

For Dr. James Lehman ...  
Baseball



When Dr. James Lehman says baseball is in the bones, he means it. But when other fans get excited about the crack of the bat meeting the ball, Lehman is more thrilled at the crack of a player's back when it meets his hands.

# is in the Bones

By Mike Patrick



Lehman, associate professor of clinical sciences at UB's College of Chiropractic Medicine, is team chiropractor for the Bridgeport Bluefish, a popular Minor League team, whose stadium is just a few blocks from campus.

It's a relationship forged through Lehman's love of baseball and his desire to give his students hands-on experience in chiropractic.

"The agreement I have is I volunteer to service the team as long as they permit students do sports-medicine rotations," Lehman said. "What they have is total coverage for chiropractic service, providing they allow the students to participate."

UB's degree in chiropractic is a four-year doctoral program and requires four years of undergraduate education. During the fourth year of chiropractic training, those with an interest in sports medicine are invited to apply for the Bridgeport Bluefish opportunity. Eight of the 20 students interested in pursuing careers in sports medicine were chosen to work with the team this past season.

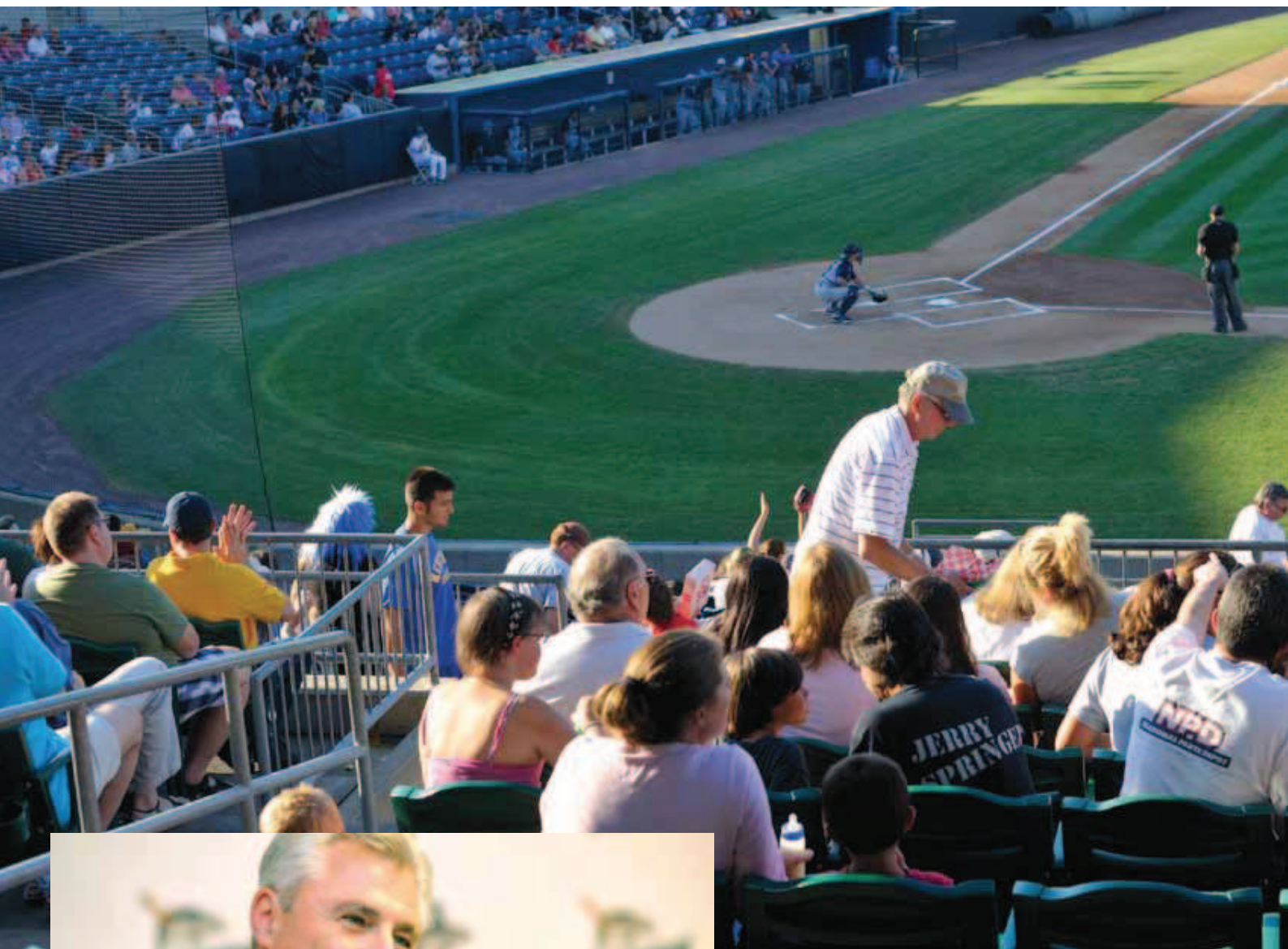
"The value to the student has to do with gaining additional clinical experience, and the uniqueness is it's a sports-medicine rotation with a local professional baseball team," Lehman said.

