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► A doctor his patients can lean on, chiropractor Leroy Perry poses with actor Jack Nicholson, a patient and staunch supporter of Perry's techniques.

PHOTO: MARLENE WALLACE

L e r o y P e r r y

Putting down the SCALPEL

“Want some dinner?” grinned Dr. Leroy Perry, Jr., offering his guests a jar of roasted peanuts. “You can get by for weeks on just carrots and peanuts if you have to,” he explained. Perry knows from experience. Regular meals take time, time he doesn’t have for such luxuries. Many nights he has stayed up working in his new International Sportsmedicine Institute until too late to make the long drive

from West Los Angeles to his home in Altadena. Even before carpets were installed in the newly re-done sports medicine facility, Perry used to fall asleep on the floor, grabbing a few hours before his first patients came in the door at 7 the next morning.

To say that chiropractor Dr. Perry is a workaholic is to understate the obvious. He puts in at least a 90-hour work week. Along with the ongoing task of fully developing his sports medicine/health club facility that opened last November, he constantly juggles patients, reporters, television crews, meetings, cross-country flights, lectures, and phone calls in order not to interfere with the treatment of his patients. He is often involved with three patients and two separate business meetings at the same time—all without the aid of a wrist-watch.

Dr. Greenberg, one of his chiropractic associates, claims that Perry works at least as much as three people. And when three people are working at the same thing, a lot gets accomplished.

Perry treats athletes from over 30 countries; he serves as technical advisor on many television and film projects; he has developed a children’s television health show, contributed to a 638-page *Encyclopedia of Weight Training*, invented a pair of

survival scissors now being used in space by NASA, published articles in sports magazines and chiropractic journals and laid the groundwork for a non-profit corporation called the Foundation for Athletic Research and Education.

But when Perry’s wife Rita and their four children come to visit him, he makes time to take a swim with them in the facility’s indoor pool.

“I remember when I was a kid and my father was a chiropractor,” says Perry. “All

that meant to me was that you never saw your father, and when you did he was trying to jam a bunch of vitamins down your throat.”

Now Lee Perry is the father his kids never see. His services are in constant demand since he’s established himself as the country’s most recognizable name in chiropractic.

His story has been well-documented in virtually every sports publication in America and abroad. He has made over 600 television appearances speaking about his muscle-balancing and strengthening techniques. On any given day many of those visiting his chiropractic center are celebrities from the sports and entertainment worlds: Wilt Chamberlain, Dwight Stones, Tracy Austin, James Coburn, Jack Nicholson, Kelly Lane, Warren Beatty or Alex Karras. Some of his super star jock pals have nicknamed him “Dr. Magic Hands,” because of all the seemingly miraculous feats he’s worked.

For nearly a decade, Perry treated the world’s best track and field athletes from a Pasadena chiropractic center. When he opened his own WLA facility in November, 1982, his loyalty to his Pasadena patients was such that he maintained a small office there also. So two mornings a week

Despite worldwide recognition as a sports medicine healer, chiropractor Leroy Perry remains officially “disallowed” from the US team medical staff.

by Lynda Huey

W

ilt Chamberlain
hangs around
on an orthopedic device
by Leroy Perry.

he works in Pasadena with Dr. Chris Laurino, Dr. Bob Gibbons, and USC dentist Lennox Miller, a 1968 Olympic medalist originally from Jamaica. Three days a week (plus many weekends) he's stirring up new projects and treating patients on the westside.

