

Kate catches up with Sports Orthopaedic Specialist, Charles Willis Owen

Working as a Physiotherapist at The Harbour Hospital, I am lucky to be able to work alongside specialists at the top of their field. This month I caught up with Charles Willis Owen, to chat to him about his passion for cycling and all the tricks he uses to achieve top results.



Can you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

Sure, I am an orthopaedic surgeon, who specialises in sports injuries. I run a business called Sports Orthopaedic Specialist. My goal is to keep people active and doing the things they enjoy, no matter what their age, or their medical problems. I have always been interested in all aspects of sport but my main focus has been endurance sports and at the moment, cycling.

I hear you have recently qualified to represent Great Britain for cycling?

Yes, that is true, I have qualified for the over 40s category in the UCI Gran Fondo World Championships, which this year is going to be held in the mountains in Italy. In order to qualify, I have to rank highly in a race called the Tour of Cambridgeshire and I managed to get within about the top 60, for all the different age categories.

Besides I hear you have qualified for the Worlds in Duathlon – that's amazing – well done!

That sounds like quite a challenge, what motivated you to do that?

Well firstly, I love cycling but secondly, given that the main purpose of my work is to keep people doing the things they love regardless of age, or injury, I thought I ought to live my own philosophy by trying to put in a good showing for Team GB at the World Championships.

What were the challenges and how did you overcome them?

Well, it has been quite a challenge to get myself fit enough to be amongst the fastest cyclists in the country and to juggle that with a very busy work life and a busy family life with three young children. I have only really managed to spare a few hours each week for training, without impinging on the rest of my life, so I have had to be very strict in order to make the best available use of that time. I have been doing that using a very structured training

programme and a lot of fairly boring but productive work on an indoor trainer, which I find very time efficient. Part of the philosophy of my work is to use the best available technology to get the best available results, so I have explored lots of new ideas with regards to cycling and training. All totally above board I should add! As well as getting my fitness levels as high as they can be, I needed to get my weight as low as it can be, for climbing hills and this has been a bit of a challenge too.

What sort of tricks have you been using?

I had a really productive overseas training camp in Girona which is where all the professional cyclists train with some good friends and we did some hard work in the mountains there. I have used something called Bullet Proof Coffee, which has come over from Silicon Valley and involves mixing coffee with coconut oil and butter to try to get your metabolism using fat instead of carbohydrate for fuel. It sounds a bit weird and disgusting, but the science is sound. I found it really good in terms of powering my training on fat which means I can cycle harder for longer. I have used a special device to simulate training at high altitude which involves breathing less oxygen than normal and makes your body

increase its number of red blood cells as if I lived at the top of a mountain. I have had a go in a Cryo chamber after a heavy training camp, down at minus 180°C to try and reduce muscle soreness and speed up recovery times. I have also explored a new technique called Voodoo flossing which is a way of reducing muscle soreness after hard workouts. So I have been a bit of a human guinea pig, but all of little things have added up to allow me to make the best available use of my training time and get a good result.

What was the qualifier race like?

With it being in Cambridgeshire, it was a very flat race, which does not suit a light cyclist like me, so

it was very fast, very busy, and a little bit stressful. The race went surprisingly well and I spent a bit of time in the lead for the whole of the country but unfortunately, experience let me down and I did not quite time things right and lost the lead just towards the end. I still qualified comfortably, and interestingly my 40-45 age group was way faster than any of the younger or older divisions. I think that is reassuring for athletes of all ages!

I know one of your specialities is knees...would you recommend cycling for people with knee problems?

You are right, I am mainly a knee specialist. Cycling is a really good form of exercise for anyone, but because your

body weight is supported by the saddle and the bike, and because there is no impact it is particularly friendly on the knees. In fact it is a really good form of exercise for my knee replacement patients and a lot of them get back to really high levels of cycling. It can take its toll on other muscle groups and can cause some muscle imbalance so the attention of a good physio and some regular core work such as Pilates is vital.

Well it's been great to catch up with you Charles and good luck for the Worlds in September!

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