

Don H. O'Donoghue, MD

1901-1992

Dr. Don O'Donoghue has been called the Father of Sports Medicine in the United States. It is impossible to ever know how many athletes benefited from his work. Dr. O'Donoghue's legacy in the world of sports medicine is his early work on knee injuries, which led to the development of the subspecialty and started the interest in the care of athletes.

Dr. O'Donoghue was born in Iowa in 1901 and received his medical degree from the University of Iowa. He was the first orthopaedic resident at the University of Oklahoma in 1929 and stayed on to work as a pediatric orthopaedist in his early years. With the encouragement of his wife, Chris, he became involved with the football team at the University of Oklahoma. Through his experience as the physician for the football team, Dr. O'Donoghue began to see many knee ligament injuries. The conventional wisdom at the time was to treat these injuries with benign neglect or with casting and most of these athletes didn't return to activity. O'Donoghue theorized that anatomic repair of the ligamentous injury might give better results. His pioneering work in the anatomy and biology laboratories led him to an understanding of the healing properties of ligaments and the mechanics of the knee.

Dr. O'Donoghue was Professor and Chairman of the Department of Orthopaedics at the University of Oklahoma, a position he held until 1974. In 1962, he published the first book in the United States on sports medicine entitled, "The Treatment of Injuries to Athletes" with three subsequent printings into the 1980's. In the 1960's and 70's it was the only sports medicine text available.

Dr. O'Donoghue chaired the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons' Committee on Sports Medicine and it was an outgrowth of this activity that led to the formation of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine. In 1972, he and 25 other orthopaedists formed the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine and Dr. O'Donoghue became its first president in 1972.

Dr. O'Donoghue practiced until he was 83 and retired at that time because of ill health.

His legacy is the foresight he had to recognize the importance of a specific approach to define athletic injuries by careful, systematic evaluation and then to treat them by anatomic repair or reconstruction. He recognized the importance of this area of orthopaedic knowledge and the need to bring together others of similar interest to discuss, modify, and improve approaches to the care of the athlete. It was the result of this initiative that led to the formation of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine.