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Local chiropractor helps Bailey work out the kinks

As a global audience watched Sunday afternoon, Donovan Bailey blew past Michael Johnson in that long-awaited race between the world's fastest humans.

The drama ended quickly, with Johnson grabbing his left leg and pulling up halfway through the 150-meter event.

But that surprising twist didn't stop Bailey from celebrating his victory in Toronto. As the patriotic crowd roared, the Canadian sprinter quickly headed for his training entourage — starting with a doctor from Colorado Springs. Mike Leahy.

Some might wonder what a doctor of chiropractic from this far away was doing at Skydome. Maybe a few people were like the Associated Press photographer who mistook Leahy for Bailey's coach in writing a caption for the accompanying photo.

"I have a feeling I won't be able to hide anymore," Leahy said Monday. In truth, Leahy had ample reason to join the revelry. He made the trip, at Bailey's request, to provide muscular treatments that made sure the Olympic 100-meter champion was at his best.

"We spent four very intense days making adjustments right up to a few minutes before the race," Leahy said. "On that day, I fully believe there's no way he would have lost."

Bailey first came to Colorado Springs about a month ago, for treatments from Leahy and unpublicized workouts at the Air Force Academy track, as part of his preparation for the race.

"He flew out here to take care of a problem," Leahy said. "We work with a lot of athletes, but we don't give out their names unless the athlete says, 'Hey, let's do this.' Because it's not the doctor who wins the race."

But why Mike Leahy? He might not be famous in Colorado Springs, at least not yet. But he's rapidly gaining renown for his revolutionary Active Release Techniques, a system of soft-tissue treatment methods. It would be impossible to condense Leahy's work into a short description. His techniques, which have been lauded as no less than miraculous, have helped athletes overcome or avoid muscle-related problems. He also has succeeded, at a 96 percent rate, in curing patients with carpal tunnel syndrome — after just three to six treatments, and no surgery.

Leahy's approach has earned so much acclaim, the University of California-San Diego medical school has made him a professor, labeling his techniques as the standard for treating soft-tissue injuries — amazing honors from the medical profession, given the fact he's a chiropractor.

But that wasn't his initial career path. Leahy earned his first degree in engineering from the Air Force Academy, then served as a fighter and test pilot (1972-79). Only after that did he attend the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic, graduating as valedictorian.

There's another compelling side to this story. Leahy is winning a battle with cancer. In 1994, after learning his melanoma had spread to the lymph system, Leahy realistically figured he might live another year at the most.

No big deal. Leahy attacked the disease himself, with specific rest and dietary measures to strengthen his immune system. It has worked so well, he has continued his annual habit of competing in the Ironman Triathlon. While at Toronto, he went on a bike ride one morning — for 100 miles.

"Donovan thinks I'm crazy," Leahy said, but he still had ample time for his patient.

Bailey's chiropractor, Mark Lindsey, had learned the Active Release Techniques from Leahy. But as the match race against Johnson came closer, Lindsey thought it would be appropriate to include his mentor.

"For somebody like Donovan, the first thing is avoiding injuries," Leahy said. "We try to find problems before they develop, before they blow a quad in a race. Then we work on biomechanics, developing the perfect stride and motion, how one muscle slides over another.

"Donovan is coming closer and closer to perfection. He just keeps improving."

As for the race itself, Leahy said he "could tell what was happening before it actually happened. The race was over in 30 meters. It was unbelievable; the turn Donovan ran. When Donovan passed him so quickly, Johnson tried to find another gear and it wasn't there. We could tell immediately something was wrong."

Afterward, Leahy didn't stay long. Monday, he was back in his office near Memorial Park, seeing new patients into the night.

"It really is a thrill, and I've been fortunate to be a part of things like that," he said of his Canadian trip. "It's rewarding to be with someone like Donovan for that intense of an event, when the whole world focuses on that 15 seconds, and have him be so appreciative.

"But our work with CPT (carpal tunnel syndrome) means just as much, and we'll be trying to come out publicly more about that in the next year. When someone doesn't lose his job because of how you can help, that's really big."

It also qualifies Mike Leahy as a hero, in more ways than one.

And no, Mike, you won't be able to hide anymore.