemented, as it was “in tune” with the objectives of the organizations. These key informants’ comments indicated that the strategy was new and that progress was being made in its implementation.

Those who provided a clear indication that they were aware of a performance measurement strategy suggested:

- Basing the process of reporting more on interaction between the NSFs and Sport Canada, such that the annual reporting also reflects the reality of the NSF (i.e., their expenses regarding athletes, competitions, training, and infrastructure costs).
- Development of a standard reporting mechanism indicating the monitoring procedure for monies spent.
- Tailoring performance measurement to meet the objectives of the particular sport.

Sport Canada representatives reported that NSFs vary considerably in the extent to which they know about the strategy and provide performance data.

5.4 De-Carding and Re-Carding Athletes

The RMAF indicates that an outcome indicator of the Program concerns de-carding and re-carding. Performance data provided by Sport Canada indicate that from January 1, 1995 to February 2, 2002, one third (34 per cent) of all athletes carded over that period were carded for only one or two years.

Key informants were asked to provide reasons for de-carding an athlete. Almost all NSF representatives indicated that poor performance is the primary reason athletes lose carding status (there are specific rules why an athlete would be de-carded). Lack of commitment, retirement, grave injuries and personal reasons were also cited as reasons for de-carding an athlete. Reasons provided by key informants as to why an athlete would be re-carded, after losing their carding status, include performing well again. Sport Canada officials also reported that de-carding occurred because of, in most cases, poor performance. They also reported that the NSFs were primarily responsible for de-carding decisions and that sometimes the organizations make mistakes in this respect, owing to a lack of effective performance measurement data in some sports, which would have permitted accurate tracking of participation and performance.

Finally, several NSF representatives in general terms said they would like to see more flexibility in the system for carding of athletes with regard to exceptional circumstances and timing issues in de-carding and re-carding athletes. In fact, Sport Canada does card athletes who have not applied for funding if there is an Olympic event within six months of the start of a funding year and when a top 16 result has been obtained by the athlete.



6. Cost-effectiveness/Alternatives and Balance of Athlete Funding

The focus of this chapter is on the relative cost-effectiveness of the AAP, based mainly on qualitative evidence, and not a rigorous analysis of cost data and comparisons with evaluations of alternative initiatives. As well, because consideration of alternative approaches to delivering financial assistance to athletes could not be isolated from the provision of other funding for athletes, the balance between the AAP and other Sport Canada funding is also considered in this chapter.

6.1 Cost-effectiveness/Alternatives

All key informants were asked to give their views on the cost-effectiveness on the AAP as it is currently designed and delivered. It should be noted that key informants were not in a position to rigorously assess the cost-effectiveness of the Program. The findings presented are based on only perceptual evidence and, in many cases, are an assessment of the effectiveness of the Program, absolutely and relatively to other programs.

Before presenting the results of the interviews, it should be noted that a fraction of the Program's expenditures are devoted to overhead. Administrative costs amount to 3-4 per cent of the total budget of the Program. This would indicate that the Program is "lean" as far as overhead is concerned, suggesting that not much would be saved by no longer having the Government distribute AAP assistance.

Most Sport Canada officials and about half of the representatives of non-Sport Canada organizations perceived the AAP's approach to delivering assistance directly to athletes to be the most cost-effective way of doing so. A few said that direct delivery to the athletes eliminates the "middle man". One respondent indicated that the 1996 federal government Program Review indicated the AAP to be a most cost-effective means of delivering assistance. However, the Review could not be found to document the fact that the AAP was more cost-effective than other programs.

Four NSF key informants talked about the need for the implementation of a stricter monitoring system and facilitating the procedure of de-carding athletes. The NSFs do monitor funded athletes but just in terms of compliance with the training and the competition provisions of the NSF/Athlete Agreement. These key informants thought there should be closer scrutiny of how athletes spend their assistance and that the procedure to de-card them should be streamlined. It was said this would contribute to lower administrative costs, thereby contributing to increased cost-effectiveness.

