



**Characteristics and Motivations of Sports
Officials in the Province of Québec**

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Abstract

Participation in sport and recreation is important for Quebecers' health, both mentally and physically. Sports in the province of Québec are organised under the tutelage of Sports-Québec. This is a non-profit organization composed of and representing 63 provincial sports federations, supporting 90 sports and 17 regional leisure and sport units. Federations are responsible for the development of their coaches, instructors and officials. Most federations and associations identify difficulties in recruiting, retaining and shortages of officials. The purpose of this article is to describe the profile of officials in the province of Québec and to identify motivations, perceptions, expectations and attitudes towards roles and functions in their sport and within the Québec sports system. Québec sports officials usually begin when they are young, then often leave, but some return later in life. Most of them come from within the sport; in general, team sports officials are more stressed; officials from individual sports need more time; and financial considerations are an important factor but not the only element for officials. Based on the results presented in this paper and discussion with the decision makers in the field, it is imperative to develop a strategic plan that will better take into consideration the needs of sports officials.

Keywords: volunteerism, officials, sport, characteristics, motivations, Québec

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Characteristics and Motivations of Sports Officials in the Province of Québec

Introduction

According to the Conference Board of Canada (2005), “Canadians love sports. It gives them pleasure, helps them to define themselves and their communities, and contributes to their sense of what it means to be Canadian. In any one year, more Canadians are involved as active participants in sports — more than 8 million people in 2004 — than take part in public education at all levels combined. Millions more take part as volunteers and attendees”. Furthermore, as stated by the Québec “Ministère des affaires municipales” (1999), the ministry responsible at the time for the development of sports in the province of Québec, suggests that sports and recreation are an integral part of Quebecers’ lives. Participation in sport and recreation is important for Quebecers’ health, both mentally and physically. Active participants in sports and recreation suggest that they are a source of relaxation, fun, physical fitness, improved quality of life due to better health, and stress relief (Ministère des affaires municipales 1999 and Conference Board of Canada 2005).

Sports in the province of Québec are organized in a very unique fashion. Sports-Québec, a non-profit organization, is composed of and represents 63 provincial sports federations supporting 90 sports and 17 regional leisure and sport units. Its mission is to contribute to the development of sport and support elite athletes and sports (Sports-Québec 2005 and 2004). Furthermore, Sport-Québec oversees the structure of sport in the province, which represents:

- More than 2.8 million people (members and non-members of sport federations) who practice sports in the province of Québec.
- More than 400 000 young people who practice sports in schools.
- More than 60 000 people who act as coaches and instructors.
- More than 600 000 people who interact with sports organizations as volunteers.
- More than 3 000 elite athletes.

Each sport federation (Sports-Québec 2005 and 2004) heads a network of regional associations and local clubs. The federation's actions make sure the athletes have the opportunity to participate in their activity of choice. Through its members, programs and units, the federations provide opportunities from the initiation stages to the elite levels. Federations are responsible for the development of their coaches, instructors and officials.

Of all the components with which sport federations and associations have to deal, officiating is the one that is most often forgotten. Furthermore, most federations and associations in North America identify difficulties in recruiting, retaining and shortages of officials (Sabatini 2001). This situation is not different for the province of Québec.

According to Sport-Québec, the sports federations are having more and more difficulty recruiting new officials. Furthermore, they are even having difficulty retaining the officials. Specifically, certain sports, such as ice hockey and basketball, have stated that they lose from 25 to 30% of their officials during a given year. Consequently, this creates a greater burden on the officials that are left, since they have to pick up the slack and support heavier workloads.

Since most officials in the province of Québec are volunteers, (Sports-Québec 2006 and EYSA 2001) several factors may come in to play with regard to this situation. The principal reasons are, according to Lasby (2004) and the "Centre canadien de philanthropie" (2000), lack of time for volunteer activities, stressful lifestyle, work, family and other leisure activities.

