

PYRAMID SCHEME

The Companion

Everything referred to in the audiobook:
all eighteen figures, in order, and the
complete toolkit from the appendix.

Free. No email required. Share it with your board.

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How to use this

The figures come first, numbered the way the book numbers them. When the narration says Figure 7, it is on page 9 here.

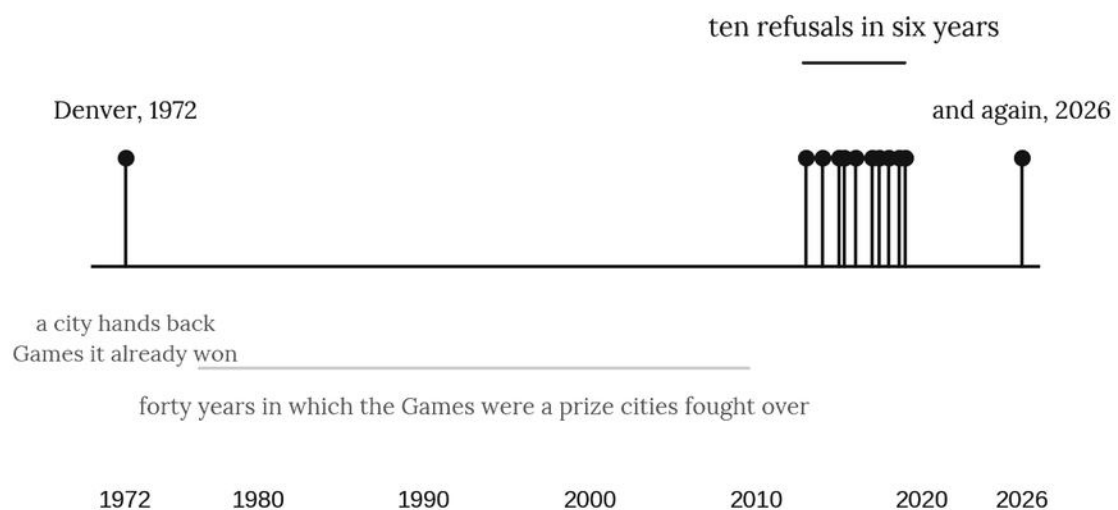
The toolkit follows. Ten tools, in the order the appendix presents them, starting with the four questions and ending with the directory.

Nothing in here needs approval from anyone above you. The four questions cost nothing to ask. The Collapse Index can be scored in an afternoon from records your organization already holds.

If you only do one thing: pull the thirteen numbers, or the eight you can get, and do not present them to anyone until you have looked at them yourself.

FIGURE 1

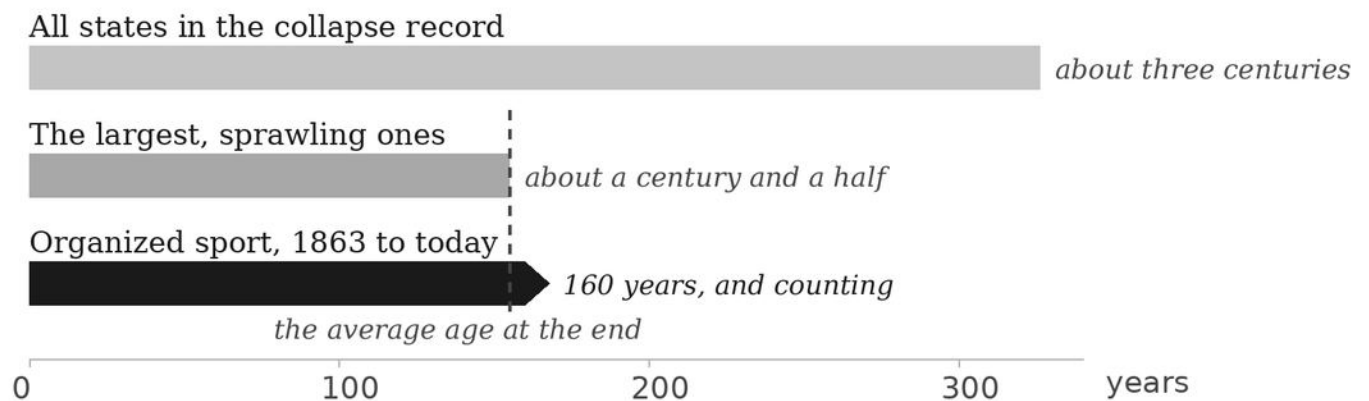
Twelve local explanations



Olympic host bids withdrawn or rejected by public vote, 1972 to 2026. Each was explained at the time as a local failure: a bad campaign, a bad mayor, bad timing.

