

Garmin's team secret

INJURY, ILLNESS AND being just plain under the weather can mean the difference between success and failure in pro cycling. So what's Garmin-Slipstream's answer to keeping in top form?

EVERY pro squad has a team of specialists working in various ways to maximise their riders' performance potential — coaches, nutritionists, physios, doctors — and Garmin is no different. However, they have something the other teams do not — Dr Matthew Rabin.

As Garmin's team chiropractor, Matt Rabin helps riders with injury recuperation and getting back to peak form as quickly as possible. As well as using his chiropractic skills, however, he is also a practitioner in the newly emerging field of Neurological Integration (NIS), also known as applied kinesiology. And the riders swear by it.

Garmin riders Christian Vande Velde, David Millar and Dan Martin have all, to a greater or lesser extent, worked with Matt Rabin. And they are convinced of the worth of NIS.

"Through NIS and Dr Matthew Rabin, I have been able to find the small problems that machines and Western science couldn't find out," says Christian Vande Velde.

"It's hard to explain and sell to others, but I don't care, it works for me."

In a nutshell

Put briefly, NIS is the maintenance of the neurological circuits that transport information between your brain and the different organs in your body.

NIS practitioners operate on the premise that when your body is ill or malfunctioning these circuits break down. As a result, your body fails to get through the right messages to help it get healthy again. Rabin's role is to facilitate the natural restoration of these circuits.

"If you imagine that your brain is like a very sophisticated but delicate computer, then when communication breaks down in

the body, the exact control over illness or injury is going to be diminished," Rabin tells *Cycling Weekly*.

"But if you get every single aspect of the body back into communication with the brain, then the recovery process will be a lot quicker."

That may sound very different from traditional methods of treatment, but for some people NIS has been extremely effective.

The way Rabin applies NIS when working with a rider is to use a single muscle, usually in the arm, as an indicator of all the different parts of a body. Usually the person will hold their arm



Millar and Vande Velde: convinced of the value of NIS

FINDING AN NIS PRACTITIONER

Getting treatment

FINDING a practitioner in Neurological Integration is a question of checking out a chiropractor or osteopath or general practitioner who also does NIS.

Rabin, for example, doesn't advertise his services; he says that he

finds word of mouth to be more effective.

As well as being qualified medicals, NIS specialists will have completed the NIS modules A and B. Essentially, the longer they have worked with NIS the better.

How much does it cost? It varies. Typically speaking, an initial consultation costs between £65 and £95.

A first 'session' generally lasts around 45 minutes. Improvement to your overall health can be seen with just one session, but it can take longer.

A useful website is <http://www.neurolink-global.com/>

"It's hard to explain and sell to others, but I don't care, it works for me"
Christian Vande Velde

WHO IS HE?

Dr Matt Rabin

MATT Rabin is the team chiropractor and NIS practitioner for ProTour squad Garmin-Slipstream. Having completed his International Chiropractic Sports Science Diploma (ICSSD), he is a specialist in the field of Sports Chiropractic.

Croydon-based Rabin's style of treatment is intricate, looking to examine the rider head to toe and inside out, in order to get the best from the treatment. To do this, he goes through the full spectrum of the rider's make-up, from their physiology and metabolism to their emotional state.



RECOVERING TREATMENT

What the riders say

Two Garmin riders who have used and benefited from being treated using NIS are Dan Martin and Christian Vande Velde

Dan Martin

When Dan Martin went to see Matt Rabin, the Garmin-Slipstream climber was diagnosed as suffering from a combination of a naturally weak immune system combined with a bacteria overload that caused him to feel extremely fatigued.

"The first thing to point out is that the higher the level of racing you do, the more you can be affected by this; the more vulnerable you are," Martin says. "Knowing your body and how it reacts is a huge help. Listen to what it's telling you."

"As regards the work Matt does, I'd say it's more prevention than anything else."

"In my case, I'd done a lot of training when the bacteria got into my system, so I felt strong, but at the same time I didn't feel great."