The notion of motivation is the main focus of the study. In their study "Retention of game officials for ice hockey" (1982), Fry and Sefton question the motivations to become a hockey official as well as the reasons to leave this position. Results from this study indicate that officials enlist for the love of the sport (54,1%), to serve the community (44,5%) and for personal pleasure (42%). The majority of referees were players before becoming officials (96,4%). We had already noted problems with regard to the lack of support, the negative image of referees assigned to the task and criticism of the users, which would explain the departure of certain officials, the majority of whom were young with less than two years experience (76%). However, the major reasons given for leaving were the lack of time (32,6%) and the numerous criticisms by users (20%). The study recommends various solutions, which include a training program for experienced referees, an awareness campaign for the users to uphold the image of

officials and finally, a recruitment program to welcome more officials to counter the issues of lack of time in order to better reconcile, family, work and leisure activities.

A study by Dorsch, Riemer, Sluth, Paskevich & Chelladurai (2002) dealing with the motivations of volunteers in sports revealed eight factors of volunteer motivation. Two types of motivation were noted: personal and group motivations. Personal motivation includes the following: social interaction, recognition and the advancement of a career, particularly by young people aged 15 to 34 years. Group motivation, especially for the 45 years and older group, include community service as well as helping others.

The study on voluntary work in leisure led by Thibault and Fortier (2003) reveals the main motivations of volunteers to commit and to pursue this commitment. The three main motivations to begin a voluntary action in leisure are: contribute to a cause, live their leisure and their passion. With regard to continuing to commit, the main motivations are: have fun with friends, being part of the action and knowing that they are useful. Other interesting phenomena are the pressure and expectations that are put on officials. As stated by Thibault and Fortier (2003), people participating in sport are now more demanding with regard to the quality of the service offered and this includes the level at which officials are officiating. These higher standards put pressure on the officials and they may not want to continue under these conditions or they may want to improve their competence in order to face this situation more adequately. However, this usually requires more training, hence more time and money to allocate to the profession (Colwell 2003 and EYSA 2001).

This pressure certainly affects the recruitment and retention of officials, which makes it arduous for those trying to manage the profession. Indeed, the Canadian Survey regarding donations, voluntary work and participation in 2004 (Volunteer Canada, 2006), indicates that we should worry with regard to overworking volunteers since there are fewer and fewer people getting involved. Thus, training efforts, recruitment and retention of volunteers must be undertaken in order to ensure that there will be a continuation in the future. Unanimously, attention is drawn to recruitment when we speak about current and possible challenges of volunteer work, in particular in the field of leisure and sport which constitutes the main volunteer sector in Quebec and Canada. (Alliance de recherche universités-communautés en économie sociale, 2006).

According to Bellefleur (1997), publicity becomes necessary to recruit new volunteers because the clientele has already begun leaving clubs for some years. In his study, "The Volunteer Management Handbook", Bradner (1995) suggests four main

directives for quality recruitment: 1) ask the people; 2) look for socio-cultural diversity; 3) plan different types of events; 4) understand and respond to potential volunteers' needs. In the same vein, Ellis (1996) explains that recruitment is both a process and an activity:

“As a process, recruitment involves all the preparation and follow-through necessary to create a welcoming environment for volunteers. The process must involve your whole organization, because volunteers must mesh with the work done by everyone. As an activity, recruitment is the task of asking”.

Thibault's "Study on Leisure Volunteers" (2001) also reveals that recruitment is accomplished using the golden rule: know how to ask. Due to the more and more blatant lack of volunteers, organizations need to use all necessary means to keep their volunteers. Professionals and volunteer administrators dealing with volunteers then have to set up activities that recognize these volunteers and their implication, to reward them in order to maintain the fervor which they have towards their organization.

This is a descriptive-based paper examining officiating in the province of Québec. More specifically, the purpose of this article is to describe officials in the province of Québec, identify motivations, perceptions, expectations and attitudes towards officiating in their sport and the province. Furthermore, the study will attempt to identify factors linked to recruiting and the retention of officials in the province and identify if, as found in other studies, lack of time, respect, and support, expectations, family, and leisure activities are all factors that influence the situation in the province. To fulfill this purpose, the objectives of this study are to determine officials':

1. Socio-demographic characteristics
2. Financial consideration
3. Motivations, perceptions and expectations of the officiating experience
4. Positive and negative aspects of officiating in the province of Québec

Methodology

Sample

The sample was taken from 16 selected sports federations who agreed to participate in the study. These federations included: ringuette, judo, wrestling, taekwondo, archery, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, rowing, synchronized swimming, baseball, football, basketball, volleyball, badminton, figure skating, and ice hockey. Each federation had the responsibility of providing a list of their officials. The list

had to include active and inactive officials. The sampling method (Judd, Smith, and Kidder 1991, and Tull and Hawkins 1993) used in this study was probabilistic and is better known as a cluster sample.

