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COMMENTARY

Passing the Torch

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Abstract

This article highlights the significant impact that Dr. Jack Taunton had on the life of an aspiring medical student.

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Introduction

There are special moments in life that we all experience that stay with us forever. For me, meeting Jack Taunton was one such moment.

There I was, a freshman at UBC, sitting behind a large desk in the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre anxiously awaiting his arrival. I was feeling incredibly blessed to have been granted a personal audience with this legendary figure. Very few people have the innate ability to light up any room they enter; Jack Taunton was graced with this gift. Towering over six feet tall, sporting spiky grey hair, armed with ski poles in hand, and a physique that resembled two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash, his presence was daunting! I immediately rose from my chair and exclaimed, "Nice to meet you Dr. Taunton." As if I was an old friend, he greeted me with a warm smile and responded, "Please, call me Jack!"

Two hours fled past, and he had shared his entire life story with me including all of his amazing contributions as a pioneering sports medicine physician

in Canada. Being an avid basketball fan, his stories from being the team physician for the Vancouver Grizzlies especially resonated with me. I learnt how caring for the entirety of somebody's physical health can be pivotal in creating a very special relationship with that individual. I left our meeting feeling in awe, and convinced that sports medicine was my calling. All I knew in that moment was that I wanted to follow in his footsteps and carry on his legacy. Little did I know that this was just the beginning of a wonderful and lasting friendship with my newfound mentor.

I decided to pursue my undergraduate studies in Kinesiology at the University of British Columbia (UBC), which allowed me to combine my interest in the sciences with my passion for the game of basketball. I found great fascination in human anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, and injury prevention.

Throughout the course of my BKin degree program, Dr. Taunton was gracious enough to meet with me regularly at his favourite spot on campus – always at

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Mahony & Sons. These meetings served as check-ins with no set agenda. What impressed me the most is the unconditional commitment that Dr. Taunton displayed. On one such occasion, I distinctly recall how he left an important conference early, just so he could catch a one-hour bus ride to UBC to meet with me on time! During our conversations at Mahonys, his empathetic style of communication and consistent enthusiasm for my endeavors propelled me to stay highly motivated on achieving my goal of being admitted to medical school. Furthermore, at these meetings he would provide invaluable guidance and connect me with opportunities to immerse myself in the field of sports medicine.

Dr. Taunton so generously offered me a private tour of the state-of-the-art facilities at Fortius Sport & Health, allowed me to join his medical team at the Toronto Raptors training camp and preseason game (Figure 1), invited me to serve as a first responder for several large-scale running and cycling events in the Greater Vancouver area (Americas Masters Games, Harry Jerome International Track Classic, Valley GranFondo etc.), and encouraged me to attend clinical rounds with the sports medicine physicians at the UBC Chan Gunn pavilion. I gained a tremendous level of respect for him, not only because of the mentorship he gave me, but because of his tireless work ethic and desire to keep people healthy and injury-free.

Following the completion of my Kinesiology degree, I chose to embark on a Master of Science degree in the Rehabilitation Sciences program at UBC. I was driven to enhance my understanding of the scientific process, build critical thinking skills, and hone in on my specific interest in using wearable technology to manage training/competition loads in elite

athletes. I was thrilled to have Dr. Taunton accept my invitation to join my supervisory committee. He provided constructive feedback on my project from the perspective of a clinician, which improved the quality of my thesis and made for a rich learning experience.

On May 13th 2020, I was very fortunate to receive an offer of admission to medical school at UBC. This was a surreal moment that served as the culmination of all my efforts in the past 6 years at UBC. After celebrating with my family, the first person I called at 8AM the following morning was Dr. Taunton to inform him of the good news. Of course, when I called, he was already in the middle of his day and heading out on his poles for a long trek. Sharing the news of my admission with him brought tears of joy to both of us. After all, we had shared a special journey together.

Dr. Taunton changed my life. His humility is immeasurable and contagious. He instilled in me core values of hard work, leading a balanced life centered around family and community, and taught me the art of contributing to better society. He was always there for me. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Taunton for his selfless mentorship throughout my post-secondary education and his unwavering belief in my potential.

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Figure 1: Toronto Raptors vs. Golden State Warriors at Rogers Arena on October 1, 2016; a dream come true!



The gifts that Dr. Taunton showered upon me are immense and priceless. I only hope one day I too can serve as an exemplary role model and positively impact the life of an aspiring medical student.

Authors' Qualifications

The authors' qualifications are as follows: Faraz Damji, BKin, MSc, MD Candidate (2024).