Physiotherapy: The body drives the mind

by Ike Ogosi

The fusion of mind and body drives the complete human being, and few would argue that the two are intrinsically linked.

In light of that, student athletes have their backs against the wall in their need to find the sort of balance that would deliver the resounding success on both fronts that is ultimately expected of them. So what exactly does it take for them to successfully nurture both body and mind?

Joe Glenn serves as athletic therapist for the UNB Varsity Reds, operating out of the treatment room at the Lady Beaverbrook Gymnasium. There he and his assisting staff treat muscle and joint strains, sprains and pains incurred by athletes in the line of duty. Treatments range from therapeutic massages and prescribed exercises for the body part in question to scans using ultrasound equipment.

The influx of patients to the athletic therapy room varies wildly, depending largely on the number of teams in action during any given week, but Mr. Glenn admits that things are constantly fairly busy since different sports seasons kick off even as others are winding down.

"We just lost three teams in the last couple of weeks," he said, referring to the soccer and cross country teams that recently wrapped up their ho-hum seasons. "That changes the load. This week's pretty slow, [though] basketball's just revving up."

In fact, two players from the women's basketball team are currently nursing injuries that kept them out of play on the weekend. Stephanie Dinn sprained her ankle in training, while Kathleen Singh is still out of commission with a cruciate injury incurred last spring.

Student athletes are not limited to those playing varsity sports; many UNB students are actively engaged in numerous sports clubs and societies that inflict rigorous physical tolls on them. In the treatment room though, much like the rest of the university system, varsity sports take prominence over non-varsity activities.

"I don't have a lot of responsibility for [non-varsity athletes]," Mr. Glenn admitted, adding, "we do treat them sometimes, if we have time. Obviously our varsity athletes are our priority; that's who pays me to do the work. But when we're not busy and things are slow, we look at other athletes, we look at UNB students – I see a fair amount of staff."

With seven varsity sports boasting both male and female athletes, the scene in the treatment room can become pretty daunting for UNB's physiotherapy staff. Since 2003, the university has had a reciprocal agreement in place with the Atlantic College of Therapeutic Massage, based at King's Place. Students from the college, under supervision from a member of their faculty registered in massage therapy, provide free massage therapy treatment for student athletes every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Rob Jackson, the administrative director of the college, viewed the deal as one that was mutually beneficial to both academic institutions in ways that surpassed monetary value.

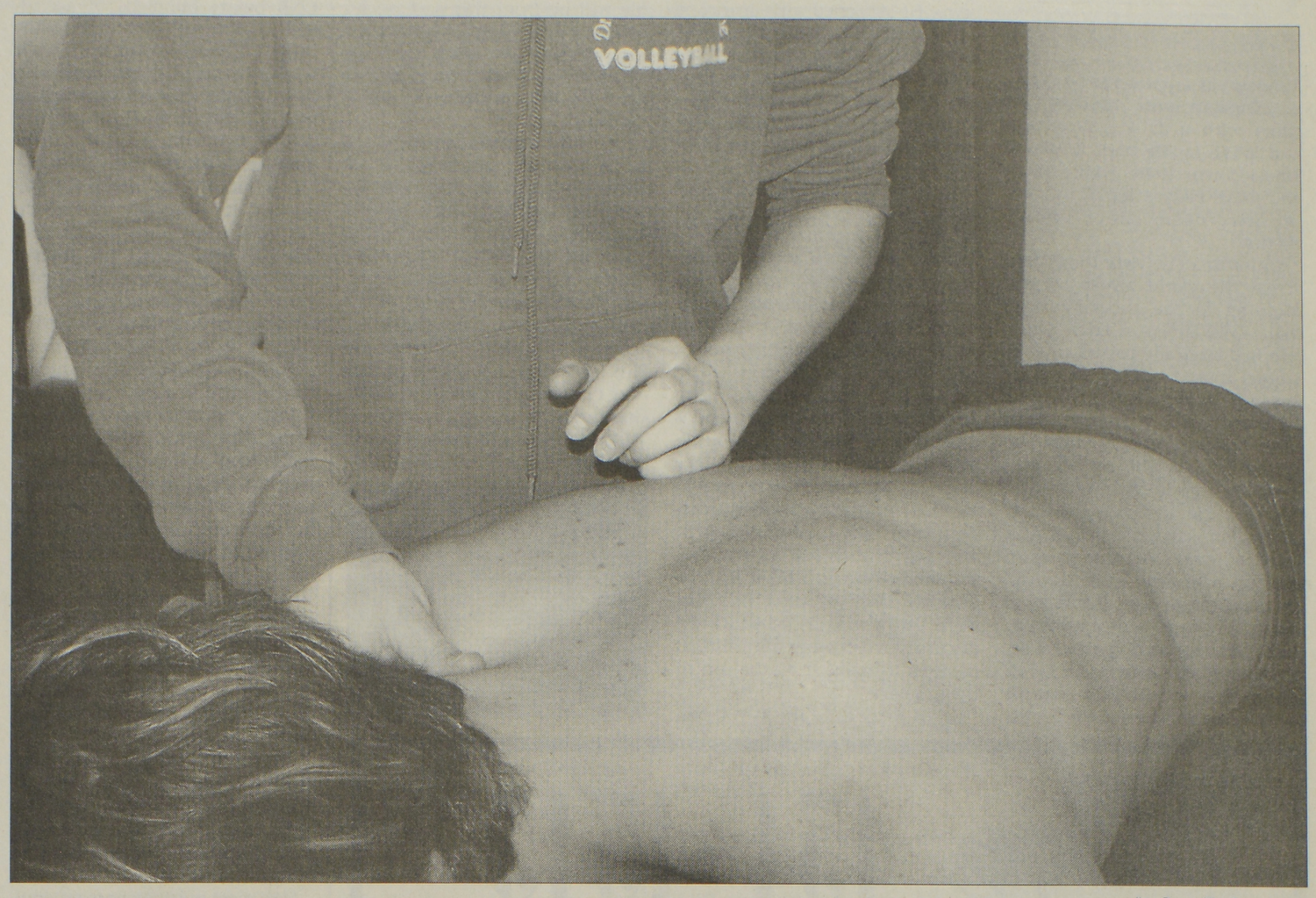
"It's done [as] a trade-off, in the sense that our students gain the experience that they need and the athletes get the treatment that they need. So we don't charge for that. We also have an agreement with the kinesiology faculty, in which our students - our graduates - are able to receive credits towards a bachelor of science in kinesiology degree, if they opt to go to UNB after they finish [at the college]."

