

PROGRESS

HEALTHSOUTH's Employee Magazine



Olympic Size Comeback

Injured in the 1992
Summer Olympic Trials, Heptathlon
Athlete **Gea Johnson** now sets her
sights on 1996, thanks to her
remarkable recovery at our Phoenix,
Ariz. Outpatient Center.

September / October 1993

Olympic-Size Comeback

Heptathlon Athlete **Gea Johnson** beats the odds toward recovery

It was June 20th at the 1992 Summer Olympic Trials in New Orleans. **Gea Johnson**, confident and focused, prepared for the second event in the heptathlon—the high jump. The 100-meter hurdles were first; shot putt, 200-meter, long jump, javelin and 800-meter were still to come. She was in peak condition, ranked second only to her training partner Jackie Joyner-Kersey. After six years of competing, this year she hoped to make the Olympics.

She got off to a good start, vaulted into the air, and immediately felt the stab of pain in her knee as she hit the mat. She had ruptured her patellar tendon, and along with it, her dream of making the Olympics.

“I was lying on the high jump mat thinking, ‘This can’t be it, it can’t be over,’” said Johnson. “On the way to the medical tent, I made the decision not to give up. I just wanted to have the chance, and I was going to do whatever it took.”

And despite what could have been a career ending injury, she gets closer to having that chance each day now.

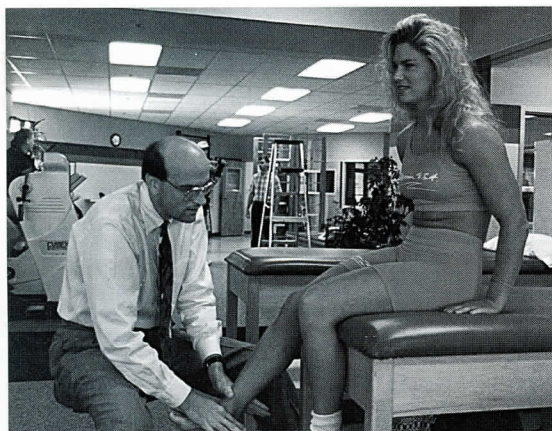
A week after her injury, she returned home to Phoenix, Ariz., where orthopaedic surgeon **Dr. Richard Emerson** worked to find a way to get her knee back in shape. He replaced her patellar tendon with one from a donor, a surgery that had never been done before.

A few months later, Emerson performed a second surgery, implanting a pin and wire to keep the knee in place. A final surgery was done months after that to remove the wire and make other improvements to the tendon for strength and circulation.

“My knee had to be perfect,” said Johnson. “If I wasn’t an athlete, the second and third surgeries wouldn’t even have been necessary.”

Johnson worked five hours a day to rehab her knee with the help of her therapist **Alan Halling**, administrator of our Phoenix outpatient center.

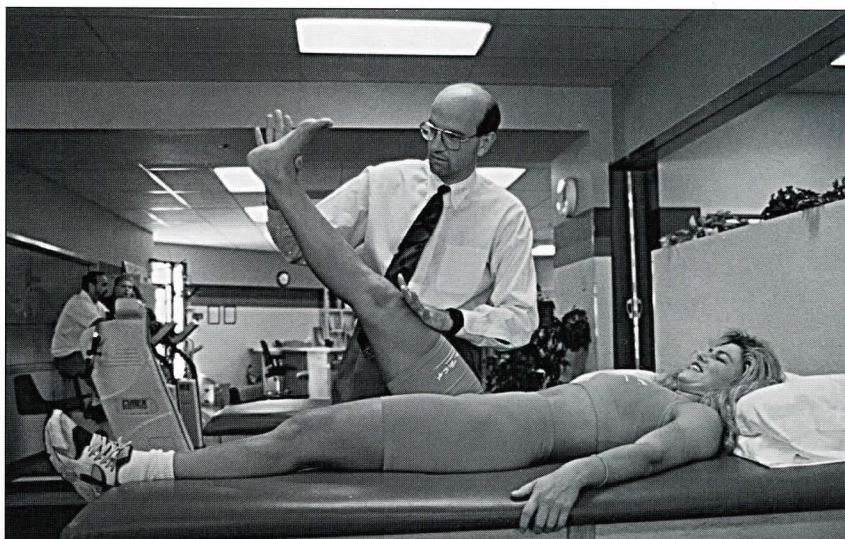
“It’s amazing she’s come this far, this fast. None of her surgeries were easy to begin with,” said Halling. “She has such a desire to make a comeback, and she’s already 90 percent recovered.”



**Phoenix’s PT,
Administrator
Alan Halling
supervised
Johnson’s five
hour a day
workouts.**

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**Allan Halling, PT
Administrator**

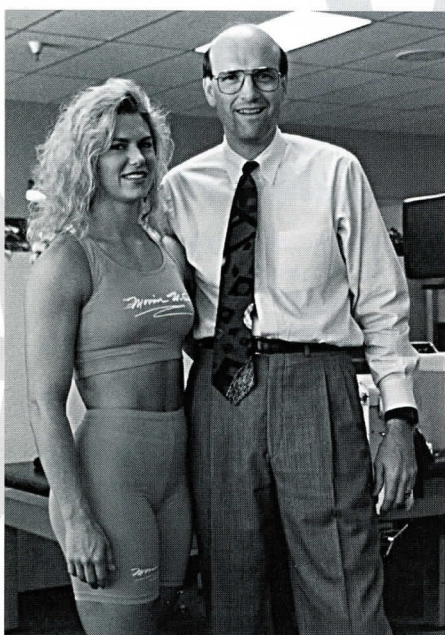


With everyone believing in her and helping her achieve her goals, Johnson could soon be in better condition than she was before. She said she has always been self-motivated and hard-working but recovering is not something she could have done on her own.

“I put all of my trust in Dr. Emerson and Alan. I knew they would figure out a way to get me back. It seemed to be as important to them as it was to me,” she said. “I wouldn’t even have the opportunity if it wasn’t for them, and that’s all I ever wanted. I owe them so much for my success.”

Johnson is now involved in intense physical conditioning five to seven hours a day, and she’ll begin event specifics in the next month or two.

She’s planning for the 1994 Goodwill Games, the 1995 World Championships, and then on to her much deserved dream, the 1996 Olympics. If her condition allows, she hopes to go on competing after 1996, because she said, “I’ve got at least a year and a half to make up for because of my injury.”



Gea Johnson, shown here with Allan Halling, thought her career was over. Now, after three major surgeries and months of rehab, the 1996 Olympics are a real possibility. “I put all of my trust in Dr. Emerson and Alan. I knew they would figure out a way to get me back,” Johnson said.

