

Hitting the Airwaves

This podiatrist uses his own radio show to promote podiatry and his practice.



Dr. Robert Weil
taping his radio
talk show.

“The culture of sports and the art of sports medicine, that’s really what our show is about.”

— Dr. Robert Weil

By Laura Gater

Many podiatrists dream of hosting their own radio talk show, but few have made that dream come true. Robert Weil, DPM, of Aurora, IL, has hosted a half-hour weekly show, called *The Sports Doctor*, (www.sportsdoctorradio.com) for 20 years. Dr. Weil specializes in orthotics and sports medicine, and has practiced podiatry for approximately 40 years. The show is broadcast on public radio station WDCB 90.9 FM, from the College of DuPage (Glen Ellyn, IL). This past year has been a truly exciting one, since he is podiatrist to Olympic gold-medal figure skating champion Evan Lysacek, and was able to share Lysacek’s achievements with listeners, as well as interview him as one who knows him.

Dr. Weil’s affair with radio came about when he agreed to be a co-host on Bob Gajda’s [kinesiotherapist in Palatine, IL] radio show in the late 1970s. The show

dealt with principles in sports medicine, and Dr. Weil was the podiatrist who helped provide answers and explanations to readers’ questions. In the late 1980s, Dr. Weil co-hosted *The Sports Doctors*

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with Jim Vickery, and when Vickery left the show, it became just *The Sports Doctor*. The show is recorded every Monday morning and aired on Thursday night. Chris Fox, sports editor of The Lombardian newspaper (Lombard,

IL) introduces Dr. Weil, and banters with him. *The Sports Doctor* covers all aspects of sports medicine, including treatment and prevention of injuries, current events in sports, and health and fitness topics.

Getting Started

Podiatrists who are interested in breaking into talk radio should speak to local radio stations about getting involved in local sports talk shows or medical talk shows, he says. A university-affiliation radio station might also be willing to help a podiatrist start a show or co-host one already on the air.

Topics related to sports medicine might be most comfortable for podiatrists to begin with, such as the role of the foot in sports; diabetes; or childhood obesity. These are all topics that podiatrists are usually comfortable in speaking about to some extent and can share their knowledge with lis-

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teners and callers, and they are topics of interest to people everywhere. From there, DPM's can branch out to focus on topics that they are most interested in, such as diabetes, or foot surgery, or sports, or general foot health, whatever their specialty.

Since Dr. Weil's show is on a public radio station, he doesn't have to worry about obtaining sponsors, but podiatrists who might need to obtain sponsors for a potential radio show can look to their supply and service vendors for possible interested sponsors, or even to others that they work with, such as a sports clinic or university sports medicine program, he advises. "The exposure from a radio show alone, without making any money, is well, well, well worth it, if it's [talk radio] something you like doing," Dr. Weil emphasizes.

Once you have the support of a local radio station to host your show, and have lined up a few sponsors from vendors and your business network, then it's time to seriously think about guests. By no means is this a quick and easy endeavor—finding a local radio station to partner with and lining up sponsors will take time and will mean talking to many people.

Anyone involved in sports is probably a potential candidate for your talk show, and this includes both young athletes and coaches as well. Dr. Weil draws from his own, ever-expanding network of contacts, not just fellow podiatrists. He has interviewed podiatric surgeons to discuss types of foot surgery performed on athletes, and a diagnostic ultrasound specialist who discussed how diagnostic ultrasound can help in diagnosing a foot injury, to name just a few of his on-air guests. "Draw on your friends, associates, and peers within the orthopedic and physical therapy communities," says Dr. Weil. "Many people are scared to do it, so the host has to be able to put guests at ease because not everyone enjoys being on radio."

A taped show also has the ad-

vantage of no "live" telephone calls. This eliminates prank calls and inappropriate questions. Dr. Weil does, however, receive e-mails related to his radio show and answers them on air. He says, fortunately, none of the e-mails he has received over the years has been "totally off-the wall." One he remembers, though, and answered on air, was more related to the psychological aspect of sports. The question was from a father whose three kids played several sports and had coaches who favored playing their own kids over the other kids on the team, which is a common problem for many parents and young athletes. The dad was looking for recommendations on what to do

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about this problem, and feedback, and Dr. Weil suggested that he talk to the coach about this. "It was much more on the psychological side of sports rather than what we usually talk about—shin splints and Achilles tendon, that sort of stuff."

Talk Show Topics

"I try to pay attention to two or three topics of interest on a show, with a guest. I never concentrate on just one topic for a show," Dr. Weil states. Recent show topics this past spring included interviews with George Hood, who was pursuing a Guinness World Record stationary bicycling (also known as "spin cycling") record; and discussion of Lysacek's broken toes, which occurred while he was a guest on TV's "Dancing with the Stars." Other possible guests are school

coaches and athletic directors, along with parents of great athletes in the listening area. Dr. Weil never limits his show topics to just local news in sports, nor does he focus on the world of national sports. His show is a blend of both, and seems to be successful in attracting and keeping a listening audience.

