

A Healthy Perspective

New columnist **Michelle Gebrian**, a former health care provider to the likes of Serena Williams, Lindsay Davenport and Kim Clijsters, is poised to share her extensive sports medicine knowledge with *Australian Tennis Magazine* readers.

After travelling on the WTA Tour as a Primary Health Care Provider for more than five years, there are few more qualified to talk about tennis-related health issues than Michelle Gebrian.

Gebrian, who obtained her Bachelor of Health Science and Sportsmedicine and Master of Physical Therapy degrees at universities in the United States, saw all manner of ailments in her full-time travel on the tour.

"Women's tennis may not appear as the most physically challenging of all professional sports, as it is a non-contact sport, however, we have treated a range of injuries, varying from dislocated shoulders and spinal dysfunctions to blisters and wrist injuries," she says.

Gebrian explains that with events played at more than 30 countries throughout the world, players not only have to contend with the wear and tear caused by constant travel, but the demands of playing on a variety of surfaces. "It's really given me an excellent understanding of what professional athletes experience," she says.

Michigan-born Gebrian has now settled in Melbourne, Victoria, where she is employed by Tennis Australia as the Sports Medicine Services Co-ordinator, which entails overseeing physiotherapists and health care providers at Tennis Australia satellite and challenger events, as well as junior events across Australia. "My role at Tennis Australia has really given me the opportunity to have a different perspective in tennis injury management," she says.

Gebrian points out that while the types of injuries and health issues that are experienced by professionals may occur less often for grassroots players, the need to focus on such issues is equally essential. "When you do have an injury it's important to be able to identify it and obtain appropriate medical assistance as soon as possible so that you don't play through an injury that could become worse," she advises.

Players who ignore niggling aches and pains also risk injury to other parts of the body. "You may begin to compensate. For example, if you injure your ankle and continue to play on it, then you may start to increase the stresses on your opposite leg, which can then lead to compensation patterns and result in a subsequent injury," Gebrian warns.

Gebrian recommends that the focus on injury prevention should begin well before a player steps on court, with specific attention paid to adequate cross training, which helps develop overall fitness and body strength. "You don't want to play tennis to be fit, but you want to be fit to play tennis," she points out.

As a qualified instructor, Gebrian is a strong advocate for

complementary activities such as Pilates, which she says is particularly suitable for tennis players.

"Pilates is something that I frequently incorporated into my treatments on the WTA Tour. The principles of Pilates are based on core stability and helping to prevent injuries, to treat pre-existing injuries and to correct muscle imbalances," she explains. "It's excellent for tennis players in particular because it helps to strengthen the muscles that are typically weak and stretch the muscles that are tight, due to the motions in tennis."

Another piece of key advice from Gebrian is the need for an adequate stretching program before and after both practice and matches. "It's vital in helping prevent injuries from occurring in the first place and to help prevent pre-existing injuries from putting excessive strain on your body when you are playing," she says.

As a regular columnist for *Australian Tennis Magazine*, Gebrian will be sharing more of her extensive health and fitness knowledge in the months ahead.

Readers will also be keen to capitalise on the opportunity for Gebrian to answer specific questions on health and fitness – as the likes of the WTA's top players could tell you, if you want the winning edge on court, a healthy body is the best way to start. ●



Michelle Gebrian, a former healthcare provider to the likes of Kim Clijsters, shares her extensive knowledge on health and fitness.