

BACK IN

THE GAME...

PRETTY QUICKLY

How the latest in arthroscopic surgery on, say, your knee can get you back playing your sport faster than ever

In the spring of 2018, Dan and Donna Curry of Naples cruised to victory at the US Open Pickleball Championships in their division, which is 50-plus, 5.0 mixed doubles. But Dan, 57, didn't get even a full year to bask in the glow of their win before he started noticing that his left knee was not working so well. He was feeling discomfort there, too. That's when he called Dr. Scott Thompson, an NCH orthopedic surgeon.

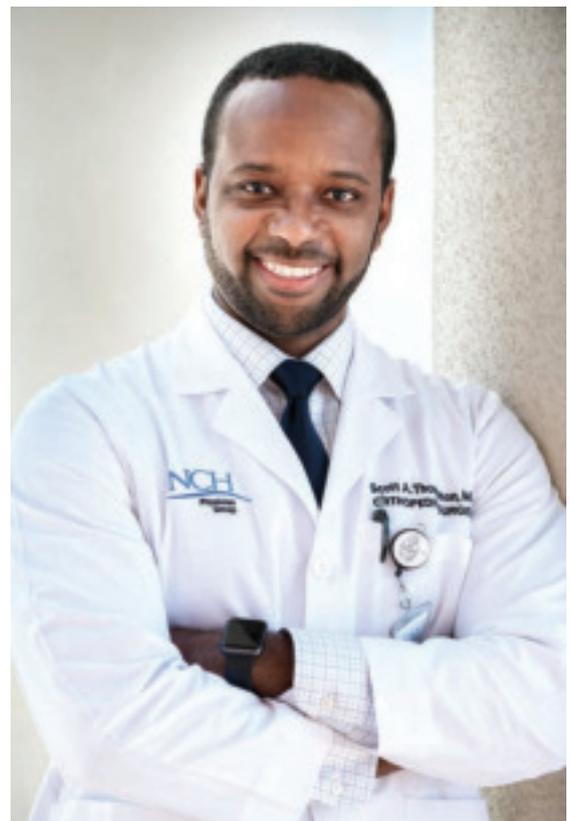
After some tests, including an MRI, Dr. Thompson determined that Curry was having a problem with his meniscus, a C-shaped pad of cartilage that acts as a shock absorber in the knee joint.

"Dr. Thompson trimmed my meniscus," Curry says. He was home the same day after the outpatient procedure. He hardly had any pain, he says. "I was only on pain medication for one day, and the next day I took Tylenol." He was walking the day after the procedure, too. He followed doctor's orders not to play pickleball for four weeks, but then he was right back on the court. "In eight weeks, I'd say I was back to 100 percent." And he noticed the difference in surgery he'd had previously. "I had meniscus work done about 10 years ago and was in much more discomfort. This time, the recovery was much shorter and with much less discomfort." And he appreciated Dr. Thompson, too.

"Some surgeons aren't all that personable. They just get in and get the job done," Curry says, laughing. "But I felt very comfortable with Dr. Thompson."

Dr. Thompson is part of the NCH Orthopedics department. The department not only has been named a Center of Excellence but also was awarded the Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval in 2016, with a perfect score. NCH is the only hospital in Southwest Florida to have been awarded the Joint Commission Certification for Total Knee and Total Hip Replacement Surgery. (The Joint Commission is an independent, not-for-profit organization that accredits and certifies nearly 21,000 healthcare facilities and programs throughout the United States for meeting the highest standards in the delivery of quality patient care.)

Dr. Thompson, who is a graduate of Harvard



Dr. Scott Thompson

Medical School and did his residency at Columbia University Medical Center and fellowship at Boston University Medical Center, says he has seen a lot of improvements in his field of orthopedic surgery in recent years. The biggest one? The advent of arthroscopic surgery, in which surgeons don't have to fully open the surgical site and can do repair work through a small opening. "All inside" reconstruction of the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) has changed the outlook significantly for this injury. ACL tears are quite common, and this type of repair tends to have good success. In general, arthroscopic surgery is typically less complicated and easier on patients than traditional surgery, and rehab is generally much quicker and less painful.

Dr. Thompson says that most of his patients know something is wrong when, as in Curry's case, they notice a decreased ability to use the body part or a decreased range of motion. "You may also recall a specific incident when you were injured," he says, such as when you hear a pop or feel an intense pain while playing your sport. Patients are often referred to him through physical therapists, athletic trainers or general practitioners.



Holly Bacon

Another Pickleball Player Down

For Holly Bacon, 57, of Bonita Springs, her problem didn't come up all at once on the court. In fact, she says, it may not even have been related to pickleball. But she realized she had a baker's cyst—a pocket of fluid—behind her knee. "It felt like I had a golf ball in the back of my knee," she says. It was visibly swollen. Bacon, too, is a pickleball champion. "I played doubles in US Open going on four years with my partner, Suzanne Graziano," she says. (Graziano works in NCH Orthopedic Services, and she helped connect Bacon with Dr. Thompson.) "We won gold in our division our second year playing." Bacon is also a certified pickleball instructor and teaches at the Bonita Springs YMCA.

Bacon went to see Dr. Thompson, who explained that a cyst like that was usually the result of a torn meniscus, and the fluid pooling near the tear. An MRI showed that indeed she had torn the meniscus in her left knee. It was surprising that she hadn't felt the initial injury, she said, because she had torn the meniscus in her right knee many years ago playing softball, and "it was pretty painful. That one I knew when I tore it."

For this tear, Bacon also had arthroscopic surgery, in July 2018. After the outpatient surgery, she went for physical therapy. "I am very active and have my own fitness routine," she says. "So once I had the exercises to do, I did them on my own." She knew from past experience how crucial those exercises were to her recovery.

The whole process went very well, Bacon says. "Dr. Thompson was very informative about the surgery and recovery. I think the most important thing, especially for orthopedic surgery, is that if you're not going to do the rehab, don't have the surgery. If you don't do the follow-up, you'll probably end up having to have surgery again."

Bacon is fully back to playing and competing now. "I feel great," she says.

In the Schools, Too

In addition to his work as a surgeon, Dr. Thompson is the head team physician for Collier County Public Schools, grades 9

through 12. His role is part of a hospital-based initiative.

He is noticing increased injuries in his young patients, he says, as the seasons get longer and the students play on various club teams even when the school season ends. His advice to avoid injury? Cross-train.

“I recommend varying your workout,” he says. “Alternate among weight training, aerobic activity and sport-specific training. Play different sports at different times of the year, and encourage your kids to do so, too.”

Still, he is pleased that the hospital-based initiative allows him to work so closely with the student-athletes and their other care providers. “NCH is dedicated to providing not only sports medicine to public schools, but also nurses and athletic trainers. The program helps us to coordinate treatment easily because there is direct communication between me, the trainer and the nurse. It allows for comprehensive care to student athletes.”

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GLOSSARY OF ORTHOPEDIC TERMS

Anterior cruciate ligament (ACL): One of several ligaments in the knee that limits movement.

Arthroscopy: Minimally invasive surgery in which examination and sometimes treatment is performed using a scope that is inserted into a joint or organ through a small incision.

Cartilage: Flexible, whitish connective tissue that protects the ends of joints.

Meniscus: A C-shaped pad of cartilage that acts as a shock absorber in the knee joint.

Range of motion: The full movement potential of a joint.