NSF representatives were evenly split in their views on whether or not they would want the NSFs to deliver AAP assistance, though it should be noted that the NSFs already play a major partnership role in the delivery of the Program itself. Some said that NSFs would not want the responsibility of delivering the assistance to athletes. Others, however, reported that, if they received a lump sum amount, they would better manage the monies than Sport Canada does. These key informants believe that NSFs are in a better position to judge which athletes

should receive funding and where the monies should be directed, and to monitor how athletes spend their AAP funding (e.g., the extent to which AAP assistance is spent on room and board and training), ultimately making the Program more cost-effective.

Some key informants believe that having a third-party organization deliver assistance, or individual NSFs do so, would *not* be ideal, for two main reasons:

- There would be no protection of equity standards between and within sports.
- Sport Canada already has a “lean” administrative structure in place to distribute assistance, the investment in which a third-party organization would have to bear before distribution could take place.

Most key informants who indicated there were more cost-effective methods for delivering support to athletes framed their response in terms of the delivery of *all* funding programs, rather than just the AAP. Examples of suggested cost-effective options included:

- a centralized training system (as in Australia and US) whereby all athletes are sequestered in a camp where their living and training needs are addressed but they are held accountable for their results;
- greater collaboration among, or even amalgamation of, different public and private sector sources of athlete support funding (e.g., a centralized, “one-stop shopping” funding system as in Australia);
- re-distribution of all monies from anti-doping activities and “big events” to athletes and NSOs;
- reduction of egalitarianism among/within sports and concentrating on “winners” as some countries now do, which would increase Canada’s competitiveness in games; or, conversely
- targeting more development-level athletes, who are “the wave of the future”.

To better address this issue, a review of what other countries are doing with respect to the delivery of income support to athletes was undertaken. Before presenting the results of this review, it would be useful to point out differences between Canada and other countries with respect to the funding of sport overall:

- Canada spreads funding over a wider range of both winter and summer sports compared to some of its competitors which typically focus resources on Olympic sports and often in one or the other season (e.g., Australia and Great Britain on summer Olympic sports and Norway on winter Olympic sports)⁵³.

53. Goss Gilroy (January 31, 2002), “Evaluation of the NSO Support Program: National Sport Federation (NSF), Sport Organizations for Athletes with a Disability (SOAD), and Domestic Sport Organization (DSO) Components. Final Report”, for Corporate Review Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage (page 45).



- Canada has a large land mass and a relatively small population spread out along the US border. This increases the cost of training athletes and makes it difficult to find athletes to participate in international games because of a lack of a “critical mass”. On the other hand, Canada’s standard of living is one of the highest in the world and so it would have more resources potentially available for sport funding.
- Canada, unlike several European countries, does not have a longstanding culture of professional leagues in most sports which increases opportunities for competition as well as for funding the sport system.
- Government funding for sport in the United Kingdom is secured through a national lottery, whereas in most other countries tax revenues are the basis for sport funding.
- Sport Canada spends less on sport than a number of European countries that are smaller than Canada⁵⁴, and, on a per-capita basis, it spends less than Australia and Norway⁵⁵.
- In Germany, the funding of sport by the central government is diminishing and sport federations are having to play an increasingly greater role in the development, management and financing of sport⁵⁶.

What other countries have been doing with respect to providing income support is now considered. It should be noted, however, that there was no evaluative information available to consider whether or not these approaches were any more or less cost-effective than the AAP.

