

# Writing + Photography: Newsletter Article

## Full speed ahead: Former Olympic athlete, wife remain active after joint replacement surgeries

**SOME 25 YEARS AGO**, Ollan Cassell was riding his brother's 1,500-lb. horse when the horse leaped and fell backward, landing on Cassell while he was still in the saddle. Twenty years later, he was having total hip replacement surgery on his right hip. That accident, years before, "probably had something to do with it," says Cassell.

Of course, the fact that Cassell was a high school, college and even an Olympic athlete probably had something to do with it, too.

Now 75, Cassell has spent the better half of his life running three to five miles a day for personal enjoyment, even after years of training for elite running competitions. He broke records in high school and college track. He won a gold medal and earned his share of a world record as part of the 1,600-meter relay in the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, where he was also a semi-finalist in the 400-meter individual run. He has won additional medals and championship titles in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Games, Pan American Games and World Military Championships. And

he didn't stop there. Well into his later adult life, he was running several miles a day, even as his jobs leading the AAU, the Athletics Congress and U.S. Track and Field took him all over the world on business.

He didn't give much thought to the damage his once-injured hip was enduring with each heel-pounding stride. "You don't worry about that when you're an athlete," he says. "Sports is what I like to do."

Eventually, the pain in his right hip became so great and had interfered with his active lifestyle so significantly that he knew he needed to do something. Merrill Ritter, MD, a now-retired orthopedic surgeon with the Center for Hip & Knee Surgery, recommended surgery when he got to the point where he couldn't sleep comfortably due to the pain. Two years later, in April 2007, Robert Malinzak, MD, performed total joint replacement surgery on Cassell's right hip.

As a lifelong elite athlete, Cassell expected to gain a lot from surgery. "I wanted to return to the same kind of life I had before," he says. Dr. Malinzak told him that he could run after surgery if he desired, but in five years, the pavement-pounding would cause the prosthetic joint to wear down, forcing him to endure another surgery. "I decided I didn't want to go through this again," says Cassell. "I haven't run since."

That's not to say that the urge isn't there. Ollan's wife Cathy recalls a time shortly after recovering from surgery when she was walking behind Ollan and he began to jog, partly out of habit and partly out of desire to return to the sport he loves. "Being an elite athlete like that, you hesitate to tell them what to do," says Cathy. She reminded him anyway. "It's such a change of pace. Dramatic. Absolutely life-changing."

Cathy can relate. A lifelong sports lover herself, she has played and/or coached field hockey, soccer, volleyball, basketball, softball and track. She has coached youth, from elementary- to high school-age, for years, and not from the sidelines. "I was never one to say, 'do it,'" she says. "I would always try to do it (myself). I would say my hurdling and high jumping lacked something, but I tried it."

Her active lifestyle likely contributed to her own joint trouble, although she attributes a 2004 meniscus injury (she tore it while playing soccer with a grandson) to the beginning of the course that would eventually lead her to surgery. Her right knee became so painful that her gait changed as her body tried to compensate. She started walking with a limp, and people would comment to her that she was leaning when she was standing or walking.

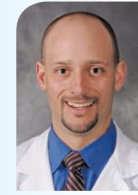
"I was going to the doctor for years," says Cathy, now 72. "But I would say, 'No, I'm not having it operated on.'" Instead of total joint replacement, she at first opted for cortisone injections, then the more minimally invasive arthroscopic surgery in 2009. But two years later, that surgery had failed. By June 2011, Dr. Malinzak was replacing her right knee with a prosthetic one through total joint replacement surgery.

### Joint recovery

Ollan and Cathy have always shared an active lifestyle, as a couple and as a family, with their six children and nine grandchildren. "Sport has been an activity for us that brings us together," says Cathy. "It has solidified our lives."

So it was never a question whether they would continue to be active after their surgeries. Both struggled at first with the realistic limits having an artificial joint requires - if one wants to extend the life of his or her new joint. The months immediately following surgery are the most restrictive, and those are the times the two struggled the most.

## FULL SPEED AHEAD



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Union (AAU) Games, Pan American Games and World Military Championships.

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### Modified expectations

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wanted to return to the same kind of life I had before," he said.

Dr. Malinzak told him he could run after surgery if he desired, but running is one of the hardest exercises on joints and joint replacements, and in five years, the pavement-pounding could cause the prosthetic joint to wear down, forcing him to endure another surgery.

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So it was never a question whether they would continue to be active after their surgeries. Both struggled at first with the realistic limits set by having an artificial joint — that is, if one wants to extend the life of the new joint as long as possible. The months immediately following surgery are the most restrictive, and those are the times the two struggled the most.

"You always think you can do more," Cathy said. "And then you lift up a fat, swollen knee, and it's sometimes mind-boggling. But you have to look at your goals and stick with them, and be persistent."

For Cathy, she always reminded herself that she had two options: "You can either park yourself, or you can get up and fight it." She was determined to stay active, eager to return to volunteering as a coach.

Likewise for Ollan, who says he always wanted to do more than his physical therapy team wanted him to do. But his inability to run has not kept him inactive. He walks, works out on an elliptical machine, stretches and does light weight training.

And while he can't do some of the things he did before surgery ("I can't climb a tree to cut limbs off, but that's not something I had a real passion for anyway"), Ollan focuses on the positive: "I don't have any pain."

Cathy and Ollan remember a key piece of advice Dr. Malinzak gave them after surgery: If you keep in mind your limitations and work around that, your quality of life will not sink. It will improve. "And of course, it has," Cathy affirms. "At our age, it's not that important that you run; it's that you do something."

His saving grace came when he discovered a new love for swimming. He now swims up to a mile a day, sometimes using devices such as knee floats and flippers. Swimming is highly recommended by joint surgeons as an effective, safe exercise. Ollan recommends swimming for anyone who is recovering from joint replacement surgery.

"The best thing for him was the fact that he could go to the pool and really learn how to make sure that his body continued that exercise," Cathy said. "I wouldn't say he's a Michael Phelps; he's not even close. But for his rehabilitation, it has been the best thing."

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Newsletter Article: Health Care

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Until this newsletter went digital, we wrote lengthy patient profiles, one per issue. We also wrote news articles, research summaries and more for this quarterly newsletter.

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And his saving grace came when he discovered a new love for swimming. He now swims up to a mile (more than 5,000 yards) a day, sometimes using devices like knee floats and flippers. It's great exercise, and it's easy on his hip. He recommends swimming for anyone who is recovering from joint replacement surgery.

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