

Wanted to say a hearty thank you to George for that introduction. We know each other from his time on the field at countless CFL Games and from my time on the sidelines at countless CFL Games. There I met the likes of George as well as one of my favourite officials of all-time, the great Jacques DeCarie of Montreal. And I'm so pleased to be here tonight to see so many familiar faces in the room and be amongst such highly regarded people.

Don Koharski who is being honoured here this weekend. Bryan Lewis. Terry Gregson who has just become the Director of Officiating for the National Hockey League. Jean Riley Senft who I know has done such outstanding judging in the World of Figure Skating and who I used to watch when she was a part of our figure skating coverage on CBC...wonderful insight into one of the most intricate sports on the face of the earth.

I do work for the CBC – That's the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation – for anyone who has any misunderstanding about that. I've been on the sidelines of just about every sport I can remember – all across Canada – in every nook and cranny.

I've seen the trotters and pacers go wild at the Charlottetown Driving Park in Prince Edward Island and also witnessed the stock car races at Oyster Bed Bridge. It was to be outdone only by the fisticuffs that occurred at centre ice every Sunday afternoon at Cahill Stadium in Summerside when the Charlottetown Abbies of the Island Junior Hockey League took on the Summerside Western Capitals.

Get this, Gerrard "Turkey" Gallant was coaching the Capitals... Forbes Kennedy was coaching the Abbies. Before every game they'd send Stevie and "Pinky" Gallant out to fight before the game ever got started. Poor "Bucky" Carragher was the referee

and every time the Abbies and Capitals played he had to send two guys off before the puck was dropped. It was a GONG show on the peaceful little Island known as the Cradle of Confederation – The Million Acre Farm – don't be fooled... They love to mix it up on PEI.

But as I've said I've been on the sidelines of many sports and seen more than one GONG show.

Nine times I've been to the Olympic Games and I witnessed what happened in Salt Lake City when the judging was so corrupt in the pairs competition that the Canadians – Salle – Pelletier – were almost robbed of the gold medal – the victims of a deal made with allies of their rivals the Russians. As you know this touched off a furour regarding the judging that takes place in figure skating and because of it the general public lost a certain amount of faith in the sport. It is a faith that is only now beginning to be restored.

I was also at the Olympics in Athens, the home of Plato and Socrates and Truth and Justice for crying out loud and I saw a Canadian gymnast Kyle Shewfelt clearly defeat a Romanian – Marian Dragulescu in the Vault final. Why? – because Dragulescu fell and Shewfelt landed his vault cleanly. And still it was the Romanian that won the medal. Why? – because there are age-old alliances in gymnastics and Romania is an established power – Canada is not. You know who got the medal and why that occurred.

The saving grace was that Shewfelt was so good in the floor exercise that they could not deny him the golden crown – a Canadian first in Olympic competition.

Here's what I'm getting at. As officials you have a job to do and it is occurs on the field of play thus making it one of if not the most important functions in any sporting environment. You ensure that

sport is sport and that the principles of fair play and justice prevail so that we allow the beauty of games to flourish in purest form. Make no mistake that corruption of your duties is the most disappointing eventuality in all of sport – because it means that sport ceases to be anything more than anarchy where brutality and intimidation ALWAYS prevail. For keeping the faith and the fairness in sport you are to be applauded.

But make no mistake - You are under siege and must hold the line when it comes to adjudicating sport in modern times.

It's not easy given what we've seen recently. Imagine when you entered this line of work, or volunteerism, whichever the case may be, that you would be asked to judge the gender of an athlete as some sports officials in track and field are now being asked to do in the case of South African 800 metre World Champion Caster Semenya.

A teenager who shows testosterone levels and physiology that identify her as having male tendencies. Should she be allowed to compete against women? This is not engineered gender change but a natural phenomenon which calls into question what is fair competition and what is not. Its entire examination is, of course, devastating to the young woman and its public ramifications have her on suicide watch. What happened to sport in this case? – it is now a matter of scientific analysis and confirmation instead of who wins the race and gets to the finish line first. It's being played out publicly and sports officials and their decisions are being called into question.

Imagine that you would be subjected to the kind of public humiliation that a line judge was at the US Open in Flushing Meadow, New York - and on national television nonetheless. It was horrifying to watch Serena Williams threaten the officials life and with such vehement profanity.

The result for the athlete was a fine – easily afforded - and the forfeiture of the match. For the official I'm sure there is a scar to remember the incident by. One that will not likely disappear quickly – rather it was a moment in time for her to question why she ever got into that situation in the first place and if she'll ever dare to go back again.

