Editorials

Warm up

So you’re a rocket scientist. That doesn’t impress me much. Unless of course you can help me live longer, feel better, and look younger. We do not have all the answers, but we can certainly add a few extra years to some bits. Your bones, for example. You don’t need to be a rocket scientist to know the importance of preventing falls and hip fractures in older people nor do you need modern technology to run an exercise programme (p 7). Resistance training helps improve muscular strength and bone density (p 18) and Tai Chi can help balance, flexibility, and fitness (p 29). Looking younger is a little more difficult.

So you think you’re quite fit. That doesn’t impress me much. But if you want to throw further, jump higher, or run faster, the laboratory may be able to help. We can test your fitness by measuring lactate levels (p 35), and assess muscle isokinetic strength and mobility (p 39). But, take care you don’t overdo it. Our knowledge of overtraining is incomplete (p 67) and sport can affect one’s perception of mental health (p 4). Measuring your thoughts—that’s a different journal.

The British Olympic Association’s position statement on athlete confidentiality

Protecting the athlete: somehow, in the excitement of sports performance, the needs of the athlete as a person beyond their sporting prowess can become secondary to the demands and expectations of the media and management. The British Olympic Association’s (BOA) position statement on athlete confidentiality is timely in reminding us of the rights of athletes: representing your country does not mean that your country owns you. Nor do athletes have to sacrifice their rights to personal, confidential, medical, and scientific care simply because they are successful athletes. The demands of management are increasing. The demands of the media are insatiable. It is too easy to allow the lines demarcating personal and public information to become fuzzy.

The BOA confidentiality document is published jointly this month in the British Journal of Sports Medicine (p 71) and the Journal of Sports Sciences, with the full authorisation of the BOA. The document has been written, with legal advice, by the chairs of the various sport science and sports medicine steering groups of the BOA, in consultation with the Coaches Advisory Group and with other professional bodies for sport science and sports medicine in the UK. It is important to note that it is not a statement of BOA policy, but that it draws together and explains the implications of the Codes of Conduct that already exist among medical and scientific support staff. It is a unique document, at least for the UK, in that it brings together the disciplines of sport science and sports medicine: its strength is in this unity.

This is a charter for athletes with a very strong message for coaches, managers, administrators, and other team officials: the athlete comes first! The definition in the document of medical and support staff also merits mention. This definition includes doctors, chartered physiotherapists, state registered dieticians, psychologists, and sports scientists: it does not include coaches. Notwithstanding the close relationship between coaches and athlete, the document proposes that the coach’s involvement in discussions with medical and scientific support staff needs the express permission of the athlete.

Confidentiality can be maintained more easily in a one-to-one encounter. This position statement sets out clearly that the code of confidentiality extends to interdisciplinary meetings. The athlete must be told who will be present and consent must be obtained in advance. Informal corridor gatherings do not meet these criteria, nor should patients be discussed in any non-medical setting. The athlete is to be protected from gossip, chat, and idle speculation.
The professional is also protected from potential conflict between the professional code of conduct and the contractual demands of the governing body. The BOA is to be congratulated in promoting guidelines that endorse the primacy of professional duty, including confidentiality, in sport. The document sets a remarkable precedent and creates an interesting potential conflict over drugs between BOA policy and the rights of the individual athlete. Medical and scientific support staff are not permitted to reveal if an athlete is taking a prohibited substance.

The BOA's position statement sets out guidelines—creating these is relatively easy; implementation is more challenging. These guidelines are about protecting the athlete and the professional. The first real test will be in Sydney, where immense pressure to breach these guidelines will exist. The test will be to survive the public and media onslaught if a key athlete is injured, under performs or is involved in a drug scandal. We can then measure the success or failure of this admirable position statement on athlete confidentiality by what appears on the back pages of our daily newspapers.

DOMNHALL MACAULEY
Editor, British Journal of Sports Medicine

ROGER BARTLETT
General Editor, Journal of Sports Sciences

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**British Association of Sport and Medicine in association with the National Sports Medicine Institute**

**Education programme 2000**

**IAB/SEM Diploma Preparation Course**
Exact date and venue to be confirmed
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**General Sports Medicine Course**
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**Current Concepts Meeting on Pre-event Screening**
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**Intermediate Sports Injury Course—Part 1**
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PGEA and CME will be given

**Current Concepts Meeting on Pre-event Screening**
Cost and location to be confirmed

For further details of these courses please contact Mr Barry Hill, The National Sports Medicine Institute, c/o Medical College of St Bartholomew’s Hospital, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6BQ.
Tel 0171 251 0583 (ext 237). Fax 0171 251 0774. Email: barry.hill@nsmi.org.uk
Web site: www.nsmi.org.uk
The British Olympic Association’s position statement on athlete confidentiality

Domhnall Macauley and Roger Bartlett

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