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Reimagining possibilities for sport in Canada: Lessons from the curling club

The Canadian sport system finds itself at a crossroads. Amid the on-going global COVID-19 pandemic; heightened focus on diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and reconciliation; as well as various sexual misconduct and governance controversies within national sport organizations, transformative change is needed to foster a system that truly serves the needs of all Canadians in an inclusive, participatory manner. Our focus as a research team is to address such a need within the sport of curling and, by extension, Canadian sport. The 'Changing the Face of Curling' symposium, held in May 2022, was one such initiative designed to present and discuss the complexity surrounding understanding and applications of DEI. The event highlighted entrenched structures, cultures, and behaviours that have contributed to the lack of diversity in the sport and presented an immediate call-to-action for implementing substantive measures to remedy this predicament. The two-day symposium drew approximately 150 participants, representing a variety of stakeholders roles and included presentations, panel discussions, and workshops designed to interrogate the challenges and potential opportunities relevant to DEI in the sport. This presentation represents our reflections on learnings gained from the design, hosting, and facilitation of this event, which was a milestone national gathering and the first-of-its-kind in curling. We offer recommendations useful for sport leaders in considering DEI interventions for structural and systemic change as well as policy implications for sport in Canada. These outcomes are derived from our collective, critical reflections regarding the symposium and ongoing research activities. The insights gained by scrutinizing conditions affecting curling not only offer value to the sport, but may be more broadly relevant for the Canadian sport system, especially regarding barriers, tensions, and possible resolutions to inequities. These understandings help to decipher why conditions persist, which deny opportunities to participate and render initiatives to combat disparities ineffective. Further, our reflections include considerations useful for sport practitioners seeking to reshape the sporting landscape in order to better reflect the rich diversity of persons living in Canada.