He has drawn to him many top experts in all sports-related fields. The medical director of the facility is neurologist and marathoner Ron Lawrence, MD. Podiatrist John Pagliano, one of the country's leading running doctors, serves as a consultant. Acupuncturist Whitfield Reeves, who treated marathoners Julie Brown and Ron Tabb at his practice in La Jolla, has recently relocated in Los Angeles and joined the ISI staff. Four other chiropractors work with Perry at the Institute. Dr. Mike Greenberg read about Perry in a magazine story and contacted him. John Hertz, DC was formerly the head clinic director of the Western States Chiropractic College in Portland, and has moved south to join forces with the Perry clan. Dan Twogood directed ISI's physical therapy department until he completed his chiropractic study requirements. Vicky Vodon, DC, former UCLA trainer-turned chiropractor, adds expertise in working with athletes—she also serves as trainer to premier sprinter Evelyn Ashford. All of these health care workers wanted to work for Perry because they know they have much to learn from him. Plus, the potential of his new 20,000 square foot institute is enormous and everyone sees that.

The concept of the International Sportsmedicine Institute is that of comprehensive health care. Doctors from various disciplines—chiropractic, medical, podiatric, acupuncture, Electro-Acuscope, and dental—work together, referring patients back and forth when necessary, in order to provide optimum and complete health care.

"Anything that helps patients is good," comments Dr. Lawrence. "So I believe in multi-disciplinary, multi-modality health care. The chiropractor's knowledge of the musculoskeletal system complements an MD's knowledge. Then, of course, Dr. Pagliano is very important to us because so many athletic problems start at the foot. Ours is one of the first attempts to integrate all aspects of health care; I hope there will be many more such attempts."

If a patient needs to strengthen or stretch a specific part of the body, the doctor can prescribe activities from ISI's Athletic Department. Drop-in exercise classes taught by such folks as Olympians Lee Evans and Rosalyn Bryant provide biomechanically sound instruction in aerobic

conditioning, AquAerobics, weight training, swimming and yoga flexibility training. Gregory Raiport, MD, PhD served as sports psychologist to the 1976 Soviet Olympic team. He now offers psychological training to ISI's world class bevy of athletes. An executive fitness plan combines all the fitness services into one package, including private and semi-private training sessions. And after the sweating, there's a choice of sports massage, shiatsu, structural integration, or relaxation massage. All this takes place in the Institutes wing of private offices, conference hall, exercise rooms, indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna, steam room and weight room. It's Perry's dream come true—to see a thorough approach to rehabilitation and fitness.

Perry's concrete accomplishments are easy to see. But the surface view tells only a portion of the story. Who is this guy behind the reputation? What draws so many of the rich and famous to Dr. Leroy Perry? What motivates him?

Only Perry and some of those closest to him know the abuse he's taken the past decade as he's tried to gain acceptance for himself and chiropractic from the medical establishment. He may have introduced chiropractic to the athlete, but the athletic hierarchy has been long in accepting his help. Acceptance of his work by foreign Olympic teams has never made up for the pain of rejection by his own US Olympic medical staff.

LEE PERRY WAS BORN IN OAKLAND IN 1946. In a sense, it could be said that he inherited his family's knack for healing. His great-grandfather in Portugal was called "Brilhante" by the local villagers, meaning brilliant. He was the village blacksmith, considered the problem-solver, bone-setter, helper. Perry's father taught chemistry to chiropractic students and was eventually lured into the field himself, calling chiropractic the wave of the future. But Lee, the third of six athletic and competitive children, was

determined to go to medical school and become a plastic surgeon. Between his wrestling and swimming workouts, he'd found time to enter and win a high school sculpting contest; he figured he should put his artistic talent to work with his medical interests.

He started pre-med schooling at Chabot College in Northern California. At the same time, he was on call as an air crewman in the Naval Air Reserves.

"I flew S2Fs—sub-chasers," recalls Perry. "I had a great commanding officer. We'd fly into the state capitol for lunch or The Nut Tree for dinner. It was skate time."

Perry is usually quiet and serious, but he lets loose some real belly laughs when he tells old Navy stories, proudly relating antics he got away with. But the fun and games were abruptly interrupted.

"In 1966 I was working a civilian job during the week at the Chrysler parts depot in San Leandro," said Perry. "Some rotted-out wood sidings from World War II collapsed, jolting the four-ton hoist I was operating 25 feet in the air. It snapped back on me and I had just enough time to get half of my body out of the way. I was pinned under that thing for 20 minutes. All my ribs on the left side of my body got cracked. That side of my head was split open and my knee was mangled. We always wore knee-high leather boots on the job and my left boot literally burst under all the pressure."