The federation lists were cleaned up and organized by address. In order for the sample to be representative and accurate to proportions of 5% with a confidence level of 95% of the officials of sports federations participating in the survey population, 364 respondents were required from a population of approximately 6 000. While taking into account the expected response rate of about 30% (Larson 2005 and SurveyStar Inc. 2005), the weight of each federation (as presented in table 1, when possible, 50 officials were randomly selected from the federation list and an additional 10% from the total population from each sport federation was added to the sample), people having moved, incorrect addresses, and so on, the authors estimated that in order to obtain the necessary number of responses, 1 616 surveys needed to be mailed out. A total of 16 sports federations participated in this study with a total number of responses of 469 (Creative Research Systems 2005).

Table 1. Sampling Frame and Respondents by Sports Federation.

Sports Federation	Sample	# Respondents	%
Archery	56	26	46.4
Badminton	5	4	80.0
Baseball	135	45	33.3
Basketball	114	35	30.1
Cross-country skiing	58	8	13.8
Downhill skiing	233	35	15.0
Football	75	27	36.0
Ice Hockey	310	112	36.1
Judo	56	38	67.9
Figure skating	158	41	25.9
Ringuette	98	20	20.4
Rowing	13	4	30.8
Synchronized swimming	106	26	24.5
Taekwondo	81	11	13.6
Volleyball	90	35	38.9
Wrestling	84	2	2.4
Total	1672	469	28.1

Questionnaire

The research process for this study is based on Dillman (1978) and Abbey-Livingstone and Abbey (1982). A questionnaire was developed to ask Québec sports officials to respond to a variety of topics relating to their officiating experience. They include seven main sectors: officials' actual personal experience (years of experience, sport, role, level of intervention, number of hours officiating, amount of money received, expenses), motivation to become an official and to continue as one (evolution of motivation), recruitment and retention of officials (recruitment methods and circumstances for hiring), present situation of officials (perception of the situation and reasons for leaving, if necessary), support and recognition of officials (opinion on recognition and the means to recognize), possible solutions to the situation in the province (priority actions to undertake) and personal characteristics of respondents (date of birth, sex, family situation, level of study, professional situation, area of residence).

Process

The survey was developed through several phases. First, the researchers met with Sports-Québec and selected sports federations to obtain their input on the development of the survey. Second, three focus groups were held, which included officials from different levels: administrators, referees, and judges (active and inactive). Finally, with the information gathered from the different phases, the researchers built a questionnaire.

To verify the validity and reliability of the survey, a pre-test was done with 30 young officials officiating in a student-athlete setting. Following this pre-test, the questionnaire was adjusted and distributed to the sample of the study.

Data Analysis

Each official was sent a packet containing a questionnaire, cover letter, and a pre-paid return envelope. The officials were also informed of the confidentiality of their responses in the cover letter that was sent with the questionnaires. The return process also assured confidentiality where no names were associated to any of the questionnaires.

Four weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder postcard was sent to all non-respondents. Each questionnaire was given an identification number, which corresponded to an official's name. This number was used to assist with data entry, confidentiality and mailings.

Completed surveys were returned to the “Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire” where the researchers sorted and logged them into a computer database.

After the completion of data entry, it was verified and edited in a master database, which consisted of checking each variable’s frequency distribution for out-of-range or extreme values and identifying inconsistencies in the response record (e.g., skip instructions not followed, multiple answers to single-answer questions). Identified keying mistakes and other inconsistencies were corrected where possible by examining the returned questionnaire.

Results

Socio-demographic

As presented in table 2, respondents between the ages of 16 and 55 represent 86% of officials in the province of Québec. Furthermore, there seems to be a decrease in the number of officials between 26 and 35 years of age and a gradual increase between 36 and 55. Also present is that 70% of officials are male and 68% of respondents had at least a “Diplome d’Études Collégiales” (DEC) or CEGEP degree. Full-time workers represent 54% of officials. Finally, 61% of respondents suggested that they lived with a partner.