- *Australia:* The Australian Sport Commission (<http://www.ausport.gov.au>) does not currently have an income support program like the AAP. Between 1995 and 2001, it did have the Direct Athlete Support (DAS) scheme, which appeared to be patterned after the AAP, as it was very similar in design and intent. While Australian athletes no longer have access to such a program, elite athletes selected for the Australian Institute of Sport receive, along with state-of-the-art training and coaching, room and board as well as access to career and educational guidance through the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program.
- *United Kingdom:* Sport England/Sport UK (<http://www.ukспорт.gov.uk>) provides Athlete Personal Awards (APA) to athletes, aimed at contributing towards costs associated with living, training, and competition, while in pursuit of high performance levels. There are four “carding” levels for athletes participating in the World Class Programme (WCP), which were established to identify and support talented athletes: World Class Performance, World Class Potential, World Class Start, and Commonwealth Games. Funding for living costs under the AAP provided to athletes at the World Class

54. T*MAC*W Management & Communications Services, Inc. “Funding and Performance Levels in Olympic Games, 1972 to 1996”, based on a comparison with results from a study by the Council of Europe, Committee for the Development of Sport (January 1994), *The Economic Impact of Sport in Europe: Financing and Economic Impact*. The study also found that sport development is fairly decentralized: central government financing plays a minor role in total expenditures on all levels of sport, compared to expenditures on sport by participants, families, and spectators.

55. See Goss Gilroy, 2000, *op. cit.*

56. See T*MAC*W Management and Communications, 1997, *op. cit.*



Performance level is means tested on the basis of financial situation as well as age and competitive performance level. Elite athletes receive the highest subsistence, but they must: be over 22 years of age, not live at home with their parents, and have an average annual income of less than £17,000/year. AAP assistance received under the World Class Start and Potential programs is not means-tested, but minors receive less under the program.

- *New Zealand:* There does appear there is an income support program like the AAP in New Zealand. However, through a network of high performance centres, the New Zealand Academy of Sport, which aims to meet the needs of elite athletes, their coaches and national sport organizations by means of a network of services and facilities, does provide support to athletes in the form of the latest in sport science and sport medicine services, as well as personal development guidance and educational/career services. The latter is provided through the Athlete Career and Education Programme, which is very similar to the Australian initiative and helps athletes plan for a post-athletic career.

In addition, in New Zealand, there is the Prime Minister's High Performance Athlete Programme, which recognizes the need for athletes to establish their long-term careers and the importance of higher education. The scholarships covers carded athletes' fees to a maximum of NZ\$10,000 per year and may also provide living assistance. The student must pass the course for the institution in order to be paid. Deferred scholarships (similar to deferred tuition under the AAP) are available, but only to those athletes who have been carded at a elite level (Level 1) for two consecutive years. A living allowance, available to athletes pursuing higher levels of education, varies with funding level, increasing with seniority.

- *Ireland:* Ireland appears to provide financial support to athletes needing assistance. The Irish Sports Council (www.irishsportscouncil.ie) introduced an International Carding Scheme in 1998 to provide a range of support to assist top athletes realize their potential at the highest international level. Direct and indirect support is provided. Direct financial support is provided to those athletes who need help with meeting necessary international competition and training expenses (not otherwise covered by the respective National Governing Body of Sport). There is no mention of how "athletes who need help" is defined. Indirect support consists of access to National Coaching and Training Centres, coaching development, international competition programs and training for specific competitions.
- *Denmark:* In Denmark, income support also appears to be provided to high-performance athletes. The Danish Model of Elite Sport (www.dif.dk) seeks to improve the conditions of top athletes and strengthen Danish sport internationally. Team Denmark, a self-governing institution of elite sport, has as its objective to initiate, coordinate and make effective support for elite sports. Its budget, consisting of government funds and income derived from selling media and television rights, is responsible for supporting those activities that an elite athlete needs, including access to sport centres, training, coaching, study grants and direct financial contributions. Whether or not study and financial aid is means-tested is not clear from the documentation.



- A number of *other European countries* (e.g., France) have the practice of employing elite athletes in public sector jobs (such as in the army or post office) as a means of enabling them to cover their living and training costs.

Finally, turning to athletes' views, almost all support the idea of direct payment of assistance to them. Survey responses indicate that 98 per cent of athletes agree that the AAP assistance should continue to be paid directly to athletes (responding with 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point agreement scale). Note that this is not necessarily indicating that athletes feel that Sport Canada should be delivering the assistance to athletes, but that it be delivered *directly* to them.

