

Pelvis

Socket  
(acetabulum)

Femoral

ll  
(femoral head)

Thigh bone  
(femur)

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# Paging Dr. Sands



Nearly one year ago, 52-year-old Michael Western of Cleveland, Tenn. started experiencing pain in his left hip – pain significant enough to not only affect both his daily racquetball routine and weekly cycling sessions, but also enough to hinder his ability to walk.

“I couldn’t walk,” says Western matter-of-factly, perched atop a Floyd Medical Center hospital bed. “I was limping, and then I couldn’t ride my bike without pain. So I knew I had to do something about it.”

Shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with osteoarthritis, a degenerative joint disease and source of chronic hip pain commonly found in American adults.

Upon his diagnosis, the procedure proposed to Western as the only solution, a total hip replacement, would have ended his 30-year hobby of playing racquetball – an activity he was not yet ready to relinquish.

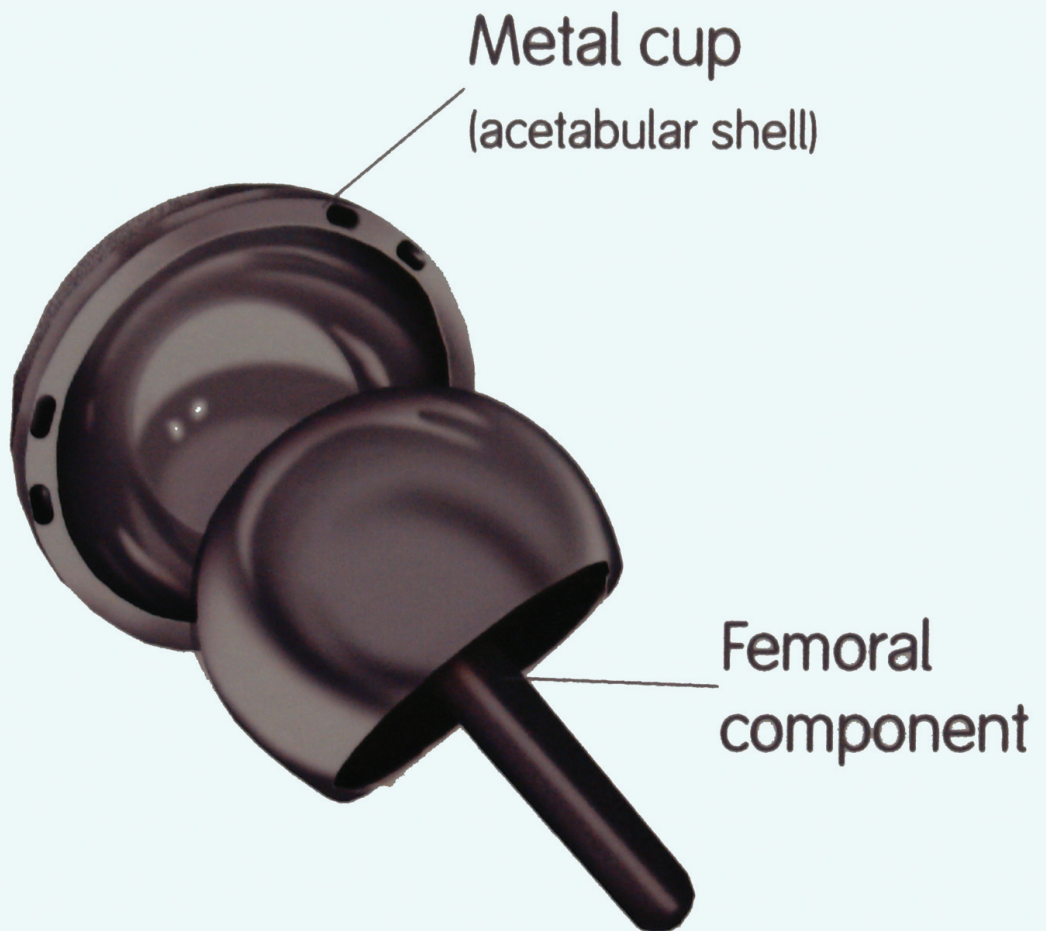
Thus, rather than lie down and accept what, at the time, appeared to be the inevitable, he began an internet-based search for alternatives; and eventually encountered a website for then 2006 Tour de France winner, Floyd Landis, who, Western discovered, had also suffered from hip pain following a 2003 cycling accident.

Further research revealed that the renowned cyclist had selected Birmingham Hip Resurfacing – a state-of-the-art, bone conserving procedure that implements metal “cap-like” components to replace arthritic hips.

