



OPEN LETTER TO CAS MEMBERS, CLUBS, COACHES AND OFFICIALS

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." (Barack Obama)

Forging Unity Through Diversity

When we adopted these four words as the brand essence of newly named Canada Artistic Swimming in 2018, our board and those who took part in our re-branding research envisioned a sport where everyone had a safe, welcoming place to participate, and a place to become their own best self, regardless of body shape or size, skin colour or gender identity. By adopting the brand at that time, we committed to taking steps to achieve our diversity and inclusivity goals moving forward.

Two years later, with the world justifiably protesting the injustice and racism that continues to exist in our society, we are again reminded in a very tangible and shocking way that there is much that still needs to be done in our own organization.

While we collectively share the outrage, at the same time we must acknowledge that **synchronized swimming** was neither a diverse nor a welcoming environment. Experience in the sport, with its narrow definition of ideal physical attributes, has damaged the self-image of some participants. This same narrow definition may have almost entirely precluded participation from the Black, Indigenous and People of Colour communities.

We have spent the past several weeks listening – to the voices of our athletes, to the voices of people in the broader sport community and to the voices from around the globe calling for an end to discrimination in any form.

Artistic swimming is an incredible and amazing sport and can be different from its predecessor. It has the potential and the capacity to be what we envision: dynamic, inclusive, powerful, collaborative, and creative.

We need to do better. We need to turn these words into action, and we need your help.

We will lead the way to change our sport, to hold unacceptable behaviour accountable and to move forward together with our Member provinces, our Clubs, coaches, and officials using our influence to promote change at the international level.

What we are committed to:

- Creating a welcoming, safe and kind space for everyone in our pools, on our teams and for those who are part of our Club and Member boards.
- As outlined in the CAS Conduct Policy, calling out racism, body shaming, and any other form of discrimination when we see it – from other athletes, from coaches, parents, administrators, or officials.
- Removing obstacles and barriers that have prevented participation of diverse communities, and, more than that, to actively recruit participants that have not traditionally participated in our sport.

What we have done:

- Ensured our [Discipline and Complaint Policy](#) addresses any issues of discrimination or harassment, on any basis, including race, religion, or gender identity.
- Introduced a [Coaching Registration and Certification Policy](#) that requires coaches and other participants to acknowledge and commit to support the [CAS Conduct Policy](#) as a condition of registering. This policy defines the appropriate behaviour expectations for all participants in our sport.
- Required coaches and officials to [complete mandatory Respect in Sport Certification](#) every three years and to follow our new [Screening Policy](#).
- Encouraged all athletes to report to a responsible person or directly to our external, third-party [Safe Sport Officer](#) if they feel they have been subjected to discrimination or bullying of any sort.
- Created the [Safety in Sport Coordinator](#) position at the National Office to support our commitment to safe and inclusive sport programs, and to answer any questions from athletes, coaches or anyone in the organization.
- Supported our national team athletes to join athletes from all sports in standing against racism and discrimination.
- Implemented a Talent ID Program that asks Club coaches to recommend athletes they have identified from their Club for evaluation by Talent Scouts at National events.
- Established standards and assessment tools focused on the development of athleticism and athletic values, moving them to the top of athlete developmental priorities and using these values to inform athlete selection.

What we will do:

- Establish a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force to address on-going gaps in achieving our goals of access for all - including finalizing our Diversity and Inclusivity Policy -, to conduct a full review to ensure the sport's rules support inclusivity, and also to examine ways to make the sport more financially accessible for all.
- Reach out to people who have provided personal and systemic feedback to invite them to be part of the solutions as we go forward.
- Support Canadian leaders in building a new judging and scoring system at the international and national level that reflects the ideals of the Olympic motto - faster, higher, stronger, and is based on objective and measurable performance criteria - consistent with Canadian sport values.
- Add specific choreographic training to our NCCP courses to give coaches the confidence and sensitivity to build routines without themes or to select culturally appropriate ones.
- Use imagery that represents racial and gender diversity in our advertising and promotion - so more people can see themselves reflected in the expression of the artistic swimming community.

What You Can Do:

Members and Clubs

- Ensure your Member and Club policies are up-to-date and reflect those on the CAS website related to safe and inclusive sport participation.
- Adopt and follow the "we are committed to" statements identified above.
- Ensure your Club advertisements and registrant recruitment initiatives reflect a commitment to advertise programs in non-traditional communities in your city or region. Partner with community cultural organizations to offer opportunities for athletes who might not be aware of our sport.
- Actively promote AquaGO! to the broadest recreational community with an emphasis on all children aged 5-9 years and all groups in your region. (CAS will provide marketing materials designed to assist Clubs with this task later this summer)
- Ensure that your team selection processes do not consciously or unconsciously bias against athletes of colour, race, or of specific physical attributes.
- Celebrate the diversity on your team and cease taking any additional cosmetic steps meant to make athletes look more like each other.

Coaches and Officials

- Advocate for and live by the safe and inclusive sport principles described in the CAS Conduct Policy and the Universal Code of Conduct for Addressing Maltreatment in Sport.
- Listen, learn and lead by example to educate the athletes in your care.
- Work together to ensure athletes are assessed on their athletic performance, not on the basis of their physical appearance, and that teams are assessed on their athletic achievement, not on their physical uniformity.

Be a part of the solution

CAS is currently recruiting new [CAS board members](#) for the coming year. We encourage anyone who would like to be part of our organization's future to submit their name for consideration. CAS is committed to building a skilled, diverse Board that is reflective of Canadian society and of our sport community.

If serving on the Board is not of interest, please help us by sharing your ideas on building a more inclusive sport or participating in our Diversity and Inclusivity Task Force by contacting Jackie Buckingham, CEO (jackie@artisticswimming.ca) or Rieanne Gushulak, Safety in Sport Coordinator (rieanne@artisticswimming.ca)

We have high expectations for our Members, our Clubs, coaches and officials to join with us to take action against discrimination of all types: race, religion, gender, and physical attributes.

We know that true progress toward achieving our brand essence will not happen unless we stand together. We know that this is a difficult time in our sport in general and we all feel the pressure to get athletes back into the pool in a way that looks and feels "normal". Our athletes greatly appreciate your support. We welcome your input. And we pledge to do all that we can to foster a safe space where all artistic swimming participants thrive.

CAS Board of Directors:

Judi Enns Bradette – President
Margie Schuett – Vice-President
Lindsay Duncan
Shannon Higgins
Florence Klein
Olivia Zawadiuk (Athlete Council Chair)
Jackie Buckingham (CEO)

June 26, 2020