FIGURE 2

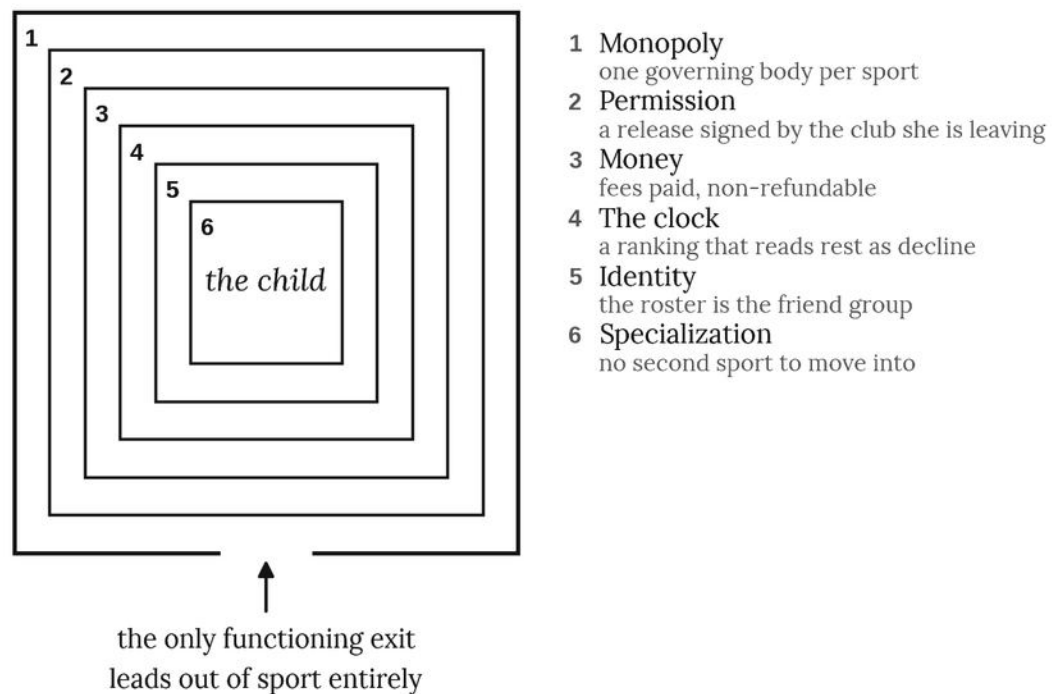
Right on schedule



Average lifespans in Kemp's collapse data, set against the age of codified sport. Bigger does not mean sturdier. Bigger means shorter.

FIGURE 3

Six walls around a fourteen year old



What a young athlete has to get past to change clubs. In a healthy system unhappy participants move sideways. In a closed one they disappear, and the system records it as dropout.

FIGURE 4

The price of a door

Through a school **■ \$70**

Through a
recreation centre **■ \$85**

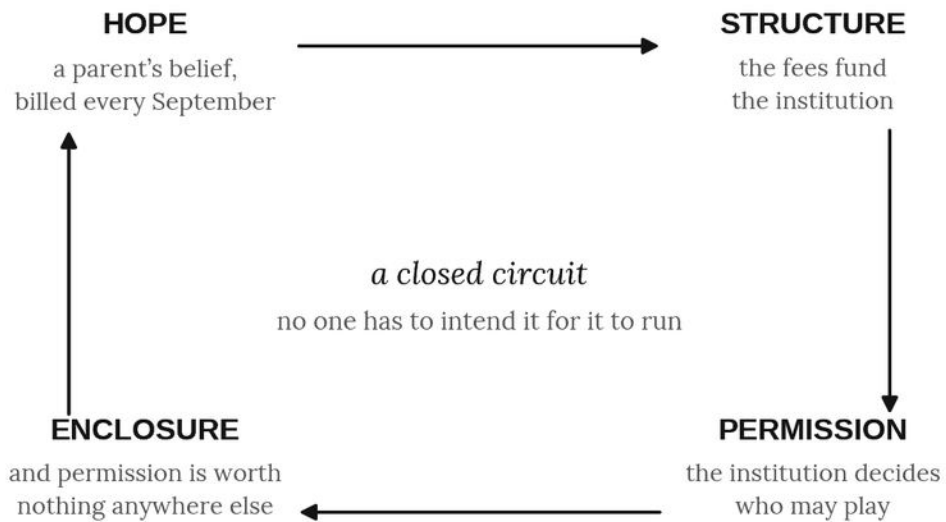
Through a sport club **■ \$1,122**

thirteen times the price for the same child, the same sport,
and the same ninety minutes in a gym

Average annual cost of youth sport participation in Canada, by point of entry. Source:
Canadian Tire Jumpstart, State of Play Youth Report, 2024.

