



Meet Your Doctor

By Mike Costanza, In Good Health, Rochester's Healthcare Newspaper. Visit us at GVhealthnews.com

Dr. Dave Privitera

Sports medicine doctor: Don't push athletes experiencing pain

Q. What drew you to specialize in the surgical and non-surgical treatment of sports injuries?

A. I had a personal experience, and an interest in science. I tore my ACL [anterior cruciate ligament] and meniscus in high school, and had them respectively reconstructed and repaired. As I explored my interest in science, I kind of looked at the clinical and basic science opportunities, and had experiences in both. I really enjoyed the application of science to the human body. Having a personal interest and understanding its impact, that's kind of what culminated my interest. It was also the types of injuries, and the types of patients that I could help.

Q. What was it about those patients that drew you to sports medicine?

A. Sports medicine is a general field that takes care of people that are looking to maintain their activity level. Often, they're very motivated and have very high expectations, and I enjoy helping people get back to their activities.

Q. Is that why you enjoy working with the Rochester Institute of Technology's sports teams?

A. Absolutely—I love it. I certainly have a connection looking back to when I was a college student and trying to be active, and I enjoy the spirit and the motivation of these athletes. They're generally just fun to be around and I enjoy watching the games and supporting them.

Q. Have you ever worked with pro athletes?

A. Yes. Throughout my residency and my fellowship, I was fortunate to have some opportunities through my attending to have some experiences with the New England Revolution, which is a major league soccer team in Boston. I was involved with diagnosing their injuries, and coming up with their return-to-play. In residency, I had an experience with the Buffalo Sabers, [a professional hockey team in Buffalo] where I was involved in pre-season participation screening physicals.

Q. You are also a member of Rochester General Sports

Medicine Institute, an outgrowth of the alliance between Rochester General Hospital and RIT. What is the institute?

A. The Sports Medicine Institute is really an association of people and resources to provide better care to athletes or people who are afflicted with sports injuries. It's kind of in its infancy right now, but it potentially will incorporate emergency department physicians, physical assistants, and other orthopedic surgeons and orthopedic primary care sports doctors. One location is my Culver Road office.

Q. What kinds of patients do you see in the office?

A. I work with a mix of patients, from adolescents involved in sports to people that are older and have shoulder arthritis. In the shoulder, common problems are rotator cuff problems, shoulder instability, and arthritis. That is where it gets into the shoulder reconstruction element of my training.

Q. What other types of injuries or conditions do you see in your practice?

A. I also take care of the hip and the knee and occasionally the ankle, as it relates to sports medicine.

Within each joint, there is a common list of conditions that often affect people that I see in the office. The types of things that affect your foot and ankle in an athlete would be things like a stress fracture, ankle sprains, and different kinds of injuries. In the knee, I would say cartilage problems, arthritis, ligament injuries such as ACL tears—those are common. I would say the most common are subtle sprains or maltracking of the kneecap [a condition in which the movement of the kneecap goes off-track when the leg is moved]. In the hip what I see commonly is labral tears. Essentially, the bumper cartilage gets torn.

Q. More and more kids are playing organized sports more intensely and at younger ages than before. What kinds of physical problems are you encountering among the children and adolescents you treat?

A. I would say the most common types of problems that happen in kids often involve either a growth plate, or overuse. You can get growth plate injuries. Injury to the growth plate has an increased risk of early growth plate closure. [the "growth plate" is the part of a long bone at which bone growth occurs. Premature closing of the growth plate impedes bone growth].

Q. Are there guidelines parents can follow to prevent their children from suffering such problems?

A. It's hard to set true guidelines—it depends on the young athlete, their age what sport they're playing. It is important to stretch before and after practices. Sometimes kids tend to get tight in their hamstrings, their calf muscles and tendons. That can kind of put them at a little more risk for getting injuries.

My general recommendations would be to parents to know their kids, and not push them through sports pain. Understand the difference between muscle aches and alarming pain. Muscle aches are OK to kind of deal with—most people have been dealing with them. Pain while walking, causing a limp, can be a sign of something more alarming going on. Aches from kind of using your muscles generally aren't associated with significant swelling, but injuries that are substantial are.

The other thing would be mechanical symptoms, like new catching or locking sensations that they didn't experience before [while moving]. If the child's complaining of a catching sensation that's new, that's a warning sign.

If you want them to stay active throughout the year, it's also important to change the activities, and cross-train.

Lifelines:

Current Positions: Western New York Medical Practice, specializing in sports surgery and shoulder reconstruction; member of Rochester General Sports Medicine Institute.

Education: Residency in orthopedic surgery, State University of New York at Buffalo; fellowship in sports medicine and orthopedic surgery, Brigham and Women's Hospital at Harvard Medical School, Boston; MD, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Personal: Born in Rochester, grew up in Pittsford, lives in West Henrietta. Married, enjoys spending time with his wife, skiing, and playing beach volleyball, soccer, and football.