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Bluefish mascot "B.B." cheers on the hometown fans.





**School of Chiropractic's Dr. James Lehman keeps the Bluefish competition-ready before the games begin at Harbor Yard.**

“There’s a difference in the way a professional athlete responds to care than a patient who is overweight, deconditioned, diabetic or sick. A professional athlete is very, very in tune with how their body should function.”

Lehman said he and the students work together to do examinations of the players, looking for postural and spinal issues and muscle injuries. They’ll then perform spinal manipulations, soft-tissue treatments, and even advise the players about general health and wellness issues. One of the most frequent is dehydration, which can lead to muscle tightness and pain.

### **The crash**

It was Lehman’s love of the game—and a back injury that derailed his high school sports career—that drew him to baseball chiropractic.

Lehman was 14 when he was a passenger in a car that hit a telephone pole.

“It affected my ability to run without pain for about three years,” he said. “Finally, someone suggested I see a chiropractor, and within two treatments the problem was resolved.”

While the injury put a damper on his high school athletics, the chiropractic cure meant he could join the game again in college. In fact, he even went on to play shortstop on a semi-pro team in Canada called Alba, the same name as the city where it played.

“I’m a die-hard St. Louis Cardinals fan, and all of my kids played a lot of baseball,” said Lehman, whose three sons and daughter are all grown. “I’ve always had a real liking for the game. It would be, I guess, my favorite sport.”



So, he's right at home in the Bluefish training room, which has many of the accoutrements you might expect: weights, exercise equipment, tremendous containers of Gatorade. Lehman's therapy table is less anticipated, and for many of the players, Lehman's services were a first.

"The first year I noticed a lot of players were not so excited about having chiropractic done," he said. "There was a time period for the players to gain some trust."

Once they did, they soon found Lehman and his cadre of chiropractors-in-training could help them feel better, and even improve their game.

"Most often they have strains and sprains, muscle spasms and biomedical issues like a twisted pelvis," he said. "One player had a stiff neck and couldn't pitch last night because of that."

Center fielder Adam Greenburg of Guilford, Connecticut, thought he had a torn hamstring until Lehman and his student caregivers determined that tension in his upper back was the source of his pain.

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## A Home Away from Home (Plate)

By Mike Patrick

The successful partnership that Dr. James Lehman forged between the School of Chiropractic and the Bridgeport Bluefish Minor League baseball team was not done overnight. In fact, the team wasn't tremendously interested at first.

"The discussion started with the previous general manager three years ago. I told him of my interest in baseball and asked if they had a team chiropractor," he said. "He said it wasn't possible that year, but that they were starting a new program called Family Host."

That program, in which members of the community invite a player to stay at their home for the season, is a baseball fan's dream. And Lehman is a baseball fan—and a big one.

Even before Lehman came on board as chiropractor to the Bluefish, and then arranged for students to spend clinical hours with the team, Lehman's hosted a number of players in his home, including team members from as far away as the Dominican Republic.