FIGURE 5

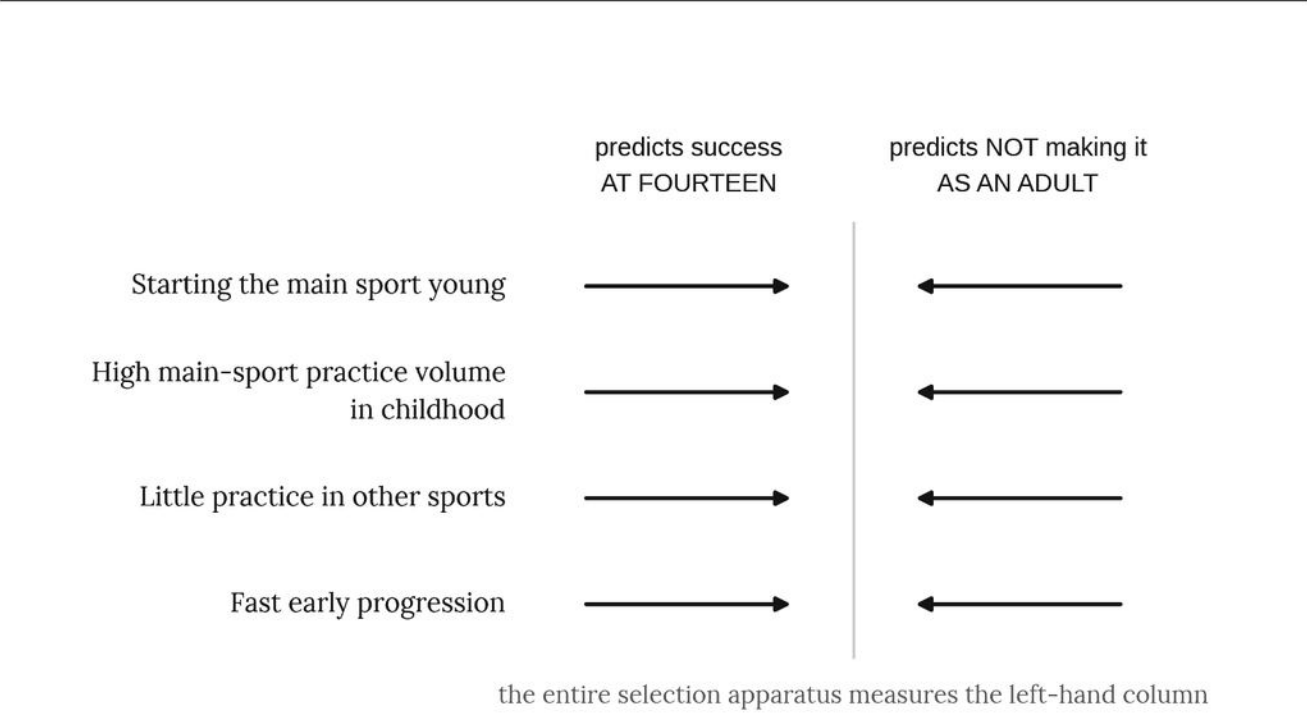
How the three conditions lock together



Surplus, permission and enclosure are separately survivable. Combined, they form a loop in which the price of permission can rise without demand falling.

FIGURE 6

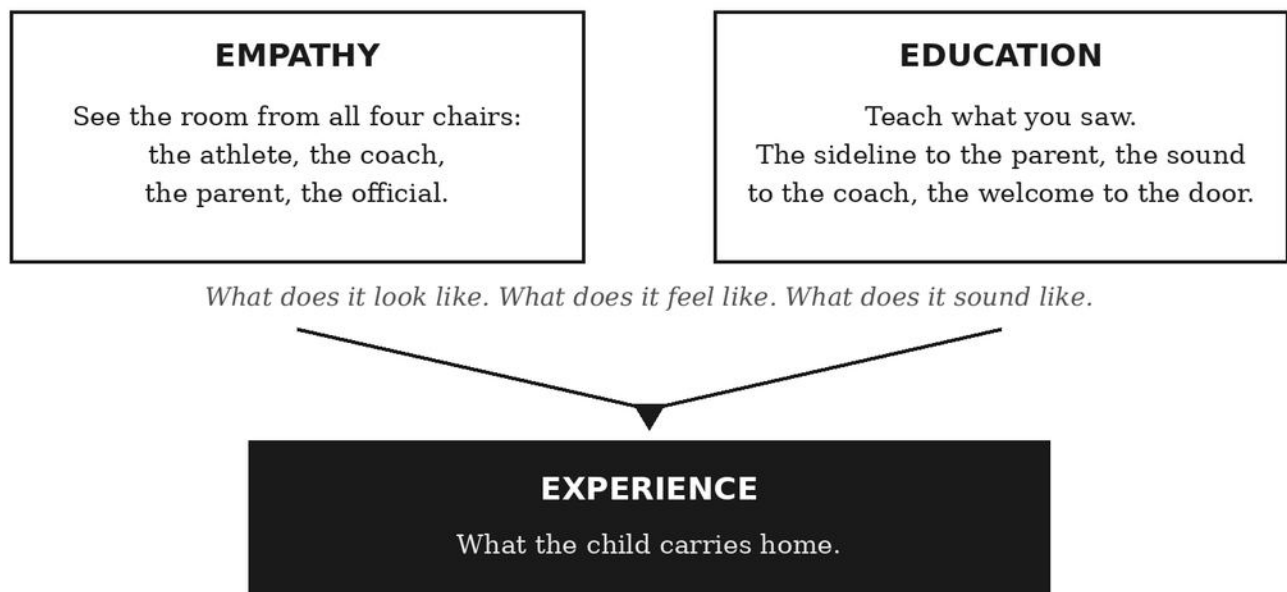
The machine runs backwards



Direction of association only, not magnitude. Predictors of junior elite performance and of senior elite performance run in opposite directions. Sources: Gullich, Macnamara and Hambrick, 2022; Barth et al., 2022.

FIGURE 7

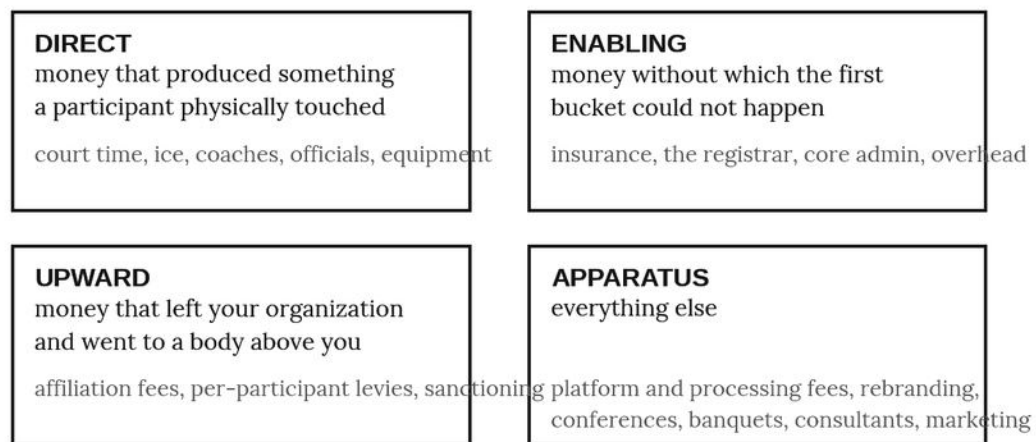
Empathy and education build experience



The three E's. Empathy tells you what the environment is. Education changes what it is. Experience is what it produces. Get the first two right, on purpose and on repeat.

