



# TEAM CANADA WOMEN'S ROLLER DERBY

## STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

August 2016 • [www.TeamCanadaRollerDerby.com](http://www.TeamCanadaRollerDerby.com) • Contact: [TeamCanada.ChefdeMission@gmail.com](mailto:TeamCanada.ChefdeMission@gmail.com)

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To help inform our strategic planning process, Team Canada (Women's) Roller Derby wished to consult its constituency, partners, and previous staff and athletes about the organization's performance to date. About 40 influential members of the Canadian roller derby community were approached by Chef de Mission Germaine Koh to complete an online survey or phone interview in July-August 2016. Two-thirds of the people completed the survey, representing the following groups, with some overlap:

9	2011 Team Canada Women's players
7	2014 Team Canada Women's players
9	Team Canada Women's staff, past or present
5	Team Canada Men's players or staff
2	Team Canada Junior players or staff
7	Non-Team-Canada roller derby players, current or retired
4	Non-Team-Canada roller derby coaches or administrators
2	Roller derby officials
4	Media, announcers, journalists, photographers
2	Representatives of other sport or roller derby organizations
2	Sponsors or suppliers for Team Canada Women — previous or current
1	Volunteer for Team Canada Women
1	Business
1	Other [*2011 & 2014 tryouts]

The survey included four open-ended questions. Key points are summarized on the following pages.

### 1. OPERATIONS & GOVERNANCE

**Ideally, how do you think Team Canada Women should operate? What should be its range of activity or responsibility?**

### 2. PARTNERSHIPS & OPPORTUNITIES

**Who do you see as likely partners for Team Canada Women?**

### 3. CHALLENGES

**What are the challenges that Team Canada faces? This could refer either to the organization or to the evolution of the sport.**

### 4. SUCCESSES & WEAKNESSES

**In your opinion/experience, what has Team Canada Women's team done well in the past? What not so well?**



# 1. OPERATIONS & GOVERNANCE

## Key suggestions:

- Clear governance structures
- Operate as a national sport organization
- Ongoing operations
- Collaborate with Team Canada Men & Juniors and others
- More practice for team cohesion
- Transparent procedures
- Take responsibility for sport development
- Clear communication around team selection
- Assemble best individual players but build a TEAM
- Better integration of athletes from smaller centres

**Ideally, how do you think Team Canada Women should operate? What should be its range of activity or responsibility?**

“You should try to **separate as much as possible the sport aspect from the business/administrative aspect.**”

“Team Canada should have **a continuous regional leadership/management group** that is either paid or has expenses offset to allow people the time to provide their time... Some in depth looks at other national programs in other sports would be a good framework to consider.”

“Team Canada should operate with **a streamlined chain of command that never stops functioning.**”

“Consider creating an organization that would allow for **national representation, advocacy, and fundraising for the sport** of roller derby.”

“Team Canada should operate like other national teams: as a non-profit national sport organization with an ongoing operational structure and **public accountability, plans for long-term athlete and organizational development, controlled staff turnover, and stability** that will build trust in the program.”

“**If the men’s, women’s and junior’s groups could work together it would benefit all of the groups.** There is a lot of administration that could be handled centrally... Currently all these groups work independently and it’s so inefficient.”

“Team Canada women should operate with transparency. Be open and honest with the skaters that try out. The goal should be to **build a team that can be sustained** long after the World Cup is over, so it can continue to improve and evolve.”

“I would like the team to be able to meet and practice more often, either at tournaments or other events... The vastness of the country is a huuuuug-ggeee obstacle!!!... Money wise and logistically it will be hard for everyone to get to everything. I think having a well set out schedule in advance would be good.”

“Ideally, Team Canada presents as **the Canadian national team at international competition for women skaters in roller derby. This seems obvious, but demands a level of rigor and transparency — from governance and executive direction off the track, to comportment and performance on the track — that is currently missing from roller derby** at all levels, and in all regions of the country...”

It is the duty of the national team in any sport to present to all ages, all regions, and all levels of ability in that sport, as the pinnacle of achievement. **There should be a clear progression and structure** that allows a young athlete to be able to map out the steps needed to represent her country.”

