

# **Fetishizing Medals in Canadian Sport Policy, and Declining Participation in Youth Sport**

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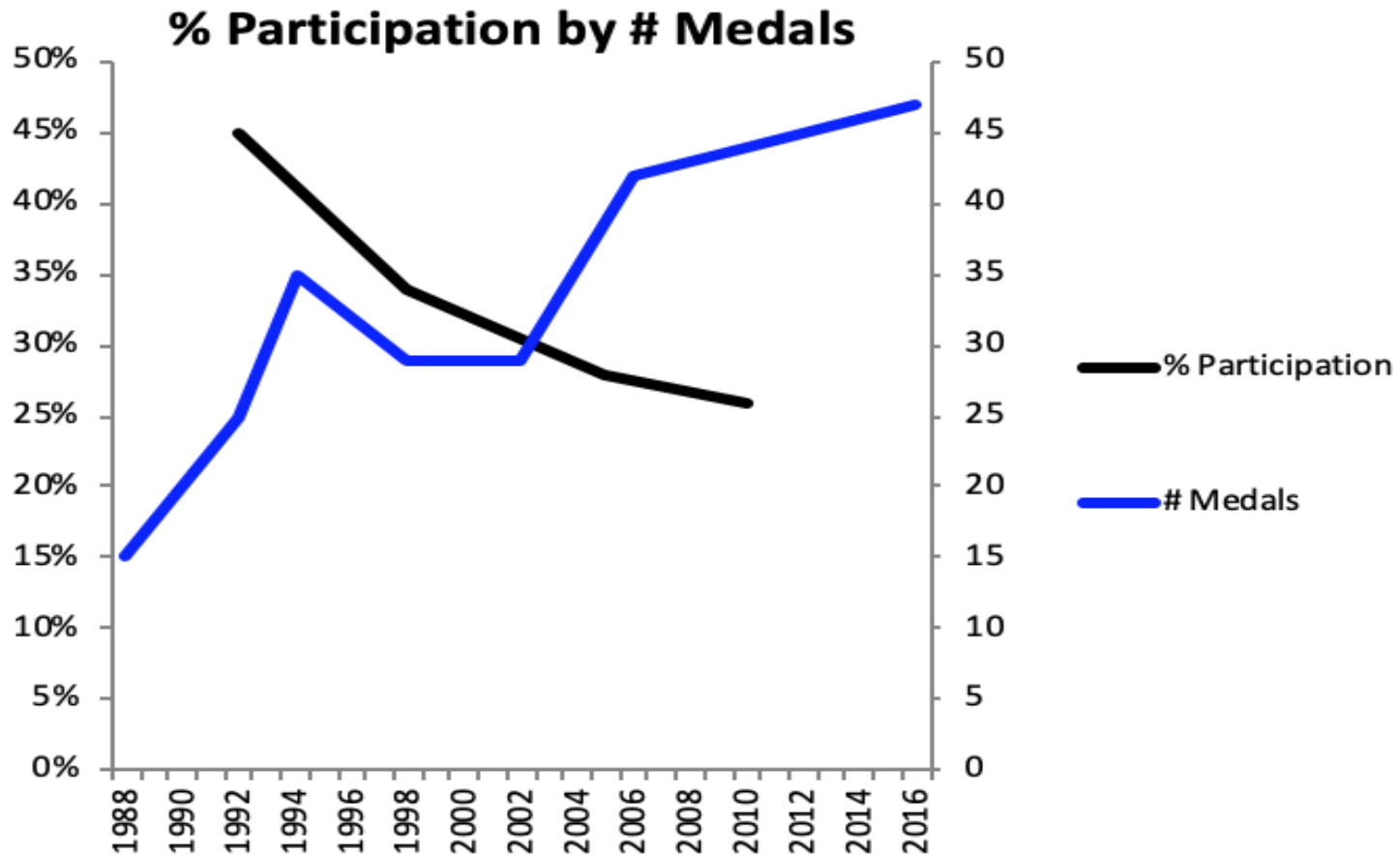
# Outline

- Deliberately provocative title
- Not intended to imply direct causality
- Not going to argue that governments have a choice between funding grassroots and funding high performance
- Going to argue that if everyone has a right to participate (and I believe they do) then they have “a right to participate badly” (i.e., to play, and enjoy playing, at a low level of skill)

# 3 data points

- Sport participation in Canada
  - Data from GSS, large sample, every 5 or 6 years, regular participation in organized sport for citizens over 15 years of age
- Olympic medals won by Canadian athletes
  - By Olympiad (i.e., total medals from Winter and the following Summer Olympics [e.g., Sochi + Rio])
- Sport Canada spending on sport
  - Sport Canada annual budget allocations to sport