FIGURE 8

Where the dollar actually went

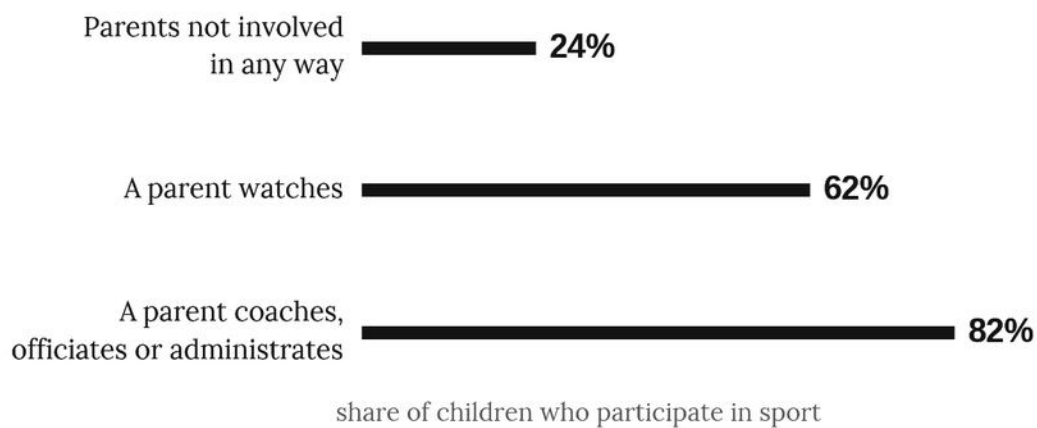


Then split every bucket by tier. Two numbers come out:
the share of a family's dollar that reaches their own child, and the ratio of top-tier to entry-tier spend.

Reorganize last year's expenses into four buckets. Nonprofit accounting sorts by expense type, which answers the auditor's question and not the family's. This takes an afternoon.

FIGURE 9

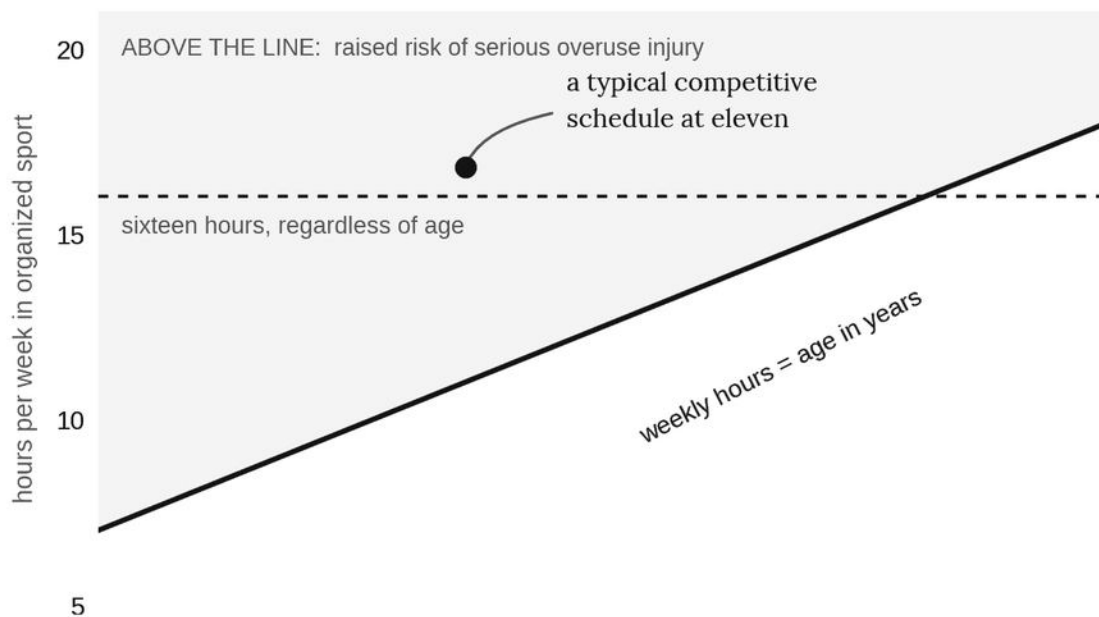
The volunteers are also the supply chain



A club that loses its volunteers does not only lose the labour. It loses the participation those adults were producing. Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Trends, kids and sport participation.

FIGURE 10

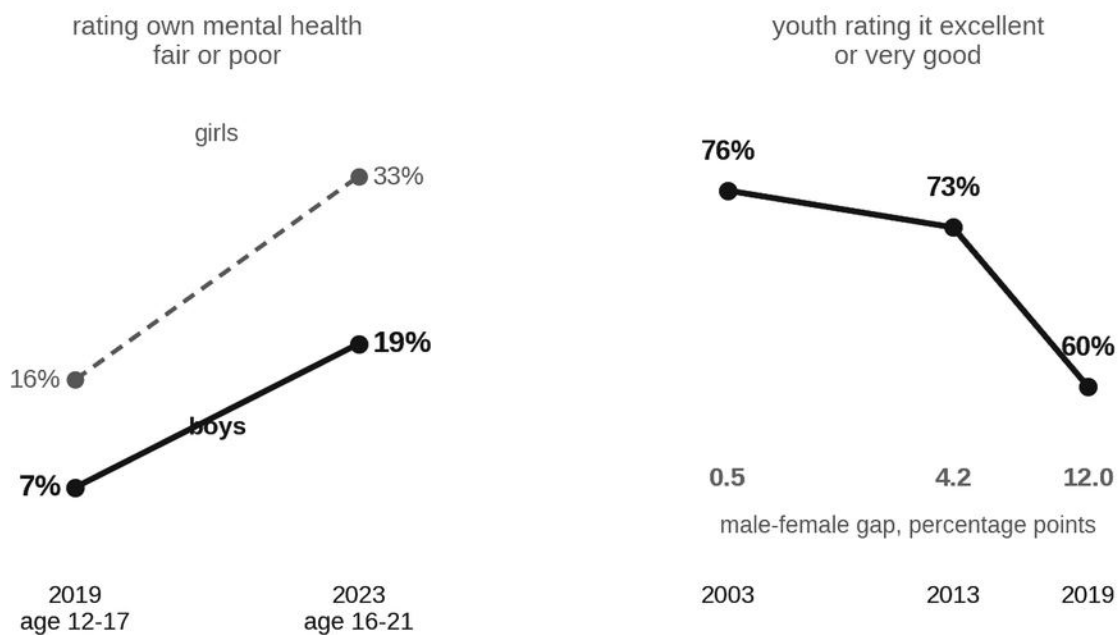
The line almost nobody stays under



Athletes training more hours per week than their age in years had roughly twice the odds of a serious overuse injury. Source: Jayanthi et al., American Journal of Sports Medicine, 2015.

