

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring



A Shoulder to Cry About

Last summer as I was sitting next to Pat, I put my left arm around her shoulders (romantic soul that I am) and experienced pain in my left shoulder. I didn't think much about it then, but began to notice more pain with certain other movements, like reaching behind my back to tuck my shirt in my pants. There were more and more exercises that I couldn't do in my Building Bones class. In recent years, I had waited out bouts of tennis elbow on both sides, but **this wasn't getting any better.**

So finally in mid November I go see a doctor who tells me, "**You have a frozen shoulder.**" I said, "That's impossible, I haven't left Tucson in six months. How could my shoulder be frozen?" Unsmilingly Dr. Bob explained that a frozen shoulder, known in the doctor business as "adhesive capsulitis," is when the capsule surrounding the shoulder joint thickens or gets smaller, restricting shoulder motion and causing pain. Of course my next question was, "What causes frozen shoulder?" His answer amounted to, "No one knows." I mentioned to the learned doctor that I had come down with this malady after two years of three-times-a-week exercise of that shoulder (and most other body parts). Dr. Bob shrugged blankly.

By this time, I was almost afraid to ask about my treatment and prognosis. Apparently this "not very well understood" condition often clears up on its own, but it can take **as long as three years!** To shorten this period, Dr. Bob recommended physical therapy - and if I didn't improve, there were still "surgical options" to consider. Uh-oh!

So I started twice-a-week physical therapy on my frozen shoulder. Mike the therapist **promised me gentle, prolonged stretching.** I should think of my shoulder as two sticks glued together. We were going to slowly pull the sticks apart from one end, looking for gradual increased motion (sticks pulled further apart) each week. I was very highly motivated to improve after Mike told me that the probable last-resort surgical option was to manipulate my shoulder under anesthesia to force the capsule to stretch or rip. Ouch!

Each therapy session started with precisely six minutes of warm-up on something called an upper body ergometer. Then I had up-close personal experiences with pulleys, long rubber tubing, large rubber balls, or my favorite: a huge, steel, bird-cage-like thing, inside which I could twist myself into various pretzel positions. Finally, came the "gentle stretching," during which I was entirely defenseless, on my back with my feet raised grotesquely. The object here I soon found was for Mike to twist my arm as far as possible (limited by my grimaces or tears) and **hold the position until I gasped, "uncle."**

By my seventh treatment, I had **not one, but two, (terror)pists manipulating my shoulder** at the same time. Then, as if in desperation, they started assigning different staff people to my case, finally even bringing in a contractor "gunslinger," giving me the false hope: "The new one can't be as hard on me as the previous one." Wrong! Every week or so they measured (with a protractor, I kid you not) how much further I could move my arm, compared to when I started treatment.

After seven weeks of this, in late December I returned to Dr. Bob, who (I swear) pulled out his protractor and pronounced me "**much improved,**" but ... The good news was that "surgery was not indicated at this time." The bad news, you guessed it - more physical therapy. ... *To be continued?*