“Play to win with a roster of Canada’s best women **team player** skaters. Emphasis on the TEAM in team player.”

“The main goal should be international performance. But **Team Canada should also work on developing our sport across Canada.**”

“**You need to build support of the community behind the tryout process** so people don’t think it’s always going to be dominated by Ontario/Montreal. There is some mistrust about the process outside of Central Canada now. Roles and responsibilities and decision-making processes need to be made transparent.”

“**There is quite a bit of talent outside of WFTDA charters that gets ignored.**”

“Being that two teams in Canada reign supreme on the east and west coast, some of the players in the prairies are easily overlooked.”

“Why isn’t there **a scouting process?** Open tryouts are good for wild card players but it doesn’t allow for a bar to be set or help narrow what the team is looking for. During the tryout process, pick some players to train up for the following World Cup.”

## 2. PARTNERSHIPS & OPPORTUNITIES



### Who do you see as likely partners for Team Canada Women?

In addition to specific suggestions for partnerships to pursue, respondents shared strategies for developing partnerships,

either with businesses...

...or with governing bodies and other teams.

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“Pushing towards national brand corporations would be great. Many of them support sports across the country and if Team Canada positioned itself properly and provided the information to these organizations in a timely and professional manner then getting them on board would help the entire sport along with getting money for the squad as well.”

“Private businesses need to see return on their dollar through publicity and ultimately increased sales.”

“Sponsorship from major Canadian companies should be achievable... Some are well known for supporting Canadian athletes. Working with provincial and federal governments should also be a goal.”

“There are two obvious classes of partners: one for governance (political/governing bodies), and one for sponsorship (corporate). From a sponsorship perspective, there seems a logical hierarchy of needs for a national team... **From a governance perspective, it’s critical to establish a progression within the National Coaching Certification Program.** I strongly believe that roller derby needs to find common cause with skateboarding, rugby, and ice hockey (for example).”

“Ideally, there should be a single Team Canada organization, which encompasses Women, Men, and Juniors. I’d like to see Team Canada have **a stable enough organizational structure that it can obtain government funding and substantial corporate sponsorship.**”

**“If the national teams are to be standing teams, they should probably be amalgamated as some kind of non-profit organization... They are all missing governance. Formalizing the team and its structures would help its credibility.** Could also think beyond derby to partner with other national teams, Sport Canada, and provincial teams. Better structure could lead to both financial support for the organization and support for on-track performance.”

“Perhaps look at women’s rugby 7’s and how they went from unknown and virtually ignored to one of the best programs in the world and now an Olympic sport; all in the last decade. leverage their model, planning and structure.”

### 3. CHALLENGES



**What are the challenges that Team Canada faces?**

**This could refer either to the organization or to the evolution of the sport.**

#### Logistical:

- Geographical
- Organizing sufficient practice to develop teamwork
- Funding the program

#### Management:

- Organizational capacity
- Perception of regional biases & favouritism

#### Sport-specific:

- Lack of infrastructure & recognition for roller derby
- Staying ahead of sport developments

“Since Canada is such a large country, one of the main challenges is to provide a consistent practice for its members. Yes, practices and training camps can be organized but it is also a financial burden for the athletes and coaches.”

“Geography. **Teamwork is very difficult to organize cross country**, and is part of why there ends up being west coast and east coast lines on the track... Funding. Travel is a huge part of the team player’s expenses. **Many simply can’t afford to participate** even if they made the team.”

“The obvious geographical and financial challenges point to the difficulty of developing a unified team and program. This could be addressed long term by developing regional feeder programs that help develop the sport and create a sense of shared purpose.”

“Geographic challenges were the biggest issue for training. **Having any kind of coherent training plan needs buy in from all skaters in all parts of the country.**”

“The biggest challenge is being scattered across the country, making it hard to cohere as a unit. **The 2014 roster was balkanized** into Montreal, Toronto and Terminal City, which to some degree was inevitable. But the **lack of unit cohesion prompted skaters in stressful situations to act as individuals**, which cost the team dearly.”

“Need to **show return on investment of sponsorship dollars**, financial tracking and reporting, and **setting up some kind of not for profit business to run the organization...**”

“Challenges: Fundraising. Good management with transparent goals.”