6.2 Balance Between the AAP and Other Sport Canada Assistance

As background to this issue, it is instructive to recall from Chapter 4 the changes that have occurred in the balance between Sport Canada athlete-based funding (the AAP) and organization-based funding (the Sport Support Program, SSP), which also benefits high-performance athletes. Since the late 1980s (as observed in Exhibit 4.1), the ratio of AAP expenditures to those of the SSP has fallen from 9:1 to under 3:1 currently.

Key informants indicated that the balance among different types of Sport Canada assistance varies significantly across sports. For some sports, AAP assistance is one of the few types of support available for athletes, whereas in others, athletes have varying degrees of support for training and coaching and other services from their sport federation and from National Sport Centres.

About half the key informants do not believe that the current balance optimizes athlete performance. While it was said that the development and training of athletes did benefit from Sport Canada assistance, a number said the current balance is not optimal. They said there needs to be more support coming from the National Sport Centres and the NSFs, as well as increased training and competition opportunities, than there is now. (This corroborates a finding of the evaluation of the Sport Canada support program for NSFs⁵⁷.) Sport Canada officials, on the other hand, believe that, at least for some sports, the balance among all forms of federal support for high-performance athletes is optimal, with team sports less inclined to have an optimal balance.

To improve the balance, a number of key informants suggested there needs to be better coordination among the different assistance programs and services. Enhanced coordination was suggested not just within Sport Canada, but across *all* sources including private sector ones. This would reduce the number of situations where the same athletes obtain assistance from several sources while others get little. Efforts have been made in this direction, but more work was seen as being needed. Enhanced collaboration was also a response frequently given to the question on the effectiveness of the AAP.

57. Goss Gilroy (January 31, 2002), "Evaluation of the NSO Support Program: National Sport Federation (NSF), Sport Organizations for Athletes with a Disability (SOAD), and Domestic Sport Organization (DSO) Components. Final Report", for Corporate Review Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage (page 45).



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In the athletes survey, a question on balance among different kinds of Sport Canada support (e.g., the SSP) was not asked directly, but, the evidence indicates that athletes are much more likely to rely on AAP assistance than NSF assistance. Overall, 80 per cent said they relied on the AAP to a great extent (6 or 7 on a 7-point “extent” scale), compared to just 31 per cent who relied on NSF assistance.



7. Main Findings and Recommendations

Following are the main findings of the summative evaluation of the Athlete Assistance Program (AAP), based on evidence gathered in a review of documents and the literature, interviews with key informants, and a survey of athletes who are currently receiving AAP assistance. The findings are grouped under the four main evaluation issues: rationale/relevance, impacts/success, design/delivery, and cost-effectiveness/alternatives/balance. The chapter concludes with a series of recommendations.

7.1 Rationale and Relevance

High-performance athletes in intensive training for world competitions continue to need income and training support. The AAP is clearly focused on this need, which is a priority of the federal government. The Program is aligned with current government priorities in sport and with the strategic framework of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Some program objectives were found to be poorly articulated and some lacked measurable performance indicators, while most lacked expected result targets as well as benchmarks.

Rationale for Federal Government Funding of Sport and Athletes. A review of Sport Canada documents identified a number of arguments in favour of government support of high-performance sport. The arguments were typically stated in terms of the benefits that would not accrue to Canada without government funding for sport. Identified benefits included: enhanced world influence and image, enhanced values of respect and inclusion, the social and employment skills imparted to youth who are attracted into sport activities by the accomplishments of high-performance athletes at games, the economic benefits of sport, and the health benefits of participation in sport.

A review of documentation associated with the inception of the AAP in 1973 (as part of Game Plan “76”) and its official implementation in 1977 reveals that there was little in the way of concrete evidence to corroborate athletes’ unmet need for income support at the time and for governments’ role in addressing this need through program support.

