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Injury leads Stacey Hardin to her dream job

Written by Tracy Lightfoot || Photography by John Sommers II

A nightmare of an injury woke Stacey Hardin from her dream job. Fortunately, an innovative procedure had her dreaming again before she even started counting sheep.

Hardin had started seeing trainer Dale Benedict in 1998 at The Training Studio in St. Matthews.

“I was like a completely different person after six months,” Hardin said. “Not just physically — mentally and emotionally, it just changed my whole life.”

One day, she told Benedict she envied his career. “You’ve got the greatest job in the world,” she told him. “To see the changes that you make in somebody has got to be the most rewarding thing in the world.”

Hardin told him she’d love to become a trainer — if she was 10 years younger. She was nearing 40, but Benedict kept telling her she could do it. Her parents had both been chiropractors and had placed an emphasis on good health, and she had worked for their practice for several years. Thinking her background was pulling her in that direction, she decided to pursue her personal trainer certification.

“I had not worked in several years because of my children,” she said, “and I did not want to go back to doing what I was doing.”

Hardin had been managing a doctor’s office, which she described as a stressful position.

“I wanted to get into something I could really enjoy,” she said.

So she studied under Benedict’s tutelage, shadowed him for six months and earned her certification in 1999. She began working with Benedict at The Training Studio, and after six months she approached him about becoming a business partner.

She bought into the business in 2000 and The Training Studio moved into a unique, bright, two-story studio space on St. Matthews Avenue.

“It has just been an incredible experience,” she said.

Benedict was her inspiration, Hardin said, and without his guidance and support, she knows she would not have found such a gratifying and fulfilling career.

And, through example, he got her interested in triathlons. Benedict has completed three Ironmans, but it turns out they’re not for Hardin.

“I tried — the water and I don’t get along,” she said. “I had a couple of bad experiences as a child, so I actually have a fear of the water.”

Afraid or not, she participated in a total immersion clinic to improve her swimming. That was when she injured her hip, an injury that seemed minor at the time but quickly worsened.

Hardin was in the middle of marathon training, and although sore, she kept running on it. The injury went undiagnosed for almost a year, she said, and became so painful she could not use the elliptical or ride a bike.

“Everything became so painful,” she said.

It turned out she had torn the cartilage in her hip, and running on it caused her to develop

arthritis. First, she had a hip arthroscopy to trim torn cartilage. The procedure frequently delays or completely eliminates the need for a hip replacement, and is done by making a small incision through which the surgeon can thread a camera to see inside the area.

“Because my arthritis had progressed



to the point it had, it didn't help mine," Hardin said. "So the next thing was hip replacement."

She made an appointment with her orthopedist, but before that day arrived, she read an article about a new procedure in the paper. It had been performed for the last decade, but not in Louisville. Dr. Jonathan Yerasimides is the first, and currently only, surgeon in the state who uses the anterior approach for total hip replacement.

The anterior approach is less invasive than the common anterolateral approach, but few surgeons are trained in the technique and it does risk damaging a major nerve, the lateral femoral cutaneous.

In the anterolateral approach, surgeons separate the hip abductor muscles, the gluteus medius and minimus, to reach the joint. Because muscle is cut from the bone, Hardin said, you lose stability and the recovery period is much longer.

But, the anterior approach utilizes an existing soft tissue area to access the joint, in an area high on the front of the thigh, between the sartorius and tensor fascia latae. The incision is 4 inches long, much smaller than is seen in other approaches.

Armed with information about this new procedure, Hardin inquired about it at her appointment. After consulting with several doctors, they decided she would be fine and was a "perfect candidate" for the procedure — especially because she wanted to run.

Because Hardin did want to run again, the surgeons elected to customize her new joint. Most replacements are a titanium stem connecting the femur to the femoral head, which is made of ceramic. The liner of the joint is usually ceramic as well. Hardin, however, has a cross-polymer liner because it offers better shock absorption.

Hardin said the only downside is that her replacement will likely wear out sooner than the traditional ceramic. Doctors estimate she'll need a new one in about 15 years, but she hopes having it done at a younger age will also help her rebound faster.

And, as far as rebounds go — Hardin was back to work a few weeks later and started doing weight training six weeks later.

"I started off very slow — everything was body weight," she said.

Her surgery was performed last November, and Hardin was able to resume running in January.

In fact, she completed the Triple Crown of Running and the Meijer



Derby Festival miniMarathon this year.

"My hip did not bother me throughout any of the races," she said. "The worst problem was that I couldn't breathe!"

Although her cardiovascular system had "plummeted," Hardin did prepare for surgery by doing a lot of strengthening exercises leading up to it. She was happy with her miniMarathon time, 3:06:46, and plans to participate in several triathlons in the summer and fall.

Hardin continues to teach at The Training Studio alongside Benedict, where they offer private training, group weight training circuit classes, a massage therapist, active isolated stretching and multi-sport training.

The multi-sport training is popular, with a large running group — about 130 this year, Hardin said. The 2007 list of upcoming events includes Ironman Louisville, various turkey trots and the Columbus Marathon and Half-Marathon.

To contact Benedict or Hardin, visit their Web site at www.thetrainingstudio.com or call (502) 893-4024.

Tracy Lightfoot is a local writer who crops up in various area publications. She just completed her first half-marathon and plans to run another in the fall, and enjoys local 5k races for the camaraderie and the opportunity to support good causes. She's finishing her bachelor degree at the University of Louisville, lives in Jeffersontown with her husband, two children and three dogs. She can be reached at tf.lightfoot@insightbb.com



After shadowing Dale Benedict for six months, Stacey Hardin earned her certification in 1999. She began working with Benedict at The Training Studio and became a business partner in 2000. The studio is now located in a unique, bright, two-story studio space on St. Matthews Avenue.