During the first two weeks Perry spent in the hospital, his only goal was to get his crushed body out the sixth floor window. His 159-pound wrestler's body ballooned up to 220 pounds. His waist went from 28 inches to 36-and-a-half inches. The hospital staff mistakenly gave him double injections of drugs and he went into anaphylactic shock. He nearly died; most of his body hair fell out.

"I had always taken my body for granted," Perry says. "Suddenly I had to watch every little thing I ate or else I'd be constipated for up to eight or nine days. I had to learn to live cerebrally rather than physically."

Only a few months before the accident, Lee had met Rita Mudge. She was 17; he was 21. She was a good friend through his rehabilitation, and they dated off and on for the next four years before they finally married in May of 1970.

"Lee was really devastated by the accident," remembers Rita. "He got depressed every time they told him he needed another surgery."

Four surgeries and too many drugs later, Lee knew he no longer wanted to be a medical doctor. "Those jokers actually wanted me to have my knee fused permanently. I had such a bad experience that I didn't want anything to do with drugs or surgery. I wanted to help heal people with a more conservative approach. That was when I turned to chiropractic."

He entered Los Angeles College of Chiropractic in 1969 with 22 wire stitches still holding his leg together. His arm was bigger around than his thigh. So he took to the water and designed his own rehabilitation program to redevelop the strength and coordination in the leg. It was a slow process, but in 1974 he took his first run along a Carlsbad beach and by 1983 he had regained enough stamina and overall fitness that he could accompany triathlete Pat Hines through the marathon portion of the Hawaii Ironman competition.

During the decade of Perry's rehabilitation, he built a solid practice as one of the nation's leading sports medicine practitioners. Perry is a specialist within chiropractic, a chiropractic orthopedist, and as such is particularly concerned with movement, structural weaknesses and muscular imbalances. In 1973 he became the team doctor for Wilt's WonderWomen, a La Jolla-based women's track club sponsored by Wilt Chamberlain. Before long, the top track athletes in the country were visiting him for the education he imparted as well as chiropractic help. He treated them like family. In fact, he often had them up to his house for dinners or parties. There was never any sugar or alcohol around; they never had to worry about breaking their training diets at Perry's place.

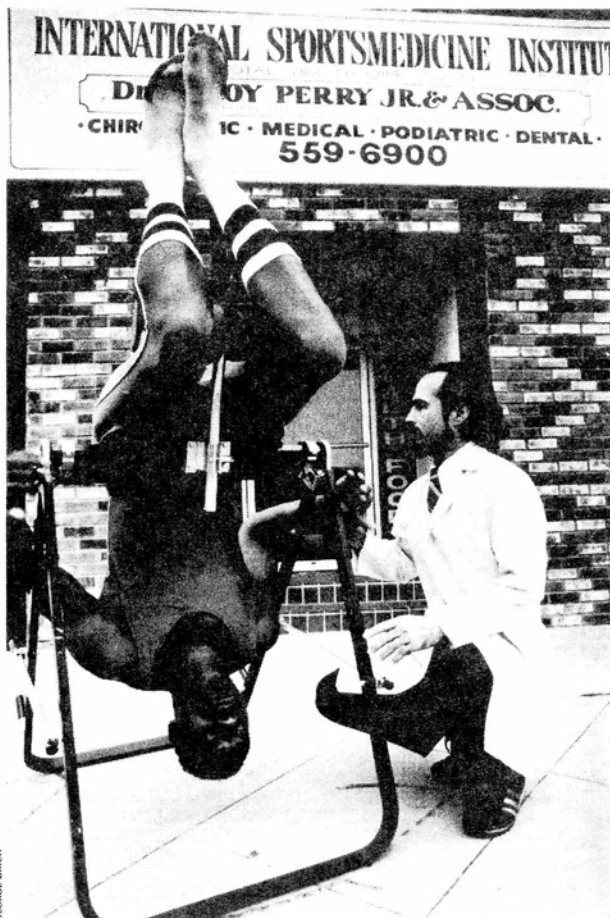
Word spread and soon there were gymnasts, tennis players, swimmers and baseball players all clamoring for his attention. Tennis pro Stan Smith visited Perry in 1978 with back problems. Perry put a heel lift in Smith's shoe and prescribed body-balancing exercises.

