

THE PHOENIX SUNS MEDICAL TEAM

BY RICHARD EMERSON, D.O., SUNS TEAM PHYSICIAN



In Talk to the Doc, Dr. Richard Emerson, the Suns' team physician answers questions from "weekend warriors" regarding their aches, pains and injuries.

I'm asked many questions by fans throughout the season. However, one of the most common questions I am asked is how I manage to work 100 games a year into our regular practice of Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine? How can one person keep track of the health and well-being of 12 to 15 world-class athletes? Well, one person can't.

THE MISSION

Phoenix Suns trainer Joe Proski is responsible for the awareness of the health of the players on a day-to-day basis. The Prosk has distinguished himself in this field with many years of experience and a very keen sixth sense. The magic hands of Joe Proski have become legendary.

Joe is the first line of communication with players and/or coaches when a player develops an illness or injury. Joe and I then discuss the particular situation. It is not unusual for us to talk on a daily basis regarding any number of players and their response to treatment.

Robin Pound, strength and conditioning coach, coordinates his efforts with myself, physical therapist Alan Halling and Proski and arrives at protocols for the players. Protocols are individualized for each player depending upon his strengths and weaknesses and the goals which need to be obtained. Robin and I will frequently review the protocols and Robin's expertise in supervision of these conditioning techniques helps maintain our players at the optimum level of strength and conditioning.

The job of being team physician is a year-round endeavor which includes not only the regular season and playoff games, but summer leagues and rookie camp, as well.

Of course, the preseason physical evaluation kicks off the NBA year and is

a comprehensive review of all current and new players relative to their physical health and medical history. This examination includes not only musculoskeletal and orthopedic exams, but also includes general medical and cardiovascular tests including treadmill, echocardiograms and other subspecialty evaluations.

These examinations are conducted by approximately 20 of the top specialists in the greater Phoenix area. These physicians also serve as consultants if needed throughout the year in their specific area of expertise.

In addition, at the end of the regular season, postseason physical examinations are performed which focus on offseason goals to implement correction of various injuries and illnesses which may include surgery, conditioning training or rehabilitation protocols.

Over the last 10 years since my involvement with the club, 36 surgeries on Suns players have been performed. Five of these were referred to consultants, the rest were conducted by me. All of these players returned to professional basketball, either with the Suns or with another team, following surgery.

Over the last 12 months, the activity of the medical team related to the Suns resulted in 105 office visits, 55 x-ray studies, six MRI evaluations and six surgeries. This does not include players which are evaluated at the Arena medical office either before, during or after games. This office, which is just a few steps away from the basketball floor, has full x-ray and minor surgery capabilities.

NBA policy dictates that the team physician or his representative be present at all home games. Away games are the responsibility of the host team's physician to ensure that the emergency medical and routine medical services are provided and available to the visiting team. However, it is not unusual for me to travel during the regular season for selected road trips, especially if a player does require special observation or treatment which would not be obtainable in the visiting city.

The NBA policy also states that team physicians accompany their tam in the Playoffs when they are on the road. This

policy was instituted to avoid any controversial decisions by the home team physician as it relates to the availability of a player on the visiting team.

THE SPORTS MEDICINE TEAM

Being the team physician for the Suns is an enormous responsibility and challenge. However, to enjoy the success we have had requires other individuals than myself working together in dedicated cooperation. I am very proud of the physicians who work with us to provide optimal care for our professional athletes.

Although I am an orthopedic surgeon, my specialty is that of orthopedic sports medicine — as with the majority of team physicians in the NBA and other professional leagues. Each team, as with the Suns, also has either an internal medicine specialist or a primary care sports medicine specialist on staff. I am very fortunate to have as an assistant Dr. Craig Phelps, who is a charter member of this medical specialty — primary care sports medicine. Dr. Phelps has distinguished himself in this specialty and is a nationally recognized authority in the field.

Dr. Phelps not only provides valuable assistance in the primary care for players and their families, but also oversees, along with cardiology consultant Dr. William Rappaport, the complexities of cardiovascular problems which are unique to the high performance athlete. This has obvious implications as it relates to the drafting of players with potential problems and, obviously, the prevention of catastrophic sudden death incidents.

Other problems unique to the NBA relate to the feet and ankles. The high intensity and repetitious running and jumping predispose basketball players' feet to a multitude of problems, mostly soft tissue related. The maintenance of these athletes' feet is very capably managed by podiatrist Dr. Mike Kates.

