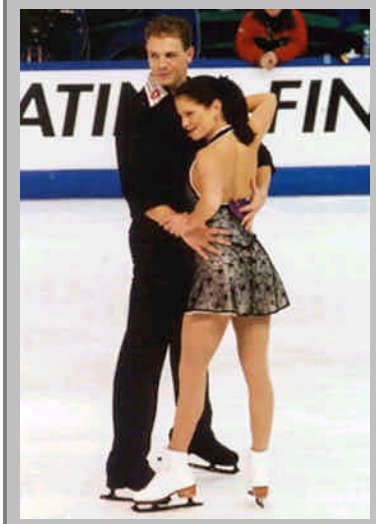
Improving Skating Performance with Active Release Technique

By Dr. Al Jeffels and Dr. Brian Abelson

ART at the Olympics (Dr. Al Jeffels)



In July of 2001, I was intrigued to see the name, Jamie Sale, listed in my appointment book. Although the name was familiar, I didn't know much beyond the fact that she was a figure skater.

During the following weeks and months, I treated both Jamie Sale and David Pelletier with ART and became familiar with their remarkable achievements to that date. These achievements included:

- Nine first place finishes in Grand Prix pairs competitions over the previous 3 years.
- First place finish at the World Championship in 2001.
- The Olympic Gold Medal at the 2002 Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City.
- Three other top honors in various competitions.

Groin Strain is one of the most common injuries suffered by skaters. This injury is generally is a result of excessive strain upon certain adductor muscles.

Groin Strain is usually involves more than one muscle:

- The adductor longus muscle is found to be the most commonly strained muscle in the hip region.
- The sartorius, iliopsoas, gracilis, rectus femoris, pectineus, pyramidalis, obturator externus and abdominal musculature may also be involved.
- The external rotators of the hip can be involved in recurrent strains.
- Eccentric contraction of the involved muscle and affects the musculotendinous junction.

The Active Release Technique approach considers many variables. Injuries to soft tissue (ligaments, muscles, blood vessels, fascia and nerves) result in inflammation and swelling of the tissue. The body responds to this inflammation by laying down scar tissue (cross fibers on the tissue) in an attempt to stabilize the affected area. This scar tissue:

- Restricts motion.
- Reduces circulation.
- Inhibits nerve function.
- Causes ongoing friction and pressure.
- Usually results in the production of more cross fibers and adhesions.

To effectively treat any injury these soft tissue restrictions must be addressed.

Effective treatment of soft tissue injuries requires an alteration in tissue structure, usually effected by breaking up cross-fiber adhesions and restoring normal function to the soft tissue. This process substantially decreases healing time, treats the root cause of the injury, and improves performance.

Jamie and David had received Active Release treatments from various providers over a three year period while training in Montreal. They then made the decision to move to Edmonton to train with Jamie's old coach, Jan Ullmark.

Jamie and Dave were first referred to my clinic by Dr. Joe Pelino, an ART instructor who has had the privilege of working with the Toronto Raptors and many other professional athletes.

At our clinic, we were able to use ART to take care of the strains, sprains, and subluxations that are the result of a punishing training schedule which included ballet, weight, aerobic training, and endless hours on the ice.

More than once they hobbled into my office on weekends, or met me at my home on a Sunday, so they would be able to continue training the next day.

I was quite excited during the week leading up to their long program at Salt Lake City. That night my family gathered around the television and we all gasped in horror as Jamie collided with the Russian skater, who was twice her size, during the warm-up. I could almost visualize damage done to previously injured regions of her body. We were all relieved and amazed to watch them skate flawlessly. On their return she told me that two days later she felt like she had been hit by a truck. Once again ART was able to reduce and correct the damage caused.

Over time, many methods have been developed to remove these adhesions. As clinicians, we have tested and used many of these techniques. Unfortunately, most of these techniques fail in the critical area of identifying the exact location and direction of these adhesions. ART addresses these issues, providing effective means for identifying, locating, and removing adhesions across soft tissue.

With ART, a considerable amount of tension (not compression) is applied to free up the restrictions on these structures. This is especially effective if the adhesion has altered blood circulation. Decreased blood flow results in a decreased amount of oxygen getting to the soft tissue, a primary factor in the production of new scar tissue.

Rehabilitation remains an important part of the ART procedure. After the ART procedures, we have patients ice, stretch, and strengthen the to prevent re-occurrences. We also have them test our treatments by returning to their workouts. This is what we call *dialing in the body*. We validate the effectiveness of the treatment by checking the ability of the patient to complete the task that caused the injury.

We have found Active Release Techniques to be an extremely effective tool in the treatment of soft tissue injuries. ART and Chiropractic manipulation are the perfect combination to treat athletic injuries and to enhance athletic performance.

For more information about Active Release Technique, call 888-396-2727, or go to their Web site at www.activerelease.com.

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Please use the following pictures where appropriate when generating the magazine article. They are of Dr. Al Jeffels with Jamie and David: