

APMA *News*



FOR THE LOVE
OF THE GAME:

A SPORTS PODIATRIST WINS BIG

Eliminate Medical Errors

Keeping Soldiers on Their Feet

How to Boost a Dwindling Practice

BEND IT LIKE LIEBESKIND

BY AIMEE CONDAYAN

Soccer legend David Beckham readies for his high-profile move to the LA Galaxy. Abbey Wambach gears up for the Women's World Cup in China. LA Kings' Brian Willsie closes out another season. What do they all have in common? The care of Howard Liebeskind, DPM, whose lengthy résumé lists services provided for countless teams, including the entire Pepperdine University sports program. Penciled in between these obligations are 11-hour days, four days a week at his private practice in the Los Angeles suburb of West Hills—including one day a week in the operating room. Howard Liebeskind, DPM continued on page 20

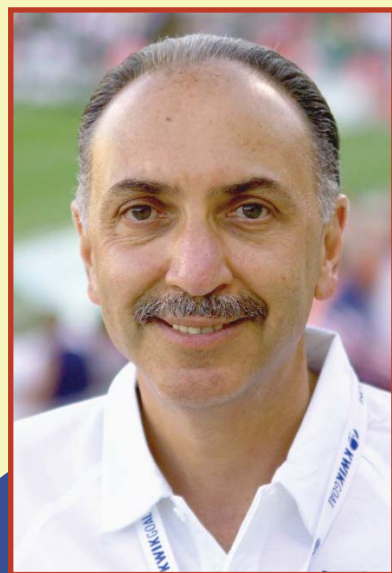
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Does he sleep? It's hard to say. But his devotion to the practice of sports medicine is indisputable.

Dr. Liebeskind adjusts his private practice schedule to accommodate his responsibilities to various sports teams but regardless, his plate remains full. "This is unfortunately, but very fortunately, my life," he said. "I'm a high-tech kind of guy—a very time-management oriented individual. I've been able to only have minimal conflicts in my schedule in the way that I've organized my work." Luckily, his family approves. His wife Joyce is an avid sports fan, as are his daughters, Alison and Jessica.

"They understand and support me, and they come to as many events as they can."

Though it's open throttle now, his career didn't start out this bustling. In fact, like many recent college graduates, Dr. Liebeskind found himself prepared for the work force but looking for direction. He had completed his DPM degree from the Illinois College of Podiatric Medicine in 1978 and later his residency in podiatric surgery at Van Nuys Community Hospital when he began work in a private practice. He worked energetically in the practice for a couple of years when, by chance, his discerning eye set his now diverse career into motion.



HOWARD LIEBESKIND, DPM

During a family gathering, Dr. Liebeskind picked up a popular running magazine that belonged to his father-in-law. While flipping through the pages, he noticed something was amiss. The athletic shoe in an advertisement had a midsole construction characteristic that was opposite of what he knew to be biomechanically appropriate.

With his father-in-law's encouragement, Dr. Liebeskind called the magazine's editor and told him about the design error. "Are you sure?" the editor asked.

He was, and within 24 hours two men from the athletic shoe company's product development team arrived at Dr. Liebeskind's office to discuss his findings. A few days later he received another call from the editor asking him to participate in the magazine's annual running shoe survey.

After nine hours examining athletic shoes at the magazine's headquarters, he shared his thoughts, and a friendship developed. Shortly thereafter he was asked to become part of the publication's technical advisory board. His ardor for biomechanics was opening doors, and it didn't stop there. After the running shoe survey was published, it caught the eye of one of the athletic trainers at Pepperdine University, and he in turn invited Dr. Liebeskind to come and meet with him. "It was an exciting opportunity because at that time there weren't many multi-disciplinary sports medicine programs around, and they had a very nice program," Dr. Liebeskind said. He graciously accepted the spot as podiatrist at Pepperdine.

AS HIS REPUTATION GREW, arrangements arose with Major League Soccer, the National Hockey League, Arena Football, and Major League Lacrosse.

Word of Dr. Liebeskind's podiatric expertise was spreading fast, and around 1984 he received a call from Mike Shimensky, athletic trainer for the LA Clippers, who heard he was working with the Pepperdine basketball team. The Clippers had just moved from San Diego to Los Angeles, and they asked him to come on board as team podiatrist.