In the ensuing years, the chief argument offered for such support was that it was a challenge for athletes to combine training and competing with employment or education, with many athletes living below the poverty line as a result. Without financial assistance, it was argued, many promising high-performance athletes would leave their sport before reaching their peak. Evidence gathered in a 1996 survey conducted for Sport Canada (documented in *Status of the High-Performance Athlete in Canada*, 1997) lent credence to the claim that high-performance athletes were enduring financial hardship while training.

Evidence from the current evaluation survey of AAP recipients corroborates the perception that athletes in training continue to experience financial difficulties. For most athletes in 2003, the AAP is the principal source of income, followed, to a much lesser extent, by employment, NSO support, and parental support. Many athletes incur net sport expenses (above what is covered by other sport service providers and programs) that consume much of their personal income.

Furthermore, the income distribution of athletes is skewed to lower income categories compared to the income distribution of the overall population.

Alignment of Program Objective with Government Priorities. The review of program documents determined that the AAP is aligned with the federal government's policy for sport as articulated in the May 2002 *Canadian Sport Policy* agreed to by the federal government and 13 provincial/territorial governments, along with representatives of the sport community and organizations benefiting from sport.

Specifically, the Program addresses the "Enhanced Excellence" goal of the Policy, which is to expand the number of athletes achieving world-class results in international competitions. Under this goal, one of the government's commitments is to increase high-performance athletes' accessibility to financial support and other services to enable them to successfully compete on the world stage, which corresponds to the aim of the AAP.

Alignment with Strategic Framework of Canadian Heritage. The Program is aligned with the Department of Canadian Heritage strategic framework, specifically with the "Cultural Participation and Engagement" strategic objective. The AAP seeks to defray high-performance athletes' living and training costs to enable them to train and participate in training and athletic competitions, which are viewed as "cultural activities" by senior officials of the Department of Canadian Heritage and Sport Canada. Secondary impacts are observed in terms of athletes' successes in encouraging the wider public to participate in sport.

Clarity of Program Objectives. Many key informants said the Program's objectives lacked clarity. A number said that some objectives needed to be better articulated and required greater precision. One reason identified for the lack of clarity is the overlap between some objectives, for example between the sub-objective of (1) helping Canada's international-calibre athletes to excel at the highest competitive level and (2) facilitating the attainment of athletes' long-range goals of excellence in Olympic/Paralympic or world competition.

Some respondents pointed to the great difficulty in attaining the program objective of helping athletes to excel at the highest competitive level, while ensuring they can prepare for a future career or participate in full- or part-time career activities, particularly *full-time* work. Many key informants contended that the intention of the Program should be articulated simply as the provision of financial support to enable athletes to reduce their need to work or go to school, in order to free up time for training and competitions.

The lack of specified measurable performance indicators for some objectives and the lack of benchmarks and expected results for all objectives contribute to perceptions of imprecision in the Program's objectives and renders the measurement of objective attainment difficult.



7.2 Impacts/Success

The Program's precise role in athletes' performance at games could not be identified and athletes continue to experience financial hardship while training. Evidence was mixed or modest with regard to attainment of the Program's sub-objectives and intended impacts.

The evaluation was not able to determine definitively the extent to which the Program attained its objectives and intended impacts, because: (1) there are several other sources of support for athletes, making it difficult to attribute success or failure to the AAP; (2) Canadian athletes' performance is affected by what competing nations are doing in the area of support for high-performance sport; (3) not all objectives are clearly articulated or have measurable indicators associated with them; and (4) no objectives have stated expected results or benchmarks. The latter two reasons were addressed with rationale and relevance issues.

Contribution to Improved Athletes' Performances. Program data indicate that there has been improvement in athletes' performance over time. Since 1992, almost three-quarters of funded athletes in individual sports have improved their finishes at World Championships or Olympic Games, and a third of Development-level athletes progressed to a Senior-level. Key informants indicate that the AAP has contributed to the improved performance. However, it is impossible to attribute improved athlete performance uniquely to AAP assistance owing to the role played by several other forms of support and the lack of benchmarks and specified expected results.