Table 2. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Québec Sport Officials (N=511).

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Officials %
Age	
14-15	2.3
16-25	30.3
26-35	16.5
36-45	17.6
46-55	21.7
56-65	8.1
66 and older	3.5
Gender	
Male	70.0
Female	30.0
Education	
Elementary	0.4
High School	31.0
Cegep	29.0
Undergraduate degree	28.0

Graduate degree	10.4
Main Occupation	
Student	28.4
Retired	7.9
Without employment	0.4
Full-time employment	54.6
Part-time employment	5.0
Marital status	
Single	28.2
Single parent with one dependent	1.4
Single parent with more than one dependent	3.9
Couple	26.7
Couple with one dependent	10.6
Couple with more than one dependent	24.4

The study identifies that 15% of active officials have more than 20 years experience as officials. On the other hand, 63% of inactive officials never had more than 5 years of experience (table 3). Officials who participated stated that they became involved through their own initiative (32,9%), because someone from the organization approached them (24,8%), or because a friend invited them (16,6%).

Table 3. Percentage of Québec Sport Officials according to their Years of Experience as an Official (N=511).

Number of years	Active	Inactive
Less than 1 year	5.8	5.4
From 1 to 2 years	13.5	21.6
From 2 to 5 years	23.4	36.5
From 5 to 10 years	21.3	18.9
From 10 to 15 years	15.5	5.4
From 15 to 20 years	6.1	5.4
From 20 to 30 years	10.9	5.4
More than 30 years	3.6	1.4
Total*	100	100

* Numbers may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Expenses linked to officiating activity

The total annual expenses by officials for insurance, training, and dues range between 0 and 11 000 dollars (table 4). Approximately 62% of all officials spent less than 100 dollars. Furthermore, officials participating in team sports seem to have higher

expenses with regard to insurance, training, and dues than officials participating in individual sports. From an individual sports perspective, 32.2% spent more than \$1 000 while 40.4% of team sport officials spent more than \$1 000. Overall, officials spent 67 851 dollars with regard to insurance, training, and dues; team sport officials spent \$42 681, while individual sport officials spent 25 170 dollars.

When looking at each sport independently, it can be noted that officials who spent the least amount of money with regard to insurance, training, and dues were involved with the following sports: ringuette, volleyball, downhill skiing, synchronized swimming, figure skating, and archery, while ice hockey officials spent the most money with relation to those types of expenses.

Table 4. Average Annual Spending on Insurance, Training, Dues and Transportation, Meals, Lodging, Equipment by Category of Sports (Percentage).

Money	Insurance, Training, Dues			Transportation, Meals, Lodging, Equipment		
	Individual Sports (140)	Team Sports (280)	All Officials (434)	Individual Sports (142)	Team Sports (279)	All Officials (435)
0	32.9	8.6	17.1	21.1	7.2	12.4
1 – 50	13.6	23.9	20.5	12.7	9.0	10.3
51 – 100	21.4	27.1	24.9	4.9	18.6	13.8
101 – 200	12.9	25.4	21.0	14.1	19.7	17.9
201 – 1 000	16.4	14.3	15.2	31.7	40.1	37.0
More than 1 000	2.9	0.7	1.4	15.5	5.4	8.5
Total*	100	100	100	100	100	100

* Numbers may not add up to 100 due to rounding

From the perspective of expenses linked to transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment, 63.4% of officials spent more than 100 dollars over one year (table 4). Furthermore, 8.5% of officials spent more than 1 000 dollars and expenses went as high as 11 000 dollars. Therefore, when compared to internal expenses (insurance, training, and dues), officials have to pay more for external expenses (transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment).

In contrast to expenses linked to insurance, training, and dues, officials participating in individual sports spent more money on transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment than officials from team sports (table 4). Hence, 15.5% of officials from individual sports spent more than 1000 dollars while only 5.4% of officials from team

sports spent more than that amount. Overall, officials spent more money on transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment (\$212 311) than on insurance, training, and dues (\$67 851). The amount spent on external factors can be broken down into 114 290 dollars for individual sport officials and 98 021 dollars for team sport officials.