“**The challenge for the new coaches will be to see beyond their own derby knowledge, to be open to knowledge outside their regions and comfort zones, to be open-minded and open to help.** Also, the skaters need to learn to work with people they don’t know and to play outside their comfort zones. Without unity the team won’t have success. The team should also do more work on mental toughness.”

“It will always be a challenge to forego personal bias and simply look at the skills and personality of each new player. Politics play a major role in the challenge as well.”

“Coaches with affiliation to leagues have a hard time not being biased when it came to game play and picking the team.”

“**The biggest problem is the continued fractured nature of roller derby in Canada.** There is nothing to pull us all together as a sport and though Team Canada can be that thing it has failed to do so in the past.”

“There is still a misconception of what derby really is, which holds it back from being recognized as a legitimate sport.”

“We’re in a weird in-between stage that is part serious sport and part entertainment. The community wants different things from the sport, so it’s hard to move forward.”

“Team Canada is a big organization, but **right now, there is no canadian sport organization to support it.**”

“No hierarchy in the sport. B and A level provincial teams should help feed the national team.”

“Juniors that will be eligible to skate as adults are virtually unknown to the program today, so a stronger presence at the junior levels will help build a network.”

“Team Canada is at **the cross-roads between DIY and international legitimacy.** Like other ‘marginal’ sports that are now mainstream, the pioneers are now aging-out. The national organization needs to map out the progression from intake to house to travel to province to national...”

“We’ve done well to get a reasonably well-prepared team to the podium in 2011, and to get 4th in 2014, but our early-adopter advantage is disappearing quickly.”

“**The level of the game has increased exponentially, and I’m not sure as a country we’ve adapted and evolved at the same pace.**”

## 4. SUCCESSES & WEAKNESSES



**In your opinion/  
experience, what  
has Team Canada  
Women's team  
done well in  
the past?  
What not so well?**

### Selected feedback received about previous World Cup missions:

- **Organization**
- **Building the sport & program**
- **Community outreach**
- **External communication**

**“Top 4 at both World Cups. We built a sense of pride** from the country. **We have not done so well at taking care of our own skaters and staff.** Skaters and coaches did not always leave with a positive experience. It was issues like burn out, play time, lack of communication and transparency.” (2011 & 2014 player)

“Team Canada has always seemed to try their best to take care of the individual players at a basic level. I definitely appreciated that.” (2011 player)

“The last World Cup was very well run... I would like to see **responsibilities more appropriately distributed and roles defined.** The new Business Manager role is really important. Adding roles is a great step in being able to really produce more excellence!” (2014 player)

“For 2014, fundraising went well as far as I could tell. Social media went pretty well, but we didn't have a strategy for it. We got a balance of skaters from across the country without having to use a quota system. We had a good number of practice games prior to the tournament in Dallas. The downside was there was no schedule for them... What didn't go so well was the **ability to bounce back from adversity.** We should have policies for roster substitution, drug use, etc.” (2014 staff)

“Operations have become more structured. More finances and more practice were made to support the last team.” (2014 staff)

“— Poor communication and planning (which I don't blame on coaches or team. Coaches were doing all the things).  
— Lack of timelines. The next team should have been picked already.  
— We need a whole sponsorship team. I also think Team Canada is worth more than what it has previously sold itself for.” (2011 & 2014 player)

“...My main suggestion would be that there is ONE sponsorship contact.” (previous sponsor)

“Tryout process could be more comprehensive... In order to get back to the podium, need to do something different. Must be a a better TEAM.”

“I believe that we are taking some positive steps towards legitimacy and getting back to the podium in 2017, but am concerned we are not moving quickly enough.”

**“Team Canada has done well at promoting the individual stars who made the team, but not so well at promoting the sport.** There has been opportunity missed in marketing & media profile... Could do better at looking beyond top WFTDA teams and tapping into resources across the country.”

“Could get more involved within the Canadian roller derby community.”

“In the past Team Canada has not done so well at communicating to the community at large with the kind of transparency that builds long-lasting support. It has done well to draw on the enthusiasm of our community and its desire to support the team. **However, that support could wear thin if it's not acknowledged or seen to contribute to the development of the sport across the country,** especially with fundraising fatigue already rising.”

