

Health & Fitness Journal of Canada

Copyright © 2020 The Authors. Journal Compilation Copyright © 2020 Health & Fitness Society of BC

Volume 13

September 30, 2020

Number 3

COMMENTARY

Dr. Jack Taunton, Trailblazer and Mentor

Navin Prasad^{1,*}

1 Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6T1Z3

**Corresponding Author: nprasad@mail.ubc.ca.*

Abstract

This article highlights the important contributions that Dr. Jack Taunton has made to the field of Sport and Exercise Medicine during his long and illustrious career. He has been a mentor to many young clinicians and has been a pioneer in shaping the Sport and Exercise Medicine landscape in Canada and internationally. His energy and passion to grow this field have influenced many young clinicians and he has set a high bar that will be hard to match. **Health & Fitness Journal of Canada 2020;13(3):25-28.**

<https://doi.org/10.14288/hfjc.v13i3.326>

Keywords: Sports and Exercise Medicine, Pioneer, Team Physician, Olympic Games

Introduction

When we look back at our mentors, we sometimes forget to appreciate how much an individual can shape our life and take us on a journey that we have always dreamed of. Dr. Jack Taunton and his wife Cheryl have done that for my wife and I and it is a true honor to be able to recognize them for all they have done for both me and the field of Sport and Exercise Medicine in Canada.

I remember when I was still a medical student in Edmonton, Alberta in the mid 1980's and was keen on considering a career in sports medicine. At that time, sports medicine was mainly dominated by orthopedic surgery and those were my only early teachers. The primary care side of sports and exercise medicine was still a very young field and there was not a lot of peer reviewed journal articles on this topic. Most of the literature was filled with

exercise physiology and biomechanics but not the clinical aspects or epidemiology of sports injuries. There were some occasional articles in non-scientific journals such as Sports Illustrated or Physician and Sports Medicine talking about sports injuries, but there was not a lot of evidence-based, peer reviewed articles in these journals. As I would sit in the library and literally spend hours poring over articles, it was clear to me that the names of Dr. Jack Taunton and Dr. Doug Clement would come up over and over especially in the field of running injuries. Living in Canada, I assumed these were well respected physicians working with large research grants in the US or possibly in Europe. To my surprise, these were articles written by physicians in Vancouver, BC just a province away from me in Edmonton. Drs. Taunton and

Trailblazer and Mentor

Clement established the first Sports Medicine Clinic in Canada at UBC. I decided then and there that my career path must travel through Vancouver and the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Center where these esteemed physicians were working. It became my goal as I worked through my medical school residency, that I would find a way to learn from Dr. Taunton and Dr. Clement in Vancouver and I was fortunate enough to be accepted into a fellowship for Sports Medicine under their tutelage in 1991 at UBC. During this time, I learned valuable lessons in clinical medicine and team event coverage as Dr. Taunton was the head physician for the Vancouver Grizzlies NBA team and the National Women's Field Hockey team along with being the medical officer for multiple Olympic Games and international events including Chief Medical Officer for Canada at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. A tribute to Jack's passion and determination was the fact he participated in this highly stressful environment only 6 weeks after open heart surgery. Jack himself was an established athlete having completed over 60 marathons in his career and he set an example to all the Canadian athletes of how to fight through any adversity life throws your way. In 2010, Vancouver hosted the Olympic Winter Games with Dr. Taunton as the Chief Medical Officer for VANOC and he received recognition from the IOC as having run one of the most successful Winter Games ever. The most recent major event coverage experience I shared with Dr. Taunton was his role as the Chief Medical Officer for the America's Masters Games in 2016. This was the first time these games were held in North America and even in the twilight of his career, Dr. Taunton organized coverage for over 5000 athletes from over 50 countries and drew

raves from all the participants about how well the event was run.

After finishing my training at UBC, I started my own clinical practice in Sports Medicine in New Westminster, BC including work as a team physician for the BC Lions professional football team. In 2001 destiny smiled on me again when I was asked to come join the partnership with my mentors at the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Center at UBC and I once again had a chance to work as a colleague with Dr. Taunton over the next 15 years.

It was during this time that my wife and I were also introduced to Jack's wife, Cheryl. Cheryl is one of the most supportive spouses we have ever met. Not only was she helping the clinic with many of the administrative functions including accounting and office management, but she was also helping Jack with the many publications and research articles he was conducting with the graduate students. We often joked that Jack would have to be in 2 places at the same time in order to accomplish everything he was doing, and we quickly realized that was because Cheryl and Jack were a team and while Jack might be doing something on the clinical side of sports medicine, Cheryl would be helping with the academic work and when Jack was busy with the academic work, Cheryl would help out at the office. Cheryl welcomed my wife Nutan into the clinical practice and they would organize the most amazing office Christmas parties and "team bonding" events. It was a great time to be at the Allan McGavin Center.

