



Patrimoine
canadien

Canadian
Heritage

2023 Status of the High-Performance Athlete

Summary

Prepared for Sport Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage

Supplier: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

Contract Number: CW2268682

Contract Value: \$80,184.80

Award Date: January 17, 2023

Delivery Date: April 19, 2024

Registration Number: POR 108-22

For more information on this report, please contact Canadian Heritage at por-rop@pch.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

Canada 

2023 Status of the High-Performance Athlete

Summary

Prepared for Sport Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage

Supplier: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

Date: April 2024

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Sport Canada (Canadian Heritage). The research study was conducted with 857 Canadian high-performance athletes, as well as 132 National Team Coaches and High Performance Directors and 15 Presidents and Athlete Service Managers of Canadian Sport Institutes between March and December 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : La situation de l'athlète de haut niveau en 2023 : rapport final.

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes only. Prior written permission must be obtained from Public Services and Procurement Canada. For more information on this report, please contact Public Services and Procurement Canada at: tpsgc.questions-questions.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca or at: Canadian Heritage at por-rop@pch.gc.ca

Communications Branch
Public Services and Procurement Canada
Portage III Tower A
16A1-11 Laurier Street
Gatineau QC K1A 0S5

Catalogue Number: CH24-50/2024E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-0-660-72081-4

Related publications (registration number: POR 108-22):

Catalogue Number CH24-50/2024F-PDF (French Report)

ISBN: 978-0-660-72082-1

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2024

SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

This report presents results of the sixth study of high-performance athletes since the early 90's. As was the case with the previous studies in 1992, 1997, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 the primary goal is to gather information from various sport stakeholders in order to paint a current picture of the characteristics of high-performance athletes. The original 1992 study provided a comprehensive examination of athletes' sport, social and economic characteristics and was a key contributor to the development of athlete support policies at Sport Canada. Each report has drawn upon multiple lines of evidence collected from carded athletes, coaches and National Sport Organizations, updating information collected from previous research. A key objective of the research is to provide a picture of the costs of sport and the needs of athletes with respect to assistance through Sport Canada's Athlete Assistance Program (AAP). Results from the 2023 study are particularly important, in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, impacting the world in 2020 and 2021, with resulting spike in inflation in 2022 and 2023.

This survey builds on much of the data from the earlier studies. The specific areas of investigation include:

- Training, competition and other sport-related activities;
- Adequacy of support services available to athletes;
- Social and economic characteristics; and
- Satisfaction with the AAP

B. SURVEY METHODS

This project involved collecting sets of data from three different target populations. Data were collected through:

- An online survey of AAP carded high-performance athletes;
- An online survey of National Team Coaches and High Performance Directors.
- An online survey of Presidents and Athlete Service Managers of the seven Canadian Sport Centres; and

Each survey instrument relied on previous questionnaires (2019), although some revisions were made to reduce the overall length of the survey. Each questionnaire focused on the areas of investigation already cited and included some of the questions that were asked of athletes in the

1992, 1997, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 surveys of high-performance athletes to track changes in status and experiences. Prior to collection of the survey, the athlete instrument was tested with 13 athletes in English (9) and French (4) and changes were made to the wording, programming, and language as needed. The average time to complete the athlete survey was 19 minutes.

For each survey, all members of the population were included. There were no exclusionary criteria. Since no sampling was conducted, a margin of error is not applicable to the results. In each survey, sizable and reasonably representative proportions of the population were captured, and results are therefore considered projectable to the broader population.