But cast aside those visions of Lehman leisurely playing catch with a ballplayer in his back yard.

"While a lot of people think that must be cool, the reality is they have a very busy schedule," he said, adding many people think the only time ballplayers work is when they're on the field during a game. Actually, most of their time is taken up by training and practice. Add a 15-inning overtime game to the schedule and he might not expect a player to come home until past midnight. They'll sleep until noon, have lunch, then go back to the ballpark.

"This is a serious business for these guys. They all want to make it back to the major leagues," Lehman said. "Every once in awhile, if they have an off day, we'll watch a game or get a pizza."

The Family Host program has one thing in common with the chiropractic service Lehman provides the team: It saves the players money.

"It gives you a more relaxed feeling when you're away from home," said catcher Tom Pennino of Long Island, New York, whose staying at the Lehman home this season. "It's expensive, especially for the guys who don't make as much."

Minor League baseball doesn't traditionally pay well. When Lehman opens his home to a player and provides chiropractic service, that player then doesn't have to spend the better part of his paycheck on a hotel and a personal chiropractor.





**Fish Fever! Even Yankees fans root for Bridgeport's home team.**

"I'm putting stress and strain on joints and ligaments that would cause problems," Greenburg said. "One of the benefits of having chiropractic care is the checking of the overall functionality of how the body works. It's a benefit and bonus for me to make sure my body is in line."

During a brief chiropractic session with Lehman, Greenburg said he "just wanted to make sure my legs and hips are all in line." He leaned against a wall, and Lehman, with his elbow, pressed against Greenburg's back, creating cracking and popping noises as bones and muscles shifted into place.

"I examined his spine for posture and function," Lehman said afterward. "I found his pelvis was tilted and had joints not moving properly. I treated his muscles to stretch normally so he could function in today's game."

### Perfect pitch

Lehman said he and the students frequently treat pitchers, whose job often casts their bones and muscles way out of alignment.

In baseball, so much attention is placed on a pitcher's arm that it's easy to forget he uses his entire body to launch the ball at the batter. The pitcher lifts his leg, turns his head, rears his whole body back, then shifts his force to his pitching arm before releasing the ball.

It's an entire workout in a few seconds.

"Pitchers really have so much trauma to their bodies from the repetitive pitching," Lehman said. "It's not natural to put your arm in this position and throw a

ball. It's a strain on the rotator cuffs, tendons and also the shoulder and neck."

Pitcher Matt Pike is at a season high for games started and innings pitched, and partially credits Lehman and his students for keeping him at the top of his game.

"It eliminates back pain, I can tell you that first hand. It prepares my body to go out there and pitch every day on a 140-game season.," Pike said. "You throw the ball over 100 times a game. It throws your body out of whack. You deal with a lot of arm, shoulder, and rotator-type injuries, overuse injuries."

And the batters need chiropractic care, too. While many people may associate batting with upper-body and arm strength, Lehman said, it's easy for the viewers of the game to overlook that the batter puts his entire body into the swing.

"The feet, ankles, knees, hips, and lower back are all used in hitting. If his back feels tight then he doesn't get his full swing," Lehman said. "He's got to contract muscles in his lower back and abdomen to create upper-body force."

For trainers, managers, and coaches, players are pieces in a well-oiled machine. They consider Lehman and his students to be preventative maintenance, keeping the Bluefish at the top of their game.

"I see the guys definitely feel more comfortable with their bodies; they feel they can go out there 100 percent without second guessing themselves," said coach Alberto Martinez. "It's a great reassurance to them having the doctors come here and work with the players."

Some even take advantage of it themselves.

"My back used to lock up all the time, especially because you got your feet in the ground," Bluefish field manager Willie Upshaw said, adding he appreciates the chiropractic service, too. "You get rid of all the tightness."

The arrangement between UB and the Bluefish has been so successful on each side that next season, Lehman plans on increasing the clinical hours students spend with the players, but decreasing the number of students, so each student could be more involved in treating the team.

"It's important that you love what you do in life," says Lehman. "I love baseball and I love chiropractic and it's a tremendous joy to combine the two to benefit the baseball players and my students." ■