Orthotics are very important to Dr. Weil, so he includes them in every show—"I feel that almost everyone would benefit from orthotics to prevent injuries or enhance performance." He also blends into every show the importance of the foot, particularly in athletic performance and conditioning, but stresses that his show is not about "how to keep your feet healthy." It's more about all the ways the foot is vital to sports performance, and he manages to blend that focus into the topic of every program he airs.

The time spent recording the show is "absolutely" Dr. Weil's favorite time of the week. His enthusiasm level is high when he's talking about the show, and it's easy to believe that he's always this passionate about sports and podiatry, not to mention orthotics.

"I don't do the show alone. I always have somebody with me to share the talk. The interaction between the hosts can help keep a show from getting stale," says Dr. Weil. "We have an endless array of topics from A to Z in sports to talk about, and if that should ever get stale, I reach out. Podiatry-related sports topics are limitless. I've had orthopedic surgeons and sports psychologists on the show. We talk about diabetes, geriatrics, women's high heels, orthotics, and sports."

His talk show didn't begin with a plan to focus on the foot and foot health, nor was it an attempt to focus strictly on podiatry. Dr. Weil says that he was around people and concepts in sports medicine that excited him enough to include them in a radio show. The show was not specifically planned for podiatrists, nor is it intended to be. Topics over the past year encompassed golf-

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ing, football, figure skating, and running, plus podiatric-specific ones. Golfing topics included Tiger Woods, of course, at the Masters, and discussion of the torque created on his knees during his golf swing.

Topics for parents and athletes alike covered parents dealing with parents/coaches, anti-inflammatory medicines, knee injuries in female athletes, exercising to relieve stress, starting and maintaining a health and fitness program, and toenail problems. Gridiron sports topics included the physicality of football and dealing with shin splints. Running issues dealt with preparing to run a marathon, and common running injuries. Alternative medicine, and drugs in sports were topics that probably appealed to a broader listening audience.

One hallmark of Dr. Weil's show is the diversity of interviews.

There were many interviews of guests, such as a licensed massage therapist, a pediatric occupational therapist, a pediatric sports medicine specialist at the University of Chicago, and Candy Brown Burek (Evan Lysacek's first figure skating coach), and of course, Lysacek, and George Hood, who has set world records in spin cycling. Dr. Weil doesn't anticipate ever running out of topics for *The Sports Doctor*. "No way will we run out of topics, like 'Let get kids walking, 'What's going on locally in sports,' or 'Drugs in sports.' So much stuff is going on. We're not going to run out of foot-related topics."

Tanya Lysacek, mother of Evan, has been on the show many times. Years ago, Dr. Weil interviewed her about the physical challenges the young figure skater faced, and later, about what it was like going through the labyrinth of developing a world athlete. She was also on the show after the 2006 Olympics, to discuss Evan's challenges and achievements there. Dr. Weil believes that she has a lot to share with parents of developing young athletes, and her experience as well as her son's can inspire many to continue their quest for excellence in their sport.

"I talk about here all the time to lots of parents, and I quote her a lot," says Dr. Weil about the mother of an Olympic champion.

Hood is also one of Dr. Weil's favorite guests. Hood is a former Marine and, in Dr. Weil's words, an "extreme athlete." He was a guest on *The Sports Doctor* before his latest record-breaking attempt, as well as during his ride, and Dr. Weil says it was "a fascinating discussion" of all things related to spin cycling and sports medicine.

Jim McMahon, former Chicago Bears quarterback, was also a prominent guest 15 years ago, well-remembered by Dr. Weil. Another well-remembered guest, or guests, was a group of consultants from North Carolina who worked with race car drivers in all aspects of training, from hand-eye coordination to nutritional coun-

whether or not race car drivers are athletes. Their focus was on fine-tuning the athlete/race-car driver. Yes, Dr. Weil believes that race car drivers are athletes. Their bodies need to be in top shape to endure being strapped into a car going 200 m.p.h., often for hours at a time.

"This was definitely a little bit off the normal scheme of things on my show, but we mixed in podiatry and the sports medicine aspect of race car driving, and touched on the role of the foot in driving a race car, as well," he says.

Podiatrists interested in breaking into the world of talk radio are invited to visit Dr. Weil's website, www.sportsdoctorradio.com, and listen to a few of the shows there. They are listed by date and topic, so it is easy to find one that fits your interests. ■

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Podiatry-related sports topics are limitless.



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