

## A TEAM MANAGER'S VIEW

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In this context I shall limit the term "team doctor" to one sport - in this case my own sport of athletics - and not to all sports as is the position of our Olympic team doctor Raymond Owen.

Having said ONE sport I shall now contradict myself by saying that athletics is really several different activities under one administrative banner. The marathon runner, the pole vaulter and the hammer thrower have relatively little in common except that they travel as members of the same team. Add the racewalker, the sprinter, the hurdler, the steeplechaser and all the other diverse activities that go up to make an athletics team and we get some measure of the complexity of the task that faces the team doctor. He is in the same position as a team coach and, ideally, should understand the technical requirements of each event.

Although most international teams might like to have a full time medical officer on a long term appointment, in practice only Russian athletics appear to enjoy this facility. Indeed, I understand from Gavril Korokov, their senior coach, that they now have a psychologist to travel with the team. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that all Russian textbooks always advise an athlete to consult both his coach and his doctor. The implication is, of course, that every athlete has both. On the other hand, paradoxically, the most consistently successful athletic team in the world, the U.S.A. track and field team, has no regular medical officer and, indeed, appears to have no continuity in any of its departments.

Even Poland which takes its athletics very seriously and has a regular medical officer, nevertheless uses him only on an ad hoc basis. His is not a fulltime appointment but he does seem to travel on all their matches.

In 1965 the British Amateur Athletic Board set up a medical advisory committee of five. Of these, however, only Peter Travers works on training methods and then he is also qualified as an honorary coach.

It is essential that a team doctor should be in sympathy both with athletics and with athletes. After all most of the team's medical problems are very minor ones indeed - in the sense of general practice - but the most minor upsets become major worries to a competing athlete at International level.

Athletes must accept, and the management should expect, that the team doctor will never put the needs of the team above the well-being of the individual athlete. On the other hand the medical officer must not only be able but must be prepared to advise the management. Furthermore he must have

the courage and initiative to volunteer advice to the management, if necessary even when it is not sought.

It has been said - indeed it was frequently quoted by a former chief national coach - that one does not need to have suffered from measles in order to cure it. On the other hand there is no doubt in the speaker's mind that it is desirable, from every angle, that the team doctor should have had experience in athletics, preferably at, or near, international level.

He must realise that there are only two kinds of champions, those who are scared and show it and those who are scared and don't show it. Those who are never scared are never champions. Equally it must be understood that the basic emotion of a top-class athlete before a major competition - even an Olympic gold medallist - is fear of failure. One goes into the arena hoping that nothing will go wrong, the sprinter that he won't be dis-qualified for two false starts, the long-jumper that he won't have three no-jumps, the distance runner that he will fail to finish the course.

Fundamentally the athlete is scared that he will disgrace himself before the public and, nowadays, the television camera, and let his country down. In this respect the task of the team doctor is the same as the team coach..... to reassure the athlete at a time when he is most in need of re-assurance.

Last year we took as our team doctor on a tour of Hungary and Poland Dr. Martyn Lucking. Martin Lucking was also in the team as our first-string weight putter. Successful as this was, and there is no doubt whatsoever that the team had a great respect for Martyn, a respect enhanced by his quite, authoritative manner and a not un-imposing presence, nevertheless this was not fair to Martyn as an athlete. Indeed it is the need for economy that so frequently makes us use an athlete who is a qualified medical officer as a team doctor. Whereas, of course, we really want an ex-international athlete to do this. Having said that the team doctor should if possible be an ex-athlete it is only right to emphasize that he has to be extremely fit in any case. Human nature being what it is none of us expect the doctor to suffer from the same strains and maladies of the rest of us. He has all the strain of travel that affects the rest of the team and yet, having to treat the sick and the injured, he is usually the last to bed after his night's rounds and often the first up the following morning. On tour he has no static base from which to work and, in a foreign country, is naturally reluctant to send athletes for hospital treatment or indeed to hospitalize them. This, in turn, means that he has to carry with him the bulk of the equipment and drugs that he is likely to require. In this respect its fair to say that when British athletic teams travel abroad we almost invariably have at least one physio-therapist and, where there is a team of both men and women, usually two.

Once we get into a foreign country we expect the miracles from our medical officer. He is asked to rule on water, food and general hygiene, cure the sick and make whole the injured. In fact we expect him to be a

combination of general practitioner, dietician, St. John's ambulance man, sanitary inspector and a specialist in physical medicine and orthopaedics! The miracle is that he so frequently is!

If I had to define the task of the team doctor in one sentence it would simply be:-

To be part of the team and to help the team achieve its maximum potential.

Of as Isiah (Chapter 40, verse 31) prophetically puts it - his task is to see that:-

"They shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."