

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Matt Gibble guides all-star Kidd back from injury

BY DAVID ZARO
Staff Writer

Fort Lee — With his career on the line following micro-fracture surgery on his left knee, New Jersey Nets' all-star point guard Jason Kidd needed to take careful, measured steps in order to get himself back on the basketball court.

To this end, Kidd and his surgeon, Dr. David Altchek of the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, entrusted the responsibility of charting the course to recovery to Ridgewood resident Matt Gibble.

Gibble, the co-founder (along with Gary Flink of Franklin Lakes) of Excel Orthopedic Rehabilitation in Fort Lee, has been working with athletes on all levels of competition since the mid-1980's, when he was the assistant to New York Knicks trainer, Mike Saunders.

Since founding Excel in 1990, Gibble and Flink have worked with numerous NBA all-stars past and present, including Stephen Marbury, Patrick Ewing, Dikembe Mutombo, Kenny Anderson and Willis Reed.

Gibble never doubted that he was the right man for Kidd; it was simply a matter of Kidd becoming comfortable with him.

"On the first day that Jason walked in (to Excel), he was looking at all of the framed jerseys and pictures on the wall of the other athletes that have been here," Gibble recalled. "I got the sense that he was very comfortable here from the start."

"The fact that I was hand-picked by Dr. Altchek also helped to set the stage in terms of gaining Jason's belief in me. Each week, I sensed that his confidence grew in the knowledge that I was going to do everything in my power to help get him better and make all the right decisions for him."

Kidd underwent the micro-fracture surgery on July 1, and was restricted to walking with crutches for the next six weeks, as he was instructed by Dr. Altchek to refrain from placing weight on the joint. Kidd spent the following four weeks simply easing himself into everyday activities.

By the time Kidd was ready to begin the rehab process in early-September, Gibble was faced with the initial challenge of making him whole again. Literally.

"After surgery, there was significant muscle atrophy in Jason's left leg," Gibble explained. "We needed to re-build the strength around Jason's knee in order to support

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the patella. Also, we had to work in the pool to help his aerobic pace and build his lungs back up for sustained exercise."

After six weeks of physical therapy sessions and grueling workouts in the pool, Gibble was able to get Kidd on the basketball court and back into the feel of the game.

In anticipation of working with Kidd, Gibble created a basketball-specific drills program, geared towards functional movements that allowed him to examine certain stresses placed on both the knee and the joint.

"The first week that we were on the court, we did only straight-plain movements (forward and backward), and then mixed in some shooting and dribbling at half-speed, so that Jason could get a feel for the ball again," Gibble said. "The next week, we went three-quarter speed and put in a few cutting drills at half-speed. By week three, we were around full-speed."

Gibble looks back at the workouts in the pool as the "x-factor" in Kidd's ability to take to the on-court drills with the assurance that his knee was ready for the increased pressure.

"All of the running, cutting and jumping in the pool allowed Jason to gain confidence in his knee and he was ready to go and do the same things out on the court," said Gibble.

However, the trust factor would come into play, as Gibble had to stress to Kidd that he must let him know if he felt any stiffness or soreness in the knee throughout any part of the process.

"Jason and I established early on that he would be honest with me and tell me if there were any problems with the knee," Gibble said. "That way, we would be able to nip it in the bud before it got any worse."

Keeping with his detailed and

intricate planning, Gibble based the on-court sessions with Kidd on a 65-70 minute time frame, which he based on watching NBA games and factoring in Kidd's career average of 38 minutes per game in relation to real-time on the court.

Gibble also incorporated back-to-back high intensity workouts, due to the Nets playing games on consecutive nights within the first few weeks of Kidd's planned return date.

Upon his return to practice on Dec. 3, it was evident that the conditioning plans were right on target, as Kidd integrated himself without any noticeable difficulties.

"Jason's first practice back with the Nets was 70 minutes long, which is right around the length that we had been working at," said Gibble.

Kidd played his first game of the season on Dec 6, and has averaged just over 27 minutes per game in the 11 games that he has played in thus far. As each day goes by, it seems as though Kidd has the ability to be one of the few success stories of athletes returning from micro-fracture surgery, but Gibble remains cautiously optimistic.

"To this point, we couldn't have scripted it any better," Gibble said. "There have been no major setbacks to deal with. If he can get into late January and early February, we will feel much more secure about the overall process."

Throughout the grueling 12-week period, Gibble noted how impressed he was with the manner in which Kidd carried himself.

"Jason is an old-school guy," said Gibble. "Aside from being a fierce competitor with a strong work ethic, he is genuinely a great person."

"After our sessions, he insisted on putting away the weights and other equipment himself. He also made it point to thank all of the people behind the scenes in the facilities we worked at and always held doors for the people he was with."

"It was very refreshing to see a guy at his level not be as affected by fame and notoriety as others that are in the same position."

Gibble is a 15-year resident of Ridgewood and resides in the village with his wife, Lisa, and his daughters, Samantha (12) and Christina (10).

He and Flink are currently working on plans for a 9,000 square-foot personal training and physical therapy facility in Hackensack, which is expected to open in the spring of 2005.

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Matt Gibble of Ridgewood, left, and Gary Flink of Franklin Lakes, right, the co-founders of Excel Orthopedic Rehabilitation of Fort Lee, with NBA All-Star Jason Kidd of the New Jersey Nets.



Matt Gibble, left, helps Jason Kidd through an exercise during a physical therapy session. Gibble worked with Kidd for over three months following Kidd's recovery from surgery on his left knee.