It can also be noted that officials from volleyball are the officials who spent the least money on transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment, while officials in judo, basketball, football, ice hockey and baseball are the ones who spent the most on these items.

Most officials (63.4%) are not reimbursed for their expenses, with regard to insurance, training, and dues and 55.6% of officials are not reimbursed for transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment (table 5).

Table 5. Percentage of Expenses that are Reimbursed Yearly.

Reimbursement	Insurance, Training, Dues	Transportation, Meals, Lodging, Equipment
None	63.4	55.6
Between 5 and 40%	3.9	9.5
Between 50 and 95%	12.3	20.5
100%	20.4	14.4
Total*	100	100

* Numbers may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Motivations for officiating

As presented in figure 1, the officials surveyed in this study mentioned that the main reason they began officiating was for the love and passion of the sport. Second, they mentioned that they officiate since it is a way for them to participate in leisure or recreational activities, and enables them to develop on a personal level.

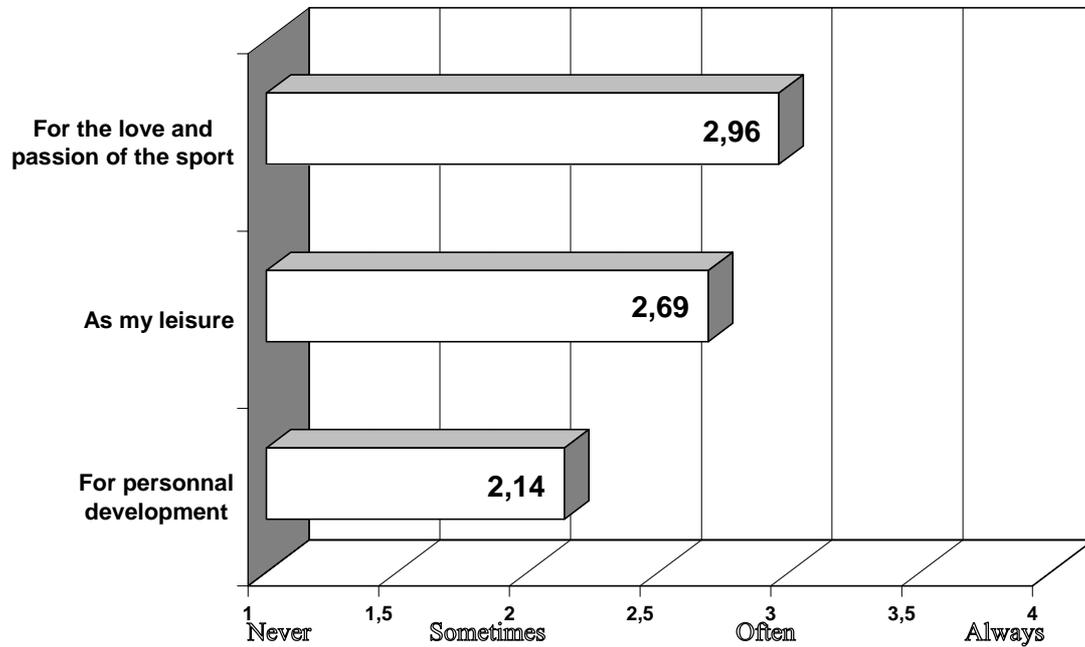


Figure 1. Motivations for Being an Official.

The survey identified several factors that officials stated as reasons for continuing in their functions (figure 2). The first being satisfied, useful and being integrated into the officiating community with regard to the functions they perform as officials. Second reason identified was having the opportunity to surpass yourself personally.

