

John Combe

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By Hannah Fell

Imagine one of your clients coming back from the Olympic trials with a medal around their neck, having earned a place on an Olympic team. The next time they compete it will be at the Olympic Games representing the U.S.

For John Combe, LMT, BCTMB, a massage therapist from LaGrande, Oregon, the dream of watching his clients achieve this kind of success is a reality.

“It’s what a lot of athletes spend four years working toward,” he said. “It’s pretty humbling and super rewarding to know you’ve helped them achieve that.”

Combe has been working with elite distance runners for about 19 years in Eugene, Oregon, as well as other cities around the state. As a runner who has completed several marathons, including the Boston Marathon, Combe understands that massage is instrumental to any athlete.

He is a first-career massage therapist, and when he started out in the massage field in 2000 this was a rare thing because at that time most people got into massage as a second or third career.

“I felt drawn to massage therapy,” he said. “I was on the path to chiropractic school and had a chiropractor as a mentor

and felt passionate about helping people in a more natural way.” He was premed as an undergraduate and realized how important the muscles are to how the body works.

After premed, he said he wanted to focus on soft tissue work, and instead of choosing the path of chiropractic he enrolled in a massage therapy program at Central Oregon Community College.

Athletes must push themselves constantly to the next level, Combe said, and massage helps. Massage therapists understand the immense value massage has on improving overall performance and recovery time for athletes because of increased blood circulation in the body. Research is now confirming what massage therapists have known for years.

According to a study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, researchers studied the effectiveness of massage on muscle recovery after runners completed a 10,000-meter race. The researchers found that when athletes received massage there was an improvement in the overall muscle soreness compared to those who didn’t receive massage.

The study concluded that massage was an effective recovery tool for athletes.

“The biggest surprise to me as a provider isn’t the value athletes place on massage therapy,” Combe said. “It is an integral part of their performance. It’s probably the most highly used tool in track and field. And we know how valuable it is to elites. What surprises me is that we are still trying to prove its value to the everyday consumer.”

To work with athletes on any level, Combe believes the massage therapist must respect what the athlete is telling you regarding their needs. “The athletes have you there for them, and you are not there for yourself,” he said. Even though he is a runner, he said, he never lets his knowledge of the sport overtake the needs of his client.

“I love working with runners, and I think being a runner is a big player. I’m able to connect with them and be in their shoes to an extent. And pushing through as a massage therapist can bring good outcomes for them.” **M**

Hannah Fell is *MASSAGE Magazine’s* associate editor.

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