determine, but it was sad to see that almost half of the poster presentations did not arrive. A splendid banquet was arranged on a floating restaurant which provided typical Cantonese food with so many courses one lost count, but each one was memorable in its own right. There followed some splendid staged entertainment, a formal presentation of mementos and then some rather informal and less skillful entertainment. Karaoke was started on this side of the world and it became apparent that each member

country had to sing for its supper. Fortunately, there were a number of representatives from the UK and Ireland who performed with great gusto but little harmony.

Per Renstrom has circulated a paper entitled 'What is the role of FIMS?', and this was discussed at a separate meeting of delegates. It is important that each member country gives some input into what it requires from FIMS so that this International Federation can develop and provide a suitable service. Clearly the requirement of

large wealthy countries is quite different from those of the underdeveloped world. It was clear by the end of the meeting that many of these questions still required answers and this has been left to the Regions to discuss further. Indeed, the North West chapter will be posing the same questions in their meeting in Gothenburg in May.

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The challenge of elite training

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Sir

Endurance running speeds have improved enormously over the last 50 years. The stopwatch is an unforgiving taskmaster, and performances which won Olympic games 30 years ago are now commonplace. A 4-minute mile would not win a British vest now. Synthetic surfaces have been the only technical improvement. Changes in footwear, for all the gimmicks, are insignificant. These improvements are due to progressions in the quantity and quality of training. The days of Bannister taking a brisk walk for a session are gone. It is incredibly hard to maintain the sheer volume of training required by modern athletics. It is a case of the survival of the fittest. Those who can cope with the training and the pressures go on to win championships.

I recognize in myself all the characteristics from A to G that Veale^{1,2} proposed for exercise dependence. Without them I would not have been able to cope with the workload. Going running twice a day, every day, with the added psychological stress of interval sessions is tough and one has to be single-minded. The discipline demands development of these patterns of behaviour, particularly if the athlete is trying to pursue another career. The self-esteem which the authors describe and warn against is an integral part of the psychology of the elite, particularly

the explosive events. If Linford Christie had a middle distance runner's introspection, then he would not be sprinting beyond club level. I would challenge the author's contention that the behaviour is pathological. The individuals who fail to respond with the mechanisms outlined, in my terms of the elite athlete, do not make the grade.

If we are going to help our elite athletes then we must recognize these behavioural patterns as a means of coping with the training loads. The difficulties in managing them arise when overtraining and tiredness set in. It is difficult for those not having experienced the behaviour described in the paper to countenance how hard it is *not* to go out training. That is when the coach/sports psychologist is needed, but please recognize that these patterns are part and parcel of being at the top of elite sport.

On a lighter note, I would also like to suggest another criterion for the table:

The meticulous maintenance of a training diary.

I kept mine for 15 years! However, even I would agree that the female marathon runner who used to carry a set of weighing scales in her handbag to measure each morsel of food she ate to write in her diary is perhaps overstepping the mark!

References

- 1 Veale D. Exercise dependence. *Br J Addict* 1987; 82: 735-40; quoted in:
- 2 Greenspan M, Fitzsimmons P, Biddle S. Aspects of psychology in sports medicine. *Br J Sports Med* 1991; 25: 178-80.