

# advance

## for Physical Therapy & Rehab Medicine™

By RICHARD COLLINGE, MSC

## Earning Elite-Level Status

Watford Football Club's athletes get a leg up thanks to high-power laser therapy



When Watford Football Club earned a spot in the English Premier League (EPL) 15 months ago, it's safe to say that the stakes were raised to a level that I couldn't have imagined. Along with this came the pressure one would expect when you have been elevated to the very highest level of play.

Promotion to the EPL is no simple task. It is the most competitive (and watched) football league in the world. Qualifying for a spot in the EPL is very different from many professional sports, in that a team truly does have to "qualify." If a team's performance diminishes, they can be relegated out of the league to make room for a better team from the league below.

As you can imagine, once you arrive on the big stage and the spotlights are on, it's "game time" and the goal is to have everyone performing at their best. It's hard to describe the pride that pulses through the club and fuels everyone in the organization to perform at the highest level in every way.

It's especially evident within our medical program. We are doing all we can to incorporate the most effective evaluation and treatment methods.

### It's About The 1%

At this high level of game-play it's about the 1%. The finest of margins can make a difference. Getting that extra 1% of performance or the extra 1% of recovery can make a difference between winning and losing. Getting these players on the pitch even one day sooner could tilt the scales in our favor at the most crucial time.

Medically, we created the right infrastructure to accomplish these marginal, but essential, improvements. It's my job to decide what's going to be most beneficial for the team and the individual players. We strive for the best outcomes but the solutions also have to be cost-effective. We treat injuries when they happen, but we also have a substantial injury prevention strategy to keep our players

well — and having the right programs and technologies to prevent injury is important to us.

Sifting through the noise can be difficult. I vividly remember the day we were promoted to EPL. I instantly received a battery of e-mails from companies trying to

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sell me all kinds of things. I began looking at research and decided to evaluate a few modalities. We are pretty much practicing 24-7 medicine in our environment, and the purpose of trialing equipment is to ensure new technologies are going to hold up to our harsh demands. Additionally, and most importantly, we need to see results and experience positive feedback from players.

Time is not on your side when you have a match right around the bend. Finding the right methods and technologies to incorporate can be a challenge when you're looking for outcomes fast and trying to keep players comfortable and happy.

### Exceeding Expectations

As I conducted research and talked to my colleagues, it was recommended that we take a look at deep-tissue laser therapy. I had encountered laser therapy 15 years ago but did not pay it much mind.

Historically, my impression had been that laser therapy was limited in its application. But I was told that the new higher-power lasers were more versatile and effective. We decided to bring it in for evaluation. When we began our trial of the laser with Watford FC, it was a rebirth of laser in terms of application, potential and results.

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Professional soccer players for Watford Football Club in the United Kingdom now request laser therapy treatment from the medical staff. There is a deep-heat feeling in the tissue and athletes can feel the difference. Player feedback is crucial to compliance and outcomes.

We've been so impressed with the wide variety of conditions we can effectively treat. Of all our modalities the laser is most versatile. We treat the array of acute, chronic, post-surgical and early degenerative conditions with fantastic results. Results have been extremely positive in players with Achilles, shoulder, and patellar tendinopathy. Numerous knee pathologies have also responded extremely well.

With our eyes open to the newfound versatility of laser therapy, our club did in fact invest in the technology, and I'm sure we'll be looking to expand with it over the coming years.

### Player Favorite

As we prepare for play, we monitor injuries and attempt to get players on the field so they can compete safely and without discomfort. Laser therapy has been excellent in reducing overall recovery times and is a fast, easy treatment that we feel gives us tremendous results leading up to a match.

As a pre-performance treatment, the ability to quickly stimulate blood flow and warm up deep-tissue structures makes players more comfortable as they prepare for heavy competition. Players come in for treatments before they go to the gym to

work out, before practice, and especially before matches. Players are more comfortable in their movements after receiving laser therapy treatments.

Players now come in and ask for the treatment. There is a deep-heat feeling in the tissue and they can really feel the difference.

Player feedback is crucial to compliance and outcomes. You can believe that the technology is the greatest in the world, but if the players do not gravitate toward it, you will have an uphill battle trying to make it a daily event. The therapy laser has actually become a mandatory part of my kit based on player demand.

### Simple Solutions

Laser therapy has been easy for staff to grow accustomed to. We've learned dosing techniques that were completely foreign to us in the past and are developing our skill through education opportunities.

We're finding that the technology is not intimidating, and is actually quite the opposite. Built-in protocols have made it easy to set up and delegate treatments, and keep things consistent. Treatments are fast and easy and you don't have to be a laser scholar to operate.

We've learned to use the laser adjunctively with shockwave therapy, cryotherapy chambers, and other recovery strategies. As an added benefit we've been combining laser with manual therapy treatments by utilizing the massage ball head attachment. This allows us to work with the tissue more effectively while delivering a dose of laser energy.

Portability is a massive bonus. We stay in hotels every night before home and away games. Having equipment that can become part of our travel kit is important since we often set up our medical clinic in a hotel room. A battery-operated unit allows us more mobility in tight work spaces.

### Proof Case

In January we signed a player who had come to us from another club. He had undergone surgery in November for a meniscal injury. When we conducted his initial medical exam there was still inflammation in the area; however, we accepted this as a risk that came along with the player.

In his previous rehabilitation program, he had not been exposed to the therapy laser, so we began that straight away. We started at a medium power and progressively became more aggressive.

After just the first treatment, the player reported positive results, and the swelling quickly subsided. Six months later we still treat him with the therapy laser pre-training and pre-game. He comes in asking for it every day because it has worked so well.

We have also seen impressive results in surgical cases where scar tissue had persisted. The laser is helping optimize the tissue in a state in which it is more prepared to heal. The results we saw on scar-tissue from a post-surgical lower-abdominal procedure were impressive.

### A Kit Essential

We are well underway and having fantastic experience with deep-tissue laser therapy. We've had terrific outcomes and the players have come to expect and appreciate the benefits.

The portability and ease of use have made it easy to adopt, and the unit has been great for the entire staff regardless of level of experience. I can confidently say the therapy laser is an essential part of our medical kit. ■