Book Reviews

Sports, Medicine and Health

Proceedings of the XXIV World Congress of Sports Medicine, Amsterdam, 27 May–1 June 1990

Excerpta Medica: Amsterdam, New York, Oxford, 1990. 178 x 246 mm. 1176 + xix pages. Illustrated in black-and-white. £130.84 hardback

The Organizing Committee of the successful Amsterdam Congress has excelled itself in its remarkably swift publication of such high quality Proceedings. The World Congress books over the years have given an invaluable 'snapshot' of sports medicine's development. This time the main sections covered orthopaedics, physiology and biomechanics, cardiology and behavioural sciences plus 13 keynote lectures. The manuscripts are well reproduced, the tables, plates and radiographs clear.

There is a modern conflict between the financial aims of the congress trade and the point of holding congresses, i.e. intellectual cross-fertilization and dissemination of knowledge. It is regrettable that the great cost of this volume will preclude its availability to those who would most appreciate its contents. Is there no obligation to promote the widest (and, if necessary cheapest) circulation of World Congress Proceedings?

It is sad to record that this volume makes no mention of the Health Minister's opening address, nor of Hollmann's FIMS Presidential address, major omissions of notable

events. A few words about the memorable social events would surely not have sullied the pages of the FIMS family reunion; nor would rapporteurs' accounts of the livelier symposia and round-tables. Even more bizarre is the virtual absence of mention of the International Federation of Sports Medicine, whose congress this was! Apart from the unlabelled badge on the cover, there are but four mentions

of 'FIMS' in the brief Preface, so history may never find out what this stands for – and the only possible contact address would be care of the independent publisher.

Perhaps this may be a true reflection of the world representative body in sports medicine.

P. N. Sperryn FRCP, FACSM

Research Methods in Physical Activity. 2nd Edn

J. R. Thomas and J. K. Nelson
Human Kinetics: Illinois, 1990. 240 x 190 mm. 550 + xi pages hardback. Illustrated in black-and-white

I have to begin this review with the admission of a strong bias against American textbooks. From discussions with colleagues, I know that I am not alone in disliking the general style and layout which they adopt. When picking up a new book, my first response is to flick through the pages. This invariably produces a sinking feeling when the things that leap from the pages are the sequences of aphorisms, which are inevitably printed on a shaded or coloured background, and the rather uninspired cartoons. The aim of these seems to be to reinforce what is generally referred to as the 'take home message', but I find it hard

to believe that students really are incapable of deciding for themselves what is important and what is not.

As well as differences in style, there are also some substantial differences in the ways in which subjects are taught in North America and in Europe. Research methods is a subject which figures large (often to the extent of 30–40 h of formal teaching) in the syllabus of almost all American undergraduate and graduate degree courses in science and physical education. In this country the subject usually does not merit more than a token lecture or two. That is not to say that we do not teach the subject, but we expect students to learn the basics of the scientific method by example and by (often bitter) experience. How many students arrive at the stage, near the end of their Honours Degree course, where they are expected to embark on a project – a piece of laboratory work which has to be designed, completed, subjected to statistical analysis, and written up – without having any real idea of how to set about the task? By the end of this experience, they have either learned and survived or become disillusioned.

This book makes a good attempt at covering the basics of the research method, from literature review, through identification of the problem, experimental design and statistical analysis to report writing. In spite of my reservations about the American style, students should enjoy reading it. The authors obviously enjoy their subject and enjoy teaching it. Students will appreciate the anecdotes which are used for illustrative purposes, and no doubt their teachers will be happy to use these as their own.

R. Maughan