

“SPORT MEDICINE IN QUEBEC”

by JEAN LALONDE

In the Canadian province of Quebec, more and more people are running, swimming, skiing, cycling and taking up a multitude of physical activities. However, from time to time, in their enthusiasm, people hurt themselves or overdo things. The sports doctor's task is to help the athlete prevent this/sort of problem and find ways of getting him back on his feet as soon as possible. Of all patients, the sportsman is the least willing to accept breakdowns in the human machine.

MEDICINE FOR THOSE WHO TRY TOO HARD TO BE FIT.

Since the early seventies, the people of Quebec have been increasingly aware of the health benefits of physical activity. Encouraged by government consciousness-raising campaigns and by the holding of the Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976, the number of competition and amateur athletes has been growing steadily.

Whilst sports activity ensures greater physical fitness, it can also give rise to injuries or cause physiological disorders if the athlete does not keep to a suitable training programme. With the increase in the rate of participation in physical activities, Quebec has developed a high level of expertise in sports medicine in order to cope with the increase in sports-related injuries.

Sports medicine is a very young discipline. Originally, it was mainly the concern of orthopedists, who are the surgeons of the skeletal and muscular structure of the body. For some fifteen years now, however, sports medicine has been gaining experts in a host of other branches of medicine.



Physiatricians and physiotherapists have the task of treating injured athletes and supervising their rehabilitation. The athlete has to concern himself with the health of his heart, lungs and digestive system. Sports medicine has also attracted the expertise of specialists in such diverse fields as gynaecology, ophthalmology, allergology or dermatology. Even the psychologist is sometimes called upon to make a contribution. Sports medicine is therefore multidisciplinary and can not easily be considered as a single speciality.

A SPECIALITY FOR THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER ?

In the face of the popularity of sports activity, medical faculties have been wanting to offer specialised training in sports medicine. However, the range of knowledge required posed a serious problem. Doctor Pierre Beliveau, physiatrician at the Hotel-Dieu in Quebec, took part in these deliberations. "We came to the conclusion that specialists could never be trained adequately and in sufficient numbers to cope with the growing demand among the public".

"There was such a pressing need for practitioners of sports medicine that our reflex was to generate awareness among general practitioners who see every day in their surgeries people who jog and practise sport to keep fit, train in a discipline and often run into serious health problems".

It was then that Doctor Beliveau, head of the sports medicine department at the University of Laval since its creation fifteen years ago, organised in 1972 the first sports medicine day.

Thanks to these annual meetings, general practitioners, specialists in various fields of medicine and coaches and teachers of physical education have been able to gain awareness of the particular problems related to physical activity.

In 1980, the Federation of General Practitioners followed suit. Every year, its members take part in an ongoing training session in sports medicine. Specialists in various disciplines are invited to discuss with the general practitioners particular disorders affecting athletes and recent discoveries on the best forms of treatment.

A DIFFICULT PATIENT

What distinguishes the athlete from other patients ? Doctor Come Lassonde, a general practitioner who follows very closely the evolu-

tion of sports medicine, provides some elements of the answer. A marathoner himself, he now has a large number of athletes among his patients at Beloeil near Montreal.

"Between doctors, we say in jest that a sports injury is easy to treat, you just prescribe that the patient stop his activity and that is the end of it !" However, the problem comes from the sportsman who has developed a passion for his sport. He has set goals for himself which he does not want to compromise... at the risk of aggravating his injury.

The most frequent problems are disorders linked to overuse of a joint, a muscle or the system as a whole. Doctor Lassonde concludes: "It is not the case with top athletes, but you often come across great athletes who overdo it and absolutely refuse to stop. We then have to convince them to redirect their training towards activities which will enable the affected organ or limb to rest."

"CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING AMONG ATHLETES"

A major information campaign is being carried out among Quebec's sportsmen. For example, in the indoor sports centres where certain sports such as squash, racketball and tennis are played, the players too often go on court without having performed sufficient warm-up exercises. By means of consciousness-raising, we shall be able to reduce the number of torn muscles which are an all too frequent occurrence in these gymnasias.

The organisers of marathons, which are attracting thousands of new participants every year, have well understood the importance of informing and protecting amateur runners. By means of brochures or newspaper articles, the importance of a good training programme, a suitable diet and warm-up exercises before the race is clearly explained to them.

ONE INFORMED RUNNER IS WORTH TWO

The Montreal international marathon alone attracts 12,000 runners in the popular category. A Medical team of three hundred volunteers, most of them from the health professions, ensures that each runner completes the 42 kilometer event without risk.

The expertise developed in Montreal is recognised by marathon organisers all over the world, who have copied the organisational struc-



tures and techniques perfected by Doctor François Croteau, general practitioner (GP) in charge of the Montreal marathon medical team.

ATHLETES IN GOOD HANDS

Overall, the campaign to promote physical activity to improve the health of the population of Quebec and the quality of care provided for sportsmen are also recognised outside Canada. "Quebec has developed an original approach and many visitors from other countries are impressed by our facilities and want to learn what formulas we have used", comments Doctor Pierre Béliveau.

The medical faculties work closely with the sports centres. Students obtain there a basic medical training and at the same time, throughout their studies, they have the opportunity to keep up with the latest research in this field, like the 600 doctors who represent 10% of Quebec's GPs. With such professional support, the athlete in Quebec can consider himself in good hands !

J.L.