



From trouble walking to triathlons

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By Mallery Nagle



PHOTOS PROVIDED Jesse Martin not only participates in triathlons, but wins them. At one time in his life it wasn't sure he could walk properly.

Jesse Martin won three triathlons in 2017. That's impressive.

What's even more impressive is that only a year earlier, Martin, now 32, was almost unable to walk because of what he called "excruciating" pain in his left hip and leg.

Martin, the urban forestry project specialist for the city of Edmond, found relief at The Hip Clinic just on the outskirts of town at 9800 Broadway Extension.

In 2016, Martin admitted he was ignoring his body. "I had some pain," he said. "But I had a big race coming up, and I thought I could wait until after the race." The "big race" was a national qualifying event that might have punched his ticket to compete in the world championship in a race put on by the International Triathlon Union. This is a grueling competition that challenges contestants to swim 2.4 miles, to bike 112 miles and to run a marathon, 26.2 miles. ITU, Martin explained, works in conjunction with the Redman Triathlon that is held at Lake Hefner every September.

Instead of competing in a world championship triathlon two years ago, Martin ended up in surgery to repair his labrum, the cartilage that is a seal, similar to the rubber gasket in a Mason jar, in the ball and socket of the hip joint. Martin also learned that he had a crack in the ball of his femur that was repaired during the same surgery.

These victories were possible with the help of Brandon Johnson, M.D., who is able to repair or to reconstruct the labrum using a 3D imaging surgical technique, in many cases. Damage to this cartilage can cause groin pain and keep active people sidelined from activities they enjoy, Johnson explained.

Johnson, who is from Yukon and a University of Oklahoma Medical School graduate, is only one of two physicians who is fellowship trained in hip arthroscopy in Oklahoma. This fellowship was completed at Santa Monica Orthopedic Group (SMOG) in Los Angeles. There he was one of the team physicians for The LA Galaxy, Chivas USA, the U.S. Men's and Women's Olympic soccer teams and for Pepperdine University.

Arthroscopy is a minimally-invasive procedure performed by making small incisions, in this case in the groin area. A small telescope or "arthroscope" is introduced into the joint, and with the use of x-ray guidance and surgical instruments, the surgeon can make the required repairs.

Johnson is the first and only physician in the state to conduct total labral reconstruction. He is also the only physician in the region performing total labral reconstruction, although he called injury to this structure "common," with a labral tear being the most common injury to the hip.

"The majority of my patients are females, about three-fourths," he said. "They have nagging groin pain that can be caused by child birth, and they've had no proper diagnosis." And although his typical patient in his or her 30s or 40s, Johnson said he has performed this procedure on a patient as young as 13 and on patients in their 60s.

As long as there is not extensive arthritis in the hip, it is possible for the hip to be preserved through repair or reconstruction. Other symptoms of labral damage can be hip pain when sitting for long periods or having trouble getting up from a seat. Athletes, Johnson added, are not the only people who are susceptible to labral damage.

The surgery can be beneficial for those with bony impingements or incongruent bony structures in the joint, people with loose bone fragments in the joint, patients with damaged hip ligaments and even those with unexplained hip pain.

Martin mainly attributes the injuries to his hip and leg to the fact that one leg is slightly longer than the other.

The repair procedure is a 60-90 minute surgery requiring what Johnson called "two poke holes." This procedure accounts for about 95 percent of his surgeries and is done on an out-patient basis.

Other patients require total labral reconstruction when the labrum is beyond repair. Using tissue donated from cadavers, Johnson is able to fashion a new labrum for the patient. This surgery requires four "poke holes" and takes about three hours. This surgery is also done out patient. The typical patient is back to normal activity in about six weeks.

Martin, who had his surgery in February or March of 2016, was back to a full training schedule by July of that year with no pain. A typical day for Martin includes rising at 4 a.m. to swim. In the evening, he will bike or run, depending on the day. A "short" run is five to six miles, while a long training run can be as much as 10-12 miles.

Johnson said his goal is to help patients avoid hip replacement. "Hip replacements have a shelf-life of 15 to 20 years," he said. After that, many artificial joints require another surgery to be repaired or replaced. "You want to avoid that," he noted.

In addition, activities such as long-distance running, snow skiing and water skiing are discouraged for people with hip replacements. No such restrictions are placed on labral repair or reconstruction patients. "A lot of patients see success as getting back to running, which is great," he said. In fact, Johnson participated on a marathon relay team with female patients. The team, The Hipsters, completed the race in four hours and 10 minutes.

Martin said last year's triathlon victories were on shorter courses than the Ironman, he is currently training for the Boulder Ironman event in Boulder, Co. in June. He hopes to top his personal Ironman best time of 10 hours and 58 minutes. "It's the difference between night and day," said Martin of his hip surgery. His advice to anyone suffering with hip pain is, "Don't wait. You'll only cause yourself more trouble," he said.

Johnson said he performs 300-400 labral repairs and 30 total reconstructions per year. People come from as far away as Texas and Arkansas for the procedure. He noted that most of those who travel to Oklahoma City for the surgery do so because they have had previous repair attempts fail.

"I had job options in Southern California, but Oklahoma is an underserved market," he said of his decision to move back home. Since he has been back in Oklahoma, he estimates he has completed 800 procedures. "I'll eclipse 1,000 this year," he said.

His website, thehipclinicokc.com, is a resource for people who are having hip issues. There people will find exercises, information about surgical procedures and other materials.

Another surgery success story

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By Steve Gust



Athlete Walker Brown

Another athlete to benefit greatly from Dr. Johnson is Walker Brown, a senior from Edmond North -- a standout in both football and wrestling.

In the past two and a half years, he has had surgery on his left hip as well as on his left and right shoulders. He also mended his right ankle, left knee and left elbow without surgery.

"Dr Johnson was a blessing from God," he said. "He gave me my life back!"

He's a big believer in what Dr. Johnson does.

"I'm back and 100 percent pain free," he said.

After graduation, Walker plans to attend Oklahoma University and get a degree in aerospace engineering.

"Sports have always been a very important part of my life," he noted. "When I was about to give up, Dr. Johnson breathed life back into me. I'm eternally grateful."