

# Play and How It Has Moved

## My Professional Life

### John Byl

I came into this world as a child of playful Creator God, and of Dutch parents. I immigrated to Canada when I was four years old. My parents thought Canada provided more opportunity for their children. Canada, in Turtle Island, is a country that has certainly blessed me with opportunity. I have an older sister, and two younger brothers. I also had two indigenous siblings for a few years during the Sixties Scoop—I wish I knew then what I know now. There were challenges in my upbringing and the playground next door was an oasis of neighbourhood kids to play with. I also learned about the importance of hard work and what most needed doing next.

I struggled in school. The before school, after school, recess, and lunch breaks were havens of play. Following my high school graduation, I went to work in a door plant for nearly a year and as that was unsatisfying work, I was encouraged by a friend to apply for a Recreation Diploma program at Vancouver City College. I was accepted, completed the two-year program (1974), and then decided to get my Bachelor's degree in Physical Education from the University of British Columbia (UBC--1976), and my British Columbia Teaching Certification (1977).

After high school I experienced a break-up with a young woman, only to have come to better know the presence of Creator God in my life, and meet another wonderful young woman, Catherine, with whom I married in my fourth year at UBC (1975).

My first job was at a Christian high school in Surrey, British Columbia—a one year position since the regular physical education teacher took a one-year study leave (1977-1978). In preparation for teaching, I put together a philosophy paper I called, *Fitness for Life*, and a *Minor Games* manual to help use small sided fun and purposeful games as the meat of my teaching.

In my second teaching position I was gifted with working at a Christian high school in Chatham, Ontario. I taught and coached at this school for three years and then decided to obtain a Master's degree from the University of Windsor (UW) under the capable and caring mentorship of Dr. Alan Metcalfe. Though I enjoyed teaching high school students I thought a Master's degree would enable me to have further impact in teaching incoming teachers. My Master's thesis helped me develop a richer understanding of Christianity and Physical Education. The thesis was entitled "Dance and Physically Active Games in the Christian Reformed Denomination" (1982). Our young family then moved to British Columbia again where I taught and coached at Christian high schools in the Vancouver area for the next four years.

At the beginning of my fourth year of teaching in British Columbia, I burned out. Counselling and adjustments to my teaching and lifestyle kept me from the debilitating effects of depression. During this burned-out phase, I had little interest in play.

I was then offered the opportunity to be a Professor at Redeemer University (1986) in Hamilton, Ontario. My dream of teaching university students came to fruition. The University provided much freedom to pursue my contributions to the field of Physical Education. One of the requirements for continuing as a Professor at Redeemer University is that I get a PhD. I completed my PhD studies at the State University of New York (1989-1992) while teaching and coaching part-time for one of those years and working full-time the other two years. I completed my dissertation, under the caring mentorship of Dr. Warren Button, on a history of the Margaret Eaton School, *Women's Education in Elocution, Drama, and Physical Education*. I was able to procure funding from Bob Young, founder of Red Hat, and whose great grandmother was the founding principal of the Margaret Eaton School. With those funds I oversaw the funding and implementation of the Margaret Eaton School Digital Collection ( <http://libguides.RedeemerUniversity.ca/MES> ), hosted a conference: "Being Shaped by and Shaping Canadian Culture: The Margaret Eaton School Women (MES) 1901-1942," (2017), and, additionally, initiated an ongoing fund for women leaders through PHE Canada (2023).

When I started teaching and coaching volleyball at Redeemer University, I also began playing weekly golf with several colleagues. We have continued playing through to the present. I have found my times on the golf course a wonderful time being outdoors, connecting with friends, and playing golf. It feels like a sacred place to me.

Part of my teaching and coaching had me reflect on play and athletics. I came to conclude that playful games, no interest in winning, can be done very positively and very negatively. Athletic games, with a greater emphasis on winning, can also be done very positively and very negatively. My focus turned to how to promote play and athletics, and everything in between, in a flourishing way. In addition to coaching, I was also involved administratively with intramurals at Redeemer University and with the Ontario College Athletic Association (OCAA). I was honoured to be inducted into the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association Hall of Fame as a "Builder" (2007).

One of the responsibilities of being a Professor at Redeemer University was to engage in research and writing. My first connections to contributing to the field of Physical Education was through a series of books Marvin Zuidema was writing for Christian Schools International. I contributed six chapters for two of their books. Christian Schools International also had a Library Materials Guide and over the years I contributed over 300 small book reviews.

