

Going for the Gold

World-Class Martial Arts Champ Returns from Two ACL Reconstructions to Defend Title



As the world's reigning martial arts champion, Nikki is accustomed to hard fights and grueling physical competition. So when she injured her knee while sparring at the 2012 World Martial Arts Games in England, she was not deterred. "My coaches wrapped up my leg and made me finish," says the 27-year-old from Culpepper. "An hour later, I had to compete again. Everyone watching knew what had happened. I got a standing ovation. The mayor took pictures."

Nikki boarded her flight back to Washington with two gold medals, a world championship ring and one torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in her **right** knee. As soon as the plane took off, she knew who to call: George Aguiar, MD, at Commonwealth Orthopaedics. One year earlier, he had performed ACL reconstruction on her **left** knee and supervised her return to global competition.

This time, her comeback goal was even more ambitious: to be ready to compete in the Caribbean Sunrise Showdown Battle of the Arts in Trinidad and Tobago within eight months. Dr. Aguiar performed ACL reconstruction on her right knee and Nikki spent

several months in what she calls rehabilitation "boot camp" – intense cardio and strengthening focused on returning her to top physical condition.

"Nikki is an exceptional patient," Dr. Aguiar says. "After both her surgeries, we outlined a careful rehabilitation program and she was highly motivated and extremely diligent with her exercises. The timing to return her to competition was very individualized. Numerous assessments and tests were required prior to clearing her for sports."

ACL tears are one of the most common knee ligament injuries. Athletes who play sports that involve running, pivoting, turning and jumping are especially susceptible. They may feel a slip or pop in their knee and the knee gives out from under them.

"ACL tears are often the result of plain bad luck and there's not a lot that people can do to prevent them," says Commonwealth surgeon Bruce Zimmer, MD. "They happen to everyone – even pro athletes in great shape, like Redskins quarterback Robert Griffin, III. It all has to do with the force and angle at which the knee gets hit."

Nikki was recently inducted into the World Organization of Martial Arts Athletes International Hall of Fame as International Female Instructor of the Year!

Symptoms include knee swelling, pain and stiffness, limited range of motion and tenderness along the joint line. Treatment varies depending on a patient's age, function and activity level. "For those individuals who are stable, with little desire to return to high-level sports or fitness routines, we often recommend non-operative rehabilitation," Dr. Aguiar explains. "We see many patients over 50 with ACL tears who are very stable after rehab and can avoid surgery entirely."

ACL reconstruction can return patients such as Nikki to high-level intensity, but again, proper rehabilitation is critical. Athletes who resume cutting and pivoting sports too soon risk re-injury. Dr. Aguiar notes that one great challenge is slowing down high-level athletes. "Although many can progress quickly, the key is proper assessment to determine if they are truly ready for the next phase of recovery," he says. Communicating the goals for recovery to the patient is vital to ensure an excellent, long-term outcome.

"We usually recommend patients wait from eight to 12 months before returning to aggressive contact sports," says Dr. Zimmer. "The time is important for the vascular structure to strengthen and the graft to get strong. If patients feel good four to five months out, they can jog. But for anything involving contact, it's better to wait a few more months."

Nikki's hard work paid off. She was able to compete in – and win – the Sunrise Caribbean Showdown. One month later, she successfully defended her international title at the 2013 World Martial Arts Games in Dublin. But she heeded Dr. Aguiar's advice and limited her matches to forms (also known as Kata) only. "I don't want to take any chances, so I'm waiting to return to competitive fighting until the end of the year," she says. In Ireland, she was inducted into the World Organization of Martial Arts Athletes International Hall of Fame as International Female Instructor of the Year. She is now back in the classroom, teaching earth science at Kettle Run High School in Nokesville and coaching martial arts students at her family's Karate Sports Academy in Warrenton.

She loves Dr. Aguiar's no-nonsense approach, and routinely recommends him to family and friends. "His work is superb and, as long as you listen to his advice, you'll get back to your game," she says. "It's come to the point now that if someone I know gets injured, I send them to him – no matter what body part it is."

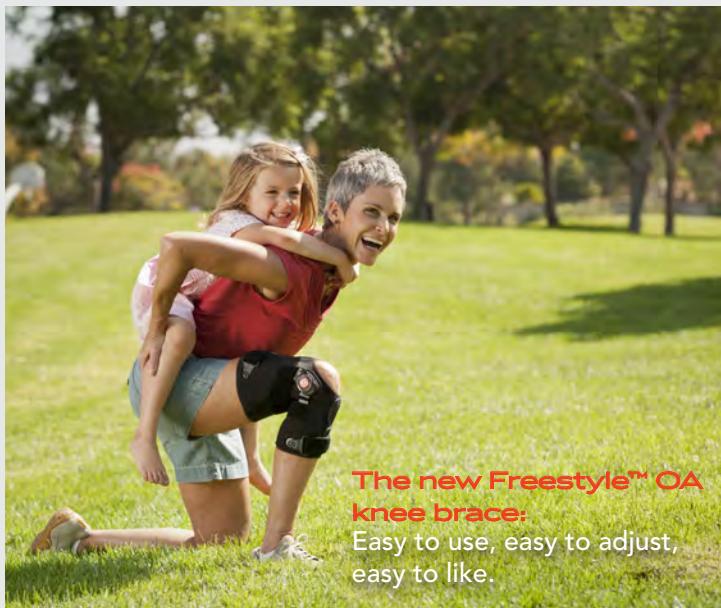


George Aguiar, MD, graduated with a BS in Biology from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and then continued his education at the Georgetown University School of Medicine where he earned his medical degree and completed his surgical internship and orthopaedic residency. Dr. Aguiar was named to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society.



Bruce S. Zimmer, MD, graduated magna cum laude with a BS from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, and then earned his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia. He stayed on at the Medical College of Virginia to complete both his surgical internship and orthopaedic residency.

For full biographies and a complete directory of the physicians at Commonwealth Orthopaedics who perform these and other procedures visit our website at www.c-o-r.com.



The new Freestyle™ OA knee brace:
Easy to use, easy to adjust,
easy to like.

All Breg Braces Come with 360° Customer Care:

- High quality products that are comfortable and easy to use
- Tailored solutions to help reduce your workload
- Unmatched service levels that exceed your expectations
- A commitment you can count on to meet your needs, fast

Visit www.breg.com, or call Breg today at 800-897-BREG (2734).

©2012 Breg, Inc. All rights reserved. 0612
Freestyle is a trademark of Breg, Inc.

BREG

360° CUSTOMER CARE