FIGURE 11

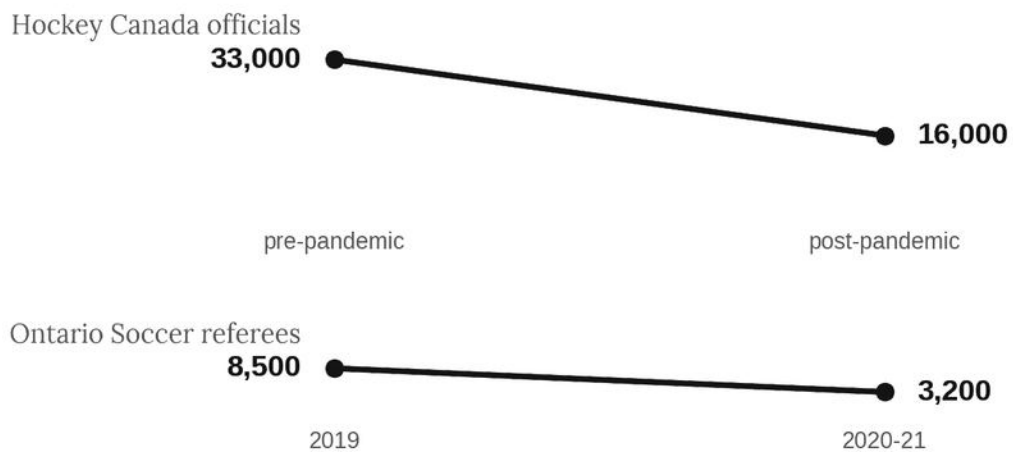
Both lines went down. One went down faster.



Left: the same young people, followed four years. Right: the long series, showing the overall decline and the gap that opened underneath it. Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, and Health of Youth in Canada.

FIGURE 12

The workforce that walked

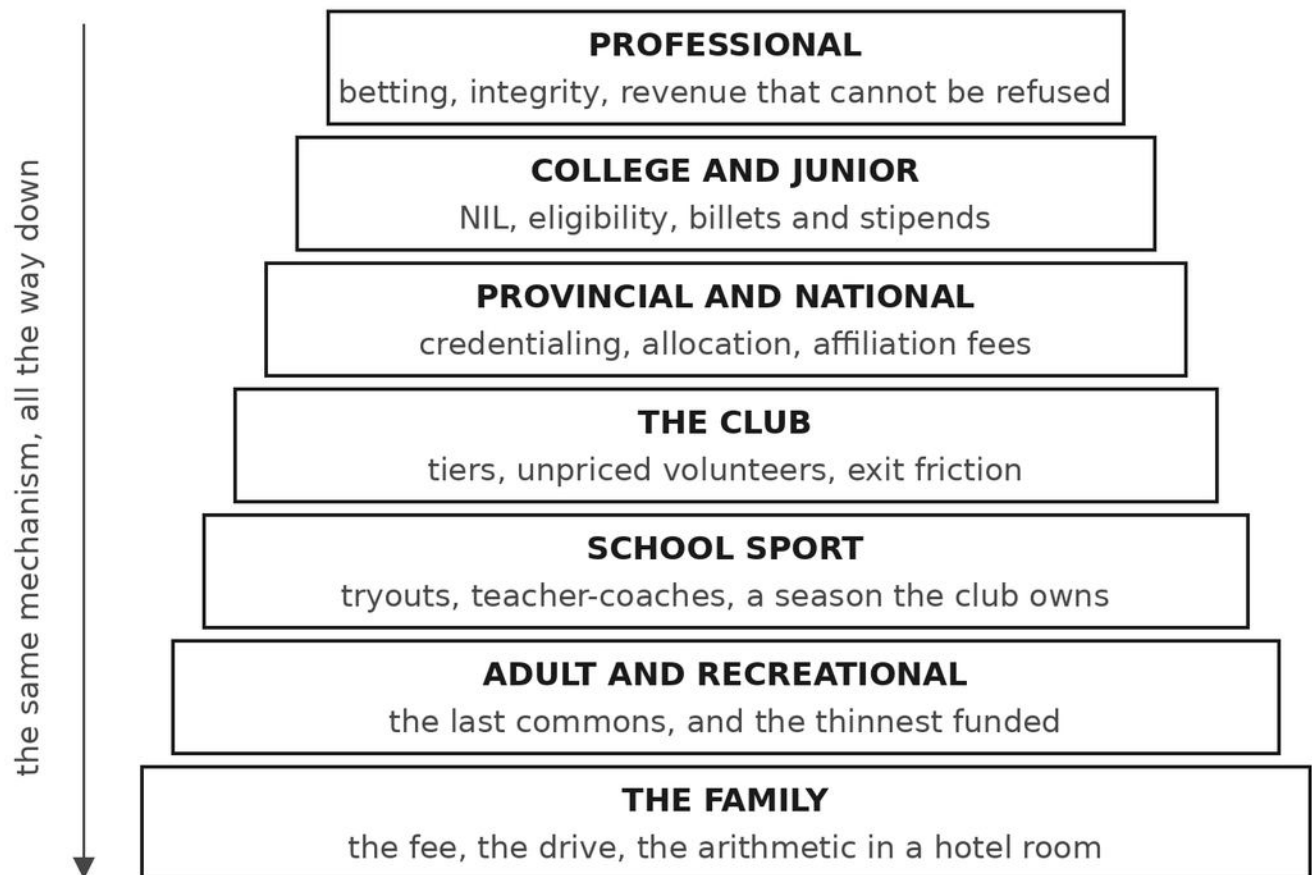


and in 2009, more than a decade before any of this,
roughly half of all new Canadian referees and umpires were quitting every year

Registered officials, two Canadian sports. Sources: Hockey Canada via SIRC;
Ontario Soccer Association via Capital Current; Globe and Mail, 2009.

