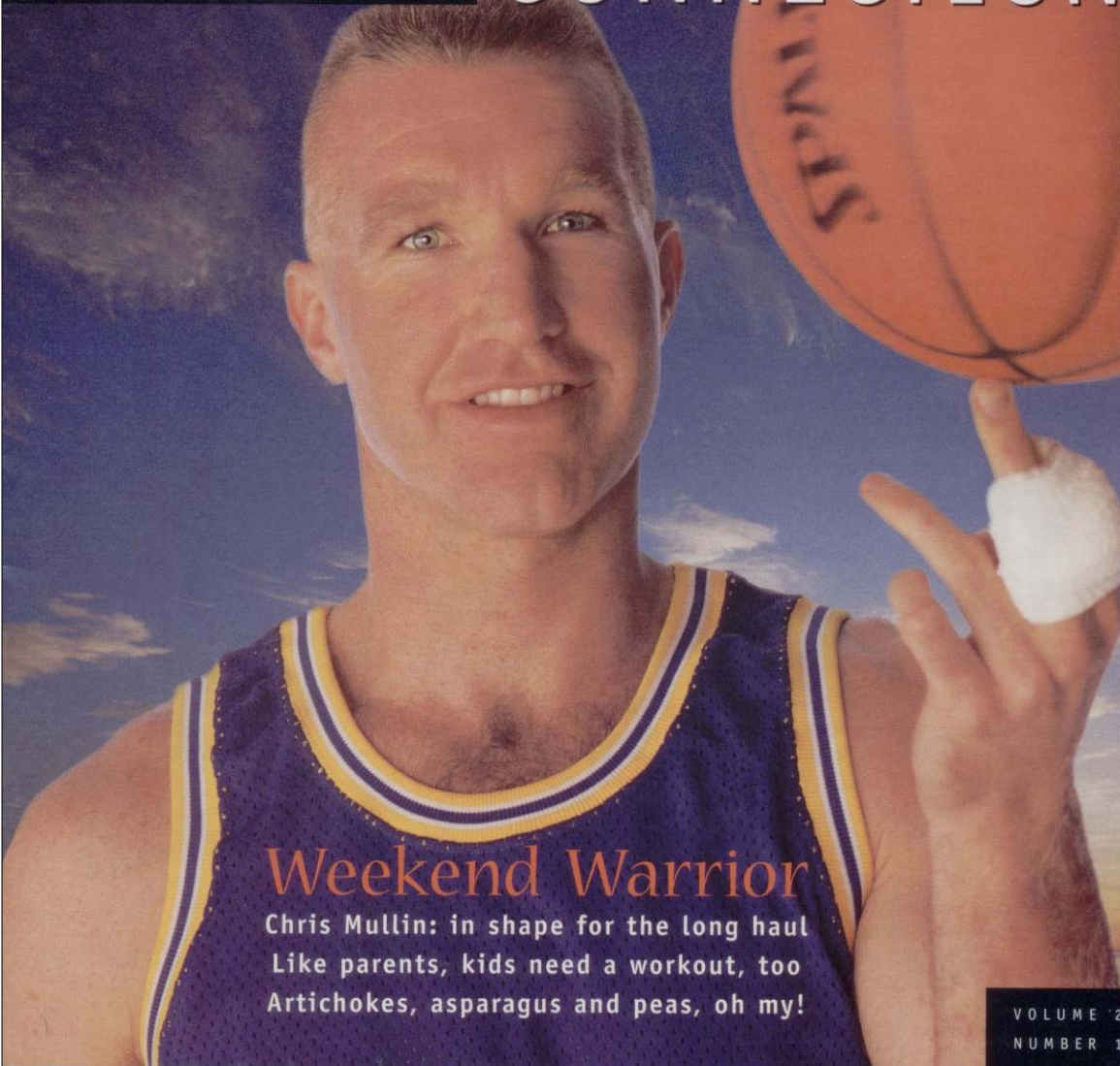


Alta Bates
SUTTER HEALTH

BRINGING WELLNESS TO THE EAST BAY
CONNECTION



Weekend Warrior

Chris Mullin: in shape for the long haul
Like parents, kids need a workout, too
Artichokes, asparagus and peas, oh my!

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Weekend Warrior

IT TAKES MORE THAN TALENT TO KEEP AN ATHLETE OF ANY AGE IN TOP SHAPE.

By Linda Gebroe

When most people travel, they look for a great place to eat, stay or take in a show. When Chris Mullin travels, he looks for a great place to work out.

As co-captain of the Golden State Warriors, Mullin needs to be in top shape to do more than endure the rigors of an 82-game NBA season; he has to perform at peak level.

Weekend warriors, those men and women who *want* to perform at peak level in sports, may not have the access to top gyms, trainers and equipment that Mullin does. Nor do they have the time that professional athletes do to devote themselves to conditioning. Still, it's possible for them to be in great shape, enjoy sports and avoid injuries.