"The heel lift was gone after two years," says Smith, "because the exercises evened out my back. My back is in much better shape now. Dr. Perry helped me understand how I have to take part in my own preventive medicine routine. I still do my exercises religiously."

Golfer Donna Capone swears by Dr. Perry's work. "What Lee has done for me is get me in correct alignment. I've walked 4 miles a day since I was a little girl and it's easy to keep your head down, out of the sun. Lee changed my walk, pulled my shoulders back, lengthened my stride to help prevent injuries. When I lived here in LA, I came to see Lee once a week just in case. Now that I live in Boston, I see him every time I'm in town, but I'm having a hard time replacing Magic Fingers."

Tracy Austin took her well-publicized sciatica to Perry. She, too, had rave reviews. "At first I was scared to go to a chiropractor," she says. "But he was so knowledgeable. And he genuinely cared about how I was doing. He found out that my lower back was stronger on one side, so I had to do exercises to strengthen the other side. And he watched my strokes to see what I might be doing to hurt myself. I think in the future MDs are going to be interested in biomechanics, too. Dr. Perry's just ahead of his time."

When Hollywood and the media surrounded Perry, his reputation was secure, at least on his own turf. But the medical folks who already enjoyed Olympic-related status weren't about to share the spotlight with a chiropractor. Often times Perry found himself in the position of hav-



GEORGE BRICH

ing to treat the athletes who needed his help out of the back of a van in a parking lot since he had been disallowed entry to the competition site.

"I think the lowest point of that whole rejection scene was in 1976 at UC Berkeley. I had been prohibited from treating anyone there, so I had to work on my regular athletes under the bleachers, down there on the ground with the popcorn boxes, the empty bottles. Every once in a while someone would spit down around us."

WILT CHAMBERLAIN, IN 1977, JOINED forces with Perry to develop the Foundation for Athletic Research and Education. It's a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of athletic potential in everyone. FARE does investigative research into the prevention and rehabilitation of athletic and stress-related injuries, then makes its research available to the public through its periodical *FARE Play*. As the 1984 games draw near, FARE has begun sponsoring special events that give Olympic athletes and coaches a forum through which to interact with the public. In conjunction with the LA Coliseum international track meet last July, FARE put on a "Meet the Athletes" night that drew over 150 people to the place to meet some 50 athletes from nine countries. Cuban Alberto Juantoreno headlined the first in a series of pre-Olympic swimming competition. Throughout the year FARE puts on weekly Wednesday night self-help lectures that are free to the public. The next project for FARE will be to develop an aerobics instructors' certification program so that modifications will be made in the genre of exercise to avoid the predominance of injuries that accrue.

"I don't think there's anyone I've ever met who works with athletes who's any more conscientious and dedicated to make people aware of what they can do to get the most out of their bodies," says Chamberlain. "We've been involved in a whole new educational process—getting people to look at chiropractors with more respect. We want folks to know you can have faith in these people. They'll do a good job for you."

In 1978 Lee Perry was playing in the front yard with his children. The little ones climbed on a trailer in the driveway, and it started rolling down the hill. Lee ran to stop it and in the process practically tore his right arm right out of the socket. But even a fourth-degree shoulder separation didn't give him much rest. He found that the athletes who were used to his services became very demanding, unable to understand that their personal healer might actually need healing himself. So he continued working, even with his arm in a sling.

