

The Bowen Technique & Sports – A Winning Formula

By Alastair Rattray

When my phone rang one day, I was surprised to find a well-known international footballer from a London First Division club on the line. "Can you give me a Bowen treatment as soon as possible?" he asked. It would have been less of a surprise if he had asked for a massage, as footballers are addicted to massage. While it is true that the Bowen Technique is an excellent therapy that could well be of great help to him, it is not yet a mainstream therapy in professional football circles. However, he was very specific: it was a Bowen Technique treatment he wanted.

When I saw him at his West London hotel, I asked him what his injuries were. He told me that he had often been injured and missed matches and training just as other players had until, three and a half years previously, he had been introduced to the Bowen Technique. Since that time, he had had a Bowen every week wherever he was in the world. As a result, he had not missed a single match or training day in three and a half years.

There have been many articles in professional journals and the press accurately describing the Bowen Technique as a gentle, holistic therapy, which would seem to make it a rather unusual therapy for the world of sport. It was developed by Australian Tom Bowen, a remarkable man who lived in Geelong, New South Wales. Although Tom left school at 14 and had no medical training, he became so busy that he had to give up his job at the Geelong Cement Works and set up a full time clinic. He also took great pleasure in treating the footballers for his local team.

The technique itself is very simple. The practitioner uses thumbs and forefingers to make small, rolling-type movements across muscle and tendon at very precise points on the body. There are a number of theories as to how the technique actually works. As it has such far-reaching results, it would be difficult to set up a complete scientific programme to prove any of them. However, what does seem to happen is that the gentle moves across muscle and tendons cause a disturbance that the brain does not recognise. In checking out what is happening, adjustments take place where and when things don't seem to be functioning correctly. This results in the body being re-balanced; something many clients will comment on after their treatments. An example of this would be a 'frozen shoulder'. Some frozen shoulders can stay the same for many years.

Often, the original cause of the condition went away many years before, yet the muscles around the shoulder are still in spasm trying to protect it. The client has no pain, but just cannot raise their arm beyond about 30%. After some simple Bowen treatment, the spasm is released and the arm begins to function normally.

So why does our international footballer find that his body is so well adjusted it can take the increasing pressure of matches at the highest levels, longer seasons, and much physical impact without being sidelined with injury? The main point about his regular Bowen treatments is that the whole body is treated and the balancing is of the complete body. Many injuries in sport are sustained when the body has been unable to cope with sudden, additional stress. Common amongst these is the hamstring injury. If the pelvic area is not properly balanced, and there are many reasons for this to happen as the body constantly adjusts to various stresses, then there is an additional load on the hamstring. It only takes further stress to cause an injury, even when the hamstring has been properly warmed up and stretched. At one club, all players received a weekly Bowen treatment. Historically, the club suffered an average of 7 - 8 hamstring injuries each season, yet after regular Bowen treatments were introduced, they didn't have a single one all season.

CASE HISTORY FOOTBALLER

"I was asked to try Bowen therapy by my football physio as I had been having problems with my back, groins and upper leg muscles for most of the season. I'd been to a chiropractor a few times and on my last visit she had advised there was nothing really wrong with my bone structure. I continued to play but still felt restricted in my movements so I decided to give Bowen a try.

"I didn't really know what to expect but I was determined to keep an open mind and give it a go. I can't explain how it worked but after a couple of treatments the problems I had been having virtually disappeared. I was able to touch my toes with the palms of my hands - something I'd not been able to do for a long while and I seemed to be able to go the duration of a game easily where I had been struggling before.

"When people ask 'does it work?' I find the best way to tell them about it is my scoring ratio since having Bowen. I'd only scored 5 goals in 27 games before Bowen treatment. From the time I

started having treatment until the end of the season, I scored 10 in 12 and from my point of view, that says it all! I also didn't miss a game through injury."

Danny Adams, footballer

A key feature of Bowen Technique treatment is that the therapist will make a couple of moves and then leave the room for a few minutes. This short break gives time for the body to respond – to “take on board” – the very precise and effective stimulation of the gentle moves. These breaks are unique but essential: they allow the body to start the work. However, what is a very important feature of Bowen is that the work, started during the treatment, will go on for at least a week and sometimes longer. It is not unusual for a client to report that on day three the condition was a bit better and by day five it had disappeared. Because of these breaks, practitioners can have two treatment rooms going at the same time without compromising the treatment to either of the clients.

Massage has many excellent benefits, amongst them producing a feeling of relaxation and well-being. Clients report the same sensations after a Bowen treatment. The difference is that massage, like many other therapies, is an intervention where the therapist produces the results and the body takes on the treatment. Bowen, however, relies completely on the body doing all the work. As a result the treatment is the start of a process that carries on, with the benefits of well-being continuing far longer than a massage would have achieved. The results at a drugs rehabilitation centre in London have shown that Bowen is the only therapy offered which produces really long-term results. Often, clients report feeling calmer and able to see important decisions through, often for the first time in years.

What is so remarkable about the Bowen Technique is that it is both completely safe and very gentle, yet can be used to treat virtually any condition. The results therapists achieve are quite remarkable. Apart from muscular-skeletal problems being successfully addressed, other conditions such as tennis elbow, frozen shoulder, RSI and carpal tunnel, constant headaches and migraine, asthma (with children responding remarkably quickly), sleeping problems, irritable bowel syndrome, PMT and period problems, colic and many more. It is therefore not surprising to find more and more qualified masseurs, physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, nurses and doctors joining courses to learn the technique. Just how many treatments can you give in a day? With the Bowen Technique it is

perfectly possible to give 12, 15, 20 a day, using the breaks to treat a second client at the same time and still feel fresh afterwards. As there is no pressure used, nor massage, it is a very gentle technique on the therapist as well.

CASE HISTORY

RUNNER

"I recently changed my running shoes and began to notice an uncomfortable strain down my left Achilles. On finishing each run the area would burn and be painful for some hours later. This developed until running became impossible without pain. Direct work with massage and other hands-on approaches to the area created little relief. On seeing a Bowen practitioner a suggestion was made that the problem could be coming from the sacroiliac joint in the lower back. Three sessions working in this area gave permanent relief. I now see the Bowen practitioner only if I am preparing for a big race."

-David Jacobs, 32

If the re-balancing of the muscular skeletal system can have such a very positive effect on sports people, it also has a similar effect on people not involved in anything more taxing than a visit to the local gym. However, what has become apparent is that the Bowen Technique affects all the body's systems so many surprising results take place in addition to fixing some injury. For example, a client reported suffering from an infection for 18 months, receiving antibiotics every three months. The condition never improved much despite the drugs. Yet, after just one Bowen treatment, the condition improved by 50% in a week and was totally clear in two weeks and has not returned. Clearly, the immune system was not defending the body and had now been re-balanced and was doing its job again.

As a Doctor said on a radio interview about complementary therapies, "Before you have that operation, try the Bowen Technique. I have seen it work. I don't know why, but it does!"

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