FIGURE 13

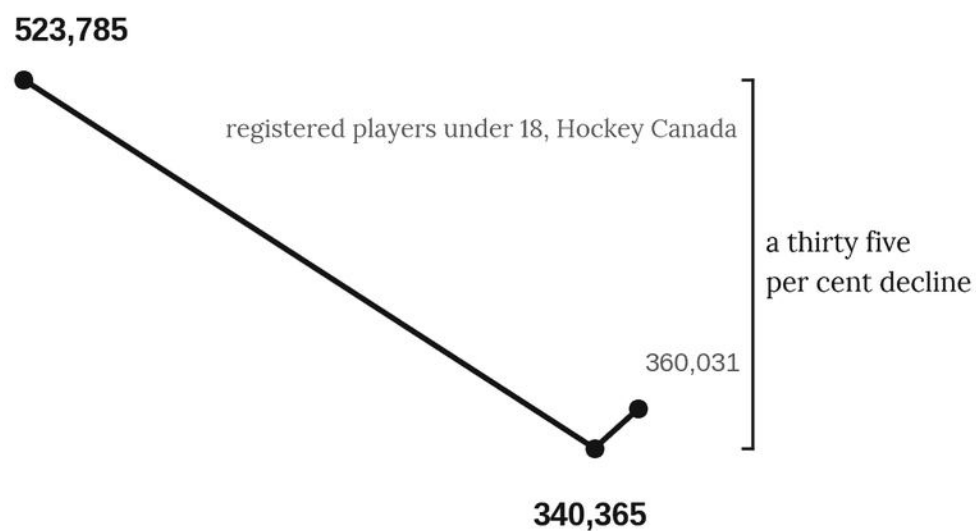
One structure, seven floors



Surplus, permission and enclosure operate at every level of organized sport. What changes as you move up is the amount of money involved, not the mechanism.

FIGURE 14

What a gold medal does not tell you



The 2022 figure was reported roughly two months after Canada won a world junior championship. Source: Hockey Canada, via CBC Sports, 2024.

FIGURE 15

One Saturday morning

parkrun finishers, one Saturday morning



free, volunteer-run, nobody selected

Hockey Canada, registered players under eighteen, a full season



four figures a family, tryouts, tiers, a pathway

Finishers at parkrun events worldwide on a single Saturday in April 2026, against the national sport's registered under-eighteens for an entire season. Chapter Thirteen explains why the comparison is not fair, and why it matters anyway.

FIGURE 16

What people chose when they left

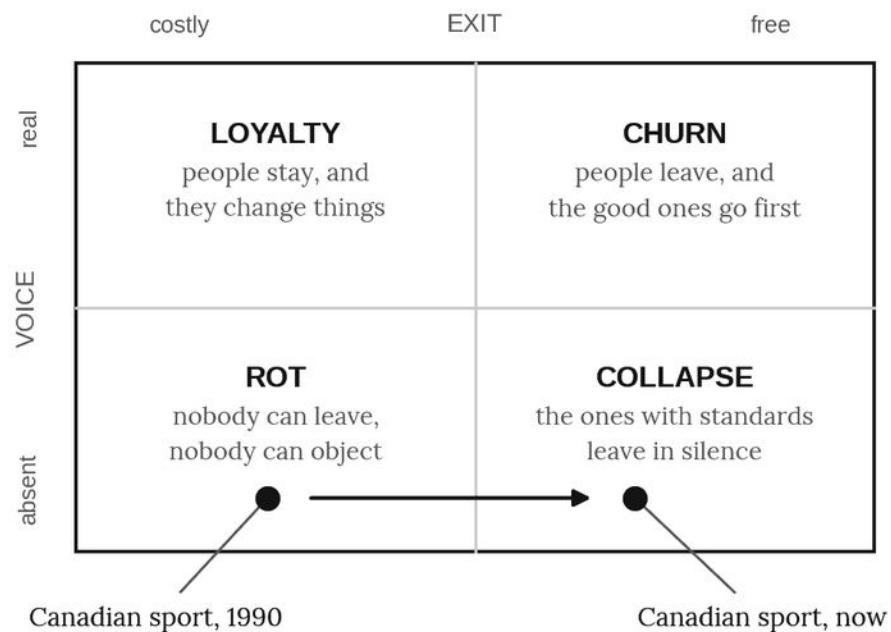
WHAT THE LEAVERS CHOSE	WHAT THE PYRAMID OFFERS
Free, or close to it	Registration, tiers, travel, showcases
Nobody is selected	Tryouts, cuts, tiering
No pathway, nothing at stake	A pathway, and everything at stake
Weekly, miss three, nothing happens	Miss three and you lose your spot
You belong the first time you show up	You earn your place, then defend it
Social first, athletic second	Athletic first, and that is the point
Volunteers organize it	A priesthood certifies it

not similar. inverted.

The properties shared by parkrun, run clubs, pickup and adult recreational leagues, set against the system people are leaving. Nobody at a run club planned this. They recognized it.

FIGURE 17

Why exit without voice makes it worse



After Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, 1970. Sport did not reform its way out of the bottom left. Families simply started leaving, which moves an institution right without ever moving it up.

