



Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

Volume 20
Issue 4 *Winter 2011-2012*

Article 5

2012

Field Doctor

David Kindred

Recommended Citation

Kindred, David (2012) "Field Doctor," *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*: Vol. 20: Iss. 4, Article 5.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwumag/vol20/iss4/5>

This is a PDF version of an article that originally appeared in the printed Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, a quarterly periodical published by Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact iwumag@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the University and/or the author of this document.

Field Doctor

As team chiropractor for the Chicago Bears, Josh Akin '03 helps keep gridiron warriors at the top of their game.

Story by DAVID KINDRED '63



A chemistry major at IWU, Akin also played quarterback for the Titans. His connection with the Bears began four years ago when a sports agent brought a client to the doctor's clinic, Chicago Chiropractic and Sports Medicine in suburban Northfield

may come to Akin in the training room. All hope the doctor's ministrations will help minimize the pain to come. Akin's goal is to "increase flexibility, put their bodies in balance and overall make them feel strong so they can perform at their highest levels."

In American sports today, the National Football League is the ultimate spectacle. When the Chicago Bears play a Sunday afternoon home game, as many as 61,500 fans make their way to Soldier Field. They will see many things, but not everything. Four and five hours before kickoff, early-rising Bears come to the team's training room under the great old stadium's bleachers. There they stretch out for the team's chiropractor, Josh Akin '03.

"My job is to help get them ready," Akin says.

Ready for what?

"Ready, physically, for the game," he says.

Here the doctor allowed himself a wry smile. Better than most, he knows what football can do to a body. He has been there, done that. Akin was a quarterback at Illinois Wesleyan. He was a good one, once named the best in his conference and his team's most valuable offensive player. To see him today, tall and lean, is to imagine Akin could suit up for the Titans tomorrow — except that he graduated eight years ago. Now, as Dr. Joshua Akin, he arrives at Soldier Field at 8 a.m. on game days.

By 8:30 a.m., he's busy. The Bears know the day's work will leave them feeling as if they've been run over by a car which then backed up to run over them again. As many as 20 players

Akin is one of a growing number of chiropractors hired by professional sports organizations. According to the Professional Football Chiropractic Society, all 32 NFL teams provide chiropractic physician services. Akin's connection with the Bears began four years ago when a sports agent brought a client to the doctor's clinic, Chicago Chiropractic and Sports Medicine in suburban Northfield.

Maybe a dozen Bears now come to the clinic for treatment on Mondays and Tuesdays after weekend games. Wednesdays and Fridays, Akin goes to the team's training facility. Every game, home and away, he is on the sidelines. His website carries a testimonial from Bears quarterback Jay Cutler, who says, "Dr. Akin has played a significant role in keeping me on the field week in and week out. Whether it is my legs, back, neck or shoulder that need attention, Dr. Akin has provided me with care to keep me healthy."

For an NFL quarterback, "healthy" is a relative term. He is liable to take more punishment on a Sunday than an ordinary person takes in a lifetime. That's because professional football is full of big people who are, in the words of legendary coach Bear Bryant, "agile, mobile and hostile." It's a long way from Illinois Wesleyan's Division III level to the major leagues of football and baseball. Akin sees it with the Bears and his other Chicago client, the Cubs, with whom he works at least once during each homestand.

"There are significant physical specimens in both baseball and football," he says. "They're all superb athletes at the top of their skill levels." Baseball injuries tend to result from repetitive motions that put stress on joints, while NFL injuries more often are the result of collisions at speed. "With the speed of 300-pound men, it's like a car crash," Akin says. "There's a whole shifting of the body's structure."

It then becomes the doctor's job to put the pieces together in ways that will keep them together another week. It's a process he first encountered as a patient. During Akin's high school football years at Benet Academy in Lisle, Ill., his next-door neighbor in Naperville was a chiropractor. Nick Gatto's chiropractic treatment became a habit. Even through his college years, after Titan games in the Chicago area, Akin would visit the doctor. Gatto's work was so influential, Akin said, that "even as a freshman, not knowing for sure what I wanted to do, I knew it would be something medical."

A chemistry major, Akin says Illinois Wesleyan "prepared me to succeed through a workload of demanding courses" that built the groundwork for a second degree in life sciences and graduate classes at the Logan College of Chiropractic in St. Louis.

Now in his fifth year of private practice, Akin specializes in both chiropractic and active release technique (ART) therapy. On his website, Akin writes, “A combined treatment of spinal manipulation and ART results in an increased range of motion which accelerates the healing process and drastically reduces the recurrence of injuries.”

Though he was Illinois Wesleyan’s starting quarterback for less than two full seasons, Akin ranks in the Titans’ top 15 in several season and career passing statistics. He knows nothing of those numbers, but now, even a decade later, he remembers the final game of his junior season — because the Titans needed to defeat Millikin University for a share of the championship of the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW).



Akin’s goal for players is to “increase flexibility, put their bodies in balance and overall make them feel strong so they can perform at their highest levels.”

It was a Saturday afternoon, Nov. 10, 2001. With just over five minutes to play, Wesleyan trailed, 20-16. The Titans were backed up to their own 12-yard line.

Akin completed three of four passes for 25 yards before facing the game’s most important situation. It was fourth down, three yards to go, at Millikin’s 42-yard line with fewer than three minutes to play. Back to pass, Akin looked to the planned receiver only to see him covered. He looked for help on the other side. There he found tight end Shaun Friziellie ’02 for 10 yards to keep the Titans’ hopes alive.

Then, on second down at the 32-yard line, Akin rolled out and went all the way for the game-winning touchdown. On the 88-yard drive, Akin had passed for 35 yards and run for 32. For the game, he threw for 113 yards and ran for 80 more.

His senior season, Akin was all-CCIW and the Titans’ MVP offensively; he accounted for half the team’s touchdowns, five by running, 15 by passing.

“The great thing about Division III is that football’s not a full-time job the way it is in Division I,” Akin says. “You get to enjoy your time, do hard academic work, and it’s still really good football.”

It’s impossible to know exactly how the Illinois Wesleyan experience shaped the next decade of Akin’s life. But it is possible, for the fun of it, to do a measurement in miles. During his senior season, his longest road trip to a Titan game was a 340-mile bus ride to La Crosse, Wis. Ten

years later, on a Bears road trip in October 2011, Akin flew to London. The distance: 3,963 miles.