

SPORTS, EXERCISE, AND RECREATION: A BRIEF EXPLORATION

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This issue of *Proteus* examines Sports, Exercise, and Recreation—is a very relevant topic for not only the American culture but for most of the world. For many of us, sport encompasses and can even consume much of our lives and for the remainder it is hard to escape the impact of how sport is intertwined in most of our mainstream and popular culture. It plays a large role in shaping and molding our American social and cultural landscape. This is evident by viewing the largest section of most newspapers: sports. It is also easily witnessed by the number of television networks dedicated to its coverage.

The 2008 Summer Olympic coverage was some of the largest in history. We were flooded with images of athletes competing in a large variety of sporting events. Sport and the exercise required to achieve the athletic excellence observed remains fresh for most of the viewing public. The modern Olympic movement was developed with an Olympic Spirit of “building a peaceful and better world through mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship and solidarity.”¹ This spirit attempts to bring global unity and national pride through fair play. The fair play model of competition promotes an environment that allows the individual with the best skill or behavior at a given task to be successful. This competitive environment allows the application of the Olympic motto of “*Citius, Altius, Fortius*” (faster, higher, stronger). Striving for these goals require the discipline that is needed for Sport excellence. The values acquired through this type of discipline can yield many lifetime skills and educational tools.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the recognized Father of the modern Olympic movement, wanted athleticism and fitness to be an everyday part of life.² He developed the idea of the Olympic Creed from a speech given by Bishop Ethelbert Talbot at a service for Olympic champions during the 1908 Olympic Games. The Olympic Creed reads:

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.³

The creed and motto are meant to spur the athletes to embrace the Olympic spirit and perform to the best of their abilities. This basic principle of hard work and dedication to the accomplishment of a goal could help anyone achieve excellence in mastering any goal or task.

The United States has fully embraced the modern Olympic movement. From 1896 to 2008, the United States has won the most summer Olympic medals thirteen of twenty-five times (excluding the 1980 U.S. boycott).² It is ironic that while the American culture has embraced and celebrated the discipline required for the achievement of excellence, it has evolved into a very sedentary and over indulgent group of people who lacks the discipline for the maintenance of a healthy body structure. The “obesogenic” lifestyle of inactivity and the over indulgence in good-tasting, high-calorie foods have produced the highest obesity rates in United States history and maybe the history of the planet.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports the prevalence of obesity has increased from 13 percent in 1960 to about 33 percent in 2004, and more than 66 percent of American adults are overweight.⁴ Overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems. For adults, overweight and obesity ranges are determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the “body mass index” (BMI). BMI is used because, for most people, it correlates with their amount of body fat. An adult who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight and an adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.⁴

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The most widely discussed questions in the health care environment center around the causal factors that have contributed to the epidemic. Many environmental factors have been hypothesized. In a recent article by John Peters published in the January 2006 issue of the *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews* of the American College of Sport Medicine,⁷ he shares a variety of thoughts and opinions, with all of them centered on the energy balance equation. This equation is based on the balance of an individual's energy intake with their energy output or expenditure. Basic laws of thermodynamics and energy transfer support the theory that an energy intake greater than expenditure produces weight gain.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports the average caloric intake among American adults increased by more than 500 calories per day between 1970 and 2003. Peters suggests much of this increase is attributed to increased convenience and easy food access, lower food cost, increased portion size, great taste through added sugar and high fat, and effective advertising and marketing. The CDC reports during this same time period 75 percent of American adults are physically inactive with 40 percent getting no exercise at all.⁴ Peters also suggests this can be attributed to sedentary workplaces and schools, "unfriendly" community designs, automobiles and drive-through conveniences, sedentary entertainment, and other labor saving devices.⁷ The \$40 billion weight loss industry has created confusion with the advertising and marketing of many quick weight loss diets and activity programs. Most in the scientific community agree a decrease in energy intake and an increase in energy expenditure is the key to weight loss and management. The problem is creating a cultural shift that generates the appropriate lifestyle that will contribute to an energy balance.

This positive energy imbalance that created the obesity problem was addressed in the 1996 Surgeon General's Report. This report attempted to shift the focus from an exercise based approach to the problem to an increased physical activity model. Exercise is a type of physical activity and has traditionally been defined as planned, structured, and repetitive with the goal of improving or maintaining one or more components of physical fitness.⁶ Physical activity is defined as bodily movement that is produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle and increases energy expenditure.⁶ The report moved from the exercise-based approach by recommending individuals should try and accumulate a moderate amount of physical activity on most if not all days of the week. It further described a moderate amount of physical activity as physical activity that uses approximately 150 calories (kcal) of energy per day, or 1,000 calories per week. Additionally, the recommended duration and intensity of different activities for achievement of this goal were included in the report. Recommended activities ranged from 15 minutes of high intensity stair climbing to washing and waxing a car for 45-60 minutes. The main conclusion was to increase energy expenditure by creating and implementing strategies that encourage more movement in an individual's daily lifestyle.

Participating in recreational activities may be one of the preferred methods for increasing energy expenditure. Recreational activities are in many forms with most activities being pleasurable experiences. Many of the definitions link recreation with activities or hobbies that are personally interesting and enjoyable. Most definitions of recreation include descriptors, such as, refreshment, renewal, relaxation, diversion, enjoyment and play. Not all forms of recreation include movement that allows for the optimal amount of energy expenditure and some forms can be primarily sedentary. Sedentary forms of recreation may include activities such as playing cards, billiards, bowling, and board or video games. These sedentary activities may be pleasurable but may utilize smaller amounts of muscle and produce limited amounts of energy expenditure. Movement-based recreational activities that utilize larger amounts of muscle mass for extended periods of time should produce the largest amount of energy expenditure. These may include outdoor activities such as, biking, swimming, hiking and camping, canoeing, or fishing and hunting. Pleasurable activities that produce the largest amount of energy expenditure could provide part of the answer in combating the excessive weight gain and obesity associated with a sedentary culture.

The study of human movement involves many sub-disciplines and is not limited to the analysis of the physiological response to activity or the biomechanical description of complex skills. Subdisciplines such as history and philosophy, psychology, sociology, and even economics and business need to be included when trying to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human movement and its impacts on the surrounding environment, economy, and culture. This edition of *Proteus* examines Sports, Exercise, and Recreation through a very diverse collection of articles from many of these subdisciplines. Please enjoy the collection.

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