

The Society of Sports Therapists

Press Release

Career Profile - Sports Therapist

Joel Harris - Arsenal Football Club

Introduction

Joel Harris, a Sports Therapist at Arsenal Football Club, actually began his working career in the Metropolitan Police. It wasn't until he had to medically retire after eighteen years of service that he took up Sports Therapy. Now working for one of the country's top football clubs, Joel is a graduate of The University of North London (now London Metropolitan University), with an honours degree in Sports Therapy. He is also a member of The Society of Sports Therapists and was one of the first persons to graduate in Sports Therapy in the UK as a mature student. He specialises in Sports Massage and is a key member of the club's medical team treating players at all levels.

How did you get started?

'I left school with 4 O'levels, and like most I wasn't sure what I wanted to do next. After completing only a year of my A-levels I ended up joining the police and enjoyed 18 years of service until I had to retire on medical grounds'.

Joel broke the scaphoid bone in his wrist during an 'arresting moment' in the summer of 1987 with a not so friendly prisoner. One of the many hazards of life in the Police Force. The fracture brought an abrupt end to his sports playing career, his first love surprisingly being rugby not football.

'I was encouraged by the coach of the team, who was a good friend, to help out with first aid on the pitch. I enjoyed this and decided to take some courses to learn some more. I signed up for the FA Treatment of Injury course which was run by Brian Morris of Queens Park Rangers, himself a Sports Therapist. I followed this with the Intermediate course which was run by Gary Lewin, physiotherapist at Arsenal FC. It was at this point that they directed me to the Society of Sports Therapists and encouraged me to enrol on The Society's Diploma Course.

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The Diploma course was a modular one, with clinical theory and practice. The format allowed me to carry on working while I was studying.'

One of the things that particularly appealed to me about The Society was their desire to protect the public in all matters relating to Sports Therapy.

As an organisation they educate but also monitor and insist on a Continuing Professional Development Programme. On qualifying, a comprehensive professional indemnity and public liability insurance is available so the public gets the best protection possible.

Following the 12 part modular Diploma course, Joel decided that his future really did lie in Sports Therapy and he was determined to continue his studies. He undertook a second Society of Sports Therapists course, the Advanced Diploma in Academic and Clinical Sports Therapy; a course which ultimately changed the direction of his life.

'The Advanced Diploma was a research based course and provided the gateway for me to university life. It gave me exemptions onto the BSc (Hons) Sports Therapy degree course so it was a natural progression. At the time The University of North London was the only University offering this course but now there are three other universities as well. '

'By the time I started my degree, I was part-time at Queens Park Rangers FC helping Brian Morris with treatments and rehab. I officially retired from the police during my first year into the degree and joined Arsenal part-time in 1998, the season they won the double. Not a bad year to start.'

Towards the end of his first year of university life, the former Detective Constable won a Society of Sports Therapist's Scholarship, to attend the Sports Institute in Australia.

'It was an excellent opportunity for me to gain an insight into their national sports development and talent identification programmes. We can learn so much from the Australian approach.'

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What's a typical week?

'There isn't really a typical week as such, massage is used as a relaxation, recovery and treatment tool as part of the injury treatment protocol at the club. Our schedule depends on the numbers of injuries players have picked-up during the week.

On training days we deal with any injuries before the players go out to train, then any injuries after training.

We are always looking at the players' all round fitness as well. We monitor a player's diet and nutrition such as carbohydrate and nutrient intake. My degree experience has also been very useful in this area as well. The players eat at the training ground and we also work with the chef to decide on menus etc.

On a typical match day we get to the ground an hour and fifteen minutes before kick-off and work until the players go out for their warm-up. If there are any problems we occasionally

work on players during half-time and then again post-match if necessary. Away games, particularly in Europe, often mean rushing for a return flight so time is limited.

If the players are in following a game we will work through light exercises in the gym with massage and stretching. If they have a day off following a game the 'cool down' phase is transferred to the next day and players will work through the same routine.

What qualities do you need?

'I think the most important thing is that you have to be approachable, and friendly, it helps you and the players if you are even-tempered and are able to laugh at yourself. Footballers are well known for their laddish humour so its helps to be quick witted and not to take anything too seriously.'

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Top Tips

'I would say hands-on practical experience makes all the difference. My experiences with the Met police in the early days were invaluable. I also helped out with Middlesex Rugby club which had players like Andy Gomarsall, now of Gloucester and England coming through the rank. Working with the young kids at Highbury in the early days was also great experience and look what it has led to now. You must be prepared to put yourself out to achieve your goal.'

For this self - effacing, hugely likeable character life has been a dream. He says, 'I have just been so lucky, one day some one will pinch me and I will wake up'.

If you wish to pursue a career in Sport Therapy and require further information on courses available to you, contact:

The Society of Sports Therapists on:

Tel: 0141 221 3660.

e.mail - admin@society-of-sports-therapists.org

website: www.society-of-sports-therapists.org

BSc (Hons) Sport Therapy Degree Courses run in collaboration with
The Society of Sports Therapists, are currently available at the following universities:

University College Chichester

www.ucc.ac.uk

Contact: Ian Littlejohn

Email: i.littlejohn@ucc.ac.uk

University of Hertfordshire

www.herts.ac.uk

Contact: Sally Waterworth

Email: S.P.U.Waterworth@herts.ac.uk

London Metropolitan University

www.unl.ac.uk

Contact: Nicki Smith

Email: n.smith@unl.ac.uk

University of Teesside

www.tees.ac.uk

Contact: Andy Cunningham

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