



Robert K. Thomas

# Restoring the Balance

**P**hysical education is a vital component of a wholistic education because it promotes a lifetime of physical activity and healthy choices. We have been given good counsel by our early church leaders about the importance of being physically active, and current research bears witness to the benefits of our healthy Adventist lifestyle.

In this era, when academics, as measured by high-stakes tests, has received significant attention, school administrators and teachers may be tempted to shift from a balanced approach to one that invests less time in physical pursuits and more in intellectual activity. Ellen White condemned this misguided paradigm when she said, “something more is called for than the culture of the intellect. Education is not complete unless the body, the mind, and the heart are equally educated.”<sup>1</sup> Her counsels have been supported by research showing that physically fit students perform better academically.<sup>2</sup>

This imbalanced approach to education has been recently recognized and addressed in the *Journey to Excellence Through Health* report written in June 2011 by the North American Division Physical Education and Health writing group. The report includes seven goals to foster a return to the principles upon which our educational system was founded.<sup>3</sup>

Giving further support for the importance of physical fitness for children, youth, and adults alike, Dr. John Ratey reveals that aerobic exercise prepares the brain to learn, improves mood and attention, lowers stress and anxiety, helps stave off addiction, controls the sometimes tumultuous effects of hormonal changes, and guards against and even reverses some of the effects of aging on the brain in his exciting book, *SPARK: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*.<sup>4</sup>

Although much of the world has moved from an agrarian to a technological model since Ellen White’s day, the principles she espoused remain true today. More than ever, we must intentionally provide opportunities for our students to be physically active. The sedentary lifestyle of today’s developed nations with their technologically based efficiencies and fast food is producing body temples (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20) that

are getting too large and unhealthy. Ellen White would be appalled at this. Nearly a century before the obesity epidemic, she asserted that physical inactivity is “one of the greatest causes of debility of body and feebleness of mind.”<sup>5</sup>

While peer-reviewed, grant-funded scholarly research has demonstrated that Adventists live seven to eight years longer and have a lower prevalence of many chronic diseases than the general population,<sup>6</sup> we still need to ensure that our students become physically active and make other healthy lifestyle choices so that the next generations maintain these benefits.

Another element of school life that many associate with physical education relates to after-school sports programs. Contrary to some commonly held assumptions, Ellen White did not oppose the “simple exercise of playing ball”<sup>7</sup>; however, she cautioned against the excesses in time, money, and resources that were sometimes dedicated to ball games at the expense of other, more important things,<sup>8</sup> and which could draw away attention from “eternal” values.<sup>9</sup> Concerns about the detrimental effects of sports have been expressed throughout the history of Adventist education<sup>10</sup> and are still valid today. The articles in this issue can help to guide decisions about how to prioritize our resources in order to best serve our students and communities.

In this issue on health and physical education, you will find articles that address a broad array of topics, ranging from the importance of physical activity in preserving the body temple to providing practical tips for teaching physical education; measuring physical activity in our schools and communities; principles for maintaining safe playgrounds and gyms; helping faculty manage their stress more effectively using NEWSTART principles; making sure we serve all of our students in a carefully planned manner; and guidelines for ensuring that when schools decide to offer a sports program, it is intentionally counter-cultural, mission-oriented, and grounded in a Christian philosophy.

We hope that this issue will provide new ideas and reinforce proven strategies for to you as educational

*Continued on page 47*

also get upset and frustrated with the officials. If players taunt the opposing team and “showboat” on the court, fans are more likely to sense this negative attitude and begin to heckle the opposing team. Appropriate penalties for inappropriate student behaviors, whether by fans or players at school-sponsored events, should be included in the student handbook.

### Dealing With Crowd Noise

The athletic director or coach needs to make clear to students and spectators the effect of noise on players. It is common to see athletes attempting to raise the noise level at a game by turning to the spectators and pumping their arms up and down. The resulting racket may cause spectators to engage in hoots and boos if they have not made a commitment to demonstrate Christian courtesy at the event.

Not only can the principles of appropriate behavior be taught, but they can and should be modeled by athletic directors, coaches, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Self-control, courtesy, and generosity of spirit are fruits of the Spirit and thus expected behavior for all Christians, including players and fans at Seventh-day Adventist sports events. With careful attention to these principles, in time, it could actually be that student athletes and spectators will demonstrate through their behavior that Christianity and good sportsmanship are harmonious, not only in principle, but also in practice. Written guidelines, such as those created by the SDA-HPERA, can help everyone involved with sporting events to apply the Golden Rule. ✍

*Guest Editorial continued from page 3*

leaders of our church. Thank you for your service!

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. The Bible text credited to NRSV is from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.
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