

BODIES IN MOTION



NEW YORK METHODIST HOSPITAL'S DIRECTOR OF SPORTS MEDICINE, ON ADVANCES IN ORTHOPEDIC CARE AND REPAIR—AND WHY YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN ATHLETE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM

BY MEGAN SCHADE • PHOTOS BY AMESSÉ PHOTOGRAPHY

"I did everything I could to not go into orthopedic surgery," laughed Matthew Wert, M.D., director of sports medicine at New York Methodist Hospital. "Yet here I am in the Guinness Book of World Records for performing surgery on the oldest person to have a hip fracture repair. My father is an orthopedic surgeon, and I grew up working in his offices; I wanted to grow in my own direction. But the more I studied medicine, the more I kept being drawn to the beauty of the musculoskeletal system. How the body moves, how form impacts function—it is beautiful to me."

Dr. Wert's studies took him from medical school at the State University of New York/Upstate Medical University, to a residency at New York-Presbyterian/Lower Manhattan Hospital, to a fellowship at the prestigious Mississippi Sports Medicine and Orthopedic Center. "During my fellowship, I became fascinated by sports medicine, not only because of my personal interest in baseball, but because some of the most innovative and minimally invasive procedures were coming out of that field," he recalled. "I chose to complete an additional fellowship in sports medicine, which focuses on the types of injuries encountered on the playing field. I treat the full range of athletic injuries—from the kid who's had a bad fall on her bike, to the weekend warrior with a torn meniscus, to the professional or college athlete with a torn rotator cuff."

Not all sports injuries require surgery, but as a trained orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Wert is prepared for the ones that do. "More and more sports injuries that require surgery, especially those that deal with the joints, can be treated using a minimally invasive procedure called arthroscopy," said Dr. Wert.

Arthroscopic surgery entails inserting a narrow tube with a fiber-optic video camera and additional tubes with small surgical instruments through tiny incisions surrounding the joint. Using images provided by the camera, which are projected onto a screen, Dr. Wert can operate on the injury without opening up the entire region.

"Minimally invasive surgery allows an athlete to get back on the pitch much more quickly than if he or she had to undergo traditional open surgery," he explained. "And minimally invasive surgery can often be performed on an outpatient basis, allowing the patient to return home and begin healing the same day."

While Dr. Wert is gifted in getting all manner of benched athletes back in action, his true clinical passion lies in cartilage restoration.

"It wasn't that long ago that even the most talented surgeon in the world couldn't do much to help a person with cartilage damage," he said. "But over the last few years, advanced cartilage repair and replacement techniques have evolved and can give patients a new lease on life."

Dr. Wert is one of the few surgeons in the tri-state area to perform the osteochondral autograft or allograft transplantation (OATS) procedures for articular cartilage damage. "Cartilage allows the bones to glide over each other with very little friction. When the cartilage is damaged, the joint surface may no longer be smooth and movement may be painful," Dr. Wert said. "The OATS procedure replaces the damaged cartilage, thereby relieving pain and restoring function—plus, studies have shown that through these procedures, over 90 percent of patients are able to return to their sports."

"One of Dr. Wert's strongest assets is his extensive training in the newest procedures for sports injuries," said Henry Tischler, M.D., chief of orthopedic surgery at NYM. "He truly broadens the spectrum of surgical options for our patients who want to get back on their feet."

"This is an exciting time to be in the field of sports medicine, especially here at New York Methodist Hospital," said Dr. Wert. "I had planned to go into private practice, but Dr. Tischler invited me to join his division. When I saw that the Hospital had the most advanced equipment and facilities, a comprehensive rehabilitation medicine program, and then when I felt the interdepartmental support, I knew NYM is where I wanted to be."

"Getting patients back to 100 percent truly is a group effort, and the main goal of the entire staff of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery. For instance, if Dr. Tischler has a patient who might benefit from an OATS procedure, he will call me in. If I have a patient who may benefit from the expertise of our rehabilitation medicine staff, headed by Mona Elkomos-Botro, M.D., I know I can rely on her. If I need complicated radiography, I work with Steven Garner, M.D., and his team always gets me exactly what I need. The access to other specialists is a tremendous benefit to me, and ultimately, to my patients."



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