

Athlete's Six Year Battle with Pain Ends after Hip Surgery

By Michelle Brubaker | August 21, 2012

As he watched the 2012 Olympic Games in London, Nathan Golding, 43, thought about the life-changing decision that allowed him to continue his passion for endurance sports.

"I've been athletic since the age of 12," said Golding. "But in the last six years I had chronic pain around my right hip. Incrementally, I was going from being able to run two hours with discomfort to not being able to sleep at night."

Golding was experiencing tightness around his hip combined with a grinding sensation. He says no amount of stretching seemed to relieve the pain.

"Eventually, even 20-minute runs were bugging me, and cycling and swimming did not feel any better. I was worried I may have developed arthritis," said Golding.

Golding's sister had recently been diagnosed with femoroacetabular hip impingement (FAI), a condition where the ball (femoral head) and socket (acetabulum) rub abnormally, creating damage to the hip joint.

"She suggested that I get my hip checked," said Golding. "My primary physician X-rayed my hip several times and said my hip joints appeared remarkably healthy."

But it was a conversation Golding had with his neighbor that changed the course of his health care.

"My neighbor was doing his residency in orthopedics at UC San Diego Health under Dr. Robertson and suggested I go to her for a second opinion," said Golding.



Nathan Golding rides again just 3 weeks after surgery.



After more X-rays and a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), Golding, like his sister, was diagnosed with FAI, as well as a torn labrum.

“Nathan and I discussed a number of treatment options. Because he is a very dedicated athlete and had failed other treatments, we decided to move forward with hip arthroscopy to repair the labrum and shave down the abnormal bone,” said Catherine Robertson, MD, assistant clinical professor with the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

“The closer I got to my procedure, the more scared I was of having my hip explored and repaired, a procedure that would require having my hip temporarily dislocated. But I was quickly put at ease by Dr. Robertson and her staff,” said Golding.

When Golding woke up from surgery, he was informed that more repairs were needed than originally anticipated.

“There was more cartilage damage than the MRI had indicated,” said Robertson. “But the good news was that Nathan’s joint was in good health.”

Golding started the rehabilitation process soon after surgery, pushing himself a little more each day.

“I trained on my bike every day, and within a week, I started physical therapy. I was very motivated to heal,” said Golding. “Pretty soon I was doing hill intervals at Torrey Pines and five hour bike rides on the road.”

Golding says there was a bit of discomfort in his hip at night if he pushed himself a little too hard on his bike, but he learned how to listen to his body during the recovery process.

“One day I was so frustrated, I threw my crutches against the floor,” said Golding. “I just wanted to be able to walk without them, and after about two months, I did.”

It was Robertson's approach to surgery and the patient that Golding says lead to his successful recovery.

"I was so impressed with Dr. Robertson's technical knowledge and understanding of the hi-tech materials she uses to make repairs. I could not have asked for a better surgeon who not only understands orthopedics, but is also in tune with the psychological and emotional needs of her patients," said Golding.

Although he still has minor tightness in his hip, Golding is back to doing all the activities he loves.

"For me, the difference has been like night and day. I have gone from not being able to comfortably run, to running three hours on trails. I have run two half marathons within a month," said Golding. "I went through years of unnecessary misery until I decided to have this surgery. Like with any surgical intervention, the patient must be realistic about recovery and understand the risks involved. I took the risks and could not be happier about my outcome."

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