

John Russell Fairs
Honorary Degree introduction
by Dr Don Morrow, Faculty of Health Sciences

Jack Fairs, Mr Chancellor, distinguished guests, colleagues, our special graduands, ladies and gentlemen, I am truly humbled and so very proud to introduce Jack Fairs to you as our honorary degree recipient today. For those of you in this graduating class, my assumption is that most of you have not heard of this man. I encourage you, as you witness this process at the very beginning of your careers, to ask yourself, how will I be recognized for my contributions to this world? Will you risk living your life in the most fulfilling way that you can? And what can you learn from the remarkable contributions made by Jack Fairs to the lives of thousands of students just like you?

Quite simply, Jack touched people in profound ways that shaped their learning, their behaviour, and their chosen paths in life, in a career that began right after he graduated from Western, in the Sciences. Blessed with an astute mind, Jack was also a gifted athlete who turned both of those talents into the service of others in choosing a career in what was then, in the mid 1940s, the very new field of Physical Education and its counterpart, Athletics. Armed with a Master's degree from Columbia University, Jack became a professor at Western in 1947 and formally "retired" in 1988. During that 40+ years, he devoted and immersed himself in teaching and coaching about sport. He played and coached 5 different sports: football, basketball, baseball, tennis, and squash. A true student of sport, Jack is a master technician when it comes to the execution of sport skills, different play-making strategies, and the ebb and flow of the game in both team and individual sport. He has taught a wide spectrum of subjects from exercise physiology to history to strategy and tactics in sport. And now in his 80s, Jack continues to exert his impact and expertise by coaching the men's squash team. Since 1970, Jack's teams have won an incredible 31 team and 21 singles' titles in Ontario University Athletics' squash. Athletes on those teams have won Canadian national championships, American national championships, US intercollegiate championships and they have achieved All American status. Moreover two of his teams have won the prestigious National Collegiate Athletic Association's team championships in squash over formidable, often highly funded teams such as Harvard and Cornell. The common denominator for all of those teams has been the coaching, recruiting, and mentoring skills of Jack Fairs who himself has received all manner of honours and awards and hall of fame inductions for his coaching successes. And these are the facts, or some of them about this man/mentor/coach/teacher/scholar.

What I want you to know is something of the personality that is Jack Fairs. Two phrases encapsulate, I believe, the essence of Jack Fairs: one, his devotion to his work, his athletes, his family, his students; and secondly, his delightful and at times, impishly-exuded love of life. Jack moves in the world with an ever-present, irrepressible twinkle in his eye, a mischievousness that he infuses gently and that seems to get fed back into his being. Consider these examples:

- he is not only an NCAA squash team coaching champion; no, he is probably the only Canadian coach to hold NCAA championships in not one, but two sports. Indeed Western, under Jack's tutelage won the NCAA deep sea fishing championship;

- a full professor and well respected scholar during his half century at Western, Jack's penchant for borrowing books from the library and forgetting to return them anywhere near on time, resulted in his library card being revoked and his subsequent reliance on unsuspecting colleagues for the use of their cards;
- Jack taught an extremely sophisticated course in the cultural history of the body in Western civilization. Years ahead of what others in the field were doing, Jack was renowned for going into his lecture room hours before class to fill the blackboards with reams of notes - and even using portable chalk boards to supplement his need for more notes. When Jack discovered the ditto machine and subsequently photocopying technology, students were inundated with his flow diagrams, charts, and chronologies;
- Imagine being a PE or Kin student and learning that some philosopher in the past said that "the body is virtually a prison house which confines and deludes reason" or that "god created syphilis to keep man's nose the grindstone";
- Or imagine thinking that you could just get the reams of notes for those classes, and showing up late for class after weeks of not being there only to have Jack interrupt his lecture to extend his hand to the student while saying, "hi, Jack Fairs, I'm the course instructor."
- And Jack was a master of words, erudite and impact-ful in what he wrote, yet always with a catch or word to make one pause to reflect. I wonder how the squash world and the athletes ruminated over one of his technical articles in squash entitled, "The Lob Service in Squash: A Portrait of the Phlegmatic Server"
- How many students and scholars do not recall Jack's most well known article and stereotypical phrase, "When was the golden age of the body"?

Many of us have experienced Jack's driving skills as we listened to him expound on a football team's defensive strategy, or our own need for improving our forehand, or something about John Calvin, that "dour and profoundly unhappy divine" while Jack drove and somehow turned to speak to us in the back seat. On more than one occasion on team trips, I was one of those athletes in the back seat who trembled at the potential outcome of such conversations, only to miss our exit on the freeway and have Jack happily continue the conversation while we backed down the highway on the margin. Even the gods have feet of clay.

Jack Fairs, in all his glory, is a man most worthy of being recognized, honoured and celebrated by the University of Western Ontario . . . Mr Chancellor...honoris causa . . .