

Tennis player Rafael Nadal is known for this athleticism. His fine-tuned fitness and aggressive playing style have taken the game to a new level of competitiveness. He chases every ball and fights for every point. He is impressive to watch, but the style that has made him so successful also leaves him open to injury. Heavy topspin and fast footwork combined with a tenacious attitude all put pressure on his body, as do hard playing surfaces and a rigorous match schedule.

Through periods of injury and recovery, Nadal has developed a trusted network of doctors and physiotherapists. The ‘King of Clay’ tells Dr Eduardo Mauri what it takes for a medical team to support a player to 11 Grand Slam titles.

Do you remember your first big injury that prevented you from playing, training or at least decreased your performance?

I remember it was a shoulder lesion a few years ago. There was not such professionalism like we have now and they didn't know the evolution of the lesion. Initially I was recommended to see the doctor of the Spanish Tennis Federation, but since my uncle was playing with the Barcelona FC football team at the time, he took me to see the doctor of the football club. This doctor prescribed anti-inflammatories. I then went to see the doctor of the Spanish Tennis Federation who prescribed some exercises which were aimed at preventing future injuries. These were very effective.

You usually travel with your personal physiotherapist. Do you think this is enough or do you think it is better to travel to all the tournaments with your personal doctor as well?

In tennis I don't think this is necessary. Sometimes we go without asking the doctor of the Spanish Tennis Federation who is coming to watch the tournament. And there is one official doctor for each tournament.

But when I travel outside of Spain, say to America, I think it's very important to have a doctor by your side during the tournament. Many times I have only been able to finish a big match or tournament thanks to the travelling doctor because he gave me a local injection. In countries such as America, the local doctors won't usually give you any kind of injections so you have to rely on someone from your own medical team.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 2002** Won his first ATP match defeating Delgado. He was 15 years old
- 2003** Became youngest man to reach Wimbledon Round 3
- 2004** Spain win Davis Cup. Nadal is the youngest player to register a singles victory for a winning nation at 18 years of age
- 2005** First grand slam win at the French Open def. Puerta
- 2006** Wins his 16th ATP title as a teenager, equaling Björn Borg's record
- 2008** Won his 4th straight French Open singles title def. Federer
- 2008** Won his first Wimbledon singles title def. Federer
- 2008** Won Olympic Games gold medal def. González
- 2008** 18 August, claimed no. 1 ranking
- 2009** Won his first Australian Open singles title def. Federer
- 2010** 7 June, reclaimed World no. 1 ranking
- 2010** Won his first US Open singles title (def. Djokovic), completing career Grand Slam
- 2012** Won Monte Carlo Masters for 8th consecutive time, making him the only player to win 8 consecutive titles at the same tournament
- 2012** Won his 7th French Open singles title (def. Djokovic)

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Have you found any difference between the types of treatments all over the world?

Of course. There are some countries where doctors are more conservative than others when it comes to treatment. Doctors in these countries don't want to take any risks. And on the other hand, you don't have the same confidence in them as you do in your doctor who you have known your whole life and who has worked with you throughout your career. You know the doctor and the doctor knows you and there is trust there.

Have the advances in sports medicine over the last few years improved to the point where it has helped you to win or advance in the rankings? I'm talking about prevention, exercises and physiotherapy.

The most important improvement is the daily routine. This is the prevention programme that you use to perform daily shoulder work

and knee work etc. Also, it is important to have one person beside you who monitors you and helps you perform this kind of training. I think this is a compulsory investment for the future.

A few months ago you had some problems with your knee tendons and it was not clear how this would be resolved. What goes through your mind when you want to play at 100% but your body doesn't allow it?

It's complicated, because as athletes, we all want very fast solutions. You expect to be recovered, to come back to play in 3 weeks, but after 3 weeks you still have some pain. So you start to feel a little bit desperate. At that stage I personally try to find new solutions. During a past injury I found Dr Mikel Sanchez who helped me a lot with growth factors treatments. Fortunately, I have now been playing for the last 1 or 2 years without any complaints or major injuries.



Left: Rafael Nadal serves in the men's singles final of the French Open against Novak Djokovic of Serbia at Roland Garros on 11 June, 2012 in Paris, France.

Above: Rafael Nadal plays a stroke during his semi-final men's singles match against Roger Federer at the Australian Open in Melbourne, 26 January, 2012.

Do you think that sports medicine is the only thing that can help you improve your performance?

Sports medicine is always helping. Everything evolves over time – it's a law of life. But sports medicine is not the only aspect that has to change to improve player conditions. Our job has to change. The tournaments and the ATP circuit also have to change a little bit. There are too many weeks. The circuit is too long and there are too many matches. Sometimes we experience problems because of the courts we play on. Hard courts are very harmful to your back, knees and shoulders. It is preferable to play on grass or sand than hard courts.

Have you ever accepted treatment through alternative medicine because you couldn't find answers in classical medicine?

In a way. Sometimes I will try new alternative treatments. For example, I've tried acupuncture but I don't really believe in it as a cure. I think it is more mental than medical. Most of the time I follow the advice of my doctors.

Two years ago you sought treatment in Aspetar in Qatar for an abdominal problem. What did you think about the hospital, the centre and the sports medicine performance here?

At the moment Qatar is really investing a lot in sports medicine. As an athlete, I appreciate this and have to give thanks for that. Qatar is now becoming the new capital of the world in sport with all of their

equipment and devices. It's huge. It meets all the demands that we as athletes have. For all the events that Qatar is hosting now and that will come in the future, Aspetar has the equipment and the facilities. You cannot find better than Aspetar.

You're a tennis player, but at the same time you have to train and be fit off court. How do you manage your fitness?

I have another person with my confidence: my coach. Based on the schedule of the year's tournaments, my coach provides me with a fitness programme to perform in every week, every tournament and every match. This programme takes into account the flights, jet lag, the change in time difference and in this way I just follow the programme that my fitness coach gives me.

Do you take any kind of supplements or vitamins?

Of course. These days every small detail is very important for an athlete. It probably won't affect whether you win, but you can certainly lose one match or tournament if you are not taking all the supplementation prescribed. Of course these are always prescribed by the doctor of the Federation. We have to take care and be aware of the doping controls as players need to follow the rules in every tournament and during the season.

Eduardo Mauri, M.D.