"The main thing is to take care of yourself on a daily basis. Dedicate yourself to it. Treat your conditioning like it's your work," advises Mullin. "Try to do something consistently during the week. Don't lay around for five days and then on Saturday, get up and push yourself beyond your limit."

Even the best athletes with the most comprehensive training programs get injured from time to time. Mullin is no exception. And just like weekend warriors, Mullin has had to come back

from those injuries by undergoing rehabilitation. While the process can be physically painful, he finds dealing with injuries on an emotional and mental level to be far more challenging.

"Emotionally, being injured is tough because you're not part of the game. It's a very lonely feeling to me. It's like I'm on the outside looking in," Mullin says. "I make sure I have family and friends around me to help me deal with that. They remind me that I'm going to heal up and I'm going to be back."

Dr. Warren Strudwick, orthopedic surgeon at Alta Bates Hospital and team physician for the Oakland Raiders, concurs.

"The mental aspect of rehab is the most challenging," he says. "Motivation is key to getting an athlete back on his or her feet. A motivated individual will rehab faster than one who isn't. But what will

happen when athletes get injured is that they if they become inactive, they can get depressed. Then their motivation drops.”

Fortunately, rehabilitation usually incorporates some form of activity that keeps the athlete mentally focused as well as in good physical shape. Strudwick and other physicians at Alta Bates usually develop programs for patients that start by exercising parts of the body that weren’t injured.

“Say a biker hurts her back. We can develop a cross-training program for her that may involve

swimming or stair-master work,” says Strudwick. “The program helps her cardiovascular system, it strengthens her muscles and it keeps her active.”

The other thing to be mindful of is that the rehabilitation process can often trigger soreness. Generally, says Strudwick, that level of pain is to be expected.

“Patients are working out muscles they’ve never worked before,” he explains. “They might think they’re worse off than they were before the injury. But they’re just using parts of their bodies that aren’t used to it. There’s going to be some discomfort with that.”

Fortunately, techniques and technology are continually improving, which is helping the entire field of sports rehabilitation. Strudwick offers an example of an athlete who tore his anterior cruciate ligament, which is critical to the functioning of the knee.

“Years ago, we would reconstruct the

ligament and put the athlete in a cast for six weeks. After removing the cast, we’d begin rehab,” he explains. “By that time, it would be difficult to rehabilitate, and it would take nine months to a year to get him to his pre-injury condition. Now we’ve made tremendous gains with arthroscopy (which uses a small endoscope to examine the interior of a joint). It’s much less invasive, and rehab can take as little as three or four

months. Of course, there are still some injuries where you need to immobilize the area. But in general, functional rehab is the key to

early recovery.”

He adds that whether the athlete is a professional or not, his goal is to rehabilitate patients as quickly as possible, without putting them at increased risk for further injury. But, says Strudwick, the patient has to play an active role in his or her rehab.

“I could be the greatest surgeon in the world and do the most perfect reconstruction on your knee. If you’re not committed to your own rehab, you’re much more likely to have a poor result,” he says.

And what should the patient look for in a sports rehabilitation facility?

“I’d try to find a place that takes a comprehensive view in rehabilitating an athlete, a place that does a lot of hands-on therapy,” answers Strudwick. “You don’t want a facility that’s so tied into one type of treatment that it’s being forced on everyone. The physicians and physical therapists need to be open-minded. And then you want features like geographic access, and the

“To maintain a healthy lifestyle, it must be just that, a lifestyle. We have to be aware of our health seven days a week, twelve months a year. Sure, occasionally everyone needs a break.” — CHRIS MULLIN

hours that the facility is open to serve you.”

Mullin adds that the relationship between healer and athlete is also critical.

“You need someone who knows what your feelings and goals are,” he says, “someone who you have a good feeling about.”

Of course if the warriors, be they weekend or Golden State, can prevent injuries from happening in the first place, so much the better. Strudwick explains that the primary thing athletes can do to stay healthy is muscular and cardiovascular conditioning.

“Adequate warming up and stretching before and sometimes after an activity are key. So, too, is proper use of equipment,” says Strudwick. “The other aspect, which is often underrated, is a good knowledge of the sport you’re playing and the level of competition you’re playing at.

“There’s a lingering feeling of invincibility among weekend warriors – and I’m one of them. We’re not in the same condition, but we attempt the same feats we did when we were younger. Pay attention. Ask yourself, ‘Am I going to go

out and hurt myself?’”

“Listen to your body,” Mullin emphasizes. “It will tell you whether you’re ready and able, or not.”

Ultimately, physical conditioning and rehab is a matter of helping people achieve their highest level of performance.

“What is that level?” asks Strudwick. “What can we do, how can we treat patients? What kinds of messages are they getting from everyone around them, their trainers, physicians, sports psychologists, their families? Like everything, sports brings together the mind, the body and the spirit. It’s almost a cliché, but it is one because it’s so enduring.

“Every time I watch someone participate in a sport, I’m waiting for something miraculous to happen,” he continues. “Sometimes it does. We rehabilitate people and send them back out. We’re part of someone’s ultimate achievement. It’s a great feeling.”