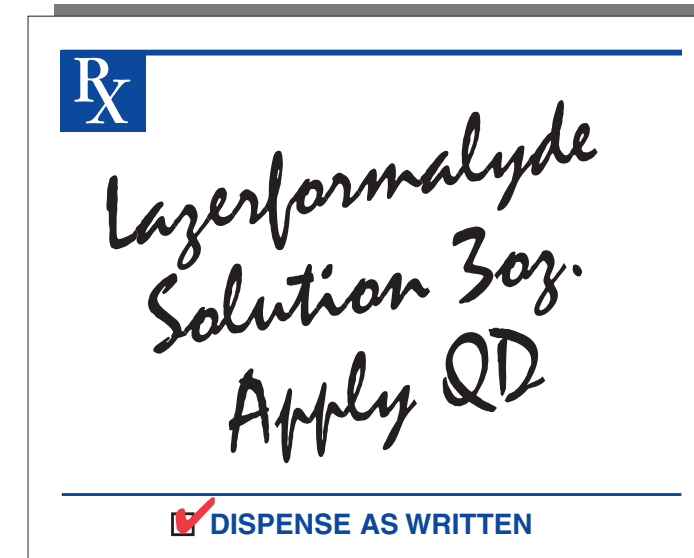
Around the same time, UCLA was looking for a podiatrist because they were also starting a multi-disciplinary sports medicine program. A leading foot and ankle orthopedist at UCLA had heard a talk given by Dr. Liebeskind and subsequently gave his name to Bert Mandelbaum, MD, who was at that time an assistant team physician. After a series of interviews with Dr. Mandelbaum and Gerald Finerman, MD, who was head team physician, they chose Dr. Liebeskind to be the podiatrist for UCLA's athletic program. A friendship with Dr. Mandelbaum developed, and Dr. Liebeskind's career snowballed from there.

When Dr. Mandelbaum later became head of sports medicine programming for the United States Soccer Federation, his familiarity with Liebeskind's work ethic and expertise led to Dr. Liebeskind's position as podiatrist to the 1994 United States Men's World Cup and National teams. Following World Cup '94 Dr. Liebeskind assumed the role of team podiatrist for all U.S. Men's and Women's National teams. As his reputation grew, arrangements arose with Major League Soccer, the National Hockey League, Arena Football, and Major League Lacrosse.

"The relationships that have developed through my love and appreciation of athletic medicine have enabled me to interact with

Howard Liebeskind, DPM continued on page 22

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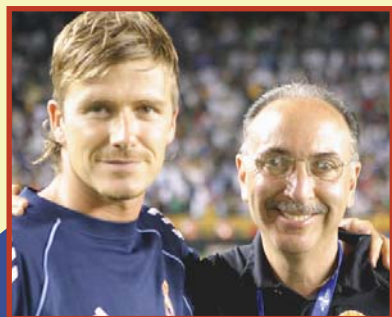
the medical staff of each team, which in Los Angeles has always been led by the preeminent orthopedic groups, so I've had great involvement and interaction with the Kerlan-Jobe Orthopaedic Clinic and the Santa Monica Orthopaedic Group. These two groups provide the care for most of the professional teams in town. Those relationships have grown and have become an integral part of my practice life, and I've been very much involved with the programming that they've established so excellently in Los Angeles."

Dr. Luga Podesta, team physician for the LA Dodgers, LA Riptide, and the LA Avengers, values Dr. Liebeskind's expertise. "He is an unbelievable asset to both my practice in orthopedic sports medicine as well as for the teams as our foot specialist. His forte is sports orthotics, and I think he's probably one of the best clinicians for that in the world, based on the injuries I've seen him treat." Dr. Podesta sends all his patients with podiatric needs to Dr. Liebeskind. "He's able to give a very specific diagnosis, treat them, and get them back on the field very quickly."

Soccer Hall of Famer and general manager of the LA Galaxy, Alexi Lalas, concurs. "Feet are to a soccer player what hands are to a surgeon. Care and treatment are essential, so it makes sense to have the best in the business working with our team," said Lalas. "Dr. Liebeskind is simply a legend in the game of soccer. If there is a foot problem, he's the man you call. He's a part of the Galaxy family, but teams all around the league routinely consult him."

His people skills aren't bad either. Much of Dr. Liebeskind's success in working with athletes lies in his ability to understand the athlete's mentality. "His credibility enables him to create a positive relationship with the player. This often produces a quicker and a healthier rehabilitation," Lalas said.

Speaking of relationships, we've all heard that they are based on trust. That adage holds especially true in regard to Dr. Liebeskind's



DAVID BECKHAM and Dr. Liebeskind

professional accord with both the franchise he is retained by and the athletes he cares for. "I am there for the player and the franchise, but the trust between all of us and the professionalism that is exhibited can never be compromised, just as with any doctor/patient relationship. I have been able to maintain a perfectly healthy balance and a trust by all."

And indeed, he has many players to look after. He is currently podiatrist for the LA Galaxy, CD Chivas USA of Major League Soccer,

LA Kings of the National Hockey League, LA Avengers of the Arena Football League, LA Riptide of Major League Lacrosse, and the Pepperdine University Athletic Department.

He has previously provided care during the length of the summer 2006 pre-season training camp for FC Chelsea of the English Premiership held at UCLA in Westwood, CA. Here he provided podiatric services to many of the most notable soccer players in the world at the club's invitation.

If that is not enough, he also has served the podiatric needs of many of the world's renowned soccer players in England's Premiership, Italy's

ON AND OFF THE FIELD, Dr. Liebeskind is recognized internationally for his practiced knowledge of podiatric biomechanics and its application to sport-specific foot orthoses as well as the biodynamics of athletic footwear.

Serie A, Spain's La Liga, Germany's Bundesliga, and France's Ligue 1, as well as the first divisions of Belgium and Mexico.