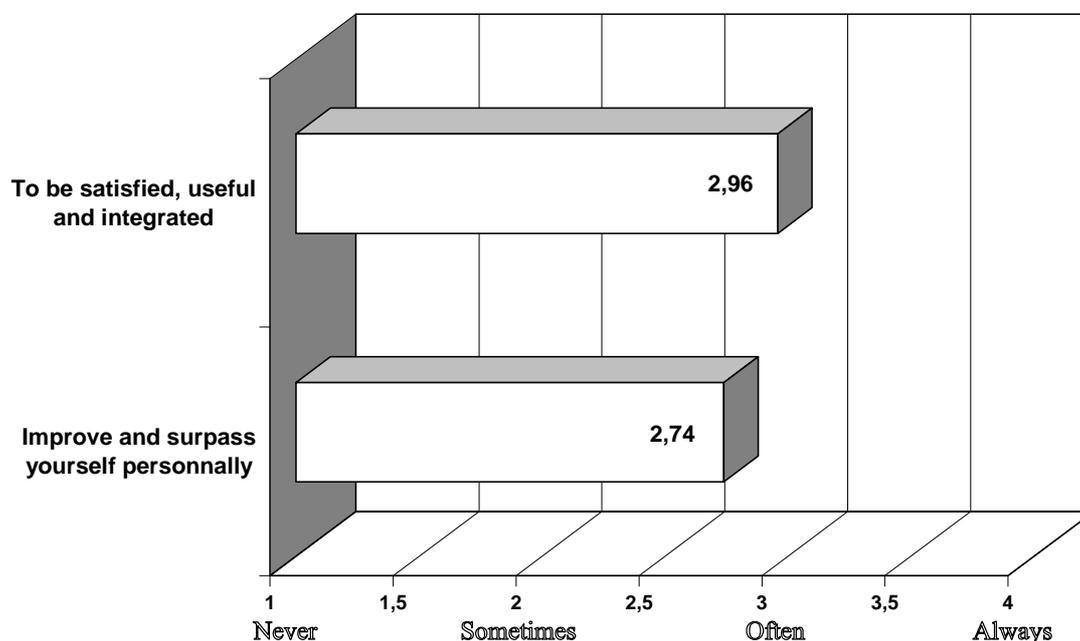


Figure 2. Motivations to Continue as an Official.

According to all the respondents of the survey (table 6), officials leave the profession for a variety of reasons, the top three being: personal reasons (family and work) (21.1%), lack of respect and recognition (19.6%), and lack of time (16.9%). Furthermore, inactive officials (table 7), responded that their top reasons included: personal reasons (family and work) (25%), lack of respect and recognition (23.5%), and lack of time (15.2%). Interestingly enough, the results from both groups were very similar and the top three reasons for leaving the profession were the same.

Table 6. Main Reasons for Leaving the Officiating Profession according to All Officials (N=511).

Reasons	%
Personal reasons (family or work)	21.1
Lack of recognition and respect	19.6
Lack of time	16.9
Exhausted - Burnout	12.1
Low salary	11.2
Lack of support	9.6
Lack of interest	9.6

Table 7. Main Reasons for Leaving the Officiating Profession according to Inactive Officials (N=84).

Reasons	%
Personal reasons (family or work)	25.0
Lack of respect from spectators (12.2%), coaches (9.4 %) and athletes (1.9 %)	23.5
Lack of time	15.2
Low salary	9.1
Lack of support	7.6
Lack of supervision	5.3
Lack of interest	5.3
Too much pressure	5.3
Health problems	3.8

Québec sports officials were asked about their perception of the situation of officiating in the province (figure 3). The officials raised some very interesting points with regard to their perception of the situation. They mentioned that officiating was too time consuming and that officiating was stressful. Furthermore, financial considerations (compensation, expenses, etc.) are not where they should be. Furthermore, they believe that there is an increasing interest in the profession and wanting to become an official.

