

Atlanta Falcons Take Wing with Chiropractic

Editorial Staff

The Atlanta Falcons of the National Football League face this season with great optimism, having come off a 9-7 record last season to make the playoffs. And while the team is off to a shaky 0-3 start this year, the season is young, not to mention that the Falcons have at least one competitive edge: the chiropractic care they've been receiving from Drs. Hovey and Purvis since the 1994 preseason training camp.

Back in 1994, the doctors saw only five to 10 players each visit, but by the end of that first season, approximately 75 percent of the players, coaches, and support staff were regularly being adjusted. "The players love the adjustment," says Kris Purvis, DC, a Palmer College graduate (1983) with 10 years of experience in treating athletes. "Many have discovered that chiropractic has helped increase their speed, strength and durability while decreasing injuries and healing time."

Coming off his first 1,000-yard season, running back Craig "Ironhead" Heyward states that he is definitely running better since receiving chiropractic care. Morten Andersen, who shattered kicking records last season, has been a long time chiropractic patient. He was under the care of Dr. Gerry Provance when he was with the New Orleans Saints and attributes his longevity in the NFL to chiropractic care.

Elbert Shelley, five-time All-Pro, remarked, "For the first time since I can remember, I can enter a football game without my low back killing me."

Former Falcon and five-time all-pro Mike Kenn credits chiropractic with sustaining his career. "These doctors have helped me overcome numerous painful obstacles. My performance and longevity in football was enhanced by chiropractic."

Eric Metcalf, Chris Doleman and Terrence Mathis have also stated that chiropractic makes a difference in their performances.

As the Falcons gear up each week for Sunday's opponent, Drs. Hovey and Purvis come to the stadium on Thursday to adjust the athletes and coaches. Then immediately prior to Sunday's game, the DCs will adjust 20 to 30 of the athletes, and, showing they hold no bias, will occasionally adjust the referees. Last year, one of the two chiropractors began travelling to each of the away games.

While each player's situation is unique, the scenario on game day follows a predictable course. Before the game there is an air of excitement and anticipation. Some players get to the locker room more than three hours before game time to prepare. Individual players are going through their pre-game rituals: stretching and getting ankles and other body parts taped, while trying to relax by listening to music. Some players are joking and lighthearted; others are focused and quiet. Somewhere in the sequence of getting ready, a player will make his way to the corner of the training room to have his spine and pelvis checked. Starting offensive center Roman Fortin walks up with shorts and a T-shirt on and says, "Check me, Doc."

After a month of taking care of a group of players, the chiropractors are aware of each one's specific areas of the spine that needs to be assessed and adjusted. Fortin lies on his stomach on the

table, and Dr. Hovey palpates his spine looking for the usual and unusual. He determines the specific areas that need attention, and with a few quick thrusts adjusts the 300-pound athlete. "Have a great game," Dr. Hovey calls out as he gets ready to adjust the next player.

"The offensive linemen are the most consistent in getting adjusted, and are always the first in line," says Dr. Hovey. "Then the others fall in for their turn. After 40-50 players, coaches, cameramen, and referees are finished, we put on a dry shirt and go watch the game."

The chiropractors are optimistic about the implications of their work with the Falcons, and those of other DCs working with players in the National Football League. "Now that the professional sports are excited about chiropractic, we're hoping that people will see the benefit for younger athletes," said Purvis. "In the past, the trainers and medical staff have always taken care of the teams from high school to professional. The chiropractor could never replace their skills and knowledge, but through our unique techniques can increase the possibilities of improved performance and reduced injury."

The battering players take on a weekly basis results in a high incidence of hamstring pulls and groin and Achilles' tendon injuries. "These injuries respond extra quickly with chiropractic," reports Dr. Hovey. "Even the trainers noticed and now they ask to have the players' spines checked."

Dr. James Hovey, a Life College graduate (1982), played defensive end for the University of Kentucky, and had a short stint with the New York Giants and with the Canadian Football League. Dr. Hovey has been taking care of professional football players since 1986. He began his association with the Falcons shortly after he began practicing chiropractic. He was adjusting a former teammate from Kentucky, Jeff Van Note, who was an All-Pro center for the Falcons, and other players made office visits. When Jerry Glanville became head coach, he hired his own chiropractor to care for the team.

Dr. Hovey finally got the break he was waiting for when current Falcon head coach June Jones took over. "Mike Kenn (six-time All-Pro) was a current patient of mine, and he was also president of the player's association. I asked him to intercede and the team said O.K."

As an athlete himself, Dr. Hovey believes his understanding of the game enhances his ability as the team chiropractor. "A lot of doctors don't have any idea what it's like to play. I not only know the injuries, but I understand what goes into playing the game, physically, emotionally and mentally. There is more of a common denominator between me and the players." For instance, Dr. Hovey points out that certain team positions, and particular stances, predispose a player to specific injuries. These insights he has from playing the game are highly beneficial in assessing the athletes.

Chiropractic's acceptance into the medical fold was made easier because of the players' receptivity to it. "It's different working with a professional team because the trainers run the show," explains Dr. Hovey. "But the Falcons trainers have been great. They hadn't worked with chiropractors before, but were open minded: anything to help the players." And the medical staff was also responsive to the results. "It's interesting to see the synergy," Dr. Hovey observed. "Everyone is respectful of each other as useful practitioners." Teamwork is essential for a football team's success, as it is for a group of interdisciplinary practitioners.

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