The more medals we win,  
the fewer Canadian participate in sport

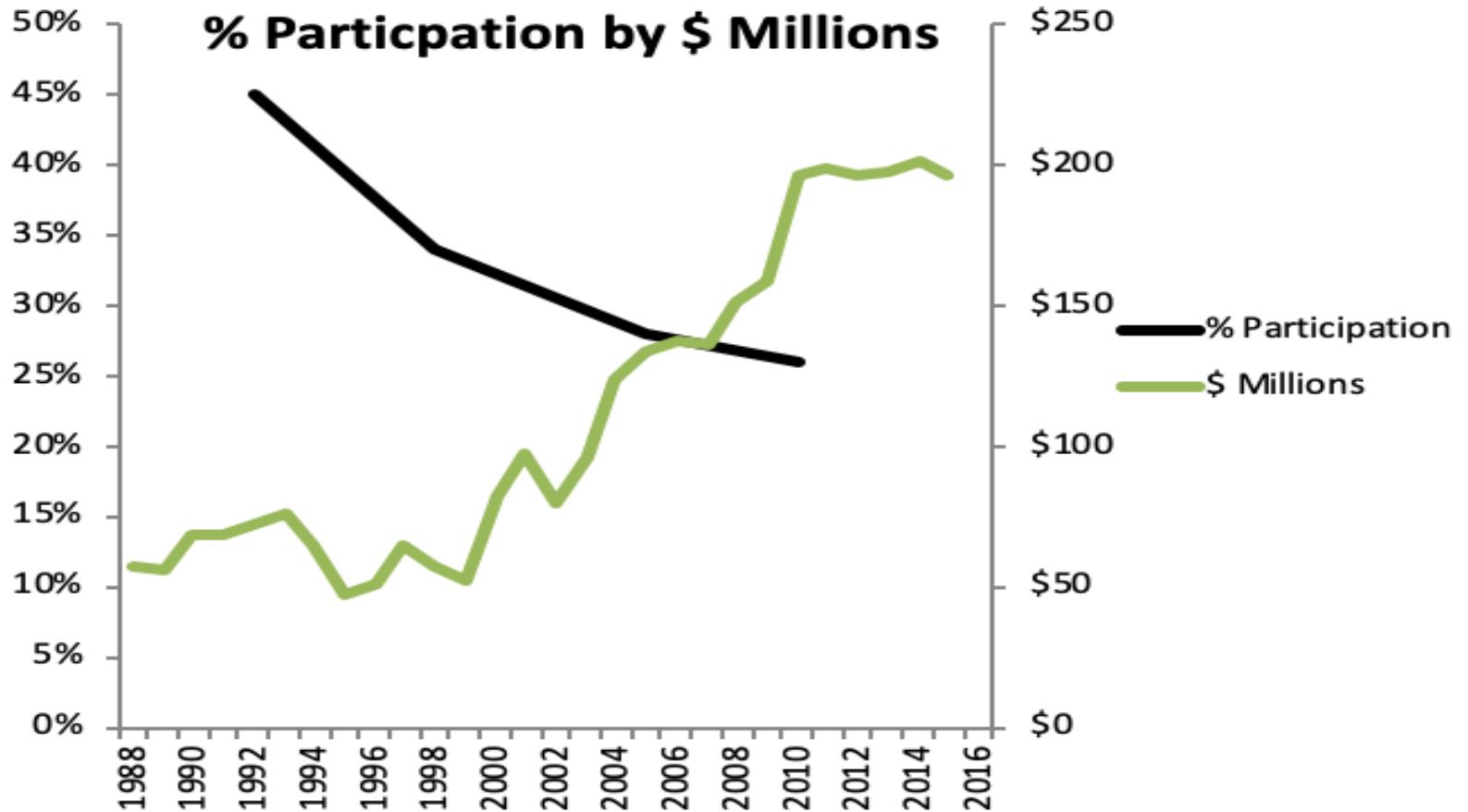


# Causality

- These data don't imply direct causality: likely multicausal with other factors in play – e.g.:
  - Aging population
  - Higher proportion of immigrants in population
  - Growing social and economic inequality
  - De-selection effect
  - More widespread trend (internationally) of shift from competitive sports, perhaps to other forms of activity

Data on participation are not good enough to determine if overall activity participation has declined as much as GSS data indicate

The more money we spend on sport,  
the fewer Canadian participate



# New data points

- Participation 2016:
  - 27%
- Sport Canada spending
  - 2015 \$471,215 [+\$271m for essential federal services re hosting PanAm/Para PanAm Games]
  - 2016 \$220,825 [Rio]
  - 2017 \$211,413
  - 2018 \$220,238 [PyeongChang]
  - 2019 \$206,189 (projected)

