

March 31, 2022

Mr. Mark Bryant  
Editor  
B.C. Rugby News

Dear Mark,

**Re: Rugby Canada High-Performance Review**

Thank you for your recent synopsis and publishing of the Rugby Canada High-Performance Review.

In many respects an anti-climactic document which reiterates dated positions already held by many in the Canadian Rugby Community.

However, in several areas I found the review to be shallow, ill-informed, and based on premises from what appears to be a small sample size of perspective.

While the review was redundant in stressing the importance of need for better Governance, improved processes, procedures, protocols, culture and more emphasis on inclusion, diversity, equity and belonging (IDEB) these aspirational pursuits are simply rubbish if the Board, Management, Staff, Coaches, Players are not held accountable to execute.

I might be mistaken, but by my count the term "accountability" is only referenced once in the entire review document. Successful high-performance outcomes, i.e., culture, processes, procedures, protocols, governance, IDEB, HR practices are predicated on accountability.

High Performance examples of accountability or lack thereof:

- Previous CEO agreeing to relocate to Langford and then not.
- Players not following COVID protocols in lead up to the 2021 Olympics.
- Coaches being late for team departure to the Airport.
- All players not training in centralized environment with no repercussions.
- The atrocious, confused coaching certification process that fails more than it passes worthy candidates.

The last 6 years has witnessed and continues to do so a litany of accountability failures within the Rugby Canada high performance environment. Adherence to securing accountability requires high caliber people invested in the program, be it Management, Staff or Athletes.

The review implies processes, procedures, protocols, are a nonexistent entity in the Rugby Canada set up; they are there. But again, if the high-performance program is devoid of high caliber quality people, it is irrelevant how specific, detailed, voluminous the document or action is if high caliber people are not in place to ensure adherence and accountability.

Additionally, there were several observations that were put forward that were poorly conceived, example:

**“Men’s 15’s Canada least competitive high-performance team receives the greatest share of direct funding”**. Of course, it does – of the 4 high performance formats across the international rugby landscape World Rugby places the highest priority on Men’s XV Rugby. Rightly or wrongly, but most likely because Men’s 15’s is the highest revenue generating area of the global game. The allocation of funding to the Men’s XV program is largely outside the purview of Rugby Canada. Those funds are strictly specified by World Rugby where the funds are to be deployed by the receiving National Union. My understanding was World Rugby was represented on the review panel, could they not have conveyed this long held funding policy?

Also, as far as prioritizing the alignment of the 4 high performance programs I am confident (and I am not alone in this position) there are a number of highly capable people on the technical side of the Canadian Rugby Community outside the current insular confines of the current high performance set up who could provide valuable insight to align and maximize what can be done.

**“Women’s 15’s and 7’s is likely to be competitive on the World stage; Men’s 15’s and 7’s are unlikely to be truly competitive on the World stage”** – not entirely accurate. Agreed, the Women’s 15’s are a highly competitive side. The Women 7’s won a bronze medal approximately 6 years ago, of which the Country was immensely proud of their accomplishment. The hard reality is in high-performance sport, “you are only as good as your last game”. The harder reality was witnessing John Tait (former Women’s 7’s coach) being abandoned by Rugby Canada senior executive and left no choice but to depart.

On his departure in approximately January of 2021 the team was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the World. 3 coaches later and to date, the team has finished no higher than 6<sup>th</sup> and is currently ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the World, after coming off a 4 year \$10 million dollar investment in the program. The Men are currently ranked 13<sup>th</sup>. The historical lack of Men’s 7’s funding and turnover in the team is now evident. The Men’s 15’s program is in disarray. All 4 programs appear to be accountable to no one above the coaching staff.

**“Rugby Canada’s talent assessment and identification process is overly biased (particularly in favor of traditional Canadian Rugby geographies/locales and/or ineffective, as it is not capable of enabling the development of players across 15’s and 7’s teams.”** The game is played outside. British Columbia has the mildest climate, as such provides more competition. Example: UBC & UVic play upwards of 18 games a season, eastern universities are fortunate to get in 10 games a season. They have also won all University Championships to date. Can talent assessment and identification be improved, I have no doubt, but this statement is overly aggressive with no supporting evidence.

**“In contrast, the 7’s team (correctly) defends its funding as being based on its recent history of on-field achievement. They compare their funding to the Men’s 15’s program which remains more highly direct funded and prestigious despite a long-term lack of on field success”** – see earlier commentary specific to this issue. My understanding was this review was intended to be objective and impartial? The

insertion of (correctly) above suggests bias or ignorance or both. Also, let's be accurate the Women's 7's team won a bronze medal almost 6 years ago, of which the entire Rugby community was proud of, but the term "recent" is aggressive. "Recent" would be more accurately employed to describe the most recent 24 months.

