

INOVA

MAGAZINE

JOIN THE FUTURE OF HEALTH

GAME ON

FALL 2014

Robin West, MD, and Inova Sports Medicine Program get athletes back in play

New Inova Sports Medicine Program to serve athletes of all ages, abilities

PHOTO BY
MIKE MORGAN

For Robin West, MD, peace is found in the locker room.

As former assistant team physician for the Pittsburgh Steelers and former head physician for teams at Carnegie Mellon and University of Pittsburgh, the orthopedic surgeon relished the process of shepherding players from injury to recovery. “I’m there for one reason: to get the athletes examined, treated and healthy in a timely manner,” Dr. West recounted in a recent journal article she authored. “Sports medicine gives me the opportunity to treat the ‘whole’ patient and to care for active people of all ages.”

The amateur endurance racer and cyclist now brings this same overriding philosophy to Inova as she takes the helm of its newly established Sports Medicine Program. As part of a five- to 10-year plan that includes constructing a regional sports medicine facility, the program will focus on the complete care of athletes of all ages, ranging from injury prevention to acute and chronic injury treatment, performance improvement and comprehensive rehabilitation.

With her college- and NFL-level sports experience, Dr. West — who in kindergarten decided she would one day be an orthopedic surgeon — was recruited by Inova to shape the mission and goals of the new program, beginning her post as Medical Director in late July.

“I’ve watched the development of the facility at the University of Pittsburgh over 12 years, so I’ve seen what works and doesn’t work,” says Dr. West, who was one of only two female orthopedic surgeons in the NFL. “Our mission is to provide high-level, integrative care to athletes of all ages and abilities and help them maintain an active lifestyle. This is a great area for it — dynamic, sports-minded families and individuals. Busy people need convenient access to premier healthcare.”

GAME ON

Where the Action Is

Robin West, MD, who was an assistant team physician for the Pittsburgh Steelers, is charged with shaping the mission and goals of Inova Sports Medicine Program.



Photo: courtesy of the Pittsburgh Steelers

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

Before the rise of the Sports Medicine Program, Inova's efforts in the field centered on its group orthopedic practices peppered around northern Virginia and the Washington, DC, metro area. Board-certified and fellowship-trained physicians specializing in orthopedics, joint replacement and sports medicine deal with a wide array of common acute and chronic athletic injuries — ranging from anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears of the knee to shoulder dislocations and rotator cuff tears to Achilles tendon ruptures — with a variety of inpatient and outpatient treatments and physical therapy offerings.

So what's different now? "We realize all of the resources Inova has to deal with athletes and sports-related injuries, and we're tying them all together into one approach instead of a fragmented system," says Matthew Levine, MD, an orthopedic surgeon with Inova Medical Group for the last five years.

"Instead of patients having to piece together all the services they're looking for, this allows us programmatically to offer one-stop shopping," adds Dr. Levine, who previously served as assistant team physician at Duke University and on the medical staff for the World

Figure Skating Championships in 2003. "Dr. West brings us to that next level based on her experience as a national leader in sports medicine."

Key to the transition of becoming a regional sports medicine hub are partnerships with area high schools and youth leagues as well as possible alliances with college and professional teams. Dr. Levine's role in the Sports Medicine Program thus far has been forging relationships with representatives from these groups.

Dr. West notes that a lot of local high schools have long-standing affiliations with great private practice physicians. She wants to maintain and enhance these relationships. Under the new program, physicians will have better access to the first-class, integrative services of Inova's Sports Medicine Program.

MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES 'UNDER ONE ROOF'

Current plans allot three to five years to develop the Sports Medicine Program while assessing potential sites for a large facility based either in Fairfax or Loudoun county that will — in addition to featuring Inova's current surgical and non-surgical treatments for athletic injuries — add staff members in complementary areas such as nutrition, exercise physiology and sports psychology, and integrate current physical therapy services.



HEAD SHOT

Find out more about Inova Medical Group Orthopedics and Sports Medicine at inova.org/inova-medical-group/adult/orthopedics-sports-medicine.



Inova's long-standing academic affiliations with Georgetown University and Virginia Commonwealth University may provide regular lecture opportunities to medical school students on sports medicine topics such as ACL tear prevention and supplements for endurance athletes. An Inova-sponsored fellowship in orthopedic surgery and primary care sports medicine caps off the program's academic goals, Dr. West says.

"It will be nice to have all that under one roof," she says, noting that the program may also encompass satellite locations for physical therapy. She also envisions a walk-in injury clinic that will facilitate faster care for athletes who might otherwise wait days or weeks to be examined. And recognizing that a young athlete's injury doesn't just affect the player but their parents and siblings

as well, the mother of two notes that the program will also aim to support the entire family unit. Many of her patients comment that Dr. West makes them feel like a professional athlete.

"This is going to be a destination sports medicine program," Dr. West says. "Patients are going to get top-notch care that's comprehensive. We're not just going to treat a stress fracture, for example; we're going to find the reason you have it and determine how to prevent it in the future. We're going to look at the whole problem and the whole person. No matter what age, sport or ability, every patient will be treated like a professional athlete." ■

COACHING APP

Inova's Coach Safely App offers Emergency Department wait times, a concussion guide detailing symptoms to look for, weather updates and more. Find it on your mobile Android or Apple device. Learn more at inova.org/connect.

CONCUSSION CARE

With the prevalence of concussions so closely tied to athletic competition — nearly a half-million sports-related head injuries are treated at U.S. hospitals each year — Inova's new Sports Medicine Program will be tackling some of the biggest remaining questions surrounding these blows to the head and how to maximize players' recovery.

Sports Medicine Medical Director Robin West, MD, plans to collaborate with other Inova initiatives such as the recently created Concussion Program and Inova Translational Medicine Institute (ITMI), which explores the connection

between genomics and health. Research from both programs will enhance concussion treatment offered to athletes, she says.

"Concussion care is a huge part of sports medicine, because athletes often get a concussion at the same time as an ACL tear or another injury," Dr. West says. "Most kids get better quickly and don't have lingering issues, but between 10 percent and 15 percent have persistent symptoms. We can help them achieve a full recovery."

Matthew Levine, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at Inova with special interests that

include sports medicine, says that young athletes in particular still need greater awareness of the damage a concussion can cause to their developing brains.

"For the most part — though not completely — the days of 'you just got your bell rung' are gone," Dr. Levine says. "Everyone understands it's more than that. The biggest questions still revolve around what's the best way to measure recovery and the best way to measure a deficit following a concussion, because everyone's a little different."

Why It Harms

When a person suffers a concussion or other brain injury, axons in the brain are damaged. Axons are specialized extensions of neurons, the cells in the brain that communicate with distant nerve cells. Severe sudden twisting or torquing of the brain can stretch, twist and damage these delicate axonal fibers, leading to permanent brain injury.

