



Helps Wheelchair Racer Get

Back on Track

Dennis McDonnell, 36, has been a wheelchair athlete for 18 years. But the stress of competitive racing had taken its toll on his shoulders, making surgery necessary. The most recent was a complete left rotator cuff reconstruction. After inpatient rehabilitation, McDonnell headed to Atlas Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine to regain his muscle strength and ability to do everyday activities.

"Dennis had sustained a severe rotator cuff injury, which is an even bigger problem for him given he is wheelchair-bound and an athlete who puts very high loads and stress across both shoulders," says McDonnell's orthopedic surgeon Rahul Vinod Deshmukh, M.D. "In an anatomic sense, he had torn multiple tendons of his rotator cuff muscle complex in his shoulder. But looking at the whole person, this was a very severe injury. It led to a dramatic change in his quality of life and ability to perform even the most basic activities of daily living, transfers in and out of the wheelchair, and daily functions."

"Usually, arthroscopic rotator cuff repair is an outpatient surgery with the patient returning to a desk job within a few days to a week," Deshmukh explains. "For Dennis, given that his arms function as his legs, he required much more significant assistance even for the most basic functions."

"I've known [Atlas owner] Ron Berger at Atlas for a long time, and everyone there knows me and my situation," says McDonnell. "For me, this type of surgery was like having a knee replacement, because of the loss of mobility. So I went to Atlas for help with range of motion, strengthening and to start the process of building the shoulder back up. They have been really good at focusing on each muscle part, and then using different exercises that apply to the movements I need to lift myself."

"Dennis came to me after he had already completed inpatient PT and at-home therapy," says Adam Schoenberg, a licensed physical therapist and certified athletic trainer. "I give a lot of credit to Dr. Deshmukh and the previous therapists. The biggest limitation that remained was transferring. One of Dennis' major goals for rehab was to be able to do

Atlas Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine helps athletes and patients of all ages and abilities get back to work and everyday living. Among the therapy advantages offered are:

- ✦ **Post-op Procedures including Total Joint Replacement**
- ✦ **Aquatic Therapy**
- ✦ **Electro-therapy**
- ✦ **Ultrasound**
- ✦ **Soft Tissue Mobilization/Massage**
- ✦ **Joint Mobilization**
- ✦ **Mechanical Traction**
- ✦ **Therapeutic Exercise & Passive Range of Motion**
- ✦ **Isokinetic Testing and Exercise**
- ✦ **Aerobic and Cardiovascular Exercise**
- ✦ **Gait Training**
- ✦ **Biofeedback**
- ✦ **Hydrotherapy**
- ✦ **Comprehensive Women's Therapy**

transfers between uneven surfaces without assistance, as he was used to doing before - getting into a car, into bed and onto the toilet," says Adam Schoenberg, a licensed physical therapist and certified athletic trainer who worked with McDonnell at Atlas. "Those transfers are all different - different heights, different body positioning, and each requires a separate set of motions. Transfers require stability and strength of the shoulders to lift the entire body weight."

Schoenberg also worked with McDonnell to get him back to his regular workout routine. "We wanted him to be able to get back in the gym safely - he is addicted to working out. The main therapies we used were soft tissue massage, a lot of stretching and passive range-of-motion work. After that, we worked on strengthening not just the shoulder but postural muscles to keep him stabilized in his chair and in his daily functioning activities."

McDonnell also wanted to be able to transfer into his racing wheelchair, which is not the same height as a regular wheelchair. "We're still working on that," says Schoenberg. "His transferring continues to improve, but he still gets fatigued and sore. So we're working on endurance and changing the routine around each session to keep his drive up. He is very motivated, so sometimes we have to put reins on him. It's surprised me how much progress Dennis has made in regaining the strength and range of shoulder motion he had previously. After this type of surgery, some people are still in a sling at the point where he was already using his arms again."

"I think the quality of the therapy at Atlas is outstanding," says Deshmukh, who specializes in sports medicine and minimally invasive joint reconstruction. "From my experience working with professional teams such as the Boston Celtics and New England Patriots, I know the unique challenges high-level athletes present. Dennis is no exception. He is an incredible athlete, and the focus at Atlas provided appropriate physical therapy and proper sports training to get him back to a higher competitive level. This type of conditioning beyond just basic rehabilitation has really made a dramatic difference in Dennis' recovery."

"Atlas was able to provide highly skilled individualized attention and improved Dennis' overall quality of life," says Deshmukh. "I am very particular with where I send my patients for physical therapy for rotator cuff repairs, and Atlas has truly excelled in caring for Dennis in taking care of his far more complex and significant needs."

"Adam and Ron customized the physical therapy based on what they knew I could and couldn't do," says McDonnell. "There's no reason I shouldn't be able to do what I used to do, after rehabilitation is complete. I'm optimistic about getting back to where I was athletically. I feel I'm 100 times better now than I was a month ago. I recommend Atlas highly. And I'm going to start looking at race dates for next spring."



**Atlas Physical Therapy
and Sports Medicine, Inc.**

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