

Celebrating three years of The Sports Doctor

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By DR. ROBERT WEIL Columnist

Believe it or not, it's three years this May that I've done the monthly Sports Doctor articles. A good time had by all! Thought I would list some of the headlines from the past articles and add some current thoughts.

May '07 -- The Sports Doctor is in The Sun. I'm still here and my office Free Foot Screenings continue. If you've got a question or problem, let's hear from you.

July '07 -- Playing with pain hurts in the long run. This still is a problem, whether you're a recreational athlete or a serious pro. It continues to filter down to our youngsters, and that's of real concern. Pay attention to "intelligent rest" and even more attention with persistent and on going overuse injuries.

April '08 -- How much activity is too much? That is the question -- Year round schedules, especially with young elite athletes are a real challenge. The tendency to specialize at young ages increases chances for those persistent overuse injuries. Enough recovery time is essential. The boomers need to listen to their bodies -- Being fit and active doesn't mean persistent soreness and discomfort. Back off if you're hurting and find out why!

February '08 -- Build support around high-performance youngsters. These elite young athletes are really something special. I tell parents all the time, "All that changes is the uniform." Whether they're figure skaters, (Hey Evan!), volleyball players, tennis, gymnastics, dancers, runners, football, basketball, baseball, etc., being an every day athlete is tough. Physical and mental demands are high. Making decisions about specializing or multiple sports can be argued both ways. Pay attention to ongoing lower extremity problems -- they're often foot type related.

June '07 -- Orthotics could be the right fit for you. The importance of foot type, mostly inherited, cannot be overemphasized. Flat type, pronated feet are often the cause of aggravated foot, shin, knee and back problems. Prescription orthotics are used to redistribute weight, control abnormal motion, and properly align the lower extremities. A common misconception is that orthotics are arch supports, they do much more than that. Pay attention when your young athletes, or you have on going foot or leg problems. Orthotics can improve speed, balance and stability.

Nov. '08 -- Master your balance to become a much more complete athlete. Can you think of a sport that doesn't require balance and stability! Neither can I. Working balance, called proprioception, using unstable surfaces is great training. Using mini trampolines, wobble boards, bosu balls are some of the ways to do this. I call it "instability training". What's great about this is that almost all ages, at all levels, can benefit from balance work, from Olympians (Hey Evan!) to grandmothers. A good trainer or therapist can show you how.

Jan. '08 -- The link of drugs and sports runs deep. This difficult problem is still upfront and center. I still feel that my description of "performance surviving" drugs is still at the top level of sports where a lot of this started. Pro and Olympic level athletes have impossible demands and schedules. Playing hurt is often the rule. Pain killers, anti-inflammatories, muscle relaxants, cortisone injections all are routine just to exist. We see young elite athletes depending on over the counter medicines to put up with the physical demand. Parents -- pay attention! If your kids need pain medicines to continue to participate, you're over the line. Find out the cause and initiate "intelligent rest".

Jan. '09 -- In sports, it all starts with the feet. Our feet are mechanical marvels. Foot mechanics involve our feet acting as shock absorbers and ground shape positioners called pronation to rigid level propulsive positions called supination. If the foot is in the wrong position at the wrong time, muscles and tendons and joints can be abused, stability and balance can be compromised, and speed and quickness are affected. Orthotics can really help to properly position the feet and control abnormal motion causing problems. Having the right shoe for your foot type is important, especially if you are a runner. Make sure you're fit properly.

Jan. '10 -- Girls knee problems often foot related. Besides acute traumatic knee injuries, persistent discomfort, tendonitis, soreness often are foot mechanics related. Girls, women have more flexibility and wider hips. Pronated feet increase twist and torque forces to the knees. Serious ACL knee traumatic injuries continue to be five times more common in females.

March '10 -- Celebrating Evan's Golden moment -- Wow, what a few months it's been since Evan Lysacek won the Olympic gold! We're all still cheering and voting for Evan with "Dancing with the Stars." You're watching one of the great physical challenges -- the combination of skating on tour across the country with dancing at this level is the highest level of sports performance. This Naperville hometown kid is something!

Looking forward to the next few years!

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