Western also discovered that Landis was back on a cycle just five days after the operation; and more impressive still, had reportedly resumed training for the 2007 Tour de France just two months after the procedure.

“I knew I wanted to do a ‘resurface’ so I could [get back to being] 100-percent,” explains Western. “That’s what I read – martial artists coming back and doing kicks, just leading a totally normal life [after their surgeries]. And I thought that was for me.”

Ultimately, Western’s research led him to Rome’s own Dr. Kenneth Sands – the Harbin Clinic’s newest orthopedic surgeon – who specializes in adult joint reconstruction and specifically Birmingham Hip Resurfacing [BHR].



“I was so excited to find a surgeon who was only two hours away,” says Western. “I thought I was going to have to go to Europe or somewhere to have it done.”

According to Western, he would’ve had the Food and Drug Administration [FDA] not approved the procedure for implementation in the U.S. last May.

With the green-light granted to BHR by the FDA, Sands became one of only 50 American surgeons selected by medical equipment manufacturer, Smith & Nephew, to employ the device.

Furthermore, he opted to travel to Birmingham – Birmingham, England that is – to study with the device’s inventor, Dr. Derek McMinn.

“Meeting Dr. McMinn was fantastic,” recalls Sands. “In seeing his patients, I really got a chance to see that this wasn’t a short-term gimmick. I found out, that when done properly, these things work.”

The concept has actually been performed overseas since the early 1990s, and European research has, thus far, rendered stellar end-results.

According to Sands, the procedure is usually recommended for patients aged 60 or younger with active lifestyles.

“The right [candidate for BHR] is definitely on the younger side,” Sands explains. “Also, patients who are still very active – who want to go out and do high impact activities – it is the perfect operation for them.”

Luckily for Western, he met these criteria, and, in turn, determined that Sands was the right surgeon for the task.

“When I first walked in the room, I knew right away that he was sharp,” Western says of his initial encounter with Sands. “And, that’s what you want when you’re going to [have surgery] – someone who knows what they’re doing.”

Now, just three days after receiving his newly resurfaced hip, Western waits in preparation for his trip home to Tennessee; and teems with anticipation at the thought of again taking to the racquetball court without the hindrance once created by his osteoarthritic condition.

“I am amazingly surprised at the lack of pain patients seem to have after hip resurfacing,” notes Sands. “It’s also impressive what kinds of things patients



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have been able to do afterward. There are some crazy videos out there of people skydiving just [weeks] after their operation.”

But while Western isn't likely to be seen skydiving anytime soon, he is no exception to the notably speedy recoveries experienced by fellow benefactors of BHR. In fact, Western claims to have ceased taking pain medication just 24 hours after his surgery, and to have begun walking unassisted shortly thereafter – an unlikely feat had he opted for total hip replacement.

As for Sands, who became interested in joint-related concerns during his final year of orthopedic residency in New York, not only is he currently credited with becoming the first physician to successfully introduce the procedure to Rome, but also with becoming the first physician in the state to perform the operation.

“My teacher would do these total joints on people who were crippled,” recalls Sands, “and [afterward] they would be so grateful. You can really help people with total joints [conditions], and the patients are extremely grateful for what you can do for them; and I really enjoy that.”

In addition to his credentials with respect to BHR, as a total joints specialist the young physician regularly conducts total hip and knee replacements, as well as revisions to hip surgeries gone awry; and was the first in Floyd County to introduce the new, less invasive procedure known as hip arthroscopy.

“Many patients [requiring his services] are patients that we've [previously] sent out of Rome, and now we're keeping them. So that is huge for our community,” explains Susan Shell, director of Harbin Clinic's orthopedic department, who also notes that Sands has seen patients from as far as Texas since he joined the group in August.

Carrying credentials from Duke University, Tulane Medical School, and a four-year stint in the U.S. Army, Shell contends that patients who elect to see Dr. Sands won't leave disappointed.

“When we first saw his [résumé], we couldn't believe his experience – his hobbies, his interests in sports,” says Shell of the former football player's natural fit into the practice of sports-oriented medicine. “Then when we met him, he was so easy to get to know; so gracious.”

With this assertion, Sands' patients seem to agree – including Western, who after traveling over 140 miles to garner his expertise, says he would recommend Sands to anyone.

“Everything I hear from my position is how he well treated [his patients are] and how confident [they are] in him; how comfortable he made them feel,” Shell gushes. “He's just such a gift to us and the community.” *SSS*