On and off the field, Dr. Liebeskind is recognized internationally for his practiced knowledge of podiatric biomechanics and its application to sport-specific foot orthoses as well as the biody-

PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: PODIATRIC CARE ANYTIME, ANYPLACE

- With available technology, we are able to be in direct clinical contact with all European and U.S.-based players.
- Instant messaging, IP telephony, Skype videoconferencing, etc., have made it possible to stay in touch with players 24/7 around the globe.
- If a new minor issue arises for a European or U.S.-based player and simple modification of a current orthotic prescription is needed, we can generally view this issue over our PC and have a modified appliance sent within 24 hours via a global delivery service.
- A portable orthotics modification lab also has been created to service any orthotic-related need our team may have no matter where we are. This portable lab travels with us to all major events. It includes every essential to modify and even refurbish appliances.

namics of athletic footwear. The world's largest athletic shoe fabricators regularly seek his advice. "I think the focus and the way that I'm viewed by the leadership of each multi-disciplinary plan I'm involved in is based on my ability to understand, provide, and fabricate functional orthotic appliances," Dr. Liebeskind said.

There's the strictly traditional way of looking at orthotic appliances, and then there's Dr. Liebeskind's way. "I'm very sport-specific and position-specific in terms of the kind of functional orthotic appliances I make. One needs to have an extraordinary knowledge of the biomechanical design concepts that are incorporated within athletic shoes, depending on the sport," he said. Required knowledge relative to ground reactive forces and type of "pitch," or field of play, is imperative when making decisions about players' needs. "We should also never forget that palliative needs to athletes are not only important, but also essential for comfortable play."

While traveling the globe to attend athletic tournaments is a definite perk, the professional in Dr. Liebeskind is always considering the players' pre-existing conditions and weighing them against the weather forecast and how it may affect field conditions. Adjustments to shoe fit and device needs must be made in some cases. A portable orthotics modification lab allows him to service any orthotic-related need the team may have, no matter where they are.

"Whether it's a simple hangnail or a severe case of hallux rigidus, Dr. Liebeskind is always proactive in dealing with a foot problem. He's realistic, but I've seen him work miracles," Lalas said. "Part of my job is to protect our most valuable assets, our players. Having Dr. Liebeskind as our team podiatrist is great way to do just that."

For each team Dr. Liebeskind works with, there is a team of physicians alongside him. "I've been so fortunate to be surrounded by some very forward-thinking individuals. All the doctors I work with have a real appreciation for podiatry. We have every specialty of every jurisdiction available to the players at all times, so it's not just me who budgets their time like this and does what I do! There is a wonderful fraternity of physicians in town with whom I practice sports medicine. They're as intense as I am about the work, and so is my dedicated staff."

Dr. Mandelbaum also views Dr. Liebeskind as the ideal team player. "The challenge of preparing a national and professional soccer team is multidimensional and intense. It is the overall objective to optimize performance, minimize injury problems, be drug-free, and prevent problems in preparation and competition," Dr. Mandelbaum said. "To accomplish these goals it is necessary to utilize a 'team' of sports medicine professionals. Collectively, these professionals are empowered to best understand and execute elements of a program that helps attain those goals. The practical aspects of overseeing the sports medical aspects break down to performance preparation, injury care, and prevention."

In line with practicing podiatry, Dr. Liebeskind is a member of the APMA and its component California Podiatric Medical Association, as well as the Los Angeles County Podiatric Medical Association and the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine.

BIOMECHANICS BASICS: ALL PLAYERS GET THEM

- Podiatric and biomechanical examinations during annual or pre-World Cup physicals
- Digital photos, where and when necessary, in normal angle and base of gait.
- Boot models, exacting sizes, and sockliners.
- Precise thermal plastic sockliner templates and current boot models from the orthotics lab.
- Orthotics cast in neutral position. Negative molds are processed to positive form. Casts are held at the laboratory and placed with boots.
- Re-examination, and orthotics prescriptions are provided to the lab when devices are needed. Biomechanical Services of Brea, CA, has provided these professional services for 15 years and produce what I feel are the finest orthoses for soccer shoes in the world.

He also has served as director of podiatric medical education and director of podiatric surgical residency programs of West Valley Hospital & Health Center in Canoga Park, CA. From 1984 to 1992 he was chief of podiatry at the medical center.

Dr. Liebeskind has contributed to sports-related texts, articles, and journals, including *Biomechanics Magazine* and *International Football & Soccer Medicine: Caring for the Soccer Athlete Worldwide*, published by the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine. Previously, he has been both a member of the medical advisory board of *Tennis* magazine and a running shoe expert to *Runner's World* magazine.

His credentials speak for themselves, but he also considers himself privileged to be where he is today. When all is said and done, it was a single advertisement in a magazine that served as the catalyst for Dr. Liebeskind, as an ambitious young podiatrist, to ultimately achieve big things. "I'm the luckiest podiatrist that's ever walked the earth." ■



KASEY KELLER, considered to be one of the finest goalkeepers in the world, with Dr. Liebeskind.