

# Presidential Address of The American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine\*

## Sports, science, our society, and the knee

JOHN A. FEAGIN, JR,† MD, FACS

*President, AOSSM*

One of the great privileges of the Presidency is the opportunity to share thoughts with you. I would like to share these thoughts in the form of four vignettes: sports, science, our society, and the knee.

### SPORTS

When I first became involved in sports medicine over two decades ago, and the Society too was in its formative years, I naively thought that sports had already grown too big and that the sports medicine bubble would surely soon burst. It has been almost 20 years since I first assumed the proud title of team physician, and our Society is now nearly 14 years old. Sport has continued to grow, sports medicine expertise is ever in demand, and continued growth seems a near certainty. Sport is an international phenomenon.

I remember well one afternoon, sitting with Ken DeHaven in Dr. Kurt Francke's living room and talking about how the East Germans used sports to lead a defeated people back to a respected place among the nations. They did not select a few and foist them to Olympic heights—they emphasized fitness to the old people, then to the workers, and finally

they rewarded the accomplishments of youth. The end result was not a few on the victory stand but a nation of fit people, with vigor in the work force and a sense of national destiny, place, and purpose.

In China, while jogging with John Bergfeld, we met the early morning neighborhood exercise groups—average age 70, bright eyed, starting their day with a form of “Jane Fonda and fitness.” This is sport at the international level, and it is a mighty force.

Although Michener's book *Sport in America* is not one of his most interesting books, it does, in his scholarly way, reflect the influence of sport in our society and the complex entwinement of sport with our national heritage. In my travels over the past several years to both Europe and China, as well as in the United States and Canada, I have felt the impact and import of sport. It has been overwhelmingly impressive. Sports are a part of our national fabric. Sports are the international arena in which our will to win is tested. Sports are a symbol of preparedness—a healthy substitute for war. Sports may wax and wane with national destiny, but as General Douglas MacArthur said in his last address to the Corps of Cadets, “. . . on the fields of friendly strife are born the seeds that on other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory.”

What is in the future for sports? What is our destiny? Where are sports going? Under Doug Jackson's leadership,

\* Presented at the annual meeting of the AOSSM, Sun Valley, Idaho, July 16, 1986.

† Address correspondence to: John A. Feagin, Jr., MD, Box 2770, Jackson, WY 83001.

our Society has established a committee on socioeconomic environment so that we might ponder these questions as they evolve. The committee report suggests that the sports bubble will not burst, nor will sports medicine be practiced the way it was when I first became team physician or the Society was first formed. The committee report dictates that we must prepare ourselves personally, as well as through the Society, to meet the changes at the local, national, and international levels of sport.

Sports, sports competition, and sports medicine are parts of a dynamic interrelated growth industry. It makes no difference whether we run on the field for Jackson High, Notre Dame, or Navy; we represent sports, and a dedication to the winning spirit. Service in this arena, whether local, national, or Olympic, is the just province of this Society and its members. Our Society is poised and prepared to participate in the inevitable growth that lies ahead.

## SCIENCE

What relationship has science to sport and our Society? Our Society will stand or fall on its science. Yet science is time; time is expensive, and the lead time in science is exasperatingly long. John F. Kennedy surely understood the implications of science to our national security and the lead time, or lag time, between concept and application when he committed our economy and our national identity to a man on the moon within the decade. Our national security was dependent on winning that race. Our Society stature and role depends on the race for truth through science.

Suppose for one instant we had turned our back on the arthroscopist with his new scientific tool. Where would we be today in the care of the knee or even the shoulder? I well remember in 1976 when Bob Metcalf asked me how I was coming with arthroscopy. I replied I could see almost everything inside the knee and was delighted with this new tool. He asked, though, what about arthroscopic surgery? I acknowledged this might be a "bridge too far." In his quiet manner, he painted the picture of the future—that there would be arthroscopic surgery—and that he, and others with the same convictions, would teach us this new discipline.

How right he was; how indebted we are to those who combined science with teaching and ensured the prompt and universal application of the arthroscope as a new scientific tool.

The founding fathers of this Society were dedicated to bringing science to the forefront in the care of the athlete. They meant to provide a forum for the best and brightest of sports medicine. Our continued commitment to the mandate set forth by the founders of this Society is evident through our membership, our committees, our Journal, our publications, and our Board of Directors.

- Our Program Committee seeks and supports the scientific efforts of our members. You see this reflected in the programs at the Annual and Interim meetings of the Society.

- Our Research Committee seeks, supports, and recognizes scientific contributions through the O'Donoghue Award, the

Merck Sharp & Dohme Awards, and more which will be forthcoming.

- Our Journal seeks and publishes the scientific contributions of sports medicine specialists the world over.

- Our Board of Directors seeks, solicits, endorses, and appoints those men and women of science among us. They lead our Society.

Yet, we cannot all be scientists. Those acclaimed today for their scientific contributions might ask, "Where are our roots? Who preceded us?" Fortunately, the link is still intact—the O'Donoghues, the Hughstons, the Stewarts, and a host of others who took their vast clinical experience, their acumen, and ranged the world as teachers—they are the roots of our Society. Through their sturdiness and resiliency, the scientists of today can grow, be nurtured, and branch out with confidence.

Today's scientists, recognized at this 1986 AOSSM Annual Meeting, can appreciate the words of Sir Isaac Newton when he was summoned to receive the highest award of the Royal Academy of Science. He responded simply, "If I have been able to see further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." This Society is built upon many giants, some gentle, some not so well known, some no longer with us, but many who have stooped to lift you higher so that we all might see further and the Society stand taller. The Society can look proudly to its scientific heritage and the emphasis and achievements which have followed. This is why our Society is strong today.