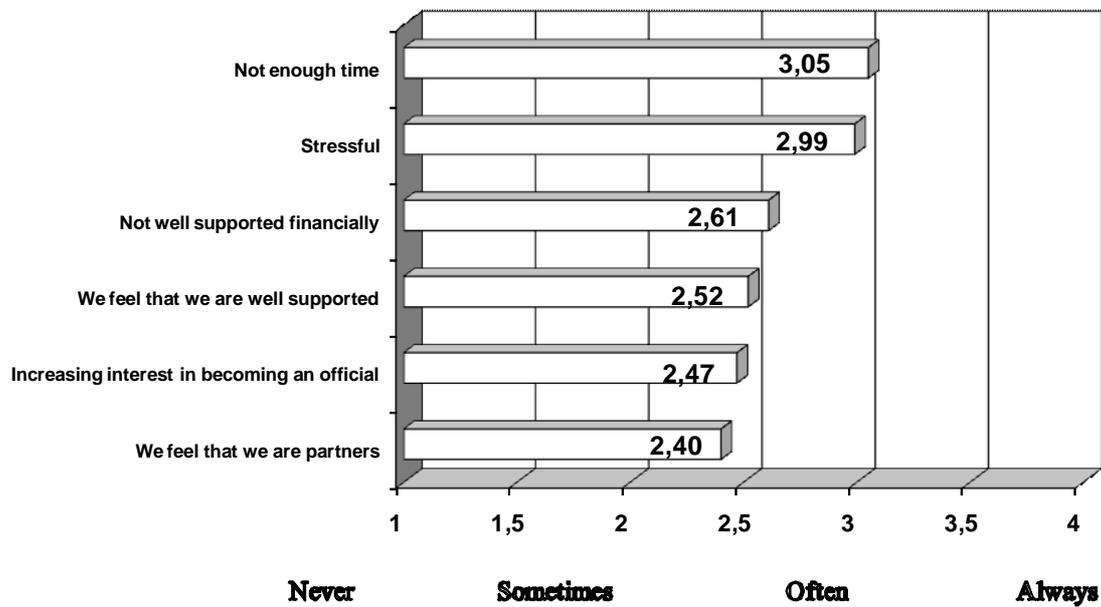


Figure 3. Perceptions of Situation of Officiating According to the Officials.

Officials identified that working on the image of officiating with the general population and the users as being the most important solution to improve the officiating situation. Other solutions such as being included in the organization of the sport at the administrative level, a better financial support, and the improvement in official training and communication would be good starting points to improve the official's situation (figure 4).

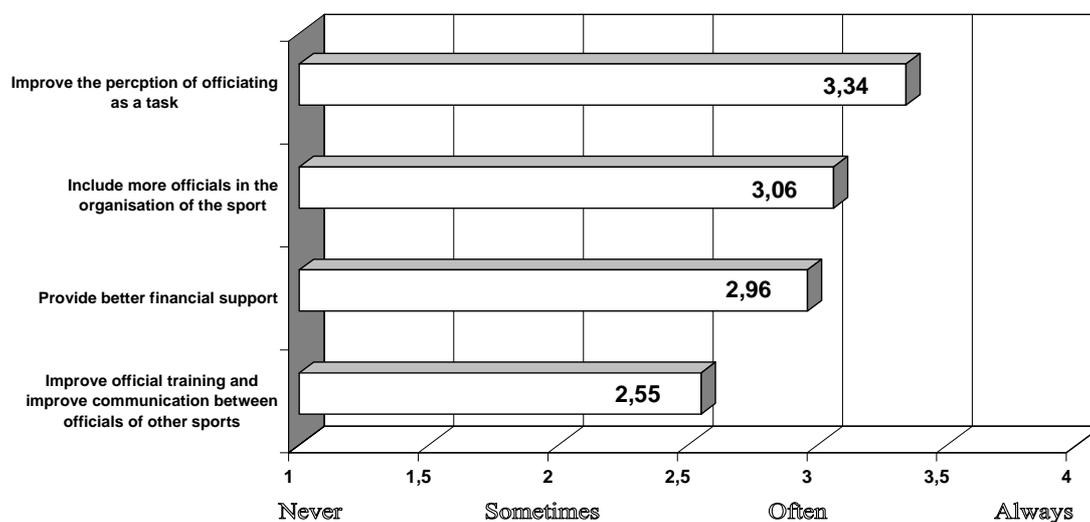


Figure 4. Possible Solutions to Improve the Officiating Situation According to the Officials.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the demographic and motivational profile of sports officials in the province of Québec. The results that have been obtained have given insight into sports officiating in the province of Québec. The information provided in this study and the data collected clearly show that Sport-Québec is doing a decent job with regard to officials in the province; however, there are issues that need to be addressed. Furthermore, the study shows some tendencies and should aid in further developing the retention and recruitment of officials in the future.

The typical official is male, has a full-time job, has at least a CEGEP degree and is in a relationship. A majority of officials are younger than 25 or older than 45, with the largest group being between 16 and 25. They have been officiating for between 5 and 10 years. A high percentage of officials are satisfied with the overall experience of officiating in the province of Québec.

