

Friday, October 29, 2010, 09:03 by Kevin Azzopardi

## Doctor Laser lands in Malta



Video: Mark Zammit Cordina

*Pier Francesco Parra, the Italian doctor of Maltese descent who counts the likes of Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Ivan Ljubicic and Alberto Tomba among his patients, speaks to Kevin Azzopardi about his laser treatment and his work in elite sport.*

It says all about Pier Francesco Parra's reputation that, in international tennis circles, he's known as Dr Guru, Doctor Laser or simply the magician.

Professor Parra's stock has risen significantly in the last two decades as high-profile athletes, including Italian skiing great Alberto Tomba, former Olympic marathon champion Gelindo Bordin and a legion of tennis players, have turned to the Italian surgeon and his revolutionary laser treatment.

Reckoned to have a 97 per cent success rate, Professor Parra's latest FP3 system was launched in Malta earlier this month.

"This treatment was first performed in 1988," Professor Parra told me when we met for an interview at the Radisson Blu Spa and Resort, Golden Sands.

"My idea was to defocus the surgical laser.

"The first Nd-YAG laser had an emission of 1,060nm and was used in the US just for surgical procedure. I started to defocus the two lasers and enlarged the ray. We found that it could be used for the treatment of some sport lesions, like in tendons and muscles.

"After that we continued to develop the laser and we arrived to the one of this year, Doctor Laser. We can apply the new laser to sports trauma but not only that."

The FP3 device's compact size means that Professor Parra can carry the equipment with him everywhere but that was not always the case.

"The machine is very small now, unlike the first one which weighed over 100 kilos, so it was not possible to transport it," he recalled.

"Now it weighs 3.5 to four kilos and we can carry it in the luggage all over the world. There was a joke... 20 years ago, I weighed 60 kilos and the laser machine weighed 120. Now the machine weighs little but I'm over 100 kilos and a BBC journalist once told me that I must have swallowed the laser!"

Although Professor Parra derives great pride from the "97 per cent success rate", he was quick to stress the importance of applying the treatment on the right injuries.

"You have to think about one important issue," he observed.

“You have to choose the right conditions where you can use this kind of laser. You must always identify the right pathologies.

“Even if 97 per cent is a very good result, it still means that the remaining three per cent we’re not choosing right. If we use any treatment for all pathologies, we’re going to have bad results. We have to go for the right treatment.”

As reports about the healing power of Professor Parra’s treatment proliferated, more athletes sought out his services.

The soaring popularity of the FP3 also caught the attention of the international media, especially in 2007 when reputable newspapers like The Telegraph and The New York Times carried interviews with Professor Parra after learning that top-notch players, including current world no.1 Nadal, Djokovic and Ivanovic, had been treated by the diminutive Italian surgeon.

“For the past 10 years, grand slam courtesy cars have been shuttling players back and forth to wherever Professor Parra happens to be so they can be treated by the man they call the ‘magician’,” Clive White wrote in The Telegraph on July 1, 2007.

Invited to recount a couple of curious anecdotes from his experiences with top tennis players, Professor Parra said: “I’ve worked with tennis players for the last 10 years but I like to remember that I started in athletics.

“Gelindo Bordin and Laura Fogli were my first patients in the late 80s. But this method has developed more in tennis...”

“Nadal was very curious in New York in 2007. He came to see me very late at night with his entire team that included the physio, doctor, coach and trainer.

“I learned that he wanted to do a movie about the treatment and I said to myself ‘it’s nice to film the procedure but it was also dangerous to treat the knee of Nadal in front of a camera.

“I was lucky that all went well but to do the treatment and have a picture of all was very strange.

“Djokovic is another type, very funny. I remember before the final in Australia, which he won, he started to visit me to receive laser treatment.”

Professor Parra is keen to promote his FP3 machine in other sport, particularly football, but he pointed out that the treatment is not intended solely for sports-related matters.

“I used this method at Juventus FC in 1995-96,” Professor Parra said.

“Now, it’s one year that the little machine, the newest one, has been at Manchester United (on a trial period).

“But, I don’t want people to imagine that this methodology is only for sports. When you look at Formula One there’s a lot of technology that is not used only for fast cars but also for normal ones and this methodology is for all people, especially if we evaluate the prevention of damage (incurred) during sports and normal activity.”

Maltese doctors, consultants, physiotherapists and sports coaches recently had the opportunity to get acquainted with Professor Parra’s laser machine during a launch hosted by the Malta Association of Physiotherapists.

Professor Parra, 53, is Italian through and through but he is also proud of his Maltese origins so much so that, in March last year, he was granted Maltese citizenship.

His Maltese parentage is the motivation behind his efforts to introduce his laser treatment machine here.

“My grandfather was Maltese and my mother was half Maltese,” he said.

“I have a Maltese passport and I have relatives here. I love to stay in this beautiful country and I’d like to do something to introduce this new procedure here.

“Alan Zammit was the physio who really appreciated this treatment. He came to see me in Italy to learn about this method and I’ve also been in Malta just to help him.

“We’ll see. This is something that I think will be very important not only for sports in Malta.”

## **Fogli’s backing**

Former long-distance runner Laura Fogli and Angelo Giglio, the vice-president of the Italian Federation of Sports Medicine (FMSI), are two avowed fans of Professor Parra and his laser treatment.

Fogli, Italy’s leading marathon runner in the 80s and 90s, extolled the benefits of laser treatment.

“I met Professor Parra in the 80s,” Fogli, who now works as an athletics pundit for RAI and also coaches youngsters, told The

Times.

“Being an athlete, I suffered injuries during my sporting activity. The professor introduced me to this type of treatment and the results were very good. I must say that Professor Parra has resolved a lot of physical problems for me.

“Gelindo Bordin and I were the first two top-level athletes to try this new therapy.”

For his part, Professor Giglio said his endorsement of Professor Parra’s methodology stems from the FMSI’s commitment towards providing Italian athletes with the best conditions to fulfil their potential.

“At FMSI, we are committed to give our athletes all the possibilities to reach their best physical condition,” he said.

“This laser treatment aids the rehabilitation from injuries and the feedback we’ve received has been very positive.”

## 2 Comments

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**Patrick Sacco**

*Oct 31st 2010, 22:22*

Thank you, Dr. Parra. You made us Maltese proud!

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**ms ghoare**

*Oct 31st 2010, 13:48*

Pier Francesco Parra, I have suffered with frozen shoulders for 23 years and bad knee for 4 years and got even worse lately My pain and sleepless nights been getting me down if you need a guinea pig i am happy to be at your services

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