

Athletes Put Their Faith in Power of Magnets

By Sal Ruibal

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Denver Broncos linebacker Bill Romanowski KO's quarterbacks, then sleeps like a baby on a Nikken magnetic mattress pad. Yankees pitcher Hideki Irabu throws a wicked split-finger fastball with a backflex and dozens of mini magnets stuck to his body. Senior PGA Tour golfer Jim Colbert swings for the greens with dollar bill-sized magnets strapped to his lower back.

Magnetic therapy is the hottest trend among professional athletes. But the idea of using magnetic fields to increase blood circulation in injured tissue and encourage healing by stimulating the nervous system goes back thousands of years to ancient Greece and Egypt. The original Olympic athletes might have used magnets. And in the same way that today's top athletes influence fashion and language, their eagerness to embrace alternative healing techniques is influencing the public: U.S. consumers will spend more than \$500 million this year on magnetic chair pads, bracelets, insoles, and even water, manufacturers say. The trend is so lucrative, athletes are adding brand-name magnets to their list of endorsements, along with sneakers and soda pops.

Romanowski began using magnets seven years ago while a member of the 49ers but didn't take them seriously. The team trainer had recommended them, but it was not until Romanowski had off season surgery that he adopted the idea. "I'm a believer, definitely," he says. "The first time I tried them, I got pain relief. It wasn't mental. I know it wasn't mental because I know my body." Because they know their bodies, it's natural that top athletes would be attracted to alternative therapies, says Dinnie Pearson, a Cranial-Sacral therapist with the Mind/Body Center in King of Prussia, Pa.

"Athletes use a lot of mental imagery, visualizing the correct muscle movements for their sport," Pearson says. "They can use that same powerful tool for healing, contacting injured areas to focus on that tissue to help it in the natural healing process." They had an acupuncturist travel with the team earlier this year. The team credits the therapy with helping second baseman Quilvio Veras get over hamstring problems.

"I think it's great," Towers says. "I know it worked on me. It blocks the nerve endings and takes the pain away. It's very relaxing. I'd go back."

Not understanding how an alternative therapy works is no roadblock for jocks in search of relief, but it can be for the federal government. Magnetic therapy has not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, but the [National Institutes of Health](#) are investigating the phenomenon.

The [NIH Office of Alternative Medicine](#), which was created only five years ago, is funding a study of magnetic therapy at the University of Virginia's School of Nursing.

Broncos safety Steve Atwater isn't waiting for the scientists to bless his magnets. "I don't know what it is, but it works," the 30-year-old, seven-time Pro Bowl player says. "I figure it can't hurt me, and it may help me."

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