# Sport Canada Funding (2018): \$220,238

**Athlete Assistance Program: \$33 million** to approx. **1,900** national team **athletes** (financial assistance)

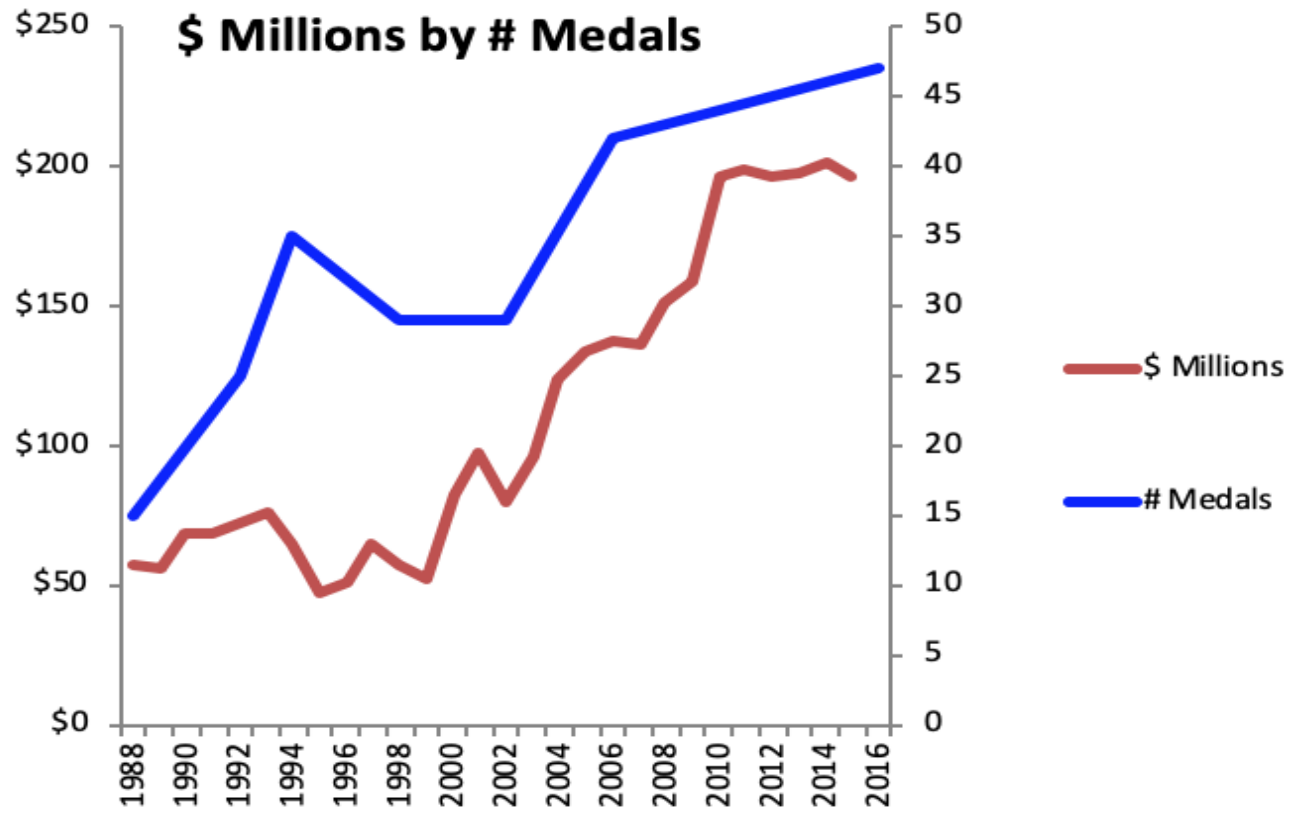
**Sport Support Program: \$150.4 million\*** to Canadian sport organizations (NSOs+)

**Hosting Program:** approx. **\$19.9 million** annually to assist Canadian communities in hosting world-class international sport events and the Canada Games

**\*\$64 million** of **Sport Support Program's** to **Own the Podium** as enhanced excellence funding for targeted sports and athletes with medal potential at the Olympic and Paralympic Games



The more money we spend,  
the more medals we win



# The Dominant Narrative

- High performance sport occupies almost all of the policy space in sport, FPT
- Federal law and policy affirm equal importance of ‘excellence’ and ‘participation’
- ‘Participation’ has been re-defined as ‘development’
- The narrative of ‘faster, higher, stronger,’ of continual improvement is pervasive

# Narrative cont'd.

- Organized sport, from childhood to youth, becomes a story of 'de-selection'
- Sports focus on fewer and fewer athletes who are continuing to, or have the potential to 'improve'
- Federal gov't. argues that PT gov't's are responsible for 'participation', but they too are caught in the narrative, and PSOs focus on developing representative teams for Canada Games

# Outcome

- No one in Canada is responsible for sustaining participation, for grassroots sport
- There is no well developed sport club system as in Europe and Australia/New Zealand
- Grassroots sport is a matter for civil society, for individuals and groups to organize and PAY for their own participation
- Grassroots sector is increasingly being colonized by the commercial, and to some extent, by charities and NGOs
- Declining participation is routinely acknowledged as a problem, but high performance has sucked all the sport policy air out of the room

# Thank you

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