"Matt figures out where the problem is, he tells your brain it's there, and then it can start to figure it out, and that's why it took 10 to 14 days."

"For 10 days I'd be waking up at 10 to 10.30. On the 11th day, I woke up and I wasn't tired."



Christian Vande Velde

"Afterwards, I would get back from training and have a shower, lunch, and it's 'what do I do now?' So, I could tell I was feeling cured!"

Christian Vande Velde (Garmin-Slipstream Grand Tour co-leader):

"I met Max Rabin at the 2006 Tour of Britain. He looked me over and pretty much called everything that had been wrong with me for quite some time. I followed his advice, and within a few weeks I was riding like I hadn't ridden in a long

time. After that and some check-ups I was sold."

"I have had a lot of injuries, but the biggest has always been my hips and upper thoracic [spine]."

"I am already pretty hypermobile, so getting a adjusted isn't always the best thing for me. And that's what

Matt is all about — he's the anti-chiro [chiropractor]-chiro!

"I never had or have any pain. I have discomfort [tightness] and a serious lack of power."

"I immediately felt better after seeing him, and continue to improve; it's not just a quick fix. I still see him as much as possible."

"To those going to NIS for the first time who don't know what to expect, I'd say, don't be influenced by others, be open-minded and let yourself be the judge."



Dan Martin

NIS APPLICATIONS

What can NIS treat?

A range of conditions that have been seen by NIS practitioners

- Digestion
- Post-crash injuries and pain arising from them
- Recovery/fitness issues
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Head injuries and concussion, as was the case for Garmin-Slipstream's Svein Tuft who crashed in the Tour of California
- Circumstances when, as Rabin says, "you're not firing correctly and can't go deep"
- Non-specific issues: "the things that fall between spaces that you can't put your finger on to say what's wrong"

out in a position that means they are having to make an effort with their muscles.

"The arm muscle in itself is involved; it's just the means of communicating problems in other areas, because we use it as an indicator," says Rabin.

"So, I go round the body checking it all out. If the strong muscle stays strong, that means we're golden and we can move on. When a strong muscle in the arm goes weak, that indicates the feedback loop is down in another part of the body.

"Once I've established a weak feedback loop, I correct it. How? By tapping, very gently, a specific point on your head while holding another part of the body, and that allows it to reintegrate."

According to Rabin, for two or three days it's not usual to feel "a little bit lousy. That's because your body is getting your immune system to work again."

Rabin emphasises, though, that he is not providing a 'cure'; rather his work is about helping the body cure itself.

"NIS deals with the body as a whole, and aims to get to the underlying causes of illnesses"

Fine tuning

"Often when you're feeling rough it's a fine tuning thing," Dan Martin tells *Cycling Weekly*.

Martin worked closely with Rabin this spring. The problem he was having was that he was racing well, but very inconsistently.

"I didn't train in February because I was so tired all the time, I was running at 80 or 75 per cent."

Martin consulted Rabin about the problem shortly before he was due to ride Paris-Nice, and Rabin used his NIS skills to help Martin combat the problem.

"I had no energy. It was almost like a monotheosis, but by working with Matt, my body shut itself down so it could fix itself."

"That actually happened about halfway through the prologue of Paris-Nice. The whole first stage of Paris-Nice, I just couldn't keep my eyes open, so the team got me home as soon as possible and I just slept for 10 days."

"I did nothing. Any time I wasn't sleeping I was watching TV. I'd wake up at 10am and fall asleep at two. It was a bit boring. But suddenly, the 11th day, I felt a lot better. I went out and did three hours' hard on the bike and felt great."

"So, who knows how long I'd have been running at 80 per cent or running into the ground?"

Recovery time

Martin took around two weeks to recover fully. Others who don't have the luxury of being able to take time off work to sleep for such long periods may take longer. But, on the other hand, the recovery period can be extremely brief — Rabin cites the case of a long-term hamstring injury pain that was reduced by 80 per cent in just one session.