Results for the second performance measure defined for the Program, top 16 finishes, are modest at best. While there have been increases in the number of Canadian athletes' top 16 finishes at the Olympics, controlling for the number of events entered reveals little progress. Over the last three summer Olympics (1992, 1996 and 2000), the number of top 16 finishes per event declined from 0.40 to 0.25. For the winter Olympics, there was also a decline in performance between 1994 and 1998, from 0.80 to 0.70, but an improvement between 1998 and 2002, to 0.90.

Combining Training with School/Work without Financial Hardship. Funded athletes are undergoing financial hardship while they combine training with work or school. The vast majority of AAP recipients attend school or work while they train. Most funded athletes reported being satisfied with current training levels and said that the 2000 increase in AAP assistance levels had a positive impact on their training. However, large numbers experience financial hardship by incurring sport expenses in excess of their total income.

Incremental Impact on Training, Competing, Performance and Education. Over three-quarters of athletes perceive that AAP assistance has had an incremental impact on their training, ability to attend sporting competitions and performance. That is, most athletes believe that, if the Program did not exist, they would be unable to participate in these activities. Athletes were evenly split on the extent to which the Program had an incremental impact on their education, however.

Complementarity: There is no specified measurable outcome indicator for the complementarity objective, which a small number of key informants pointed out. Nevertheless, the perception



among most key informants is that the Program complements other sport funding sources. Many key informants also pointed out that the degree of complementarity varies appreciably by sport, because the availability of funding sources varies by sport as well.

Athlete Identification: The majority of key informants and athletes said the Program has been effective in identifying athletes who will succeed in international competitions.

Preparation for a Post-Athletic Career: Program data indicate that the ratio of users of tuition support to all athletes receiving AAP assistance has remained about the same over the last four years, at 1:3, though the number of athletes receiving such support has increased. Yet, the survey data indicate that the majority (59 per cent) of funded athletes are attending school and, therefore, are preparing themselves for a post-athletic career.

Most key informants thought the Program has been at least somewhat successful in helping athletes prepare for a post-athletic career, in the sense of acquiring a post-secondary education. Preparation in terms of career counselling is provided to carded athletes by National Sport Centres, though the AAP also provides support to retiring athletes but only for four months. There was some confusion on the part of key informants as to what is covered by AAP tuition assistance.

Athlete Retention in Sport and in Canada: The evidence is stronger that the AAP contributes to retention of athletes in their sport than to retention in Canada.

Most athletes said the AAP played an important role in their decision to continue training at all (i.e., in their sport) and that the AAP's deferred tuition support encouraged them to continue. However, very few athletes mentioned, unprompted, the AAP as the reason they refused an offer to train elsewhere. Those who left the country most frequently mentioned better training facilities as the reason for doing so, which are outside the Program's mandate.

Key informants were more likely to say that the Program contributed to athlete retention in their sport than they were to say it kept athletes from leaving Canada. The reason is that, for certain sports, the level of competition necessary to enhance performance is insufficient in Canada, although, again, this has very little to do with the AAP.

Reaching Athletes at Optimal Time. Views were mixed with respect to whether or not AAP assistance was reaching athletes at the optimal time. Most athletes indicated that they had received AAP funding when they needed it the most. The majority of key informants thought that there should be a greater focus on Development-level athletes and that assistance should reach them at earlier stages in their development.

7.3 Design/Delivery

The Program's funding criteria were seen as fair. An appropriate performance measurement strategy was seen as being needed. Delivery of the Program was on the whole perceived to be satisfactory, but some gaps in service were observed.

