

BY BARBARA KEVLES

THE CHIROPRACTOR

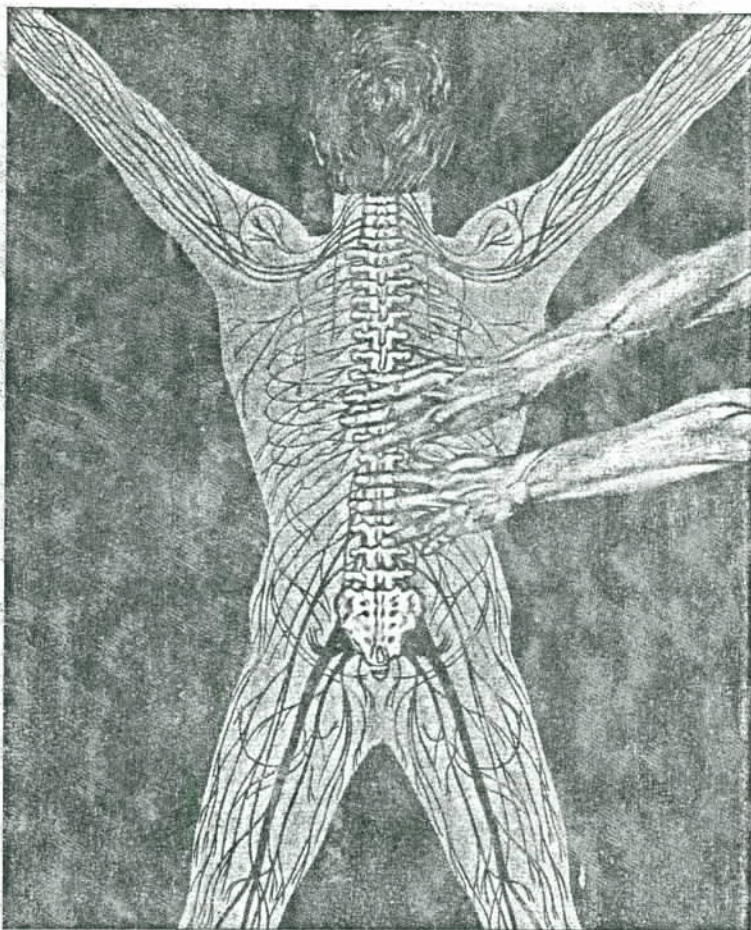
The long-misunderstood profession is making a comeback

WHEN POLE-vaulter Billy Olson, former holder of the indoor world record, hurt so bad he wanted to drop out of the '82 Vitalis/U.S. Olympic Invitational, meet director Ray Lumpp personally escorted him to the chiropractor for help. Olson's back and legs were in such bad shape, the chiropractor's twisting and cranking so rough, Olson thought he'd never move again. Yet on his next jump he cleared the bar and went back to the chiropractor for more. Then on his next attempt he set his first national record, with the height of eighteen feet six and one-half inches.

Nowadays, top-ranking athletes and amateurs alike see chiropractors for the gamut of injuries from the sprains and strains common to any sport to the more serious overuse injury. In 1978 track star Mary Decker developed sciatica, an acute injury of the major leg nerve, and had to stay out of competition for six months because neither cortisone shots, physiotherapy, nor any other traditional cure gave her relief from the excruciating pain. "As a last resort," says Decker, she started seeing a chiropractor. After treatment almost every other day for nearly two months, she began a slow comeback to racing.

During a tough speed session in the summer of 1982, runner Geoff Smith—ranked number two in the world in the ten-kilometer the year before—felt pain in his thigh, but carried on. The next day, the thigh was too sore to sit on; the diagnosis was a pulled hamstring. In succeeding months, neither ultrasound, ice, wet heat, nor sessions with a podiatrist or orthopedic surgeon could alleviate his pain. After being out the entire fall season, Smith went to a chiropractor.

"It made the difference," says Smith of his three post-season visits. The next time he saw his chiropractor was in the medical tent at the finish line of the 1983 New York City Marathon, just after Smith had come in second in his first marathon.



THOUGH NO scientific studies prove it, there is an increasing body of empirical evidence that indicates that chiropractors get results: such as Smith's recovery that culminated with his finishing time of 2:09:08—the world record for a debut marathon—and the fact that the first chiropractor used at the U.S. Olympic Committee's 1982 National Sports Festival treated nearly three hundred of the hopefuls there.

Although chiropractors use methods unlike those of any other medical professional, theirs is a licensed profession. Chiropractors are state-regulated practitioners who have completed specified undergraduate science requirements, graduated from a four-year chiropractic college, and passed national or state professional examinations.

Their philosophy is unique as well. For example, chiropractors believe that a ramming blow, a fall, or weak back muscles may throw the spine out of its normal S-curve. The displaced vertebrae, they be-

lieve, will press on nerves that exit between them and as a result deprive a part of the body of its normal energy flow. So chiropractors will often blame a leg injury on misaligned vertebrae. By contrast, a medical doctor would view a leg sprain as a problem of only the limb. But a chiropractor would trace an inflamed tendon in the calf to nerves in the spine that can't fire properly because of interference by displaced vertebrae.

Whether you're suffering from a blow to your back or a leg injury from overused muscles in a sport, a traditional chiropractor may treat you with two methods neither an osteopath nor M.D. is specifically licensed to use. He will first balance your back by separating the displaced vertebrae (traction) and then return those displaced bones to their correct position in the spinal column to assure free flow of nerve impulses throughout your body (manipulation).

