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COMMENTARY

A Tribute to Jack Taunton

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Abstract

As lawyer, author, politician, and founder of the Canadian Health and Fitness Institute (CHFI: CHFI.FIT), John Weston reflects on the role of Dr. Jack Taunton as a major influencer of health, fitness, and character in Canada and around the world. **Health & Fitness Journal of Canada 2020;13(3):42-44.**

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Introduction

If you've ever met a legend, how did it happen? And what was the difference between that person's enriching your life and your missing out completely on the experience?

Let me tell you how I met Dr. Jack Taunton, how easily I could have missed out, and what a difference unfolded because I took a path less traveled by.

I swam on the periphery of a group called the West Vancouver Masters, off and on, for years. I say "on the periphery" because I never swam at the average level of a masters swimmer. No, I didn't really swim at the low level either. It was hard to get in the water with these athletes who boasted good technique, intensity, and a high level of fitness. I survived by instinct - making sure I added flippers when necessary to keep up and getting out of the way when I couldn't hold my own.

This all worked well until one day when a couple of other less able swimmers joined the lane, but without the instincts. They

slowed things down, triggered complaints, and we all got evicted together.

Happily, there were two positive outcomes from my swimming with these "fishes". Firstly, I kept pushing my envelope for fitness and technique. And, perhaps with more lasting significance, one of the swimmers told me one day that I had to meet Jack Taunton.

Have you ever been in that position, when someone you don't know that well tells you to introduce yourself to a stranger? Like an alarmed skunk, you instantly spray reasons why not to follow through. It will be awkward. You may be rejected. You're too busy. But, for some reason, I overcame those objections, called Dr. Taunton, and was astonished by someone of international notoriety who wanted to hear my story.

Jack's story? One of the founders of Canadian sport medicine; the senior doctor for Canada in the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games; founder of the BMO Vancouver Marathon; founder of the

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Vancouver Sun Run; eminent physician; founder of the UBC Sports Medicine Clinic - the list goes on and on. Few are the sport medicine doctors around the country who *don't know* Jack. Countless Canadians call themselves his patients. Jack is truly a living legend. His stories are endless, his relationships innumerable, his story, one of noble professional service.

My story? I was in the beginning stages of founding the [Canadian Health and Fitness Institute](#), a charitable foundation committed by 2030 to "Make Canada the Fittest Nation on Earth." We were gathering an array of relevant subject experts together to disrupt negative patterns of sedentary behaviour, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental illness, and spiraling health care costs.

You can learn more about the event to honour Dr. Jack Taunton, how to contribute auction items, and how to get tickets at [CHF's website](#).

Jack responded with a level of enthusiasm that has lionized him in the eyes of fans around the world. He became one of four Founding Directors. Unlike many enterprise directors, he rolled up his sleeves and zestfully contributed to meetings of the board, fundraising meetings, planning meetings, and social ones.

Most persons with six spinal surgeries, recent jaw surgery, roller coaster iron levels in the blood, and occasional arrhythmia would take a back seat in a corporate setting. Not Jack. No matter how many people are included in an email blast, you can expect Jack to be one of the first to reply. Recently, it was Jack who among 12 meeting participants alerted me that my Zoom invitation was in error. We've had 23 Executive Meetings over two years - Jack has attended each one, always on time.

He walks the talk. Often when you call, you'll catch him on his 3-hour walks. For a 73-year-old who completed 66 marathons (with some under 2 hours, 30 minutes), having to walk with sticks must sometimes be frustrating. Jack doesn't have the time for frustration. Instead, he's out walking, demonstrating the triune benefits of physical, mental, and spiritual health. He's relentlessly ambitious - while we were in the early planning stages of our Institute, Jack was already engaging future contractors to build the facilities. He's wise - if you want a perspective on whether or not to organize a fundraising event, Jack will thoughtfully curb enthusiasm in favour of a sophisticated, experienced risk analysis.

The litmus test of Jack's character is the large circle of "Friends of Jack", a small percentage of whom I've met in the course of creating the Institute. Many of these have known his wonderful wife Cheryl and him for decades. Their response is universal: people esteem him for his character, energy, wisdom, ambition, and - maybe this is the most important - the effable delight he manifests in sharing his gifts with others.

When the Canadian Health and Fitness Institute presents Dr. Jack Taunton its 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award, we acknowledge one problem: to whom can we present the recognition next year who can rival Jack Taunton?

Author's Qualifications

The author's qualifications are as follows: John Weston founder of the Canadian Health and Fitness Institute, whose vision is to "make Canada the fittest nation on Earth by 2030". He works as a lawyer and consultant in conflict management and risk mitigation, particularly in situations involving diverse

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cultures and languages. He served as member of parliament for West Vancouver - Sunshine Coast - Sea to Sky country from 2008-2015.