Dr. Kates has been serving in this capacity with the Suns for over 20 years and provides valuable and unique service as it relates to ongoing management of corns, calluses, ingrown toenails and a variety of other soft tissue problems with the feet. He also

dispenses orthotics for shoes which nearly all NBA players are now using.

Another valuable contribution is from Dr. Marilyn Wells, osteopathic manipulation specialist. Through Dr. Wells, players have access to not only her own techniques of manipulative medicine, but her staff also includes a variety of massage specialties. Players also have access to chiropractic treatments by Dr. Roger Baker.

Each year seems to bring new and different challenges. This year we seemed to have a minor epidemic of back pain and related nerve syndromes for which we have consulted with a variety of physicians, including Dr. William White (neurosurgeon), Dr. Dale Schultz (neurologist), and orthopedic back specialists Dr. Terry McLean, Dr. William Smith, and Dr. Robert Watkins.

Other common injuries unique to the NBA are ear, nose and throat injuries for which Dr. Neil Ward is always available.

There is a recent statistic that indicates 50 percent of NBA players who have been in the league at least five years will have sustained an eye injury at some point. Our consultant staff for these injuries include Dr. Warren Heller, Dr. Sanford Moretsky, Dr. Craig Cassidy and Dr. Travis Holcomb (plastic surgeon).

Specialized fracture evaluation and surgery is available to us from Dr. Eric Freeh. Dr. Freeh receives complicated fractures from all over the Southwest. He has performed fracture surgery on several Suns players, including Cedric Ceballos — all with excellent return of function and return to basketball. He also serves as team physician to the Arizona Sandsharks of the Continental Indoor Soccer League.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Although our staff has advanced cardiac life support credentials, we are also grateful to be attended at all our events by the Phoenix Fire Department Paramedics. These highly trained professionals, headed by Rick Garner and Jim Mabry, are prepared to respond to life-threatening catastrophic events and provide emergency transport, if needed, to the hospital.

HealthSouth Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation, directed by Alan Halling, provides specialized and advanced rehabilitation for our complex problems — including those players who have had surgery.

Healthwest Regional Medical Center has made a commitment to sports medicine and currently has a portion of a

hospital wing dedicated to sports medicine under construction. For the past several years, all of our players have had surgery at Healthwest and have found it to be a rewarding experience.

I also wish to thank you, the fans, for your interest and support. We appreciate the comments complimenting our efforts. This year we received over 60 suggestions and recommendations for prevention and treatment. These have ranged from laser surgery to bee pollen. We appreciate the interest and we do review every one of these suggestions.

The bottom line in professional sports is winning. The bottom line for your Phoenix Suns Sports Medicine Team is to ensure that the players on the roster, as much as is humanly possible and medically sound, be available to play. This is most important entering the Playoffs as one of our stated goals is to have our players healthy and ready at the beginning and throughout the Playoffs.

Notwithstanding the acute injuries that do occur, preventative techniques and the progressive trends in sports medicine can help us attain these goals.

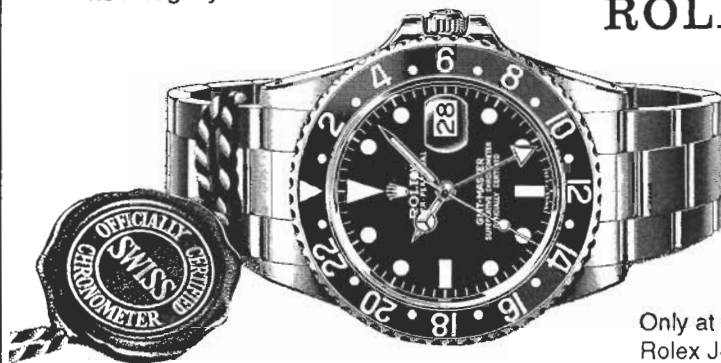


THE ROLEX CASE FOR INTEGRITY

The renowned Rolex® Oyster® case is carved from a solid block of 18kt. gold or stainless steel to form an impregnable vault. It guarantees pressure-proof integrity down to 330 feet for this Rolex GMT-Master® in stainless steel with matching Oyster bracelet. With 24-hour hand for simultaneous time in two zones, the GMT is self-winding; its integrity is self-evident.



ROLEX



Only at your official Rolex Jeweler

Family owned & operated for fifty years

3172 East Camelback
Phoenix, AZ 85016

956-6100

Mon.-Fri. 10:00 to 5:30
Saturday 10:00 to 4:30



MEMBER AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

Naughton

JEWELERS