FIGURE 18

The Collapse Index

INDICATOR		3	0
1	Officials retention, year over year	90%+	under 70%
2	Volunteer hours per participant	5+	under 1
3	Median age at exit	17+	under 13
4	Cost as share of local median income	under 1%	over 4%
5	Board mean tenure	under 4 yrs	over 9 yrs
6	Days, complaint filed to resolution	under 30	over 120
7	Top tier vs entry tier spend	under 2:1	over 8:1
8	Exit friction, days and dollars	0 and \$0	60+ days or a fee
9	Season length vs age thresholds	within all	exceeds both
10	Prime hours for free play	20%+	under 5%
11	Coach return rate	80%+	under 50%
12	Members: run in my interest	75%+ agree	under 45%
13	Ranking events per athlete, season	under 4	over 12

Score each 0 to 3. Total out of 39. Publish the thirteen, not just the total.

Thirteen leading indicators, none of which is a lagging revenue measure. Thresholds are the author's judgment, informed by the research in Part Two, and are offered as a first proposal for piloting.

The Toolkit

The complete appendix. Ten tools.

Everything in Part Four, pulled out of the argument and put where you can use it. Print these pages, or work straight from the screen. Nothing here needs approval from anyone above you.

Tool One. The four questions

Start here. Ask these four out loud at your next meeting, in this order, and write down who cannot answer them.

1. What does it cost a fourteen year old to leave us and play somewhere else?
2. What share of a family's fee reaches programming their own child touches?
3. How long did our last complaint take from filing to resolution, and did the person who filed it ever learn the outcome?
4. How many times per season do we formally tell a child where they stand?

These are not rhetorical. Each one has a number for an answer, and an organization that cannot produce the number has answered the question anyway.

Tool Two. The model movement clause

Four sentences. Adoptable at a single board meeting. Put it above the liability waiver on page one of your registration agreement.

Your right to leave. You may withdraw from this organization at any time, for any reason, without our permission. We will refund the unused portion of your fees according to the published schedule. We will not require a release, impose a waiting period, or contact any other organization about your departure. If you tell us why you are leaving, we will use it to improve. You do not have to tell us.

It is written so that the only organizations with a reason to refuse it are the ones the clause exists to expose.

Tool Three. The four bucket worksheet

Take last year's expenses and reassign every line to one of four buckets. It takes an afternoon, and it answers the question nonprofit accounting was never designed to answer.

Direct. Money that produced something a participant physically touched. Court time, ice, coaches, officials, equipment.

Enabling. Money without which the direct bucket could not happen. Insurance, the registrar, core administration.

Upward. Money that left your organization for a body above you. Affiliation fees, per participant levies, sanctioning.

Apparatus. Everything else. Platform and processing fees, rebranding, conferences, banquets, consultants, marketing.

Then split each bucket by competitive tier. Two numbers come out: the share of a family's dollar that reached programming their own child touched, and the ratio of spend per participant at your top tier against your entry tier. Publish both. The template is Figure 8. The blank worksheet is in the free toolkit.

Tool Four. The Collapse Index scorecard

Thirteen indicators. Score each from zero to three: three if the number is healthy and improving, two if healthy but flat, one if deteriorating, zero if deteriorating or unmeasured. An indicator you cannot measure scores zero, because an organization that does not count something has decided not to know it.

1. Officials retention. Of the officials who worked your games last season, the share who returned this season. The assignor already has both lists.
2. Volunteer hours per participant. The hours the season actually consumed, divided by registered participants. Estimate honestly, then price the total the way Chapter Six prices it.
3. Median age at exit. The age at which a registrant leaves and does not come back. Your registration database has been recording this for years.
4. Cost as a share of local income. One season at your middle tier, against your community's median household income. Statistics Canada publishes the denominator.
5. Board tenure. Average consecutive years served by current directors. The minutes.
6. The complaint clock. Days from the last complaint filed to its resolution, and whether the person who filed it was told the outcome.
7. Top tier against entry tier. Spend per participant at each, from the four bucket worksheet.

8. Exit friction. What it costs a family to leave you mid-season and play elsewhere, counted in days and dollars. Read your own release policy as if you were the one leaving.
9. Season length against age. Weeks per year and weekly hours for your youngest competitive tier, against the thresholds in Chapter Seven.
10. The free play share. Of your best weekly hours, the share a kid could walk into without a fee or a roster spot.
11. Coach return rate. Coaches from last season still coaching this season, anywhere in your organization.
12. The trust question. One anonymous question, asked annually, collected by somebody who does not sit on the board: is this organization run in your interest?
13. Ranking events per athlete per season. Count them off the calendar. Every one is a formal statement to a child about where they stand.

Out of thirty nine: 33 or better and you are running a society. 24 to 32, structurally sound and drifting. 13 to 23, you are running a pyramid. Under 13, late, in the specific sense Chapter One meant. Publish the thirteen scores rather than the total, and re-score annually on the same date. Chapter Eighteen explains which indicators can be gamed, and why gaming the good ones produces the outcome anyway.

Tool Five. Action by level

The mechanisms in this book do not change as you move up the structure. What changes is your reach. Find your level and start there.

If you run a community club. Delete the release requirement this quarter. Publish cost per participant by tier. Run the four buckets on last year's expenses. Ask the athletes about the environment, not about themselves. Open your best hours to unstructured play at least once a week. Score the Collapse Index and publish the number.

If you coach. Count your ranking events per season and cut the ones that exist for the calendar rather than for development. Make sure one adult around your team is not an evaluator. Stop saying leave it at the door. Ask your athletes what it is like to play for you, anonymously, and read the answers without defending yourself. Walk your own gym through the four chairs, Tool Eight, at least once a season.