Since the dawning of the fitness craze, which spawned increased numbers of sports injuries, chiropractors who've specialized in treating injured athletes have developed a new twist to old doctrine. Now not only do they say that spinal distortions precipitate injuries, but they also believe that overuse problems in your limbs such as muscle pulls, spasms, and sprains are the primary cause of misalignment in the back. You can throw your back out with a leg injury because you compensate by favoring your well leg over the injured one. And you can also develop spinal compression because of the way your body adapts to pain, like the pitcher who unconsciously tilts his neck to one side because his opposite elbow aches from too many curveballs. So a sports chiropractor will first treat the specific limb problem with electrical stimulation, ice, heat, whirlpool, or massage to reduce inflammation and relieve tightness, and then manipulate. Finally, unlike an orthopedist's prescription of rest, drugs, and physical therapy, a chiropractor will

prescribe daily exercises to strengthen the injured area, increase circulation, and reduce swelling to help the body heal itself so the athlete can continue to train and compete as part of the treatment.

TWENTY YEARS ago, according to AMA associate general counsel Betty J. Anderson, chiropractors believed in one cure—spinal manipulation—for all human ailments. So in 1966 the AMA mounted a national crusade to eliminate all chiropractic medicine by threatening to ban any AMA member who gave chiropractors business by referrals.

Chiropractors defended their profession by launching a national political campaign for recognition of their legitimate medical status. In 1972 Congress amended the Medicare Act to include benefits for limited chiropractic services, which in one year alone amounted to \$30 million. In 1974 the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged the Council on Chiropractic Education as the national accrediting authority for chiropractic colleges and as monitor of their educational standards. In 1978 the AMA House of Delegates rescinded its blanket indictment of their methods as devoid of therapeutic value and voted to lift its ban against referrals by physicians to licensed chiropractors.

NOT LONG ago Mark, a ranking masters road runner, was referred by his coach to

Dr. Mac Goldstein, the official chiropractor for the Millrose Games and the TAC Nationals (the USA/Mobil Indoor Track and Field Championships). Mark had increased his training from forty to fifty miles in one week and complained of pain in his lower right leg.

When Mark came to his office, Dr. Goldstein noticed the spinal distortion by Mark's posture. His head was cocked to the right side, his shoulder and hip were higher above the injured leg. When Mark lay on the chiropractor's table his right leg measured one quarter of an inch shorter than the left.

Certain standard orthopedic checks of Mark's leg movement eliminated possible neurological causes for this. But specific tests for limits of motion and tenderness of joints identified the problem. When Dr. Goldstein flexed Mark's right foot back and forth, he reported pain behind his ankle where the Achilles attaches. When the doctor tried to jiggle the tendon, like a rusty hinge it hardly moved. The diagnosis was Achilles tendonitis.

Dr. Goldstein explained. Mark's increased mileage and training on hills had stressed his rear leg muscles and inflamed the Achilles. Because of the pain, Mark had compensated by hitting the ground toe first instead of heel first on his injured leg to reduce the pull on the irritated tendon. The strain had thrown his back out of balance.

Dr. Goldstein's treatment, as well as his

diagnosis, concentrated on both of Mark's problems—his injured foot and his distorted back. First, Dr. Goldstein manually stretched the right tendon and connecting rear leg muscles. Then he attached wired pads linked to a machine to Mark's right knee and ankle to electrically stimulate muscle contractions. After three consecutive twenty-minute sessions, Mark's Achilles was more flexible because increased blood circulation in the area had reduced the swelling and tightness.

With Mark lying facedown, Dr. Goldstein adjusted the spine between his shoulders. The chiropractor pressed down with both hands. Like a pianist playing familiar chords, he descended the backbones from Mark's neck to his ribs to open the seventh and eighth dorsal vertebrae and free spinal nerves linked to Mark's legs. Then Dr. Goldstein separated and realigned vertebrae in Mark's neck and lower back. At the end of treatment, Mark's right leg was only slightly shorter than his left.

Dr. Goldstein's homework for Mark was action-oriented—slow two-mile runs on flat roads daily and also toe raises on a board to stretch the tendon, rebuild weakened muscles, and help hold his spine in place. Six weeks later Mark was doing hard workouts and was back in competition.

IN A book entitled *Health Quackery*, compiled by editors of Consumer Reports in 1980, it was doubted whether a chiropractor's spinal realignment and removal of nerve interference is effective.

In his rebuttal, Dr. Lee R. Selby, then-president of the American Chiropractic Association, said, "The medical profession condemns us for not having creditable research to substantiate our health care, and, on the other hand, denies us access to hospitals, their equipment and personnel that could provide it."

Though chiropractors are prohibited from practicing in most U.S. hospitals, many athletes nonetheless can't do without their treatments. During track season, Decker says, "I can't go without seeing a chiropractor once a week." So until science catches up with the realities of athletic life, the controversy will have to rest on the results of chiropractic care for both amateur and professional athletes.

After the 1983 New York City Marathon, with help from three medics, second-place finisher Geoff Smith hobbled into the medical tent where Dr. Goldstein was helping out. "Doc," Smith cried in relief at the sight of his own chiropractor. He pointed to his right leg where he'd felt shooting spasms for the race's last six miles. Dr. Goldstein took care of the leg spasm and then adjusted Smith's back. In two minutes Smith, though sore and hurting, was up and walking to the press tent for questions on his new world record.

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