Sport is supposed to be sport – a REFLECTION of life but NOT life itself. That's what makes it a distraction and an enjoyment, which we all cherish.

Knowing this we should be able to accept imperfections in sport and the human error that can sometimes lead to the good fortunes of certain competitors and the bad luck of others. But such is not the case increasingly as sport becomes disguised as big business where incredible sums of money are at stake every time someone wins or loses. And so the fine details are called into question and the advance of electronic video replay becomes a shackle to people like you.

Even in SOCCER – or FOOTBALL as most of the World calls it – technology is taking decision-making power and credibility away from officials. Everyone knows that when you interrupt the flow of play and ask the official to consult a replay - chances are you will get a sober second, third or fourth look at whether or not the puck crossed the line or someone's stick was above the shoulders.

But there is a beauty to FATE and WISDOM in the judgment of the umpire or referee. Is it really worth destroying the majestic flow of soccer, which allows no commercial time outs so that we can turn the game into a clinical demonstration of millimeters and exactitudes? Isn't there some sort of mysticism that is lost here? Wouldn't we be missing Maradonna's "Hand of God" goal that has become legendary and once delivered Argentina to the final and

eventually to the championship at the World Cup. One of the most remembered of all moments in sport.

There is also to consider this “SENSE of ENTITLEMENT” that has become a plague amongst players and their supporters. It is a plague, which threatens what you do in your passionate profession.

This logic suggests that somehow you, as arbiters of fair play, are there at the parent’s disposal and that your adherence to the rules somehow threatens the prosperity of their children. I don’t get it! How is it that referees in hockey or judges in figure skating or gymnastics can become targets – vilified - because they make sure peace reigns and the game goes on?

It’s because there is - I would suggest - a lack of respect in some quarters for what you do. That somehow you are limiting the fortunes of a few because you ensure that the deserving people win the competition and that there is a level playing field.

This berating of officials, particularly in amateur sport, has become epidemic and as you know, it threatens the ability to recruit talented and worthy people to the profession. But how do we stop it? How do we create opportunities for young, ambitious sports minded citizens to pursue a career in officiating?

I would suggest that YOU have to do it by ensuring that your profession is treated as more than some EMBELLISHMENT to sport. You have to convince the general public that good officiating is not just something, which facilitates sport but rather something which is CENTRAL to the survival and flourishing of sport.

A good official however, knows that he or she does not enjoy the notoriety that a high profile athlete does. In many ways yours is a very UNSELFISH profession. It is a CALLING, which requires

tremendous SKILL and DIPLOMACY but one, which rarely sees you get the headlines. And that's a good thing for sport because it means that you are doing your job and ensuring that the games go on to reach their full potential for enjoyment and excitement.

I can clearly remember being the captain of a high school basketball team and needing to earn community service hours – volunteer hours – in order to fulfill the requirements of graduation. I chose to referee the staff- student intramural basketball league. While I was NOT an accredited official I was familiar with the sport of basketball and I think of myself as a fair-minded person and besides this league was supposed to be about camaraderie and fun.

Well I found out differently. Not only did several of my friends turn their backs on me in the heat of the action and hurl profanity my way – the 250 pound the high school principal – who fancied himself a nimble point guard – was a persistent traveler. I let him off the hook and turned a blind eye BUT when it came to a deciding moment I blew the whistle and turned the ball over.

The principal stopped the play and threatened to...excuse my language... “RIP ME a NEW A-HOLE”. He proceeded to call me the worst official he had ever seen and belittled me in front of my classmates and teammates. It's not that he was in the right or that I didn't have tough enough skin...it's that he felt ENTITLED to do this at all.

Where does it say there is a right to BERATE or BELITTLE officials who are in fact the reason sport can take place in an organized fashion in the first place? I have to say I applaud you for your ability to get beyond this sense of entitlement by players and fans.

It is an OLYMPIC SEASON in our country and there is so much to be proud of in our sporting system. Vancouver-Whistler 2010 will showcase all of the potential that there is in Canadian youth. It will hopefully reflect a nation that has goals and dreams for fitness and a belief in healthy competition as well as a keen measure of national pride. The athletes who will wear the Maple Leaf will enjoy some much -needed time in the limelight. The skiers and skaters and bobsledders who toil in anonymity much of the time will suddenly become the focus of national and international attention – and rightly so.