If you are a school or a teacher-coach. Field a second team before you cut a player. Tier internally rather than selecting out. Protect the season from club encroachment by fixing your dates first and publishing them early. And keep the number that matters, which is not wins, but how many students in the building played anything this year.

If you run adult or recreational programming. You are the last commons in the sector and you are almost certainly underfunded relative to your value. Measure participants rather than teams. Protect drop-in from being displaced by rentals. And make the case internally with the number from Chapter Six: adults who play produce children who play.

If you sit on a board. Ask for the four bucket breakdown at the next meeting. Ask how long the last complaint took from filing to resolution, and whether the person who filed it was told the outcome. Ask what share of prime hours went to free play. If nobody can answer, that is your answer.

If you run a provincial or national body. Publish the allocation criteria before the allocation. Price the volunteer hours your system depends on and put the number in your annual report. Fund multi-sport as a condition rather than a slogan. Add non-evaluative seats to your athlete-facing structures. And commission the Collapse Index across your members, then publish the distribution rather than the average.

If you work in junior, college or professional sport. The exit question is the whole question. Whatever your competitive structure, ask what it costs a young person to leave it and go somewhere else. If the answer is a year of eligibility, a release, a fee, or a relationship, you are running the same machine described in this book with more money in it. And on betting: the only intervention that removes the mechanism rather than pricing it is prohibiting proposition markets on individual athletes.

Tool Six. The first ninety days

For a board that intends to move rather than to study.

Days one to thirty. Ask the four questions and record who could not answer. Run the four bucket worksheet on last year's books. Read your own release policy as if you were fourteen and unhappy. Score the Collapse Index for the first time, badly, with estimates where the data is missing. The missing data is a finding, not an excuse.

Days thirty one to sixty. Adopt the movement clause at one meeting. Separate the complaint route from the selector, so the person a family reports to is never the person who picks the team. Ask the athletes about the environment using Tool Seven, and let somebody outside the board collect the answers.

Days sixty one to ninety. Publish three numbers where members can find them: cost per participant by tier, the share of the dollar that reached programming, and your thirteen Index scores. Open one block of prime hours to free play and resist the urge to program it.

Then stop. Ninety days of visible change buys you the standing to attempt the harder reforms in Part Four. Attempting the harder reforms first buys you a governance fight.

Tool Seven. Ask the athletes properly

The instrument matters less than the conditions. Anonymous. Collected by somebody with no power over selection. Results shared back with the athletes who provided them. Repeated on a schedule, so the first honest year is not also the last.

Ask about the environment rather than about the child. Over the past month, in this program: did you feel listened to when it mattered; were mistakes treated as information or as offences; if something felt wrong, do you know what you would do; and if the choice were entirely yours, would you sign up again?

Sport psychology has validated instruments for exactly this, built on the same self-determination research that runs through Chapter Three, and a provincial body or a nearby kinesiology department can point you to one. A satisfaction survey is not one. Satisfaction measures whether people enjoyed the banquet. These questions measure whether the environment is doing what environments are for.

Tool Eight. The four chairs

The environment audit from Chapter Three, as a walk you can do this week. Pick an ordinary game day. Move through your building four times, once in each chair, and write down what the place looks like, feels like, and sounds like from each one.

The athlete's chair. Come through the door the way a nine year old does. What is the first thing she sees, and does it tell her she belongs here or that she is about to be measured?

The coach's chair. Can the most important adult in the room actually teach, or is the room competing with them for the floor?

The parent's chair. What does the bleacher invite an adult to become? Everything on the walls and everything said before tip off is an instruction, whether you meant it as one or not.

The official's chair. Would the seventeen year old in stripes finish this game wanting to come back next week? When you run out of officials, you run out of games.

What you saw is the empathy. What you change and teach afterward is the education. What the child carries home is the experience, and it is the only scoreboard that counts. This is the coach's and the board's half of the discipline; Tool Seven is the athletes' half.

Tool Nine. The shelf

Eight books, if this one sent you looking.

Luke Kemp, *Goliath's Curse*. The dataset this book runs on, and blunter than my summary of it.

Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Fifty years old, and it explains your registration numbers better than your annual report does.

Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*. Why adding administration to a failing system is the failure.

Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*. Collapse as worse pottery. Read it and you will never see a folded league the same way.

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*. What institutions do to the things they need to count.

David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*. The evidence that hierarchy was a choice, not a destiny.

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*. Play is older than culture. The whole argument, from 1938.

Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*. What a commons is for, and what closes when it closes.

Tool Ten. The directory

Organizations doing pieces of the rebuild now. Addresses current as of mid 2026.

Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities, jumpstart.canadiantire.ca. Fee assistance for families, and the participation research this book leans on.

KidSport Canada, kidsportcanada.ca. Registration grants through community chapters, so that cost is not the cut.

ParticipACTION, participaction.com. The national report card on whether children actually move.

Sport Information Resource Centre, sirc.ca. The research library of Canadian sport. Most of the studies cited in this book can be found from here.

Coaching Association of Canada, coach.ca. The certification system, and therefore the place to push for the evaluation reforms in Chapter Sixteen.

Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, cces.ca. Since April 2025, home of the Canadian Safe Sport Program, the national mechanism for complaints of maltreatment in sport.

True Sport, truesportpur.ca. Principles and free club level resources for the culture side of the rebuild.

parkrun, parkrun.com. Chapter Thirteen, live, every Saturday morning, including across Canada.

Project Play, the Aspen Institute, projectplay.org. The American evidence base. The checklists translate.

Changing the Game Project, changingthegameproject.com. The parent side of the movement, which is the side with the numbers.

One number to keep while you use any of this: the hour on Tuesday. Everything above is in service of it.

You cannot fix a hundred
and sixty years of anything.

You can fix one hour on a Tuesday.

Pyramid Scheme is available in paperback, hardcover,
ebook and audiobook.

Ken King

justkenking.com