

In with a sporting chance

Medicine isn't all grotty wards and patients with dementia. *Medical Student* took a trip to Arsenal's FC's gleaming training ground to speak to the man with the job we all want: Premiership club doc Ian Beasley



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FOR many years' sports and exercise medicine (SEM) had to fight to even be considered a specialty and was often incorrectly considered to be a branch of orthopaedic surgery or rheumatology. While the bid for the 2012 Olympics was being prepared, the Department of Health agreed to finally recognise it as a specialty. There are now specialist registrar training programs running across the UK.

The potential impact of SEM as a specialty will have on public health is huge; particularly

when considering the escalating incidence of heart disease, obesity trends in children and the massive costs on the NHS. Many diseases are the product of inactivity which could be prevented or managed by exercise programs. SEM is also much more than disease prevention with a wide array of potential jobs ranging from developing individualised rehabilitation for patients after myocardial infarcts to looking after world class athletes.

Arsenal club doctor Ian Beasley has had an eventful journey to the latter. A mature student while studying at Barts, he qualified aged 31. After initially going into general practice, he switched to sports med-

icine after being awarded a sports medicine scholarship at the Royal London. From here, he went on to work for Leyton Orient, Watford, Fulham, and for the past four years, Arsenal. He was also the medical officer on the governing body for hockey at the Atlanta Olympic Games, currently sits on the UEFA anti-doping committee, and is the doctor for the David Beckham Soccer academy, all in addition to working at Newham General Hospital!

A keen sportsman himself, Beasley holds the Barts and the London record for playing for the firsts' football team for the longest period: 13 years in total, including weekends post qualification.



Right: Arsenal's impressive multimillion pound training ground in London Colney.
Below: The 8am fog couldn't stop our reporters from getting snapped with Dr Beasley!



Working at Arsenal:

Is Arsene the best manager you have worked with?

Yeah I think so. He has a really good feeling for what the game should be, and that's his overriding thing. He's a good guy and has morals about the game. It is all about winning but it's also about playing properly. Gianluca Vialli (former Chelsea and Watford manager) was very good, a nice bloke and very funny guy although he was very meticulous in an environment when you didn't need to be meticulous.

Do any of the players dislike training?

He's left now but Freddy (Ljunberg, now at West Ham United) didn't like to train much. But he's a nice lad, a

very nice lad.

How do you think Arsenal will do this year without Thierry Henry?

I think we'll do all right, we got good players. I wasn't sure but looking at them so far we have done all right. We might need another year but we'll be up there.

Do you miss Thierry?

No not really. But to watch him play I will and I'll never see that again. That unbeatable team: Pires, Vieira, Henry, Campbell, Ljunberg, Bergkamp. We'll never see that again.

Has the club changed with all the foreign players?

Yes - the attitude is different: Patrick Vieira would drive up to parties, have just one glass of

wine and then drive home - the other players used to be shocked!

Who are the fittest players you've seen?

Gilberto Silva at Arsenal and Marcel Desailly are complete players. Armand Traore and Alexander Hleb are also very fit guys, but they're naturally fit. You can train me 24 hours a day and I would never get like that. Ashley Cole's a great athlete too - he can run up and down the pitch all day and nothing will happen to him.

All the European games must be a strain on the player's bodies though?

We stay on English time, we will have all the meals, all the training, getting up, and going to the game all on English time,

so if you asked us when the kick off is local time, I seriously couldn't tell you.

When Jonathan Woodgate scored for Real Madrid he celebrated with the club doctor: has anyone ever come over and celebrated with you when they've scored?

No: if everything is going well I'm sitting down. I don't want to get involved if I don't have to!

Can medical students do placements or electives at Arsenal?

No, he (Arsene Wenger) is very touchy about people coming up, he doesn't like people seeing them playing. That's why I have to do all the games; he doesn't want different people doing games. I get a week off in February, and that's it.

The job:

What's the job like?

A lot of it is organisation: sorting out scans for players, hospital consultations and so on. Medically, it's mainly seeing things like problems of the major joints: lumbar spine, hips, knees and ankles. The keepers also get problems with their shoulders and necks. I do full medical examinations and routine blood tests including Hep B and HIV status regularly too, as well as cardiac screening, echos and resting ECGs, which are important in the wake of the death of (Sevilla's) Antonio Puerta and (Leicester City's) Clive Clarke's heart attack - everyone should get cardiac screening. The one thing everyone knows us for is medicals for new players, but they don't tell us everything: some players are just more

fragile than others, but none of that comes up in a medical. We have sold players to clubs that we've said aren't going to play more than 40 games a year and then they do a full season. The problem is that we test people as doctors, lying on a coach, lying horizontally in a scan, so it is very difficult to know what happens functionally.

What's the best part of the job?

The games, the big games: the Champions League Final, FA Cup Final, Real Madrid and Inter Milan away. You get the best seat in the house and you really feel the game because you can see them breathing and how hard work it all is. It's amazing to see their ability up close too, like how they make space on the line when there isn't any space, you can't see that sort of thing on the telly.

Player enhancement:

What novel techniques do you use at Arsenal to boost performance?

"The one thing about sports medicine is that, you can read something that's very new, and you can use it the next day. For example, where we are, I'm using IV gluconate, for bone building. It's not licensed in the UK but is used in the States. We also do autologous blood injections, blood thinning with growth factors and use vitamins: I don't know if they make any difference but what you're looking for is half a percent difference, as on the day, that could make the difference. I'm on the UEFA doping panel and

there are things done by people in private labs that we can't detect, blood spinning for example: He's not with us anymore so I can say it, but Thierry Henry used to go for blood spinning and if someone was to see him, it would have got into all the papers. This will get probably get into the papers but he's now at Barca. Lots of the stuff is unproven though: when I was at Chelsea they had a hyperbaric oxygen chamber but it was so claustrophobic none of the players went in it. Dimitar Berbatov though has a sealed hyperbaric room in his flat in which he sleeps a couple of nights a week. There's no evidence it works!