A year later he re-injured his lower back and was bedridden for two months. Each time he's hurt, he says it pushes him into greater creativity.

"To create for me is everything—a new tape job, new extremity manipulation, new bone-setting technique. I loved designing a new pair of shoes to help Tracy Austin and a new biomechanically sound car seat for the NASA/Budweiser rocket car that broke the sound barrier."

Above all else, Perry likes to consider himself an inventor. And he believes that everybody has the potential for genius like his. His interest is in helping people recognize that genius and cultivate it. No matter how broken or bent a patient may be, he continues to see the biomechanically correct body inside.

"One can either pick the gauntlet up and fight the battle or not," he says. "I choose to pick it up. It's the only thing that turns me on."

Throughout the '70s, Perry carried his gauntlet, fighting his way to the heart of the athletic world. The turning point came in 1980. That year he was invited to speak to the Canadian Sports Medicine Council. His lecture was well-accepted, something Perry wasn't used to in this country since

the group was primarily MDs. Also in 1980, the US bobsled team was allowed to choose their own doctor in spite of any objections by the US medical team. They asked Perry to assist them during the team selection process. Even though Perry was wearing a low-back support and in constant pain, he set 25 shoulder dislocations and/or separations in just two days. As a result of that work, the United States 1980 Olympic bobsled team selected Perry as their team doctor and suddenly he was on the inside of Olympic sport. Then the United States boycotted the summer games and Perry turned down a request from Jamaica to be their team doctor out of respect for the sacrifice made by American athletes.

Whether or not Perry will be included on the 1984 Olympic medical roster is anybody's guess. Chiropractors are now allowed, but Perry was purposely overlooked at selection time, probably because the medical authorities felt they had already bent as far as they wanted. Olympic high jumper Dwight Stones, however, feels that Dr. Perry can be more effective working as a relatively independent doctor at the games.

"If he looks at the availability he's going to have to provide to athletes from so many countries," muses Stones, "he's probably better off not having the restrictions on his work that might go with being an official member of the US team. He might be limited to working only with American athletes, and that would go against his nature. If he could get linked up with a more major nation than Antigua as he was in 1976 (Montreal), but smaller than the US, he'd have the credentials and access he needs, but not the restrictions."

As far as the 1983 pre-Olympic events were concerned, Stones was right. Dr. Perry ended up representing Cuba as their official team doctor at the East German-American multi-national meet, then went on with Cuba and the Republic of China as their official team doctors at the first World Athletic Championships in Helsinki, Finland. As usual, he wound up treating athletes from not only those countries, but also Finland, Sweden, the Soviet Union, East Germany and the United States. Even though many countries have approached Dr. Perry about representing their country at the 1984 LA games, he insists his heart will always be with his US athletes.

No matter who he works for, some guys are going to say, "If only I could have seen Dr. Perry, I could have performed better." But Lee simply won't have time for everybody," sums up Stones.

Time seems to be Lee Perry's major enemy. There's never enough time. Especially not enough time to spend with his four children—Charlie, 11, Noel, 9, Mac (named after discus-thrower Mac Wilkens), 7, and Alexander, 2. But Perry feels he's doing his job of parenting in perhaps a slightly different way.

"The way I think we influence our children best is by creating a social structure that will positively reinforce them."

For the next six months, Perry will be flying out of town three out of four weekends a month. He's teaching doctoring to doctors, he explained. He's helping other chiropractors learn from his successful extremity manipulation techniques in order to have a core group of folks ready for the time when his International Sportsmedicine Institute starts marching across the country to 20 cities.

As an inventor, Perry prides himself on being futuristic. He feels the next wave of the health/fitness movement will be combined facilities such as his WLA one where people can obtain health advice and fitness programs all in the same place. So the plan is to have 30,000 square feet of health club linked up with 20,000 square feet of cross-disciplinary health services. After the 20 health centers in this country, it's on to Italy, Germany and the rest of the globe.

There's only one goal Perry has set for himself—to be the best—he just doesn't understand second place. ■