The traffic of graduates works both ways, with UNB students earning credits should they choose to go to ACTM. "Graduates from the kinesiology program can enter here and have a reduced program because of their training and experience and education at UNB," Mr. Jackson added.

The extra service provided by the ACTM is specialized, exclusively for athletes and primarily for varsity players, though Mr. Jackson stressed that those treated were decided on an individual basis.

"To my knowledge [the agreement] is only for athletes... who are essentially recommended by their coach. It's not something that's open, generally, to any student," he said. "I don't think we have any problem with [non-varsity athletes] as long as it's something that's needed and they have some reference from their coach that they've been sent."

For all the focus on treatment, there's little doubt that the key phrase in fitness is 'prevention is better than cure'. Both Mr. Jackson and Mr. Glenn admitted that their roles in preventative care for student athletes are relatively limited.



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A member of the UNB swim team receives treatment in the Athletic Therapy Room, located at the Lady Beaverbrook Gym.

Mr. Glenn said, "We don't have a lecture on how to prevent injuries; we try to do that through our coaching, through our coaches, we try to do that through our fitness and conditioning."

"Our students and our staff provide is remedial exercise recommendations to athletes in the clinic," Mr. Jackson said. "Typically we're not involved in straight-out preventative work where we might go, for example, to a group and say, 'here's what you can do to avoid the type of injuries that you might incur'. We do a lot of public presentations and people might glean things from those that would help them to avoid injuries and conditions that would require massage therapy."

Mr. Glenn offers hands-on help for the men's hockey team, following them about on their road games as well as their home ones.

"I'm onsite, especially during [hockey] games. I can't be everywhere at once so that's the one team that I cover events for," Mr. Glenn explained. "I set up the strength and conditioning programs for them, especially at the beginning of the year. We also have a couple of other people involved in that."

Coach Gardiner MacDougall's hockey team enjoys extra fitness help besides Mr. Glenn. Ken Seaman, an instructor for the kinesiology department at the LBG, and Adam Pitre, a fourth-year kinesiology student, serve as strength and conditioning coaches for the team, and Coach Gardiner believes that their impact on the team is telling.

"We always look at how we can enhance our program," he said, "and fitness is something we've worked on the last five years. Ken and Adam have designed programs in the past, so we looked at changing some things in our training program and asked our players to take that plan and follow it all summer. When we came back this fall and did our fitness testing and went through our training camp, as a group we had the highest scores ever and even on an individual basis, I think maybe of the eight fitness tests we do, we set new records in five of them."

The injury list for the team proves Coach MacDougall's fitness strategy is working - despite playing five games in eight nights, only defenseman Bart Rushmore is currently sidelined by injury, a concussion in his case. Coach MacDougall insists that for now, maintenance is key, with a plan already in place to ensure that.

"We supplement [the fitness training] in the fall when we have one or two days a week, depending on our schedule, and once the Christmas break comes we'll try to have another fitness-building block at that time. The players have bought into it and obviously we're off to a decent start."

With all the attention showered on men's varsity hockey, some other teams may appear to be left out. Women's volleyball boasts a lean roster of only 11 players for seven starting roles (six plus one libro). The depth of talent is rich but conditioning is even more crucial, as head coach John Richard was quick to point out.

"We don't have a lot of bodies but they can play in several positions," he said. "We can probably get away with one or probably two injuries in certain players."

