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Tara Parker-Pope on Health



August 19, 2008, 7:46 am

# A Quirky Athletic Tape Gets Its Olympic Moment

By [TARA PARKER-POPE](#)



Beach

volleyball champion Kerri Walsh wearing a new type of athletic tape. (Natacha Pisarenko/The Associated Press)

Watching Olympian Kerri Walsh compete in beach volleyball last week, many viewers were wondering the same thing: what is that black thing on her shoulder?

A tattoo? A bizarre fashion statement? No. Ms. Walsh was sporting a new type of athletic tape called Kinesio, touted by physical therapists as a better way to relieve pain and promote healing of injured muscles.

The appearance of Kinesio on the well-toned Ms. Walsh — she even wore it while meeting President Bush — has spurred international interest in the little-known brand. In black, pink, blue and beige, the tape has been spotted on a number of other Olympians, including the shoulder of U.S. water polo player Lauren Wenger and the elbows of Canadian Greco Roman wrestler Ari Taub. Members of Spain’s basketball team and Jamaica’s track team are wearing it.

Ms. Walsh and the other athletes don’t have endorsement deals with Kinesio USA; the company simply donated 50,000 rolls of the tape to 58 countries for use at the Olympic Games. But whether its appearance on the international athletic scene is a sign of its therapeutic benefit or just smart marketing remains to be seen.

Traditionally, white athletic tapes are wrapped around gauze to form a stiff bandage that immobilizes a joint or muscle. By comparison, the 100-percent cotton Kinesio tape is said to be modeled on the thickness and elasticity of real skin. The flexible tape is applied to the skin in specific patterns, depending on the injury, a technique designed to create support and guide injured muscles and joints without limiting the athlete’s range of motion.

“This tape moves with the body, so the biomechanics are still there,” said John Jarvis, director of Kinesio USA.

Both the tape and the new wrapping technique have spread mostly by word-of-mouth among athletes and trainers who swear by it. Cycling great Lance Armstrong reportedly dedicates a page to the tape in his latest book. Recently soccer superstar David Beckham traded jerseys after a game and was spotted with pink Kinesio tape on his back.

Some limited data suggest it may be effective. In July, the Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy published [a study of 42 people with shoulder injuries](#). Half of them were treated with Kinesio tape applied in a pattern designed to support the injured muscle. The other half were given a “sham” treatment in which two strips of tape were simply pressed across the arm. The study was conducted by physical therapists at Winn Army Community Hospital in Fort Stewart, Ga., who didn’t receive funding from the tape company. Notably, the study participants who received the real therapeutic tape treatment reported an immediate improvement in pain.

Last year, Research in Sports Medicine published [a study from San Jose State University](#) showing that in 30 healthy test subjects, use of the tape along the lower trunk area appeared to increase the range of motion.

Kinesio claims that in addition to supporting injured muscles and joints, the new taping method helps relieve pain by lifting the skin, allowing blood to flow more freely to the injured area. The tape is also widely used in pediatric physical therapy for muscle disorders like cerebral palsy.

Given Kinesio’s high profile at the Olympics, it seems likely that we will be seeing more and more of it. Mr. Jarvis said the tape already is used by many professional basketball, baseball and football teams. Before the Olympics, [the company Web site](#) received about 600 views a day. Since Ms. Walsh appeared with the spider-like Kinesio pattern on her shoulder,

Web traffic has jumped to 345,000 views daily.

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1. 1. August 19, 2008 9:33 am [Link](#)

For full disclosure, we need to know how much money Kerry Walsh was paid to endorse that shoulder tape? Only then, can we discuss about the true value of this product versus a generic cheaper one with maybe same benefits....

**FROM TPP — As many readers below are noting, Ms. Walsh was not paid to**

**wear the tape. It's something her trainer used to help her deal with the aftermath of shoulder surgery.**

– *therese Le Mignon*

2. 2. August 19, 2008 9:46 am [Link](#)

Great Information. Unfortunately I thought it was to pay tribute to someone who was deceased recently.

– *Dan In Guangzhou*

3. 3. August 19, 2008 9:48 am [Link](#)

A variation on this is where joints (often shoulders) are taped up to prevent hyperflexing and dislocations. Used in sports where arms are raised high eg. basketball, volleyball, Australian football etc ...

In future, wouldn't be surprised to see it adapted as some sort of performance underwear.

– *H Tran*

4. 4. August 19, 2008 9:59 am [Link](#)

My son, who has a minor orthopedic disability, has used kinesio tape as part of occupational therapy. It does work, although with kids, the challenge is making sure they keep it on. It's sticky and stretchy and isn't always comfortable.

– *just me*

5. 5. August 19, 2008 10:00 am [Link](#)

Interesting as are all your posts. Sounds like it could be the next fashion statement as well- like the zinc oxide swimmers nose of a generation ago.

– *Bruce*

6. 6. August 19, 2008 10:02 am [Link](#)

That is mad cool, yo!

– *Jeffrey*

7. 7. August 19, 2008 10:28 am [Link](#)

Hmmm, I have used a taping method for knee problems for more than 10 years which has been helpful so there may be something to this and not just hype.

– *dennisy*

8. 8. August 19, 2008 10:30 am [Link](#)

Just for the record, Kinesio tape has been around for at least 10-12 years in the US and probably longer in Korea.

