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COMMENTARY

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Dr. Norman Gledhill

Darren E. R. Warburton¹, Declan R. D. Warburton², Aedan D. T. Warburton³, and Shannon S. D. Bredin^{1,4,*}

1 Indigenous Health & Physical Activity Program, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6T 1Z4

2 Health & Fitness Society of BC, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6S 2G3

3 St. George's Senior School, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6S 1V1

4 Cognitive and Motor Learning (LEARN) Laboratory, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6T 1Z4

*Corresponding Author: shannon.bredin@ubc.ca

Abstract

This commentary honours the memory of Dr. Norman Gledhill, a visionary leader, friend, and mentor whose ground-breaking contributions spanned physical activity promotion, pre-participation screening, cardiovascular physiology, high performance sport, occupational physiology, sports medicine, and beyond. It encapsulates his profound impact on scientific advancement through innovations such as the National Hockey League Combine and highlights his enduring commitment to nurturing emerging talent. Despite facing the formidable challenge of cancer, Dr. Gledhill's resilience and loyalty never wavered; he continued to inspire with his steadfast spirit and deep generosity. This commentary intertwines personal recollections with professional achievements, illustrating how his mentorship and considerate guidance transformed the lives of colleagues, students, and the broader community. Beyond his academic brilliance, Dr. Gledhill was celebrated for his genuine care, exemplified by moments of personal warmth that left an indelible mark on those fortunate enough to know him. This tribute not only commemorates his scholarly legacy, but also reaffirms the timeless value of mentorship and human connection in advancing both science and society. His life remains a testament to the power of innovation, empathy, and perseverance, inspiring future generations to pursue excellence with both intellect and heart.

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Introduction

It is with deep respect and profound sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Dr. Norman Gledhill—a dear friend, visionary mentor, and one of the greatest minds in our field. His loss is immeasurable, and his absence leaves a void that is felt deeply by all who had the privilege of knowing him.

A Life of Unparalleled Brilliance and Compassion

Dr. Gledhill was more than a brilliant scholar; he was a remarkable human being whose warmth and kindness touched countless lives. His groundbreaking contributions spanned numerous fields, including kinesiology, sports and exercise medicine, high-performance sport, occupational physiology, physical activity promotion, public health, anti-doping, pre-

participation screening, and cardiovascular and pulmonary physiology. The breadth of his work is demonstrated by his wide ranging publications (S. S. Bredin et al., 2013; S. S. D. Bredin et al., 2013; S. S. D. Bredin et al., 2013; Bredin et al., 2015, 2016; Card et al., 1996; Cohen et al., 2022; Ferguson et al., 2001; Gledhill, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b; Gledhill et al., 1994; Gledhill et al., 1978; Gledhill et al., 1977; Gledhill & Jamnik, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2012; Gledhill et al., 2001; Gledhill & Jamnik, 1992a, 1992b; Gledhill et al., 1980; Gledhill et al., 1999; Gledhill & Warburton, 2000; Gumieniak et al., 2011; Jamnik & Gledhill, 2015; Jamnik et al., 2013; Jamnik & Gledhill, 2017; Katzmarzyk et al., 2000; Khan et al., 2007; Khan et al., 2005; Krip et al., 1995; Krip et al., 1997; Martino et al., 2002; Ong et al., 2017; Payne, Gledhill, Katzmarzyk, & Jamnik, 2000; Payne, Gledhill, Katzmarzyk, Jamnik, & Ferguson, 2000; Payne, Gledhill, Katzmarzyk, Jamnik, & Keir, 2000; Rowan et al., 2015; Smyth et al., 1984; Spriet et al., 1986; Spriet et al., 1980; Warburton et al., 2016; Warburton et al., 1999; D. E. R. Warburton et al., 2014; Warburton, Jamnik, Bredin, & Gledhill, 2011; D.E.R. Warburton et al., 2014; Warburton, Jamnik, Bredin, McKenzie, et al., 2011; Warburton et al., 2019; Weller et al., 1995; Wiebe et al., 1999; Wiebe et al., 1998) and his former trainees that have carved out leading careers nationally and internationally.

His academic work not only set new benchmarks in these areas, but also paved the way for innovative practices around the world. He was academic of many firsts, including his work with the open circuit acetylene rebreathing technique during incremental to maximal exercise (Card et al., 1996). His blood doping research changed elite sport globally allowing for

modern day anti-doping practices (Buick et al., 1980; Gledhill, 1982, 1985; Spriet et al., 1986; Spriet et al., 1980). Also, his work in occupational fitness set the international standard for *bona fide* occupational fitness testing (Gledhill et al., 2001; Gledhill & Jamnik, 1992b). His work on the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR), the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire for Everyone (PAR-Q+), and the electronic Physical Activity Readiness Medical Examination (ePARmed-X+; www.eparmedx.com) set the international standard for pre-participation screening and risk stratification. His work with Dr. Jamnik at York University has provided Canadians with very contemporary and innovative approaches to the evaluation of health-related fitness in the national fitness assessment - the Canadian Physical Activity and Lifestyle Approach and the *Physical Activity and Lifestyle "R" Medicine* (Gledhill & Jamnik, 2003; Jamnik & Gledhill, 2017). These resources set the standard for health-related physical fitness assessment and counselling. They also played an important role in the creation of leading health and wellness organizations (such as the Health & Fitness Federation of Canada (www.thehffc.ca/)).

