



PHOTO BY CHARLES HODGES

SHARING THE GOLD

By Susan Loden

OLYMPIAN & NTC'S DOT RICHARDSON

Two Olympic gold medals (1996 and 2000) prove softball is very, very good to Dot Richardson. Singled out as a star with the first U.S. hit and the first softball homerun in Olympic history, she was an NBC commentator at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, delivering play-by-play as her former U.S. Women's Softball Team won its third consecutive gold medal.

However, as an orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist, Richardson has a more enduring and direct impact on the lives of other American and international athletes of all sports. That includes Central Florida residents who want to improve fitness and athletic prowess. As medical director of the National Training Center (NTC), part of a 300-acre sports, health and education campus in Clermont, Fla., west of Orlando, Richardson establishes the vision and goals for this nonprofit

branch of South Lake Hospital. Her focus is on state-of-the-art facilities, sports science, performance programs and research in adolescent obesity, activity levels and shoulder injuries. Sports medicine services include physical therapy and athletic training. Richardson sets medical policies, establishes procedures and cultivates partnerships for the four-year-old NTC. She also still has a hand in her sport as a performance trainer for softball players. And the Dot Richardson

Softball Association, founded in 1996 and separate from the NTC, further proves her commitment to training softball coaches and players.

Texture: What's special about NTC?

Dot Richardson: Our campus is truly unique. It is the only sports training facility in the world with an on-site hospital, women's center, medical office buildings, a community college (Lake/Sumter) and four-year university (University of Central Florida-West). The campus is also home to Florida Special Olympics and Brandy Johnson's Global Gymnastics Academy. NTC has a 70-meter Aquatic Center, state-of-the-art Track Complex and ten acres of multi-purpose athletic fields. A Softball/Baseball Sportsplex will be added next year. Community clients join our fitness center because we offer more

than floor equipment, with access to all NTC facilities and fitness programs. Athletes that include top Australian triathlete Greg Bennett and the British rugby team Wigan Warriors, train here because of the care, qualifications, expertise and commitment of our 79-person staff — which includes three-time Olympians Dennis Mitchell and Sheila Taormina. It's most rewarding to provide individuals the opportunity to express their talents and use their gifts to reach goals and live up to their full potential.

T Did experiences as an athlete influence your career?

dr No doubt, athletics prepared me for my career as a physician. Even more important, through sports I learned many life lessons that help me personally and help me give back to others. My greatest achievement every day is serving others. Our lives and our health are our most precious gift and commodity. To help others live pain free, or with less pain or improved

mobility, is awesome. Sports medicine is for everyone, because at heart we all are athletes at one level or another. The human body is built for movement and sports medicine helps people return to an active lifestyle.

T What experiences brought you to this point?

dr As a teenager, I had a severe hamstring tear and needed the full treatment of a physician, physical therapy and athletic training. Later, softball scholarships covered my undergraduate education and then I coached softball as a master's candidate at Adelphi University. I went to the University of Louisville Medical School and followed up in the University of Southern California Orthopedic Surgery Residency Program.

T Why softball?

dr I love all sports and enjoy softball because of the mental and physical challenges it offers as an individual

sport, at times, and as a team sport all the time. There is a high potential of failure, because the most difficult thing in sports is to hit a moving object with a moving object. When you overcome that challenge, you have accomplished something beyond playing a game.

T You grew up in Central Florida. Why is this an ideal location for NTC?

dr Many people who have trained at the NTC have moved to the area. They are drawn by Florida's beauty, weather and recreation opportunities — from parks to softball and baseball complexes, rails-to-trails biking and running trails, water sports and boating. There are more than 2,000 lakes in Lake County to Lake Louisa State Park is ten miles from NTC. Orlando International Airport is only a 30-minute drive from Clermont, one of the top ten fastest growing cities in the country. My husband, Bob Pinto, loves the area. It reminds him of his hometown, Stamford, Conn., with the rolling hills, but without the snow. **x**

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