

Health and Sport

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The Latin phrase 'mens sano corpore sano' meaning a healthy mind in a healthy body still remains relevant in today's understanding about health issues. One important health issue that is often stated is the prevention of ill-health.

Prevention of ill-health suggests that there are both risks and benefits to health. Amongst such risks are poor nutrition, lack of exercise, tobacco smoking, and an unsafe environment. The health benefits include emotional stability, coping with stress, feelings of satisfaction, and a sense of vitality.

Whilst studies on the relation between health and sport have been limited to aspects of this relationship, that is, mental health and sport, physical health and sport, and the social aspects of sport there has been a considerable amount of research undertaken on exercise and sport. Much of this work is relevant for the health and wellbeing of the athlete and the community.

However, there are difficulties in developing a working understanding of what health is and how that definition could be related to sport. One such difficulty is being able to 'measure' health. At best, health can be described not only in human terms and the environment but also from a cultural perspective recognising the spiritual aspect.

Sport as a social activity has particular attributes for which there are benefits to health outweighing the risks involved. The intention here is to discuss the meaning of health as it relates to sport and illustrate this understanding in the form of a health assessment for the athlete.

The Meaning of Health:

Health may be defined as 'the spiritual wellbeing which interacts amongst the mental, physical, social and cultural aspects of the athlete and the community'.

For the purposes of this article the word 'athlete' means any person who engages in sport and 'community' including the environment. Many definitions of health have focused on the

human aspects alone without any reference to environmental factors. The athlete — community relation is therefore emphasised. The spiritual wellbeing is an important feature for it is a well known aspect of primitive societies. It is an essential part in the life of the community and its members. The meaning is more than a religious concept it is part of culture and therefore it is inherent in the values of the total family inclusive of ancestors, customs, traditions and daily activities. For the athlete the spiritual wellbeing defines being human within the context of the environment and more importantly to live in harmony with his environment.

Health is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic life process continually being active and yet controlled in an orderly manner. The meaning of health for the athlete therefore, considers an account of these aspects namely, the mental aspects which involves the nervous system and its function as well as personality, emotions, memory, thoughts and perceptions. The physical aspects concerns itself with build, weight/height ratio, vision, hearing, lung function, musculoskeletal system etc. The social aspects of health refers to the structure and function of the family and its extension, groups, organisations and their interaction, whereas values, traditions, customs and language feature with the cultural aspects of health. Whilst each aspect is described it must be remembered that there is a continual interaction of events which may overlap or be highlighted, eg: movement involves mental processes as well as physical actions occurring at the same time.

Health begins at birth and is governed by growth and development of the individual throughout his life. Changing environmental conditions provides a challenge for the individual to adapt accordingly.

What is sport?

The origin of the word sports stems from the old French, "desport" which means all the ways one could find to spend time agreeably; conversation,

entertainment, light-hearted banter and games. This meaning of sport has the attributes very much suggestive of what recreation means. Today sport highlights such values as an institutionalised competitive activity, the application of complex physical skills, individual participation, performance, motivation, intrinsic satisfaction and rewards.

Institutionalised competition implies the existence of a more or less formalised structure carried from one situation to another. This formal aspect of sport allows the keeping of individual performance records as well as a collective history of the activity itself. This process moreover involves the rules of the sport becoming standardised, clubs and organisations establishing tournaments, within the organisation technical officials are appointed, coaching becomes more scientific and the presence of spectators enhances the prestige of the sport.

For the athlete participating in sport requires a complex set of qualities and attributes which can relate to what sport is about. The learning of basic physical skills can be enhanced as these skills are applied to a given sport. However, goals need to be set which are realistic within the context of the training programme. Such a programme allows the athlete to be motivated towards goals set not only by the coach but also by himself. With experience the athlete begins to derive some internal feelings of value. This intrinsic satisfaction may serve as a reward within itself or may be recognised by others.

Conclusions

The meaning of health was discussed in this article as it relates to sport. The importance of the spiritual wellbeing as it interacts with the mental, physical, social and cultural aspects of the athlete and the community is emphasised.

Sport as a social activity provides a valuable means to promote the health and wellbeing for the athlete and the community. The health benefits through participation in sport outweigh the risks.