I wrote my first book, *Organizing Successful Tournaments* (1990), with Human Kinetics (HK). This first book also led me to connect with the Ontario University Athletics with whom I created hundreds of their playing schedules (2009-2019). My relationship with Human Kinetics has been most fruitful as they published six books that I authored, five books that I co-authored, and four books published in subsequent editions, all of which

have so far sold over 110,000 copies world-wide. In addition, one book was translated into Chinese, one book was translated into Spanish, and three books were translated into German. I was also grateful to be able to contribute to the writing of HK's textbook for Canadian high schools, *Fitness for Life Canada* (2017).

In various capacities I was involved with the City of Hamilton Recreation Citizen's Advisory Committee, various iterations of a Hamilton Sport Council, and the Ontario Physical Literacy Summit (1986-present). The city honoured me with the *All-Sports Award* (1997), and inducted me into the *Hamilton Sport Hero Banner Series* (2011).

One of the perks of my work at Redeemer University was that most years I attended a conference with other Christian Physical Education and Recreation professors. The organization was called Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies (CSKLS). I usually gave one presentation at each of their conferences. I was honoured to be invited to co-edit one of their books, *Physical Education, Sports, and Wellness* (1999), and four of my papers were included in CSKLS three edited books. CSKLS honoured me with each of their three awards: *Literary Award* (2006), *Presidential Award* (2006), and the *Glen Van Andel Distinguished Service Award* (2013).

As I wrote about *play* and *athletics*, eight of my academic papers were published in refereed journals, six papers were included in various conference proceedings, and I had 86 articles published in more popular journals.

A significant involvement in my playful life, was being on the CIRA Ontario Board (1996-2018). I was privileged to be its President for the last 15 years of my being on this Board. I co-authored 12 of CIRA Ontario's popular books. I was able to procure \$125,000 in grants for CIRA Ontario to produce and lead workshops in daily physical activity through an English and French resource called, *Everybody Move* (2005) and *Tout le Monde Bouge* (2006). CIRA Ontario honoured me by providing an annual *John Byl Bursary Award* for a school with an exemplary intramural program. In 2022 I began to serve a term on the board of Recess Guardians.

I was further honoured by the Ontario Government with the *Ontario Volunteer Service Award* (2004). I was also honoured as a recipient of the *Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal* for promoting physical activity in my community and across Canada (2013).

I retired from Redeemer University in December, 2013. In my retirement, and after I stepped down from the CIRA Ontario Board, I was grateful to be hired part-time to represent Gopher Sport at Canadian conferences (beginning in 2017). In some ways they are paying me to pursue my passions. Pre-Covid I was responsible for attending 40 conferences, post-Covid I am responsible to attend 15-20 conferences. To assist in promoting Gopher and helping teachers help students, I put together a website ( [www.canadago4sport.com](http://www.canadago4sport.com) ), as well as a YouTube and Pinterest site, and twice-a-week I post on X.com (*Twitter* since 2017), Instagram (since 2021), and TikTok (since 2022-- @ canadago4sport ). Additionally, I add these posts to one school-board's Facebook

pages, and twice a month I submit an activity to about 12 international Facebook pages. In terms of presentations, mostly to physical education teachers, through my work with Redeemer University, CIRA Ontario, and Gopher Sport, I have led over 1,000 workshops in my lifetime.

One way my dad contributed in life was regularly donating blood at Canada Blood Services (Red Cross in his day). I was able to contribute over 200 blood donations. I have also been active in various churches in which I was a member.

Two significant challenges in my life occurred in 2003 and 2020. In my late forties, I began to do a lot of biking. Biking 150kms in a morning was not unusual. One day, June 30, 2003, when I was biking, I found myself waking up on a hospital bed. I had been hit by a truck, driven by someone who drank way too much alcohol and chose to drive. It took me at least a half-dozen or so years to recover from the physical, mental, and emotional damage this collision caused me. During those years I coped by reducing my teaching load, and writing a lot less. Part of my healing was taking up long-distance running. I ran 30kms Around-the-Bay Race in Hamilton six times, completed several marathons, once ran 50kms, and did many shorter runs.

In 2020, I again found myself again waking up on a hospital bed. This time I had collapsed because my lungs had filled with blood clots from a totally cancerous left kidney. I collapsed because I had extreme difficulty breathing. My mean life expectancy was four years. Now, three years later, I have had my left kidney removed, my T12 vertebra radiated, experienced my thyroid gland stop functioning as a side-effect of treatments, observed that my lungs remain scarred and partially collapsed, and have been on about a one-year immunotherapy treatment that has reduced, what was once five golf ball-sized tumours on my adrenal gland, liver, and lungs, to four pea-sized tumours in my lungs. I am alive, and choosing life!

