

CARTILAGE AND THE CLEVELAND BROWNS GAME

By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB

There is no doubt that cartilage plays a very important role in the structure of our bodies. I know it does in mine!

Cartilage is a type of specialized connective tissue that provides support and protection throughout the body. One of its roles is to act as a cushion in between the ends of bones allowing them to articulate (move freely) without grinding each other down.

Quite often cartilage is torn by violent actions in athletic events such as football.

Luckily that wasn't the case last week when I attended a football game between my Cleveland Browns and the visiting Kansas City Chiefs. No one was carted off the field with any torn cartilage conditions.

But, as violent as the game is on the field, we as spectators faced some pretty adverse conditions that could have had a negative impact our own seemingly fragile (not mine) bodies.

For example, did you know that an entire game can last three hours long, although actual playing time is probably closer to 25 minutes?

And if you stay seated for that entire time you are constantly using your hip flexors- mainly your iliacus and psoas (pronounced "so-as" as in "just psoas you know, the reason that the Browns aren't winning so many games is that they are in another building year").

That prolonged seated condition will result in you feeling very stiff when you stand up. It will often take 15-20 seconds before you are able to straighten yourself in an upright position.

But that was not the case while we watching the Browns that day. That's because fans like us are constantly stretching those flexor muscles by standing up whenever our team makes a great play. This year a great play is defined as running the ball without fumbling. Come to think of it, that's been the definition for the last several years.

In any event, we were on our feet "high-fiving it" during the entire game. This not only stretched those hip flexors, it also took a lot of pressure off our gluteus maximus, medius and minimus (aka our butt muscles) which were in constant jeopardy of freezing in a stadium who's predecessor was dubbed "the mistake on the

lake”. The old Cleveland municipal stadium was called that because it was build right on the shores of Lake Erie, where on a day like last week, when the temperature was a balmy 32 degrees, the wind coming off the lake made it seem like zero. Hardly fan-friendly conditions!

Team officials must not have learned anything because, upon demolishing the old stadium, they built a new one on the same shore of the same Great Lake! That we keep on coming back for more punishment, physical as well as mental, is a testament to our loyalty, support and outright insanity.

But, back to the high-fives. If your are not careful this action can injure your rotator-cuff muscles which are located on your scapula (shoulder blades). These muscles are commonly referred to in anatomy and myology classes as the S.I.T.S., an acronym that stands for “supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor and subscapularis.

Stay with me, folks. I spent a lot of money learning this stuff in massage school and you happen to be getting it for free! (except for the price of this newspaper which I believe is \$39/year to subscribe- not as cheap as the other newspaper in town- the Pennysaver- but it has more information like this column).

In case you interpret the last unsolicited sentence as “sucking up to the boss”, you have a keen sense of the obvious.

So, there we were high fiving and slapping each other on the back every chance we could get. And that meant subjecting ourselves to injury to those rotator cuff muscles.

Compounding the situation was the state that we were in. No, not Ohio- it was a state closer to what can be described as bliss or inebriation. After a few of those \$6.50 brews you become a) a lot poorer and b) a lot more lacking in feeling. So you have a tendency to go beyond your physical limits. Fortunately, we had total (?) self control- at least during the entire singing of the “Star Spangled Banner and we subsequently survived the perils of the game without tearing any cartilage- which, if you remember, is the subject of this column.

This imbibing, by the way, had a positive effect on our bodies in that, as a result, we had to get up and go to the “trough” quite often- thus stretching our hip flexors as well as “exercising” our urinary system. I’m certain that statistics somewhere will show that it is not healthy to have a stagnant urinary system.

However, another part of our body didn't go unscathed. The game was very close from start to finish. Although Cleveland trailed by 14 points in the fourth quarter, they rallied to tie it by the end of regulation. So the game went into overtime with the Browns prevailing on a field goal. During the process of the dramatic ebb and flow of the game, we had the occasion to overuse our vocal chords (yell a lot) to the extent that, by the end of the game, they became strained.

Our vocal chords function in sound production. They are made up of ligaments which, like cartilage (aren't I brilliant?) are another specialized connective tissue. Inflammation of the vocal chords, called laryngitis, is caused by overuse of our voice.

So by the end of the game although we were temporarily hoarse, our hips were well stretched due to the up and down activities during the game and our urinary system was exercised to its fullest.

All things being equal, my body escaped intact as I made the 4 ½ hour drive home (thus over flexing my hips from sitting so long). That's the price I pay for rooting for a team that is 275 miles away.

The importance of cartilage in the structure and function of our bodies cannot be overemphasized. I am confident that I have not violated that tenet in this week's column.

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