

## Fitness Collection Receives Oldest Known Book On Physical Culture and Sports Medicine by Kay Randall

The oldest book on sports medicine, massage and physical culture, written in 1569, has been donated to The University of Texas at Austin's Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, the largest and most comprehensive collection in this field in the world. An illustrated first edition of *De Me Gymnastics*, by Italian physician Hieronymus Mercurialis, was given to the university by David P. Webster, O.B.E., a Scottish writer, sports promoter, world record-holding athlete, collector, Olympic Games official, and the leading historian on Scotland's Highland Games.

"Mercurialis' book was extremely influential when it was

written, and almost all books on gymnastics—which in Mercurialis' day meant exercise—that followed are based on this standard work," said Dr. Terry Todd, co-director of the Todd-McLean Collection, which is part of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education. "Mercurialis was the first Renaissance writer to address the connection between sport and health, and he was one of the first medical professionals to assert that exercise could be beneficial or harmful depending on its duration and intensity."

Drawing upon the writings of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Galen and Seneca, Mercurialis synthesized their views on exercise into a cohesive volume that also included his own recommendations. His numerous books were among the first to extol the benefits of living a "sober" life and attaining robust health through exercise.

"Mercurialis approached exercise and sport from three different standpoints," says Webster. "He proclaimed that sport in preparation 'for the arts of war' was valid and that sport for the good of the body and for health and fitness was a legitimate aim but that sport done purely for entertainment was not a valid goal." In addition to informing the work of future physicians and scholars on sport and exercise, Mercurialis was also widely cited as an expert on everything from breast feeding... to diet and diabetes.

"Because of the obvious value to researchers that this remarkable book on exercise and sport holds," says Dr. Jan Todd, co-director of the Todd-McLean Collection and associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, "we are making arrangements for it to be fully translated and digitized. One of the things we feel strongly about is sharing treasures such as this with other scholars—it's meant to inspire and inform, not to be hidden away."

"I have immeasurable respect and admiration for the Todds and the work they're doing here," says Webster. "I've known Terry for over forty years and Jan for over thirty, and we've worked together in competitions around the world, including at the recent Arnold Classic here in the U.S. It's given me immense pleasure to contribute to their world famous collection."

Webster's interest in athletics has led him to organize and promote Highland Games on every continent, serve as Scotland's top administrator for sport and recreation, judge at the Olympic Games, and be chosen as chief UK official at the Commonwealth Games. In addition, Webster has assembled over more than fifty years one of the greatest private collections in the world in the field of strength sports and exercise. He is also a prolific writer, having published almost forty books and hundreds of articles over the past half century.

Webster, who received the prestigious Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) award, given by the British monarchy, in 1994, also held the world record for strand-pulling, an event which involves the stretching of heavy, spring-like cables. Now in his mid-70s, Webster still competes occasionally in Master's weightlifting competitions and maintains a high degree of fitness. He has also participated in and scripted hundreds of television and radio programs around the world, and he provided most of the leading athletes in Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator*.