



CASESTUDY

**Drummer's Shoulder Gets In Tune:
Biodex Multi-Joint System Helps
Improve Shoulder Weakness In
American Jazz/Fusion Drummer**
Ultimate Rehab, Ridgewood, NJ

BIODEX

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Lenny White had a problem, and it had been dogging him already for several years. “When you can’t work because you can’t move your shoulder the right way,” he recalled realizing, “then it’s time to see the doctor.”

That’s the pragmatic realization that set White, a pioneering American jazz-rock and fusion drummer known for outstanding performances with headliner groups and musicians including Carlos Santana, Jeff Beck, Chaka Kahn, Miles Davis and Chick Corea on a worldwide tour to find help. Suffering from what was first misdiagnosed as a “frozen shoulder,” White would end up visiting several doctors and physical therapists from New York to Germany with some limited success before finally finding a more positive outcome at Ultimate Rehab in Ridgewood, NJ, with Toni LaBarbiera, PT, the facility’s proprietor, and Rick Lemus, LPTA.

Not Enough Strength

“I had been to several doctors and physical therapists over the past few years as I felt the strength in my right shoulder slipping away,” explained White, 61, who figures that if you own a decent collection of music with entries from any of the past four decades, you’ve probably heard him pound the skins. “I never had any pain in the shoulder - still don’t. It just seemed to be getting weaker over time.”

According to White, a native of Queens, NY, currently residing in Teaneck, NJ, none of the professionals from whom he sought help ever looked deeply enough into how he made a living to make him feel very comfortable before they prescribed medications or exercises.

“I kept going to new places looking for help,” he recalled, “but nothing really changed from my visits. I tried different exercises, took homeopathic injections in Germany, and almost underwent a proposed epidural before backing out when someone finally asked why I needed an epidural if I wasn’t experiencing any pain. Many of the places I visited seemed to specialize in ‘assembly line medicine’; get ’em in and get ’em out. I wanted someone who would take the time to isolate my problem and propose a way to build muscle to overcome the weakness.”

A New Jersey Breakthrough

What was happening, White revealed, was that he couldn’t raise his right arm fast enough, high enough or with as much power as earlier in his career. His arm simply wasn’t strong enough to play the drums the way he needed to when performing.

Being a musician, this was certainly a problem for White, but as the weakness progressed he feared it might also begin to interfere with other aspects of his life. Unsatisfied

with marginally positive results to that point, he stopped his physical therapy sessions until he was asked to join a major tour this spring. That’s when he stopped at Ultimate Rehab for a consultation.

“Going in, I didn’t know if things would be different,” recalled White, “but right from the start Toni and Rick seemed to dig a little deeper. They asked me to demonstrate the exact motions that were causing problems and then went online and watched clips of me playing the drums in concert to actually monitor the motions I was performing. They looked at me like I was a world-class athlete. That makes a lot of sense when you consider the speed, precision, strength and endurance I need to excel on tour. Other people told me they could help - and they did, somewhat - but Toni and Rick seemed to better understand what I was going through. I was convinced that they might be able to get me fully back on track.”



LaBarbiera and Lemus began by introducing White to the Biodex Multi-Joint System, explaining how it could help isolate the shoulder joint, strengthen the surrounding musculature and quantify progress - or lack thereof - as a program progressed. They also set up a regimen of integrated stretching and strengthening exercises to augment the Biodex sessions. Within a couple of weeks, White was noticing improvement - and the Biodex reports confirmed significant progress.

An Integrated Program

“In 2007 Mr. White was diagnosed with Brachial Idiopathic Syndrome, which means the etiology of the illness is unknown,” explained LaBarbiera during an interview recently at her Ridgewood office (Ultimate Rehab’s other office is in Saddle Brook, NJ). “This is a proximal paralysis in the shoulder area. His range of motion (ROM) is limited by about 30% in both flexion and extension and his strength is 20% below that of his uninvolved shoulder. We are using the Biodex Multi-Joint System to help him increase ROM and regain strength in the involved shoulder. He has been working mostly in passive mode to address the ROM issue, then in isokinetic mode to improve strength. We’ve concentrated on a target window of 0 degrees to 45 degrees. Of course, all of this is part of an integrated program that includes an Impulse pulley system protocol, PNF diagonals and ball toss exercises.”

Specifically, White’s Biodex protocol includes passive mode internal/external rotation @ 90 degrees of abduction, and shoulder flexion/extension from 90 degrees to 180 degrees. These patterns are designed to focus on the anterior and middle deltoid/supraspinatus muscles.

White finds his Biodex workouts to be “challenging,” but notes the hard work makes him feel as if he is really accomplishing his goals. He enjoys working on a system that displays on-screen target windows which help keep



Left to right: Toni LaBarbiera, PT, Lenny White, rockin’ drummer and patient, and Rick Lemus, LPTA, at Ultimate Rehab in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

“We have several pieces of Biodex equipment that we use regularly to help in this goal, including our Biodex Multi-Joint System, Balance System and portable BioSway. These devices are all very versatile and give us the flexibility to treat a wide array of patients.”

him motivated and focused, and adds that the printed progress reports leave no doubt he is headed in the right direction. “The reports are objective,” he stated. “That’s great, because I don’t want to think I’m improving, I want to know I’m improving.”

Toni LaBarbiera wasn’t surprised to learn White felt so comfortable with this regimen. “Our philosophy is to find out what the patient specifically has issues with in terms of functional activities and a pain-free life. We have several pieces of Biodex equipment that we use regularly to help in this goal, including our Biodex Multi-Joint System, Balance System and portable BioSway. These devices are all very versatile and give us the flexibility to treat a wide array of patients.”

Though in operation for less than two years, LaBarbiera and Lemus have combined experience of nearly half a century.

Their Ultimate Rehab facilities are quite busy, averaging 85 to 90 patients a week between two locations and covering everything from head injuries and strokes to hip, knees, car accidents, arthroscopy, high school, college and pro athletes. Still, patients are booked so that each has plenty of time to spend with their PT. On our visit, at least, none of the patients seemed to be rushed.

“We don’t overbook here,” stated LaBarbiera with emphasis, “and everyone gets special attention.”



The Tempo Is Upbeat

Both LaBarbiera and Lemus believe White's progress has been outstanding - and the world-famous drummer agrees without missing a beat.

"Last week was really tough," he chuckled before beginning a round of passive exercise on the Biodex System. "I had a rehearsal that ran from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. followed the next day by rehearsal from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. Then I played a gig that ran from 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. That's a lot harder than my concert schedule, when I usually play about two hours at a time. I might have been able to get through such a routine before I came here, but now I know I can. That's a big difference in my profession. Better still, I can hit the drums hard for several days in a row when necessary. Before, I had to schedule in more downtime between sessions."

White isn't sure if he'll ever get to the point when he'll no longer need physical therapy to continue performing at the top of his game. LaBarbiera and Lemus aren't sure either. But both agree that, for now at least, the outcome is strongly positive and improving.

"That's what counts the most," summed up LaBarbiera, "people feeling better and doing the things that keep them happy and successful. It's nice to follow the charts and numbers, but successful outcomes are also measured by the increasing frequency of the smiles on your patients as they realize each session pushes them closer to a more enjoyable, functional and pain-free life."

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