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COMMENTARY

My Tribute to Jack Taunton: Celebrating Four Decades of Friendship

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Abstract

Rick Hansen, Founder of the Rick Hansen Foundation on the incredible impact that Dr. Jack Taunton has made on his life's journey. His tribute spans four decades of friendship. **Health & Fitness Journal of Canada 2020;13(4):19-20.**

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Introduction

I have had the pleasure of knowing Jack Taunton for over 40 years. It's been a privilege to connect with him on a number of different levels over this period of time.

In the late '70s, I began participating in the relatively new and emerging sport of wheelchair road races and marathons, and it was during these events where I first encountered Jack. During those formative years, it was easy to feel different and isolated when attending road races where I was one of the very few in a wheelchair. At every event, Jack went out of his way to make me feel welcomed. Over time, I got to know him as an avid runner, and a fierce competitor. He might have muttered under his breath as I would glide past him on a slight downhill to the finish line of a marathon, but he was always gracious with me.

Jack has contributed to the success of many athletes across a wide range of sports, major games including both the Olympics and Paralympics. No matter how

big or small, he's played a critical role in helping athletes pursue their dreams.

I got to know Jack even better when he became my sport medicine doctor. He was instrumental in helping me recover from a shoulder dislocation following a crash that threatened to destroy my Paralympic and Olympic dreams. He helped assemble a world class team to ensure that my shoulder would recover and that I was in optimal condition and physical health to be at the 1984 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In spite of the fact that I often went to see Jack when I had an injury, I always looked forward to our time together, which was filled with great conversations on many subjects that reflected his insatiable curiosity, deep network, and incredible knowledge. Almost every appointment with him went past the scheduled time, and I always left with some new insight or learning.

Successfully recovering from the significant physical setback of dislocating

Four Decades of Friendship

my shoulder allowed me to keep my dream of wheeling around the world alive. My Man In Motion World Tour was fueled by my dream of raising awareness of the potential of people with disabilities and to raise funds for spinal cord injury research. Jack proved to be one of my biggest cheerleaders in helping me build momentum for the Tour. He played a critical role in assembling my medical support team, and he went above and beyond to ensure that I received every appropriate level of equipment, supplies, technical expertise, and had access to a network of global practitioners on the Tour.

In 1987, it was a special moment to have Jack join me on the road during the winter of February as I wheeled through Alberta. As always, our time was precious and cherished, and he helped me stay motivated as I prepared to wheel the Rockies in the final homestretch towards BC.

In spite of having contracted polio at a young age, Jack recovered to be an exceptional athlete. Though he has lived with a number of disabling conditions, fought off many infections, and has reduced mobility, Jack can still be found pounding the pavement with his walking sticks and the patented Taunton look of determination.

During the 25th anniversary of the Man In Motion World Tour, I had the pleasure of connecting with 7000 difference makers from across Canada and around the world to recognize each individual for their commitment to excellence. One of the greatest highlights during the celebrations was to present Jack with a Difference Maker medal and to wheel with him in our Many In Motion relay. I couldn't think of a more exemplary candidate than Jack. In everything he does, Jack demonstrates

resilience and a positive attitude. He is a loving and contributing force to many.

Over the years, I've watched Jack's influence and leadership in the field of sport medicine grow and expand. In his role as Chief Medical Officer of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, Jack was instrumental in developing the medical plan and infrastructure for the Sports Medicine Centre. As honorary Olympic Village Mayor of the 2010 Winter Games, I had the privilege to tour this incredible facility. I'm positive it will serve as a high benchmark for future facilities of the same caliber.

With the strong support of his loving wife, Cheryl, I know Jack will never stop pushing himself to remove new barriers and pursue new dreams for the future. Together they have achieved a balance of health, family, career, and community. The both of them have raised two incredible daughters, and are now proud grandparents. It has been an honour to call Jack a friend. He has certainly made a difference in my life's journey, and I will forever be grateful for his continued mentorship and support.

Author's Qualifications

The author's qualifications are as follows: Rick Hansen C.C., O.B.C., BPE.