## OUR SOCIETY

The destiny of our Society is entwined with sport and science. The strength of our Society and its stature is derived from its membership. Strength was granted to this Society by its founding fathers—by their vitality and integrity. Will this strength be lasting? As I survey our membership, I count so many blessings—so much leadership. Among us are two past presidents of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, a president and vice-president of The College of Sports Medicine, a president of the Arthroscopy Association, representatives on the Olympic Committee and appointees to the President's Fitness Council. Among us are leaders and future leaders in so many fields.

Our founding fathers can be rightfully proud of the sustained strength of the membership. It has been my privilege to have served on the Board of Directors for more than half the lifetime of the Society. During these years I have rejoiced in the leadership that has arisen from our members. Always this leadership has been constant; never has it been divisive. Always this leadership has been dedicated to goals and ideals that would bring tangible improvements to the care of the athlete. Always the leadership has been able to place the good of the Society over their personal ambitions.

Only once did we almost stumble and that was over our relationship with the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. Here, I must share my bias. I felt then, and am dedicated now, to the conviction that we are orthopaedic

surgeons first and sports medicine specialists second, and that a house divided against itself will not long endure. We must maintain our ties with the Academy for our common good.

Our next major decision will be—should we form a Sports Medicine Research Foundation and should we link this commitment and this foundation with our Academy? The criterion is our common good and I believe the common good dictates that we can and should negotiate this endeavor with our Academy.

Vigorous leadership alone, though, is not enough. I would like to mention two other special strengths of this Society. The first are the hard working committees with their willingness to give of their free time and energies to solutions to our emerging challenges and responsibilities. The committees are the pillars of this Society. Committee membership and responsibility is refurbished regularly by the Board of Directors. Members are selected from those who volunteer. I hope that some day the State Liaison Committee is the arena from which new committee members will be chosen.

Secondly, leadership must have guidance in the business of our Society and its liaison with those of a common interest. It would be remiss not to mention the role that our two Executive Directors have played in providing this guidance. The wisdom, constancy, sound judgment, as well as devoted service to the Society by Tom Nelson and Sandy Hill and their staffs, have been a major factor in our internal growth, as well as our liaison with those who share our interest in sports medicine.

Our Society, thanks to the strength, resourcefulness, vitality and cohesiveness of its membership, is *the natural leader of sports medicine* today. Our Society is eminently qualified to bring science to the care of the athlete and to the advancement of sports and sports medicine.

## THE KNEE

I have chosen to use the knee only in a philosophical way—to crystallize our thinking on some progress and some problems at hand. Jack Kennedy, our beloved past president, took the opportunity to use the knee as a subject for his entire presidential address. I admired his courage then, the more so now. Jack left us so many wonderful memories. Why then should I choose to close this address with the knee? Because the knee is the unsolved problem of sports medicine today—it is on the forefront now and has been for too long. We have crowded too many programs with too many papers of debatable value on the knee.

Where have we gone wrong? May I suggest that early on we did not define our terminology. We did not focus our research. We did not provide a common format for critical

result evaluation. We spoke to each other as though we had been granted a common language at the Tower of Babel.

Has this been all bad or all wrong? We have not squandered our activities. Our energies have been dedicated. Some of our best minds have been devoted to a solution to the “insufficient” knee. It matters that we do not have the solution at this moment; but it matters more that we now have a better path for our efforts. We have learned from our experiences. I feel with confidence that we will never again approach an “unsolved problem” in such scientific disarray.

This problem called “the knee” has been the testing ground that has brought us together. We have had to share humbly in our failures and our very modest successes. I look on this dilemma we call “the knee” with trust that no subject will ever again so fragment our efforts. We have been divided yet not disharmonious. Through trial and trial again, through patience with each other, the majority of us now speak in a common tongue.

The knee, and these efforts to solve the problem called “the knee” have brought together scientist and clinician. Progress has been made through teams—and teamwork has brought forth the veterinarian scientists like the Steve Arnoczkys and the Bill Rodkeys, and the bioengineers like the Ed Groods, and a host of others who enhance our Society. These are the rewards of this hard-fought contest. This is why I bring the knee to the fore, because I am proud of where we stand today and the lessons we have learned. The knee is not our Armageddon. It is a torch of science that we will pass to those who follow, with the assurance that they will not reduplicate our efforts as they seek to master the shoulder, the ankle, and the future problems of sports medicine and sports physiology. Prosthetics, as a viable substitute for the ligaments of the knee, are nearly a reality. We must prepare ourselves to implement the science of soft tissue replacement.

As Pasteur said, “Chance favors the prepared mind.”

Sports, science, our Society, and the knee *all* poised for growth, *all* dependent upon your leadership. We can be rightfully proud of this Society and the role it has and will continue to play. This is what we are about now—the linkage of these disciplines through your leadership. No one is better prepared than you to fulfill this challenge.

In conclusion I express again my appreciation for the privilege of addressing you as your president. This is the honor of a lifetime and a stewardship I shall never forget. I wish I could call upon the barracks ballad that General MacArthur used to address the Congress when he said “old soldiers never die. . . .” He was, though, past his 75th year and had given a quarter of a century more service than I. So I say with humility that I hope I can serve the Society in other ways on other days.

Thank you for coming today—some from so very far, for listening, and for the honor you have accorded me.