

# An exciting time for sport

It has now been about a month since I became Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport, so I thought I would write about my responsibilities in the sport portfolio.

This is an exciting time for sport in Canada. The recent Torino Olympics saw Canada place third in the medal count, with 24 medals.

Our Paralympians are now competing in Turin, including local resident Bradley Bowden of Orton, a member of the men's sledge hockey team. The improved performance of our high performance Olympic and Paralympic athletes is no accident. It is the result of a renewed focus and additional money that the Government of Canada committed to sport about two years ago.

This additional money, both public and private, along with better targeting of resources has resulted in our best-ever performances at the Winter Olympics. How well our high-performance athletes do is important for two reasons.

First, Canada's international reputation is enhanced when we do well at multi-sport events like the Olympics and Paralympics, and second, our high-performance athletes provide a role model for Canadians to live more active and healthier lifestyles, especially our children.

However, high-performance sport is only one side of the equation. Equally important is broad-based community sport and physical fitness, sports like soccer, rugby, softball and activities such as swimming, dance, and jogging. Both are equally needed in a symbiotic way. You cannot have high performance sport without a broad based community sport system that feeds into the high performance system. Likewise, children will not be physically active and participate in community sport without role models for them to look up to. You would

Michael Chong



not have thousands of local hockey teams and rinks in Canada without the inspiration of the NHL, and the NHL would not exist without the amateur hockey system that provides it with new talent each year.

Our government is going to do more to encourage greater physical fitness and community sport.

First, we are going allow parents to claim a federal tax credit on spending of up to \$500 per year per child under 16 for registration fees and memberships that promote physical fitness.

Second, we are going to ensure that annual funding for physical activity, including amateur sport, equals at least one percent of total federal health funding. Currently we are looking at various ways of implementing these two commitments. Over the coming months I hope to be able to provide you with specific details.

Our government believes that an important part of health care is prevention, including insuring that Canadians, especially children and disadvantaged groups, participate in community sport and physical fitness. As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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—Michael Chong is the MP for the riding of Wellington-Halton Hills

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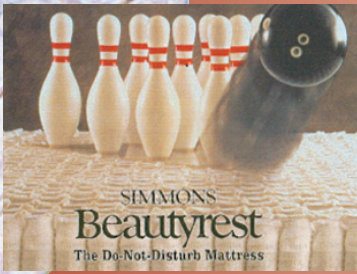
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