

Sentara Orthopedic Services

A Patient's Story

Triathlete Jay Mears knew exactly who to call when his shoulder stood in the way of his training.



Jay Mears, a salesman for a Suffolk nursery, has been exercising regularly for years. Running, swimming and biking are second nature to him – but a tree tried to get in the way of his favorite activities.

"I do all this exercise, and I hurt myself at work," says Jay, 57. "I'm in sales, and I think I was moving a tree, or something else that was pretty heavy, to show someone. I noticed pain in my right arm soon after."

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He continued working out for a while and then realized he needed help: He had big plans to compete in an Ironman triathlon in about 10 months. Ironmans are the toughest triathlons in the world – 2.4 miles of swimming, 112 miles of bike riding and 26.2 miles of running all in one day. Jay had competed in smaller triathlons before and did well – but the Ironman would take everything he had to finish strong.

Doctor turned friend

He knew just who to contact: Dr. Kevin Bonner, an orthopedic/sports medicine surgeon at Sentara Leigh Hospital. He had performed rotator cuff surgery on Jay's left arm eight years earlier.

"That time I hurt myself body surfing in the Outer Banks," Jay says. "Dr. Bonner used to play baseball in college, so he understands what it's like to be an athlete and want to stay strong."

Jay was also impressed with Dr. Bonner's commitment to his patients.

"He's a wonderful surgeon and has a wonderful way about him," Jay continues. "When you're talking with him, he makes you feel like you're extremely important to him. I feel confident in him."

Jay had Dr. Bonner perform his rotator cuff surgery on his right shoulder in December, a little over 10 months before his Ironman triathlon. It was performed with a minimally invasive arthroscopic technique and he was in and out of Sentara Leigh Hospital the same day.

After physical therapy and many workouts, he traveled to Maryland in October for the big race. The race officials allowed participants 17 hours to complete the swimming, biking and running: Jay finished in 13 and a half hours and raised his arms in victory at the finish line.

"I couldn't have done it without my shoulder!," Jay says of the picture-perfect finish and the whole race. "Hopefully, I have a few more races in me."

