



FIELD OF DREAMS

By Alexander Germanis

Roughly a hundred and thirty miles from the big sports teams, big hospitals and big headaches of Chicago, there are twin towns nestled amongst the fields and prairies of Central Illinois. Encompassed by stalks of corn instead of towering skyscrapers, this community seems an unlikely place to find what many believe to be available only in a metropolis like Chicago: cutting-edge sports medicine and arthroscopic surgical expertise.

Despite its rather humble surroundings, Bloomington-Normal is a home to many highly skilled orthopedic surgeons—surgeons like Dr. Joseph Norris, a physician who specializes in sports medicine.

Born in Springfield and schooled at Illinois Wesleyan and Southern Illinois University, Dr. Norris is no stranger to the smaller cities of the prairie. But that background melds with an understanding of sports attained through four years of playing college football, working as a team physician for the NFL team the Baltimore Ravens and now practicing in the sub-specialty of sports medicine at McLean County Orthopedics (MCO).

That knowledge base is especially helpful in a community with five competitive high schools, two universities, and professional football, hockey, basketball, and baseball organizations, not to mention amateur competitors of all ages. In fact, according to Dr. Norris, “sports injuries in this town start at a very early age. The age is creeping down lower and up higher. So much organized and intense sports start at an early age and now people are continuing in organized sports and trying to stay active at an older age.”

A broader age range means a more complex range of sports-related injuries; and when you’re hurting and want to get back into your respective arena, why travel two-and-a-half hours to Chicago when you can get the same grade of care and the same level of experience in McLean County?

Aside from handling rotator cuff repairs and cartilage transplants, Dr. Norris also performs more complex procedures like Posterior Cruciate Ligament (PCL) reconstruction, which often coincides with repairing other torn ligaments in the knee. “We’ve done two in the last two months,” he states.

He is also certified to perform cartilage restoration through Autologous Chondrocyte Implantation (ACI), which is necessary for patients whose cartilage is damaged and is unable to regenerate due to inaccessibility to the blood supply. An ACI involves harvesting a biopsy of the patient’s cartilage where it is then cultured in a lab, generating up to ten million new cells. These new cells, grown from the patient’s own original cartilage, are then implanted back into the patient’s articular joint.

As challenging or complex as that may sound, Dr. Norris is a physician who thrives on such a challenge. “[I will] take the worst of the worst and the toughest of the tough,” he declares. Even new techniques, procedures that “have all been shipped to Chicago in the past” such as the one to stabilize the patellofemoral joint—a medial patellofemoral ligament reconstruction—are welcome challenges.

And anything not quite inside Dr. Norris’ wheelhouse he is more than happy to pass to one of his colleagues. “We work very symbiotically,” he says. “That is to say, if there is a problem outside my normal

realm—my focus—I do rely on other sub-specialists who do their jobs extremely well.”

“Within orthopedic surgery, the sub-specialty is where the future is and where it’s going,” he proclaims. And Bloomington-Normal is stocked with orthopedic sub-specialists. Together these physicians have helped build McLean County into the sports medicine field of dreams it is now.

Ultimately, this is Dr. Norris’ goal: “I want people to know where they can get help,” he says—to let athletes know they needn’t make the trek north when they can get the help they need in the middle of the cornfields of central Illinois. This sports medicine field of dreams has been built so athletes of all ages will come.

For more information, you may contact McLean County Orthopedics at 309-663-6461 or visit www.mcleancountyorthopedics.com. They offer a comprehensive range of services and treat all types of orthopedic conditions and injuries.

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