The key to their fitness is working out during the summer, albeit without as established a program or formula as the hockey team. With over 30 games a season, and no specific strength and conditioning coach to call his own, Coach Richard and his team will require more than their fair share of luck to make it through the season physically unscathed. In the meantime, if anything breaks down, there's always Joe Glenn and the ACTM.

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performed as well as they possibly could."

Whatever the case, the points are on the board and the first definitive signal that the Reds might be gearing up to make a significant impact at the Nationals, where they won't have to worry about road fatigue. Home advantage also means assured qualification, a fact that relieves the pressure on the team in the league this season.

"I told the girls whether we lose all of the games in our league or we win them all, we're still going to be in the nationals on March 12th, even if we don't make playoffs or anything. Our idea is that by the time that comes around we want to be the best possible team that we can be."

To assist in that Coach Slipp has made some key new 'signings' to her side. They're not players though – the women's basketball team lacks any rookies this season. The fresh faces working with the team will be operating behind the scenes, and these two home wins might be evidence that their work is already paying dividends.

"When I knew we were hosting the Nationals this year, I asked David Scott, a sports psychologist that works here, if he could help us with our team or suggest anybody who could. He suggested Ryan Hamilton, who is a PhD candidate at UNB, so he's been having some sessions with our team and working with our captains."

Hamilton, who fills a similar role with the men's hockey team, works with Coach Slipp's charges on issues like team cohesiveness and working on the same wavelength as teammates. He has been helping out team captains Lou Walsh and Emily Murphy in their drive to become better leaders, and assisting Coach Slipp on making her players more competitive when the situation warrants it.

"He's had quite a few experiences of working with some pretty elite teams across Canada," Coach Slipp said, adding that he was using that experience to get the team to be a little bit better.

Coach Slipp also recruited the services of Ellen MacIntosh, a nutritionist that works with Student Health Services. The idea was to ask her to volunteer her time to advise the team on their dietary habits.

"We had some questions we wanted to ask [Ellen MacIntosh]: 'how long before a game should you eat', 'what should you eat to get the most energy in order to play', 'what should you do after a game', and 'what should you look for when you're looking at food choices... just some real basic things like that."

Coach Slipp's new-look squad fell into place when a kinesiology student came enquiring about ways he could work with the team in order to gain credits for his class. He now serves as a strength and conditioning advisor for the team, a crucial role in any team but one that is vacant in many of UNB's varsity teams.

"We worked out that he could do an independent study with our team, kind of designing our program and following through and do a report on it afterwards to help get credit for a three hour course," Coach Slipp said. "We had a grad student here at UNB that did a summer program for us that I really like, so the two of them got together and designed a little bit of a program that we could have for the whole year."

The main drive for such a radical change is definitely as a result of the expectations conferred on the team as they prepare to host the Nationals, but there is little doubt that if these tactics succeed on a large scale, they might become permanent fixtures for the team. And perhaps, eventually, for all the Varsity Reds.

In Other Action News:

The men's hockey team found themselves away against two teams that haunted them last season. Acadia made it to the AUS finals, knocking out UNB along the way, only to lose to Moncton. The Varsity Reds were unable to seal a win against Saint Mary's University all last season.

"We knew it was going to be a real good test for our hockey club, a real good challenge," Coach Gardiner MacDougall said. Unfortunately, last year's trend continued as Acadia topped UNB 2-0 and the Reds were once again unable to beat SMU.

"On Friday [against Acadia] we just weren't committed enough to our game plan, to get the results that we wanted. We had a good first period but we didn't raise the bar in the second and third. Spectacular goaltending by Reg Bourcier was the only reason we stayed in the game and had an opportunity right up till the end to stay in it."

While Coach MacDougall singled out Bourcier, rookie Darryl Boyce and Jessie Ferguson for their impressive display against Acadia, he insisted that, "As a group we weren't near where we had to be against a quality team like that."

The SMU game was a different thing entirely, and must have been a treat to watch as the Reds closed the first period 2-1 down, conceded a third in the second before rallying to score two in the final four minutes of the third, notching up a valuable point on the road.

In addition to the solid players at Acadia, Coach MacDougall said, "Rob Hennigar had a good match at St. Mary's, and the line of [Denny] Johnston, [Nathan] O'Nabigon and [Robert] Pearce has to be an energy line for us."

The good news for Coach MacDougall's men is that they don't have to wait to avenge their slight on the road; they host Acadia on Friday and SMU the next day.

"One of the good things about this league is where you play back-to-backs against the same teams; any team wants to see how they've improved that week with practice and making adjustments," Coach MacDougall said. The entertainment value cannot be overstated, either.

"We get to play them at home," he added, stressing the importance of home support. "I think Friday night will be one of the best games you're going to see here all season. I think it's just going to be outstanding – Acadia's got a great team and we're looking forward to that. We're certainly disappointed at our efforts down there, and we have to be more worthy of our opponents on Friday night. On Saturday night, as I said, we never had the result we wanted from St. Mary's last year, so it's a perfect challenge for our hockey club at this segment of the year."