Throughout my journey I have been blessed to have been loved by a lot of people. I cannot begin to enumerate the blessing so many people have been to me. People shared meals with Catherine and I, people poured love into our lives, people offered me wisdom, people listened to me, people accepted my teaching, people valued my coaching.... There were people who have crossed my path whose lives seemed so much together, and I also had a friend who died while incarcerated from a fentanyl overdose. Every person who came into my life have had a significant impact on the person I am becoming. Many people have been the hands and feet of Creator God, I hope I could also have been the hands and feet of Creator God with people whose paths have crossed with mine. The most significant people who have impacted me are my wife, Catherine, my children, Hannah, Judith, Matt, and Charis, their spouses, and our grandchildren. I love you all!

As I have opportunity, I look forward to playing games and engaging with my wife, Catherine, my four children and their spouses, and my 14 grandchildren. I regularly remind workshop attendees that if they have one of my grandchildren in one of their classes that their experience would be amazing, and if they did not have one of my

grandchildren in their class, that the experience would be amazing anyways for all the students in their care.

The Bible in one place creates a picture of what part of a good life looks like, “The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there” (Zechariah 8:5). Another Biblical writer, wrote the following: “There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there” (Psalm 102:25-26). If positive play is created and appreciated by Creator God, then I, as one of God’s creations, take pleasure in experiencing play, and helping others engage in it.

Published books I have authored, coauthored, or edited:

- Peter Walters and John Byl. *Christian Paths to Health and Wellness*. Third Edition. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2021.
- Guy Le Masurier, Charles Corbin, Kellie Baker, John Byl. *Fitness for Life Canada*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, (2017).
- John Byl and Bettie VanGils Kloet. *Physical Education for Homeschool, Classroom, and Recreation Settings*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, (2014).
- John Byl. *Organizing Successful Tournaments--Fourth Edition*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, (2013).
  - Translated into Spanish: John Byl. *Como Organizar Competiciones Deportivas*. Badalona, Spain: Paidotribo, 2016.
- Peter Walters and John Byl. *Christian Paths to Health and Wellness*. Second Edition. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2013.
- John Byl, Marie Burland, Mary Dyck, Michelle Lass, Kirstin Schwass, Mel Trojanovic. *Everybody Move: Daily Vigorous Physical Activity*. (Includes book, cd, and DVD). Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2010.
- John Byl. *Having a Ball: Stability Ball Games*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2008.
  - Translated into German: John Byl. *Riesen balle–Riesen spaB: Gymnastikball–Spiele* by Verlag an der Ruhr: Mulheim an der Ruhr 2009.
- Peter Walters and John Byl. *Christian Paths to Health and Wellness*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2008.
- John Byl, Andy Raithby, Herwig Bauldaf, and Pat Doyle. *Chicken and Noodle Games*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2007.
- John Byl. *Organizing Successful Tournaments–Third Edition* (Includes software). Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2006.
  - For a review of this book see: Jan Miller. Book Reviews. Joint Forces Journal. (May, 2006): 7-8.
- John Byl. *101 Fun Warm-up and Cool-down Games*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2004.
  - Translated into German: John Byl. *Aug- und Abwarmen ohne Trott*. by TibiaPress: Mulheim an der Ruhr, 2005;

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- John Byl. *Intramural Recreation: Step-by-step Guide to Creating an Effective Program*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2002.
  - For a review of this book see: <http://www.pelinks4u.org/bookreviews/intramuralrecreation.htm>
- John Byl. *Co-ed Recreational Games*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2002.
  - For reviews of this book see: Palaestra, 19(2), 52; and KAHPERD Spring 2003, 6.
- John Byl. *Organizing Successful Tournaments--Second Edition*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1999.
  - Translated into Chinese: John Byl. *Organizing Successful Tournaments*. People's Sports Publishing House, 2000.
  - For reviews on the second edition see: Erin Peterson, *Athletic Business*, May 1999, 16; and *Athletics Administration*, June 1999, 58.
- John Byl and Tom Visker (Eds). *Physical Education, Sport and Wellness: Looking to God as We Look at Ourselves*. Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1999.
- John Byl. *Organizing Successful Tournaments*. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1990.
- John Byl. *Organizing Successful YMCA Tournaments*. Champaign: YMCA of the USA, 1990.
  - For reviews on this book see:
    - *The British Journal of Physical Education*, 23, 2 (Summer 1992);
    - John Foley, *Interscholastic Athletic Administration*, (Summer 1992): 27;
    - *The British Journal of Physical Education*, 21, 2 (Summer 1990);
    - John Elwin, *The ACHPER National Journal*, (June 1990): 34.