Funding Criteria. Athletes were more amenable than key informants to continuing the two-level carding system. A number of key informants talked about the need to recognize and reward elite athletes. There was support among key informants and athletes for recognizing and rewarding athletes finishing in higher positions than the top 16, i.e., in the top eight or the medals. Others pointed to the need to identify athletes earlier in their careers.

At the same time, others pointed to the need to identify athletes earlier in their careers.

NSF Delivery. Sport Canada managers said that the NSFs varied considerably in their scrutiny of athletes' applications for funding, their monitoring of athlete compliance regarding participation in training and competitions, and their discipline and review processes.

Athletes' satisfaction with different delivery elements was wide-ranging. The greatest proportion (74 per cent) reported being satisfied with the NSFs' communications and written materials in the language of their choice. However, only 57 per cent of athletes said the NSF/Athlete agreement adequately describes their (athletes') and the NSFs' obligations and responsibilities. Less than 60 per cent of athletes said they were satisfied with the NSFs' appeal procedures, their review of applications for special assistance and deferred tuition support, and their discipline procedures, even discounting those who had not been exposed to these processes.

Sport Canada Delivery. NSF satisfaction with most aspects of Sport Canada AAP delivery was generally high. Only a minority of NSF representatives, however, were satisfied with Sport Canada's linking of AAP support with other support for athletes, which takes place in the Sport Canada-NSF review of athlete funding nominations.

Among athletes, there was a wide range of satisfaction with different aspects of Sport Canada's delivery of the Program. Satisfaction was highest (70-80 per cent) with Sport Canada's communication in the language of athletes' choice and the timeliness of AAP payments. Much smaller majorities of athletes (55-58 per cent) were satisfied with the timeliness of the approval process and Sport Canada advice on AAP matters. A minority were satisfied with Sport Canada's review procedures in funding decisions. However, almost a third of the athletes had either not been exposed to the review procedures or did not respond to the question, while an additional 30 per cent indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the procedures.

Performance Measurement Data. The Athlete Assistance Program Management Information System (AAPMIS) maintains much information that can be used to monitor athletes' performance, though it should be noted that the AAPMIS was originally designed as an administrative tool to track biographical and financial information on funded athletes.



The experience in this evaluation raises concerns about the organization of the data and the ability of Sport Canada to use the information to generate timely and clear performance measures. The lack of benchmarks and specific expected outcomes is a concern in using these data to measure changes in athletes' performance levels over time.

There was a general lack of awareness among NSF representatives regarding the performance measurement strategy *per se*. Sport Canada representatives reported that the NSFs vary considerably in the extent to which they know about the strategy and provide performance data.

7.4 Cost Effectiveness/Alternatives and Balance of Athlete Funding

The administration of the Program is considered "lean", with National Sport Federations playing an active role in program delivery. Thus, the federal government would save very little by divesting itself entirely of the distribution of assistance. Moreover, only half the NSF representatives would want to take over delivery of the assistance.

Alternatives were identified more in terms of the coordinated delivery of *all* sport funding (including non-income support). Moreover, it could not be determined if the few alternative approaches that were suggested were in fact more cost-effective. Other countries also provide income support directly to athletes.

Only a fraction (3-4 per cent) of the Program's expenditures are devoted to overhead (salaries and overhead). This is to a large extent because the NSFs play an active role as partners in delivery of the Program, in terms of assisting athletes with their funding application, nominating athletes for funding, reviewing the nominations, and monitoring their adherence to the funding agreement.

The evidence on the relative cost-effectiveness of the Program was purely perceptual. Representatives of non-Sport Canada organizations were evenly split as to whether or not the AAP's approach to delivering assistance directly to athletes is the most cost-effective way of doing so. NSF representatives were also evenly split on whether or not the NSFs should take over the delivery of athlete assistance entirely.

Few key informants could provide specific examples of what they thought were more cost-effective ways of delivering assistance to athletes. Most framed their responses in terms of how *all* sport support could be better delivered, not just income support, and no evaluative evidence could be found on the effectiveness of these approaches. Many talked about the need for better coordination of all forms of athlete assistance. Some identified a need for a "one-stop shopping" single organization to deliver all sport funding at arm's length from the government.

