

Which sports have best athletes? You decide

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By DR. ROBERT WEIL Columnist

Which sports have the best athletes? Boy, that's a great question, isn't it.

Of course there is no "right" answer but everyone has an opinion.

Last month I was sitting with Denise Provenzano, Founder and owner of Zano Salons and we were watching three different sports at the same time -- the Blackhawks in the Stanley Cup Finals, the Lakers and Celtics in the NBA Finals and some French Open tennis with champion Rafael Nadal. Only 5 to 10 minutes of each as we were really watching and cheering for the Hawks! (Super congratulations).

Two of my favorite orthotics patients from the 80's were ex-Hawks, the late Keith Magnuson and present Sharks general manager Doug Wilson.

Playing the role of "The Sports Doctor", I asked Denise the title question, which sports have the best athletes? As many of you remember, Denise participated in all the excitement and hoopla celebration with Naperville's Olympic Gold medalist skater and "Dancing with the Stars" runner up, Evan Lysacek and I often told her that world class figure skaters were among the best of athletes, let alone combining his skating tour with the DWTS competition being "off the charts" athletically.

As I am writing this article, the Tour de France has ended and I've always considered the Tour one of the most demanding of athletic events.

Denise couldn't believe the speed and power and athleticism of the hockey. The NBA basketball players running full blast up and down the court was explosive.

Nadal, playing a 3½ hour, 5-set tennis match was awesome. Then the World Cup soccer matches were on!

The criteria for the best athletes involve both physical, speed, strength, stamina, quickness, agility and the mental side as well. Things like focus, concentration, performing under pressure in the clutch come to mind.

Anyway, let's hear from you readers -- which sports involve the best athletes?

E-mail me at drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com. I'll mention some of your answers in my next article or an upcoming Sportsdoctor Radio show.

By the way, one of my votes goes to Lysacek -- He's got it all. Of course, I'm slightly biased. Another vote would go to my 2-year-old grandson, Lincoln, who I've been chasing around the last few days up and down the stairs 150 times! A little bias there also.

It's been awhile since I've answered some e-mails, so let's do it. **Mary, Naperville** -- I've been a walker for years -- three to five days a week, two to three miles. About six months ago, I started jogging, I started gradually, but my shins started hurting. The Running Store told me I have pronated feet and recommended supports. They were not comfortable. They mentioned orthotics.

Dr. Weil -- I see shin problems commonly with pronated feet. Pronation, a normal multi-directional motion allows the foot to absorb shock and shape to the ground. If the foot continues to collapse then the foot and lower leg muscles could be stressed. Once we pass over the foot, supination is the position (another multi-direction motion) to push off. Orthotics can properly position the foot to prevent over-pronation. Strengthening the muscles of the foot and lower legs also is helpful.

Cindy, Aurora -- I've read a lot about barefoot running, and that it's natural and better than with shoes. Also, what about those NFL players? Your comment?

Dr. Weil -- For those runners without problems, adding some barefoot runs on safe, soft surfaces like a golf course can be fun and productive in strengthening foot and leg muscles. Beach running also. However, in the real world, on roads and harder surfaces there are just too many problems with all sorts of cuts, abrasions, etc. to your feet. Most runners have their share of biomechanical imbalances, flat feet, high arches, leg length differences to name a few. Running shoes properly fit and with your foot type in mind is the best way to go.

Dr. Robert Weil is a sports podiatrist from Naperville with an office in Aurora. You can hear him on his weekly radio show at 6:30 p.m. Thursdays on 90.9-FM. Contact him at drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com and visit his Web site at sportsdoctorradio.com.