Based on the results of this study, here are some highlights that may be identified:

- Replacing volunteer officials with paid officials will be very expensive
- Officials start young, leave and return later in life (life cycle)

- Most officials come from within the sport
- Officials from team sports are more stressed
- Officials from individual sports need more time
- Money is not the ONLY problem for officials

These results are very important because they will help to understand the situation of officiating and allow in developing a framework which will be very useful when trying to recruit new officials, and when trying to retain those who are already active.

Salaries and expenses of officials need to be considered in the future. While, not being considered the only reason for officials leaving the field, they are still factors that weigh on the officials and in the long-run, could determine whether or not officials stay or leave. These financial considerations are not necessarily salaries but have more to do with the expenses (internal and external) that the officials have to incur during the year. These are particularly important since officials are required to pay these expenses in order to be officials or to participate in games or competitions. It was felt that the federations should at least pay for these expenses.

Officials' expectations with relation to their functions as officials:

- Have fun
- Have a social environment that will allow them to interact with other officials
- Participate in the development of the sport and continue to love it
- Receive positive feedback from participants (athletes), teams, coaches, and fans
- Have an opportunity for self-fulfillment
- Have the opportunity to be integrated into the planning and development of their sport.

Twenty five years later, the motivations to make a commitment as an official in sports and the reasons to leave are much the same. Fry and Sefton (1982) reveal the main motivations to become officials in sports are: the love of the sport, service to the community and personal pleasure, whereas the current study specifies that officials make a commitment through passion and love for the sport, to live their leisure and to progress personally. These motivations are also similar to those found by Thibault and Fortier (2003) in their study on voluntary work in leisure. As for the reasons which

explain abandonment of the commitment as an official, the main reasons cited in the Fry and Sefton's survey are the lack of time and the numerous criticisms of users. These reasons which were also noted by the referees in our study: personal (family, work), lack of respect (spectators, coaches and athletes) and the lack of time.

The best way to recruit volunteers or sports officials, as suggested by Bradner (1995), Ellis (1996) and Thibault (2001), is to ask. In effect, 41,4% of respondents in our study specified that they committed to the sport after having been invited by the organization (24,8%) or a friend (16,6%).

Furthermore, based on the results of this study, it is possible to identify positive and negative aspects of the situation of officiating in the province of Québec. From a positive perspective, officials mentioned that the more you officiate, the happier you are, and in Québec, officials suggested that they have ample opportunities to officiate and they are very happy with the situation. However, too much officiating in the long run may cause the officials to overexert themselves. Furthermore, officials stated that their position is sometimes stressful, there is a lack of respect, they are not well-perceived, they are not seen as partners, it is expensive and they do not have the support they would like.

Conclusion

This study examined a variety of factors with relation to sport officiating in the province of Québec. Some of the main elements drawn out of the study included that retention and recruiting of officials were becoming more and more problematic in the province of Québec, with retention being the more difficult of the two. Recruiting seems to be in a stronger position for the time being, since officials have a passion for the sport and because of this passion, they are willing to start acting as officials. However, sports federations need to be careful in the long run, since some of them have already identified that it is more difficult to recruit officials, whereas in the past, they had always been able to easily recruit them.

Furthermore, from the stand point of retention, the situation is not as positive. Once the officials have engaged in the activity of officiating, the situation is riddled with negative aspects which include lack of support, respect, recognition and integration, thus making officiating a burden, and passion is not enough anymore to continue. Officials have been taken for granted for a very long time and if something is not done soon, the situation with regard to retention will worsen.

Presently, there is no existing structure to manage the officials within the Sport-Québec structure. The organization does not know how many officials are officiating in the province and it is not organized to ensure support for its official population. There needs to be a system in place to ensure the sustainable development of officials in the province.

Based on the results of this study and discussion with the decision makers in the field, it is imperative to develop a strategic plan that will better take into consideration the needs of sports officials. This will allow a better retention of existing officials and the ability to recruit new ones. The strategy will need to take into consideration the reality of officials from a variety of perspectives which include: family, time, money, and work. These variables affect all aspects in the ability to officiate.

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