



Clay Sniteman treats an injury sustained by World No. 20 Fernando Verdasco

# THE TENNIS MEDIC

CLAY SNITEMAN ON WORKING FOR THE ATP, TREATING SUPERSTAR ATHLETES, AND GETTING MASHED IN THE POTATOES

## Q&A

**In layman's terms, what exactly is an athletic trainer and a physical therapist?**

Physical therapists are primarily healthcare professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages on a myriad of health problems. We specialise in treating biomechanical injuries and work out of a clinic in most cases. Athletic trainers treat acute injuries. You usually see them at athletic events where they assist athletes. They are on-the-spot experts who handle emergencies that involve impairment, functional limitations, and disabilities.

**Is there a difference between being an athletic trainer and a physical therapist?**

I am a trained personal therapist and athletic trainer. I combine both disciplines, and I'm prepared to treat the pros on the court and in the clinic for more extensive injuries.

**How did you get started in physical therapy?**

I always played sports, but injuries were a part of my life. I went to numerous physical therapists over the years, and I found that I was fascinated with seeing how the body healed. It just seemed natural to cover the waterfront by becoming a physical therapist and an athletic trainer. That way, I could do it all.

**What was the first sport you were involved with as a physical therapist?**

American Football. As you can imagine, football players are a lab in themselves. However, I now treat the whole gamut of sports: football, tennis, track and field, skiing, soccer, hockey, rugby, basketball, volleyball, and many others in my clinic, which is located on the campus of Weber State University.

**Is your work more reactive, or do you also help train athletes to prevent injuries?**

Certainly, I treat athletes after they are hurt. But prevention is the name of the game. If you can show athletes (or anyone else) how to avoid injuries, they are ahead of the game. It's critical to treat injuries as soon as possible to avoid further damage while also being proactive in terms of injury prevention.

**With all of the advancements in sports science, nutrition, and technology, why do athletes still get injured?**

Athletes push the envelope of their abilities. Otherwise, they wouldn't be great. Any time you want to go beyond the average, you're at risk, and this goes for the pros or the casual athlete.

**How did you eventually get involved with the ATP?**

I was a physical therapist and athletic trainer for the 2002 Winter Olympics and also for the World Championships. I contacted the ATP, and after an extensive interview process, I was fortunate enough to be selected. I have now been working on the ATP World Tour for eight years.

**Was there a transition and adaption period to get used to the sport and its specific injuries?**

From the Olympics and working with Division One athletics, I already had extensive experience at the highest level. It was just a matter of learning what the players wanted and what helps them the most.

**Are there rules that limit what you can do to treat injuries courtside?**

In tennis, a medical time out is three minutes. You can also treat the players for two changeovers during the match. As you can imagine, the time compression factor requires quick decisions and hyper-fast treatments.

**Do you ever get distracted by the entertainment of the tennis matches you're assigned to?**

The quality of the action on the ATP World Tour never ceases to amaze me. I think it gets better and better each year. But we work long hours treating the players, which makes it hard to get out and watch some of the action.

**How much time do you spend travelling around the world?**

I cover 22 tournaments a year on the ATP World Tour, which is about half the year when you add up all the weeks. So there are many days spent on aeroplanes and in hotels. You might say I'm a professional nomad.

**Have you ever been star-struck working when you treat superstar athletes?**

Certainly. To this day, I'm amazed at their abilities. But I found out quickly that people are people no matter how high up they go. Everybody gets nervous, everybody wants to be happy, and everybody is a child of God. That keeps me even keeled being around superstars.

**You've worked with tennis players, sledgehockey players, Olympians and Para-**

**Q: If you yourself got injured, could you treat yourself, or do you need another physical therapist around?**

**A: I treat what I can get to, and then I go to another healthcare professional. The great thing is that I know enough to go to the right expert. I am never bashful to ask for assistance.**

**Olympians. But who are the best athletes to treat? Or, more diplomatically, which kind of athlete makes your job a lot easier?**

The athlete that is willing to do whatever it takes to succeed — no matter what the sport.

**Have you ever been under any pressure to certify an athlete as fit when you clearly knew the athlete wasn't?**

Playing sport at the elite level comes with pressure for everyone involved. I made a commitment to do what I think is best for the health of the athlete and to always talk to them about potential risks. At the end of the day, it's always about helping them make the decision that is best for them.

**Athletes can be very grateful to the people who heal their injuries. What's the best thank-you gift you've ever received?**

All of the players are appreciative of what we do for

them, but for me the most rewarding part of the job is when you get a simple 'thank you' from the guys. It makes everything worthwhile.

**How do you balance your time between working for the ATP, Sundance Physical Therapy, your speaking engagements, and Weber State University?**

I have wonderful staff at the clinic in Utah. When I'm on the road travelling with the ATP, I focus solely on tennis. When I'm at home, I turn my attention to my patients back in Utah, while also still being focused on the ATP. I'm fortunate to be a high-energy person, so I'm comfortable going three different ways at once.

**When you do manage to find the time, what's your favourite sport to play and to watch?**

I enjoy watching basketball, American football, and hockey. I also enjoy being actively involved with anything that involves a boat — skiing, wake boarding or sailing. In the winter, I can't wait to be on the slopes to go skiing.

**You'll be the athletic trainer at this year's ATP Malaysian Open. Are there any specific injuries players could get due to our weather, our humidity, our courts or even our food?**

Every player faces different challenges when moving from one tournament to the next. That is the nature of the ATP World Tour and what brings out the best in the players. They are pretty resilient and have this incredible ability to adapt quickly to the surroundings that they are competing in.

**Finally, how do you deal with male athletes who**

**take a shot directly to their genitals?**

This is always a painful one. It's always funny except for the person that it happens to! But genital trauma cannot be taken lightly, as it could develop into something more severe. If I suspect that there might be a more extensive problem, I will send the athlete to a specialist. **FHM**

*Catch the Malaysian Open at Putra Stadium from 24 Sept-2 Oct. For more info, visit [malaysianopentennis.com](http://malaysianopentennis.com)*

**VITALS: CLAY SNITEMAN**  
AGE: 37 FROM: UTAH JOB: PHYSICAL THERAPIST AND ATHLETIC TRAINER  
YEARS WITH ATP: EIGHT