**"The realities of Canada's geography are an undeniable challenge and Rugby Canada's physical structure at times exacerbates the challenge – the benefits of Langford are not being realized."**

- **Langford appears to be a true "double edge sword" for the high-performance program.**
- **The effects of isolation in Langford (combined with the current cultural challenges in high performance) are seen as being detrimental to the holistic development of athletes –** according to who? Is this a revelation germinated during COVID, an aberrational time in history?
- **Langford is not viewed as a positive place to live with it being framed as a "expensive and isolated" –** this sounds like an inverse conclusion. "expensive" would be consistent with a densified urban area, i.e., Vancouver or Montreal. "isolated" would suggest low urban densification, less expensive to live. Why wouldn't the authors attempt to validate this assertion as it comes across as illogical?
- **"The isolating feeling of Langford is seen as potentially heightening cultural pressures and demands greater involvement of responsible leadership"** No doubt there is room for improvement which I agree would most aptly be served by proactive leadership. Is this a perception held by all athletes training at Langford or just some? Was this issue raised in the lead up to the Women's 7's team winning a bronze medal in 2016?

**"In comparison to Langford, many have questioned if there truly is an overall benefit to removing athletes from effective club/university/provincial development programs in favor of centralized Langford based program"** Who is "many"? How informed is the "many" on best practice high performance training environments? How many effective club/university/provincial development programs are there in Canada? Like the geography, the caliber of development programs and duration of seasons is vast. When the Women's 7's team won their bronze in 2016 they were centralized. When Men's 15's finished 8<sup>th</sup> at the 1991 World Cup 90% of the players and coaches were based in B.C. – a looser form of centralization. When the Men's 15's program centralized the Pride program at UVic there was a material uptick in the Men's 15's program. These are factual assertions not superficial hypothesis. Did the review seek out the views of the winningest coach in Rugby Canada history for his perspective on centralization? Were the views of the Men's 7's team who finished 8<sup>th</sup> at the recent Olympics aggregated in the review? It is conceivable with less than half a percentage point of OTP funding (\$133,000) in comparison to the Women's 7's program (\$10,000,000) over the 4 year lead up, centralization was essential for the Men's 7's team to be competitive and secure 8<sup>th</sup> at the Olympics.

**"Langford's physical location on the extreme edge of Western Canada maximizes its geographical remove (?) and generally exacerbates already challenging Canadian travel logistics"** Does the review provide any well considered location alternatives?

**“Conversely, the ability to centralize athletes is seen by some as the only way for Canada to establish a competitive advantage”** It really doesn't matter what “some” say or think. I think a reasonable person would always defer to persons of technical high-performance acumen and experience. I revert back to my earlier reference to accountability; my understanding is members of the Women's 7's team in the lead up to the Olympics were not held “accountable” to train at Langford full time. Could this have played a detrimental role in their performance at the Olympics? At the risk of sounding pedantic, did the accountability of the Men's 7's team to train full time at Langford offset some of the sizable lack of funding to finish in 8<sup>th</sup> place at the Olympics?

**“Athletes on the Women's 15 team, despite being the highest ranked performance team, are provided relatively fewer resources despite they being the most likely to achieve high performance outcomes”** Again, the differential in funding between the Men's 15 program and the Women's 15 program is largely a funding decision of World Rugby.... not Rugby Canada. It's the same scenario with OTP's targeting of dramatically more funding towards the Women's 7's program versus the Men's 7's program; the funding allocation is outside Rugby Canada's control. Were the authors of this report not made aware of these long-standing funding policies?

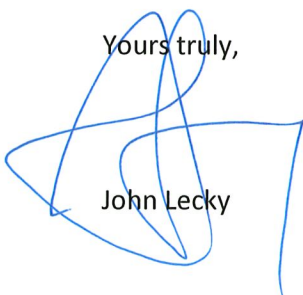
While the review was blunt, direct, and collated many deficiencies in the Rugby Canada high performance set up that many in the Rugby Community were well aware of, there was some bias and lack of understanding with how Rugby Canada is funded by its partners. Also, there were several superficial statements. There would have been great value added if 3<sup>rd</sup> party review panel members could have imparted some high-performance best practice examples for Rugby Canada and the Canadian Rugby community to contemplate.

Again, all the workings (processes, procedures, protocols, IDEB, governance, etc.) are pointless without adherence to accountability - from the board room to the grass. When accountability permeates an organization, it builds culture and high performance is typically not far behind.

Although the CEO has moved on, accountability is still a scarce commodity around the high performance set up at Rugby Canada. The senior executive with the endorsement of the Board must move with utmost urgency in making necessary personnel changes and enforcing accountability for all high performance functions, if Rugby Canada is to rally.

I would be curious to hear your perspective on the above noted elements of the High-Performance Review.

Yours truly,



John Lecky