A scan of approaches to delivering assistance to athletes used elsewhere indicates that, in some countries (e.g., Australia), athletes are sequestered in training camps where their living and training costs are covered. Such athletes are also provided with advice and, in some cases,



scholarships (e.g., New Zealand) to pursue further education or their future career. Some nations employ their top athletes in public sector jobs while they train. Some countries do have direct income support for athletes (e.g., United Kingdom). In these cases, the level of assistance depends on the “carding” level of the athlete, but in only one case (United Kingdom) could it be determined that the level of assistance depends on athletes’ means.

7.5 Recommendations

A. Design

1. *Articulation of Objectives:* A lack of clarity was observed in the Program’s objectives, arising out of perceived lack of precision in some objectives, overlap between some objectives, and a lack of benchmarks and measurable performance measures for all objectives.

Recommendation: Clearly articulate the rationale and objectives of the Program and specify measurable performance indicators and benchmarks for each objective.

B. Success/Impacts

2. *Measurement of Impact:* The experience of this evaluation indicates that it was not possible to disentangle the influence of AAP assistance on athletes’ performance from other forms of support available for high-performance athletes in Canada, such as coaching and training assistance available through National Sport Centres and financial support from private sector sources.

Recommendation: Consolidate future evaluations of the AAP with the evaluations of other Sport Canada programs that support high-performance athletes.

C. Delivery

3. *Awareness of what Tuition Assistance Covers:* There appeared to be a lack of awareness of what the tuition assistance covers.

Recommendation: Increase awareness of the types of education that are covered by AAP tuition support.

4. *Performance Measurement Data/Indicators:* Sport Canada appeared to have difficulty in generating timely information from the Athlete Assistance Program Management Information System to measure athlete progression. There appeared to be a lack of awareness of a performance measurement strategy among some National Sport Federations. Some objectives did not have clear, measurable performance indicators and none had benchmarks against which progress could be tracked, nor had expected results targets been specified.

Recommendation: Implement an adequate performance measurement strategy, including measurable performance indicators linked to each objective’s expected results, for which

data are collected and appropriately organized to enable the generation of timely and usable outcome data. Ensure that National Sport Federations are made aware of the performance measurement strategy. Specify benchmarks and measurable expected results for all objectives and indicators.

5. *NSF/Athlete Agreement*: A small majority of athletes stated that the NSF/Athlete Agreement inadequately described the obligations of the NSFs and the athletes.

Recommendation: Review the NSF/Athlete Agreement and ensure that the responsibilities of the parties are clearly specified.

6. *NSF Delivery*: National Sport Federations were said to exhibit inconsistency in their application of the carding criteria, scrutiny of athletes' applications, monitoring of athletes' compliance, and discipline and review processes. Only a minority or small majority of athletes expressed satisfaction the NSFs' appeals and disciplinary procedures, and their review of requests for special needs and tuition assistance.

Recommendation: Encourage National Sport Federations to consider improvements in many of their activities under the Program, including their monitoring of athletes' compliance and the, review procedures in regards to tuition and special assistance, and appeals and discipline procedures.

7. *Sport Canada Delivery*: A minority of NSF representatives expressed satisfaction with, and many were uncertain about, Sport Canada's linkage of AAP support with other support for athletes during the review process. A small majority of athletes were satisfied with the timeliness of Sport Canada's funding decisions and with the advice it provides to athletes on AAP matters. A minority of athletes were satisfied with Sport Canada's review procedures in funding decisions, even discounting the third of athletes who either had not been exposed to the review procedures or did not answer the question and recognizing that an additional 30 per cent indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Recommendation: Sport Canada should consider improvements in the linkage of AAP support with other support for athletes, the timeliness of funding decisions, the advice it provides athletes on AAP matters, and its review procedures in AAP decisions.