

Startups

How an NBA Player Created a Medical Device

Jonathan Bender was the No. 5 pick in the 1999 NBA draft and spent six seasons with the Indiana Pacers before knee pain forced him into early retirement. But during those years on the sidelines, Bender developed a rehabilitation and fitness device he credits with helping him return to professional basketball in 2009.

What began as a homemade contraption eventually evolved into the JB Intensive Trainer, a device that uses resistance bands to build strength in order to relieve shoulder, back, hip, and knee pain. The Class I device is said to be effective at relieving everything from chronic shoulder, back, hip, and knee pain to sciatica.

Last year, JB3 Innovations reported that sales of the device were growing at a 60% rate month-over-month. In this interview, Bender discusses his path from NBA player to medtech entrepreneur.

Q: How did you come up with idea for the JB Intensive Trainer?

A: I wanted to develop something to kickstart the healing process. As I went through therapy and went back to the court and noticed my muscle strength dwindle away, I thought there had to be a better solution to keep the stress on my muscles and keep the pressure off my joints for a longer period of time.

I am creative by nature. It was easy to come up with an idea. I can draw pictures in my head. Once I had an idea, I grabbed some items from the store and put it together. It wasn't fancy looking, but it did what I thought it would do.



Bender

Q: What kinds of items did you use in the first prototype?

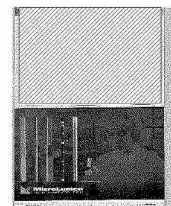
A: Waist belt, ankle braces, bands, duct tape, wire cutters. Little knick knacks. But I found what I needed to get the picture out of my head and get it into a physical form.

Q: How did you get clinical validation for the device?

A: I had hundreds of testimonials before I went to Purdue University to get some research behind it. They did a biomechanical analysis on an early version of the device.

After that, I went into a deep study, trying to find out how to optimize the use of the device. I worked with a local seamstress, bought new materials locally, and continued to buy parts from the local Sports Authority

Image courtesy of JB3 INNOVATIONS



and Home Depot, and made the bands myself. I used to put hundreds of [the devices] together myself. I continued to refine the product as I did research.

Q: How is the device regulated?

A: FDA considers it a Class I device. It's a simple device. There is not anything inside of it that someone at FDA would need to think long and hard about. We have already submitted everything there.

In terms of functionality, it keeps stress on the lower extremity and makes sure the core is activated, making sure the pelvic area is pushed back in the right position, taking pressure out of the lower spine.

It basically gives you a physical-therapy sort of movement by standing up and walking. If you have a bum knee, the product can help strengthen it as it forces you to use the weakened muscles that have been neglected—not from their own neglect, but it just might be painful to get to them. A physical therapist's job is to get around that pain and to force you into dif-



The JB Intensive Trainer can be used to strengthen a number of muscles throughout the body.

ferent movements that engage the muscle that will protect or take pressure off that joint. This device does just that.

Q: Any NBA players use it?

A: There are plenty of them. We have some NBA guys and some football guys.

I also market it to the older generation because a lot of their aches and pains are relatively easy to address using normal exercise instead of pills, shots, and things like that.

Q: Have you always been a tinkerer?

A: From a young age I was doing things like messing around with radios and making up games. I could take a physical problem and solve it pretty easily. I can draw, but I can't draw like an expert. But I can draw in my head and then find pieces I need to make that a reality.

*Brian Buntz is editor-in-chief of MPMN. **M***

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