Dr. Gledhill (alongside other Canadian researchers) played a leading role in the global evaluation and promotion of the health benefits of physical activity. Some of the seminal works in the field have been developed through initiatives headed by Dr. Gledhill and colleagues providing inspiration for generations of Canadian researchers to follow. For instance, Dr. Gledhill, alongside other Canadian health and fitness pioneers (such as Dr. Veronica Jamnik, Dr. Claude Bouchard, Dr. Barry McPherson, Dr. Art Quinney, Dr. Art

Salmon, and Dr. Roy Shephard (Bouchard, 2001; Gledhill, 2001a; Quinney, 2001; Shephard, 2001)), were instrumental in increasing the awareness of the importance of regular physical activity for optimal health and well-being. Global conferences, such as the first and second “International Conference on Physical Activity, Fitness and Health” (held in 1988 and 1992), the “Dose-Response Symposium” (held in Toronto, October 2000), the “Communicating Physical Activity and Health Messages: Science into Practice” meeting (held in Whistler, December 2001), the Toronto Charter for Physical Activity (3rd International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health, Toronto, 2010), and the 8th International Society for Physical Activity and Health (2021) Congress, are a few examples of Dr. Gledhill and colleagues’ reach and influence on the field of physical activity and public health. Readers are highly recommended to review the insightful and thoughtful work of the late Dr. Roy Shephard for further information on the role of Dr. Gledhill and other Canadian researchers in exercise sciences, exercise medicine, and physical activity promotion (Shephard, 2013).

Even in the face of personal battles, including a courageous fight against cancer, Norm remained a pillar of resilience and strength. His determination and grit shone through every challenge, inspiring those around him to persevere and to strive for excellence regardless of the obstacles.

Mentorship and Lasting Impact

One of Dr. Gledhill’s most enduring legacies was his mentorship. Working alongside him and Dr. Veronica Jamnik at York University was a life-changing experience for many. Norm’s guidance

went far beyond imparting academic knowledge; he nurtured the potential in each of his students, helping shape scholars, mentors, and caring human beings. His generosity, loyalty, and thoughtfulness created a supportive environment where everyone felt valued and capable of achieving more than they ever thought possible.

A striking example of his enduring commitment to excellence came even after his retirement. Battling cancer, Norm still found the strength to review and provide insightful advice on an article from our team on optimal ice hockey performance (Rice et al., 2024). This piece celebrated the foundational roles he and Dr. Jamnik played in developing the National Hockey League Combine—a model that revolutionized elite and professional sports testing worldwide (Gledhill & Jamnik, 2007). His contributions in this area are a testament to his lasting influence on sports science and performance.

Personal Moments and Heartfelt Memories

Beyond the academic and professional accolades, what many will remember most about Dr. Gledhill is his incredible kindness and genuine care for people. We vividly recall the warmth he exuded during personal interactions—whether it was dancing with a 13-month-old Declan or ensuring that Declan could return to the dance floor after being asked to step aside. Moments like these, along with memories of Norm and his closest collaborator (Roni) attending a hockey tournament where Declan played for the Vancouver Vipers in Ontario, speak volumes about the deep, personal connections he fostered with his friends and colleagues. He was

never just an instructor or a mentor; he was family.



Dr. Veronica Jamnik, Declan Warburton, and Dr. Norman Gledhill

A Legacy That Transcends Time

Dr. Gledhill's legacy is woven into the fabric of our professional and personal lives. His passion for knowledge, unwavering spirit, and boundless generosity will continue to inspire future generations. The academic innovations he championed and the lives he touched are enduring reminders of a life lived with purpose, compassion, and an unyielding dedication to making the world a better place.

As we reflect on his remarkable journey, we celebrate not only his scholarly achievements, but also the profound human impact he had. Our world was so much better because of his wisdom and kindness, and while we mourn his loss, we are equally grateful for the indelible mark he left on our hearts and our community.

Rest in peace, Norm. Thank you for everything. Your legacy will live on in every life you inspired.

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Authors' Qualifications

The authors' qualifications are as follows: Darren E. R. Warburton MSc, PhD, HFFC CEP; Shannon S. D. Bredin MSc, PhD, HFFC CEP. Declan R. D. Warburton (Junior Hockey Player and Student Volunteer); Aedan D. T. Warburton (Student Volunteer Grade 11).

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