Dan Martin: body shut down at Paris-Nice in order to recover

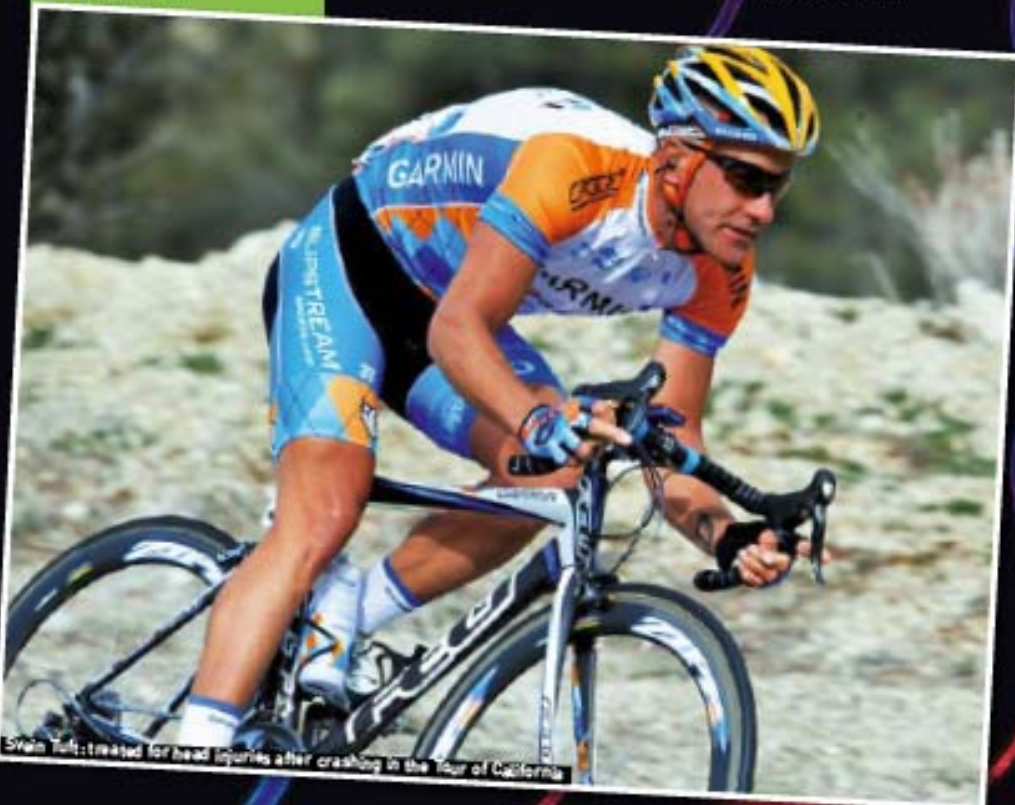
For pro bike riders, Rabin says NIS is particularly useful because, among other things, it can improve health generally and thereby deal with digestive issues, insomnia, sniffles, colds and coughs. All these illnesses crop up frequently as part of the travel-intensive lifestyle of a pro rider. At the same time, NIS can also help address the more serious issues of recovery from injuries and post-crash traumas.

On the plus side, too, NIS is non-intrusive (ie it doesn't involve any kind of medicine, homoeopathic or otherwise) and is low-impact as a result. It deals with the body as a whole, and aims to get to the underlying causes of illnesses, rather than simply combating

the symptoms. Even when it's ineffective, Rabin says that, because NIS is non-intrusive, a patient for whom the treatment is not working will simply be no worse off than before.

He's at pains to emphasise that NIS is no miracle cure and that "sometimes the brain has lost so much control over a particular illness or injury it can't get that area back to what we consider as normal."

Conventional treatment methods still have their place. But it's not just pro bike riders who suffer from a sudden inexplicable loss of form, persistent colds, stress issues or insomnia. So, perhaps NIS could offer the rest of us something, too.



Svein Tuft: treated for head injuries after crashing in the Tour of California