The NHL hockey players will, of course, be the most talked about story but that's because Canada has this OBSESSION with hockey. Still, the exploits of World Champion downhill skier John Kucera and sublime Figure Skaters like Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir as well as Cross Country stars like Chandra Crawford will come into play.

But also on display at these Games will be a Canadian tradition of which you ALL are the GUARDIANS. This is the Canadian tradition of FAIR PLAY.

Canada has always been known for this in the OLYMPIC CRUCIBLE. That's why the 1988 Calgary Olympics remain the favourite of the athletes in the annals of the Games. These were not the 1936 Olympics of Berlin that became a propaganda tool for a certain regime. Calgary was loved because it was BIG and GLORIOUS and PEACEFUL and it was superbly OFFICIATED and EXECUTED.

Years ago at summer camp we had the MINI OLYMPICS. It was an elaborate affair with an Opening and Closing ceremony and two days worth of competition involving about three hundred kids. We were organized into countries – USA – CANADA – GREAT BRITAIN – JAPAN – GERMANY. There were torches and the

lighting of the cauldron and under the stars in Haliburton, Ontario our Camp Director would open the Games by uttering the words of Baron Pierre de Coubertin one of the founders of the modern Olympics.

“In the Olympics as in life it’s not the victory that matters most but the struggle – the taking part.”

I always remember these words because at those Mini Olympics some of the senior counselors were chosen to be the captains of their countries – to lead their teams in pursuit of the medals. It was seen as a plum to be a team captain.

I was NOT chosen – instead I was given the responsibility, along with a friend of mine, of being the Head of the Games Organizing Committee. I was in charge of the OFFICIATING and making sure everything went according to plan. At the time - for a brief moment – I was disappointed and felt as if I had been passed over.

However, as I watched the joy of the competition and the goodwill that prevailed in what was a mammoth undertaking with seemingly so much at stake – I smiled inwardly. No –one really noticed me at the time - but the results of my efforts were clear.

This is what it means to be a GOOD OFFICIAL. It means that you allow sport to happen and for its great benefits to be enjoyed by participants and spectators alike.

I am a broadcaster – a storyteller of sport - and I love it. Sure I once had ambitions to play in the NHL – to be at the Olympics – but I think there is an almost greater satisfaction in communicating the MAJESTY of SPORT through what I do now – by TELLING its STORY.

I'm sure that all of you must draw on that kind of feeling about what you do as officials. You are ENABLERS of sport. You - by being FAIR and WISE and JUST allow it to happen in all of your brilliant ANONYMITY. I want to show you this piece of video. It ran before our trip to Beijing for last summer's Olympics. Notice that the officials are INVISIBLE but rest assured that they made it possible for ALL of this to happen....

PLAY VIDEO – FIX YOU

I was saddened by the death of my friend and colleague Dr. Gene Sutton a few weeks ago. Some of you may have known her. She was a long time gymnastics judge in Ontario. She was also an educator and a driving force behind the Commonwealth Games and Pan American Games bids in the City of Hamilton. Add to that she was the Chair of the Canadian Olympic Academy – the educational arm of the Olympic movement. Gene also served for many years on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Olympic Committee and Chris Rudge the Secretary General/CEO of the Committee has always referred to Gene as the CONSCIENCE of the Canadian Olympic effort.

Gene made it possible for me to go to the International Olympic Academy in Olympia, Greece to speak at a seminar of journalists a couple of years ago. It was a life changing experience. To be in the home of the Ancient Games and to experience the feeling surrounding sport at its ELEMENTAL level was very moving.

Gene Sutton was NOT the star athlete who enjoyed the ADORATION of the crowd. She worked behind the scenes to OFFICIATE and ENABLE and to make sure that all was FAIR and JUST so that everyone could enjoy all that sport had to offer. She had the greatest PASSION for sport that I had ever seen and

that's what drew me to her. This is what I know motivates all of you as great officials. A PASSION for all that sport can be when it is conducted with FAIR PLAY as its most important PRINCIPAL.

And so you honour your greats this weekend...

Hockey's Don Koharski...

Jean Riley Senft of Figure Skating...

Swimming official...Louise Leblanc...of Quebec.

Softball's Maritime presence "Bob" Stanton

Track and Field's Ken Porter of Victoria B.C.

The greatest compliment that can be paid to all of these people and to ALL of you is that they are GREAT OFFICIALS and they enjoy an INWARD satisfaction because they are TRULY the UNSUNG heroes of SPORT.

Thank you so much for having me here this evening and I hope you have a prosperous weekend...

END