Throughout my young career, Dr. Taunton was always looking out for me and opening doors for many clinical opportunities. A funny story is that he saw my resume and it indicated that I played hockey growing up in Edmonton. Being of Indian origin, Dr. Taunton assumed I must

Trailblazer and Mentor

have played field hockey and therefore arranged for me to travel with the Canadian National Field Hockey team in 1992 to an international event. He did not realize that growing up in Edmonton, hockey meant "ice hockey" and I had never touched a field hockey stick in my life. Regardless by opening this door, it started an association with a program that I have now spent almost 30 years traveling all around the world. With Jack's encouragement, I have now represented Canada as a team physician including 4 Olympic Games, 3 World Cups of Field Hockey, 3 Commonwealth Games, and 6 Pan-American Games. The connections I have made through these international events have also allowed me to work with athlete's from over 15 different Olympic sports. Academically, Jack encouraged me to get involved teaching courses in kinesiology where I lectured for 5 years and helped supervise me as I completed my Master's degree looking at the Aerobic versus Anaerobic capacity of Pre-Pubertal Children.

Dr. Taunton has been likened to the Energizer Bunny. His motor is constantly running. I have never seen anyone who is more optimistic than Jack about any project he starts. His enthusiasm rubs off on everyone around him. There is no task that he cannot accomplish once he puts his mind to it. I'm sure others will write about the numerous accomplishments in his career which can take up several pages. Jack co-founded the Sports Medicine Council of BC. He was the Past President of the Canadian Academy of Sports and Exercise Medicine. He was instrumental in establishing the Vancouver Sun Run which started as a fun 10K race but now has over 50,000 participants including many elite international runners. He helped establish the Vancouver Marathon which continues

to grow in numbers, and he continues to lecture internationally on running injuries where he was a pioneer in diagnosing and treating running injuries. He is often called the "father of running in BC". He helped to establish the UBC Grand Prix of cycling to raise research money for the BC Sports Medicine Research Foundation for which I was President for 15 years. In 2016 he helped start a project in Uganda to educate young physicians about sports medicine and sport science and already Uganda is seeing some success internationally in sports outside of long distance running for the first time. However, Dr. Taunton's knowledge and expertise is not only limited to musculoskeletal medicine. He has sat on several advisory boards including the BC Concussion Advisory Network and the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. Recently he helped establish the Sports Cardiology of BC database to study cardiology abnormalities in athletes and is now involved with the BC Centre for Brain Health helping to initiate several research studies in this growing field. Despite all these accomplishments, Dr. Taunton continues to be so humble and approachable. He always credits others for his success and always mentions that it is a "team" that gets things done. Most young people would be intimidated to approach someone as recognized as Dr. Taunton, but I have had many young learners and fellows tell me that Jack will approach them first at a meeting or conference and ask them what they are studying and what their career goals and aspirations are. He makes everyone feel comfortable around him despite all his many accomplishments.

Dr. Taunton has been the Chief Advisor for almost 50 Master's and PhD students. In the academic world, he has over 150 listed refereed publications (many as first author), 37 non-refereed journal

Trailblazer and Mentor

publications and 18 book chapters. Dr. Taunton's keen mind and thirst for academic knowledge has made him a wonderful mentor for innumerable learners including prominent clinicians, researchers, and many successful sport and exercise medicine practitioners. Many have gone on to run successful sport and exercise medicine programs throughout Canada and even Internationally. While I cannot keep up with all his awards and honors he has received throughout his career, some of the memorable ones include the Inaugural Canadian Academy of Sports and Exercise Medicine Medal of Service Award in 2018 and the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014, the BC Sports Hall of Fame in 2014, Wallace Wilson Leadership Award from the UBC Medical Alumni Association in May 2016, and in 2015 he was named Most Inspiring Kinesiology Graduate Student in 50 years from Simon Fraser University.

In summary, Dr. Taunton is a Sport and Exercise Medicine physician who has been a pioneer and leader in this field for almost 50 years. He has set a high bar that will be hard for anyone to match but he has done it with an unbelievable passion and a desire to see the field of sport and exercise medicine continue to grow. His energy is limitless, and I do not think there are many physicians working in our field who have not been influenced by Dr. Taunton's research, clinical education, teaching support, or personal camaraderie. The number of young clinicians and researchers he has influenced must number in the thousands. I am personally so grateful to have had him as a mentor but also a colleague, partner, and close friend over the past 30 years.

Thank you, Jack, for all you have done for the Sport and Exercise Medicine field in your long and distinguished career.

Author's Qualifications

The author's qualifications are as follows: Navin Prasad MSc, MD, MCFP (SEM), (SEM); Clinical Associate Professor and Clinical Director, Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre, University of British Columbia.