Online Survey of High-performance Athletes

A self-administered, web-based survey was conducted between March 20, 2023, and December 18, 2023. The survey was shared with 1,971 high-performance athletes who were carded at the time of the survey. Sport Canada circulated advance communications to athletes, National Sport Organizations and Canadian Sport Centres, and communicated with National Sport Organizations at several intervals throughout the data collection period. National Sport Organizations and Canadian Sport Centres also sent an announcement to distribute or post on their social media feeds. EKOS, who conducted the study under contract for the Department of Canadian Heritage, also offered a gift card draw as an incentive to respond. Additional e-mail reminders were issued over several months, as well as reminder calls made by telephone to roughly 1,200 non-responding athletes (November and early December 2023). From the 1,971 carded athletes, 857 (43%) responded. The overall response rate for the survey, was similar to 2019 and 2009 response rates, but lower than the 51% achieved in 2014.

Based on a review of the complete set of records (1,971 carded athletes as of May 2023 when the list was updated from March 2023), a weighting scheme was applied to increase the representativeness of the final sample of 857 athletes, based on region, athlete class (Olympic/Paralympic), season (summer/winter), type of sport (team/individual), by card level, and by gender.

Online Survey of National Team Coaches and High Performance Directors

The second component of the study involved an online survey shared with 546 National Team Coaches and High Performance Directors. A total of 132 of the 546 responded for a response rate of 24%. The online survey took an average of 19 minutes to complete. The survey data was collected between June 6 and December 12, 2023. All respondents received an e-mail invitation as well as several reminders.

Online Survey of Presidents and Service Managers of CSCs

The third data collection activity for this project was a small survey conducted online with the seven Presidents and eight Athlete Service Managers. All contact information on potential respondents (name, organization, and telephone number) was provided by Sport Canada, who also helped determine which staff to include. Some of the questions in the survey questionnaire were qualitative, open-ended in nature and others were closed ended. The questionnaire was administered over the same data collection period as that of the coaches. Of the 25 individuals invited, 15 responded (i.e., 69%).

Data Analysis

Overall results are presented in the main portion of the narrative and are typically supported by graphic or tabular presentation of results. Results for the proportion of respondents in the sample who either said “don’t know” or did not provide a response may not be indicated in the graphic representation of the results in all cases, particularly where they are not sizable (e.g., 10% or less). Results may also not total to 100% due to rounding.

Results are compared to the previous two to three iterations of the study (i.e., 2019, 2014 and 2009). The reference period for questions about annual income and monthly expenses are for the complete previous year, therefore reference in this section of the report is to 2022, 2018, and 2012, respectively. In 2019 and 2014, as well as in previous years, questions requiring a scaled response were based on seven points. These were changed to five-point scales in 2023 in order to design a more mobile-friendly presentation of the survey. Labels of the low, mid- and high points of each scale, however, were not changed¹.

Bulleted text is used to point out any statistically and substantively significant differences between sub-groups of respondents which can also be found in the detailed data tables (separate document). If differences are not noted in the report, it can be assumed that they are either not statistically significant² in their variation from the overall result or that the difference was

¹ Given the need to compare results from 2014 and 2019 where a 7-point scale was used, to 2023 results using a 5-point scale, results for all points above or below the midpoint (i.e., results for responses 1, 2 and 3, or 5, 6 and 7) from 2014 and 2019 have been down-weighted to 93.5% when comparing with results for 1 and 2 or 4 and 5 in 2023).

² Chi-square and standard t-tests were applied as applicable. Differences noted were significant at the 95% level.

deemed to be substantively too small to be noteworthy. The programmed survey instruments can be found in the appendices.

C. KEY FINDINGS

Motivation and Satisfaction

High-performance athletes continue to exhibit high levels of satisfaction with their career as a high-performance athlete. Almost all athletes are satisfied with their confidence in experiencing a sport that is safe, and free of performance enhancing drugs. More than eight in ten are satisfied with the enjoyment they get from their sport and that the environment is safe. Eight in ten also rate themselves as satisfied with the environment as it is free from harassment and discrimination, and three in four see it as respectful and fair. Only 69%, however, are satisfied with their level of achievement or performance.