– *scott ferguson*

9. 9. August 19, 2008 10:32 am [Link](#)

Of note is that Kinesio tape was developed by a Chiropractor, Dr. Kenzo Kase over 25 years ago. It is a stylish and actually pretty effective tool.

Mara Frattasio, D.C

– *Mara Frattasio*

10. 10. August 19, 2008 10:35 am [Link](#)

buy stock now, this company is on the rise...

– *foolish\_americans*

11. 11. August 19, 2008 10:45 am [Link](#)

I'd never heard of Kinesio before and I have been wondering what this tape was. When I saw it on one of the Jamaican female sprinters (in a series of dots up her leg) I thought maybe it was decorative, but on others the pattern seemed more likely to be therapeutic. It is an interesting development. Maybe I will give it a try myself on my next muscle strain.

– *JohnD*

12. 12. August 19, 2008 11:03 am [Link](#)

I hear NASCAR drivers use duct tape.

– *John B*

13. 13. August 19, 2008 11:11 am [Link](#)

Just another gimmick from a corporation. I'm with #1: how much money did she take from them? Can't trust anyone or anything nowadays. Quite sad.

<http://swine.wordpress.com>

– *(S)wine*

14. 14. August 19, 2008 11:28 am [Link](#)

Initially I thought it was Chinese characters; quite handsome, really.

– *MacKay*

15. 15. August 19, 2008 11:34 am [Link](#)

Numbers 1 and 13: It does say in the article that she and the other athletes are being paid to endorse it, the company just provided a bunch for free.

It's interesting, maybe I'll have to pick some up and try it on some of the minor aches and strains I've suffered training for my first marathon (obligatory disclaimer: of course serious injuries are best treated with rest, and I should see a doctor if pain persists, etc, etc, etc).

– *Matt*

16. 16. August 19, 2008 11:39 am [Link](#)

To 9:33 and 11:11 a.m.: you should really read the article before you accuse the athletes of selling out.

“Ms. Walsh and the other athletes don’t have endorsement deals with Kinesio USA; the company simply donated 50,000 rolls of the tape to 58 countries for use at the Olympic Games.”

That’s in the fourth paragraph. Really, you couldn’t be bothered to read more than three paragraphs before you level an accusation at an Olympian? Classy.

– *Ed*

17. 17. August 19, 2008 11:40 am [Link](#)

Just another gimmick... that’s been around for 25 years and has spent all of their profits on R&D and not advertising.

Walsh doesn’t make a dime. Kinesio doesn’t have the money to spend on recruiting athletes.

It’s funny that we can’t trust anyone nowadays... coming from someone who is advertising for his own blog with every comment.

By the way, lots of track folks are wearing it, but I think the dots were Phaiton titanium appliques and not Kinesio tape.

– *Dr Bonk*

18. 18. August 19, 2008 11:42 am [Link](#)

Yeah, my PT reefed on my arm, undid 3 weeks of therapy, put this duct tape on my back and called it a day.

– *Not a Believer*

19. 19. August 19, 2008 11:44 am [Link](#)

#1 and #7, did you guys even read the article?

“Ms. Walsh and the other athletes don’t have endorsement deals with Kinesio USA; the company simply donated 50,000 rolls of the tape to 58 countries for use at the Olympic Games.”

Maybe it is just a clever gimmick. If so, it’s a gimmick that appears to be working.

– *Jim*

20. 20. August 19, 2008 11:47 am [Link](#)

#’s 1 and 13....The Olympics is a marketing bonanza. Big deal. Walsh and May are

the best on the planet at what they do. That's what I am watching.

– *bdr1976@aol.com*

21. 21. August 19, 2008 11:48 am [Link](#)

I'm puzzled by comments 1 and 13. The article states that the company donated 50,000 rolls of the tape to 58 countries and none of the athletes, including Ms. Walsh, have endorsement deals.

– *jprof*

22. 22. August 19, 2008 11:50 am [Link](#)

Comments #1 and 14: It says in the article that the athletes do not have endorsement deals with the company.

– *Melissa*

23. 23. August 19, 2008 11:53 am [Link](#)

In most arenas I am no less cynical than the most cynical of the earlier commentators...BUT...here I seriously doubt that in her Olympic quest Kerri Walsh would shoulder (pun please forgive) any product that was not performing its necessary function. If she had purported to wear it therapeutically between matches, I'd ask the money question first. But in my view money had to be not only secondary but tertiary, by a long shot, behind effectiveness to employ such a potentially damaging distraction during Olympic competition.

– *richard*

24. 24. August 19, 2008 11:57 am [Link](#)

I recently injured my elbow and the physical therapist put this kinesio tape on it. She went on and on and on about its almost "magical" qualities, and how she was specifically trained in how to apply it. I thought she was joking as did everyone (including my doctor sister) I told. But it turns out it is legit! It did seem to reduce the swelling and offer support. Who knew!

– *Biker Chick*

25. 25. August 19, 2008 11:58 am [Link](#)

Both poster #1 Therese Le Mignon and poster #3 Swine; did not read the article very thoroughly. The first sentence of Paragraph 4 is: "Ms. Walsh and the other athletes don't have endorsement deals with Kinesio USA; the company simply donated 50,000 rolls of the tape to 58 countries for use at the Olympic Games."

– *grant westlake*

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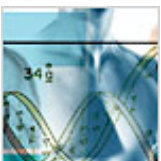
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