

# Health & Fitness Journal of Canada

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Volume 13

December 30, 2020

Number 4

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## COMMENTARY

### A Helping Hand When I Needed it Most

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#### Abstract

Dr. Jack Taunton is an internationally recognized pioneer of Sport and Exercise Medicine in Canada. Despite his legendary status, Jack is a kind, genuine person with a heart of gold. This brief memory illustrates the sincere humanity that he brings to all that he does. **Health & Fitness Journal of Canada 2020;13(4):33-34.**

<https://doi.org/10.14288/hfjc.v13i4.344>

Keywords: Sports Medicine, Olympics, Leadership, Nordic Skiing

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#### Introduction

I've known Jack Taunton for just the last twenty years, and to me, his guiding attributes have been his generous heart and his alacrity. More than anyone I know, Jack makes things happen. He is a big proponent of throwing as many eggs as possible at a wall in the hope that some of them will not break. During his career Jack has had numerous eggs that did not break (the Sun Run, Allan McGavin Sport Medicine Centre, Medical Services for the 2010 Olympic Games, Fortius, to name just a few).

For me, the moment that best exemplified Jack's heart and alacrity occurred during the 2010 Olympic Games. I was the Venue Medical Officer in charge of medical services for the Whistler Olympic Park while Jack was the Chief Medical Officer for the organizing committee for the 2010 Vancouver Whistler Olympic Games (VANOC). His tasks involved planning and

overseeing the provision of medical care to athletes, staff, the public, and the Olympic delegates, as well as running all anti-doping services. During the build-up to the Games there were rumours that Jack was chronically months ahead of schedule with all the planning, and that he was basically waiting around for other departments to catch up.

One day, during warm-up, a skier went off course into a gully and injured her chest. She was brought to the on-site medical services where she was assessed and treated (for confidentiality purposes, I will only include details from how the incident was represented in the press). She had an ultrasound of her chest to look for rib fractures, which was nondiagnostic. She returned to competition and competed multiple rounds of her event and eventually medalled. Later that day, she was assessed at the clinic in Whistler and diagnosed with a collapsed lung and rib

fractures. The next day, her team notified the press that they were considering pursuing legal action against the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the organizers regarding this incident. My understanding was that the main concern was not the medical care, but the nature of the course and the conditions.

However, when I heard about this potential lawsuit, I was concerned. Typically, in lawsuits that involve medical care, the net is cast very broadly and anybody peripherally involved (especially the physicians) get named and brought into the suit. At that moment, I was therefore extremely worried. More than that, I felt completely alone; as the person in charge of all medical services at that venue, I figured I would be prominently involved in the suit.

I remember standing outside the competition building immediately after hearing this news and trying to come to grips with the situation. At that instant, my VANOC mobile phone rang. It was Jack. He had called to tell me that he had heard the news, and that he, the entire medical team, and VANOC were aware and not to worry. They were going to do their best to help and protect me and to take care of the situation. He wanted me to know that he had my back.

This was exactly what I needed at that moment. And this was classic Jack. He cares. When a situation develops (especially with people he cares about), his instinct is to act immediately to address the problem. And when he does this, he does it with all his heart. I will forever be grateful to Jack for what he did in that moment, and will never forget it. Fortunately, when the International Ski Federation (FIS) reviewed the details of the case, they found that since this was the only skier to go off the course at this location during the entire

Games that there was no basis for the claim, and it did not go further. However, I did not know that this was how the situation would play out. At that moment when I felt all alone, Jack had my back. And it meant everything.

### **Author's Qualifications**

The author's qualifications are as follows: Michael Koehle MD, PhD, Dip. Sport Med. (CASEM).