Training, Training Plans and Coaching

Just over half of athletes indicated that they have individual, formalized plans for their development. Eight in ten athletes indicate satisfaction with their involvement in their development of the training and competition plan. The same proportion also indicated satisfaction with their plan overall. Findings point to a reasonably high level of satisfaction with the overall quality of the coaching and the technical expertise demonstrated by their coaches, which is on par with previous years. More than eight in ten athletes also indicated satisfaction with coaches' ability to promote and foster a respectful and healthy environment. Three in four athletes are satisfied with the time the coaches spend with their athletes, which is largely on par with previous results.

CSC Services and Supports

Three in four athletes feel they are adequately supported in terms of the quality of training, access to support for mental health, the quality of competition experience and performance services they receive during competitions. Two in three rate the adequacy of physical access to training facilities and performance services they receive during training positively. The financial support that athletes receive is rated much lower, with just under four in ten saying it is adequate and a similar proportion rating it as less than adequate.

Six in ten athletes believe they have been able to access all the needed sport science and sport medicine services from their CSI. Three in four athletes feel they have sufficient information about the type of sport science and sports medicine services available from their CSI. Sport science services rated most important by athletes are strength and conditioning, nutrition, and sport psychology. This is followed by performance analysis, and skill and technique analysis, seen as important by six in ten athletes. Of sport medicine services provided by CSIs, physiotherapy and massage are the most highly valued, according to eight in ten athletes. This is followed by six in ten athletes noting the value of advice or treatment from a sport doctor, mental health assessments and athletic therapy.

Financial Picture

Carded athletes were asked to report their annual income from a variety of sources for 2022. The average annual income report was \$34,945 for 2022. The largest proportion of this income is derived from Federal and/or Provincial athlete assistance (\$13,744 from Sport Canada's AAP and \$3,730 from Provincial Assistance). A smaller proportion of an athletes' income is derived from employment (\$11,990 annually), sport-related sources such as sponsorship, prize money, scholarships, etc. (\$5,884), and sports awards (\$1,381).

Expenses, on the other hand, are \$3,294 per month, or \$39,528 per year. This includes close to \$1,300 per month for housing, over \$1,100 per month in sport-related expenses and close to \$1,300 per month in living (food, clothing, transportation) and other expenses. Considering the average annual income of an athlete is \$34,945 and the expenses amount to \$39,528 per year, athletes are facing a shortage of \$4,583 per year or \$382 per month.

Almost one in seven athletes said that they have incurred some level of repayable debt in the pursuit of their athletic career. Loans from credit cards (56% of athletes with debt) and family (47% of those with debt) are at the top of the list, followed by loans to financial institutions (36%) and then student loans (34%). When loan amounts are added together they amount to an average of just under \$3,000 in repayable debt across all athletes.

In 2023, three in four athletes reported that they rely heavily on Sport Canada's AAP as the most prevalent source of financial support. This is followed by a reliance on family and/or Provincial AAP; key sources for half of athletes in each case.

Money is a significant barrier to attending international competitions and appropriate nutrition according to about one in four athletes. This is followed by barriers to proper housing and equipment according to one in five athletes.

Views about AAP Support

Three in four athletes agree that the AAP has made it possible to achieve higher levels of athletic performance. Fewer than half of athletes report that the AAP is assisting (or has assisted) them in pursuing post-secondary education. Only one in four athletes agree that the funding by AAP is sufficient to meet living and training needs. Half of athletes view the Canadian Sport System as supportive.

Just under one in three athletes have contacted this program at Sport Canada in the past 12 months. Satisfaction with service is very high among athletes that have contacted Sport Canada's AAP staff in the recent past. Virtually all athletes indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of service they received when contacting Sport Canada.

D. CONTRACT VALUE

The contract value for the POR project is \$80,184.80 (including HST).

Supplier Name: EKOS Research Associates

PWGSC Contract Number: CW2268682

Contract Award Date: January 19, 2023

To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail por-rop@pch.gc.ca

E. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)