“The communication could've been better between tryout organizers and the coaching staff.”

“Last cycle's tryouts seemed very well run and the distribution of tryout locations was good, especially considering the limited resources. Consider posting what types of drills are expected.”

“Team Canada has done a decent job of providing a goal for skaters to strive for but a terrible job of letting them know how to reach that goal... I want Team Canada to strive for a higher standard.”

## 4. SUCCESSES & WEAKNESSES (continued)



### Selected feedback continued:

- Internal communication
  - Team dynamics
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“Poor transparency with fundraising... There was no communication about game play.” (2011 & 2014 player)

“**There was a lack of responsibility, transparency and follow-through** from 2011 leadership.” (2011 player)

“Feedback and preparation could be worked on.. **I think people had difficulty understanding why they weren’t getting rostered.**” (2014 player)

“In the past, rookies and long shots haven’t really been given a chance. One criticism is about communication: don’t let people pay out of pocket to travel if they have no chance of playing.”

“The leadership groups have been very transparent with skaters and the planning and structure for try-outs and roster selection.... However both models need to be overhauled and vastly improved. Try-outs need to be more frequent and include more game play situations.” (Team Canada staff)

“I found that **Team Canada never felt like a team with set values, strategies, goals** etc. Instead, it felt like a team filled with the ‘best’ individuals. I would like to see the change from the ‘best of the best’ mentally into a National team.” (2011 & 2014 player)

“**The commitment to fitness for athletes selected to Team Canada wasn’t taken seriously enough by previous coaching staffs and by a large percentage of athletes.**” (staff)

“Good job of showing sportswomanship at a high caliber level of play.”

“Canadians from a lot of provinces were selected which created a buy-in on a local level.” (2011 player)

“I saw favouritism in the 1st World Cup and the 2nd World Cup tryouts.”

“The less known players were treated poorly.” (2011 player)

“Take the time to see who works well with who. East coast and west coast derby has subtle differences... Promises of play time foster negativity.” (2011 & 2014 player)

“Give the players who maybe aren’t so well known the opportunity to shine. You never know who may surprise you or work well with your ‘stars’.” (2011 player)

“In 2014 there was a lack of coherent training, practice, strategy for the team. Individuals’ team needs took precedence over the national team needs. Having a coach that was already busy running a Div One team made it hard for people to realise where their priorities lay. Yes they were all great skaters, but **it was the lack of trust and teamwork that made the difference** in the games.” (2014 skater)

“When deciding the rosters, coaches need to have an unbiased opinion on everyone... It’s impossible to develop chemistry between players on short notice... Skaters that are chosen need to realize and respect what it means to represent their country... Team dynamic can often outweigh someone’s abilities on the track.” (Team Canada Men’s player)

“A successful team needs to have much more practice, more communication, fun and more trust. The team needs to be involved in decisions to make them want to fight for success on and off the track.” (2011 & 2014 player)

“**There has to be a coordinated team bonding/forming plan and some kind of accountability framework.** There has to be a **team mission, vision, code of conduct/contract** that the team creates together.” (2011 & 2014 player)



## SUMMARY

Key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, and strategic priorities that were mentioned by several respondents.

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### STRENGTHS

- Building enthusiasm for the team within the roller derby community, translating to reasonable financial support from that particular community
- Roster representation from across the country (but with significant concerns about distribution of playing time)

### WEAKNESSES

- Team unity, mental toughness, preparedness
- Accessing funding and sponsorship outside of the roller derby community
- Organizational capacity and unclear organizational structure
- Transparency of processes, particularly communication

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Build unity with other Team Canada Roller derby branches
- Seek corporate sponsorships

### CHALLENGES

- Perception of previous regional/league favouritism has created mistrust
- Plateauing and/or fracturing of the sport within Canada
- Lack of unified leadership for the sport within Canada

### PRIORITIES

- Build a great team through more practice, clear expectations and team building
- Build stable organizational structure able to access government and corporate support
- Partnerships with other teams and sports
- Transparent operations
- Clear communication processes
- Leadership in developing the sport