

triumph for me because my times prior to that weren't all that good. I was definitely the underdog at that particular meet, but I came from behind and won."

The athletic prowess that enabled Johnston to so swiftly clear those hurdles gained him a sports scholarship to Southwest Texas State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree before moving on to dental school at UCLA. (In 1969, his plans to enroll at Southwest Texas State University had to be sidelined for 2 years while he served his country as a dental technician in the Army.)

It was while at UCLA School of Dentistry that Johnston decided to specialize in orthodontics.

"The man who became my mentor, Spiro Chaconas [DDS, then-chairman of the UCLA orthodontics department], pointed out to me that, in orthodontics, treatment didn't cause trauma to patients and you could get very good results. That really appealed to me. I also liked that orthodontics could be lucrative."

From UCLA, Johnston headed north to the University of California, San Francisco for orthodontic training. In 1979, fresh out of that program, he found employment in Fremont, working alongside three dentists who, with Johnston, would shortly thereafter form the wildly successful group that he left in 2004.

Prior to joining the dentists, Johnston considered returning to Texas to practice. But he'd married a Bay Area woman, so that was where he remained. He chose Fremont because it was a city on the cusp of explosive growth.

Balance of Power

In addition to his role as a volunteer coach (see sidebar) and his participation in world amateur track, Johnston also plays the part of family man. He has a daughter, 22, and a son, 20 (who happens to be a 6-foot, 4-inch southpaw pitcher for a local college baseball team). "I try to be a number one dad," Johnston says. "I approach parenting the same way I approach track: I put my whole heart into it."

Still, with so many irons in the fire, the only way busy Johnston can keep a proper balance is through good planning of his time, a task he leaves to his office manager, the official keeper of the schedule.

"She develops my daily schedule in such a way that I'm able to get all my work done and still have ample time for my outside interests," Johnston offers. "A big help with that is the extensive computerization we have here."

The efficiencies gained through computerization allow Johnston to see a full week's worth of cases in 3½ days (the office is open Monday through Wednesday and on Thursday afternoons). He's supported by a staff of five, but looks forward to the day when growth will compel him to hire more people, including an associate orthodontist.

"Whoever I bring aboard," says Johnston, "he or she will have to possess the same philosophies as mine."

That means the newcomer had better be prepared for the run of his life. ☞

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Life in the Fast Lane

Sports memorabilia is a key element of the office decor at Olympic Orthodontics. Figuring prominently in the collection are artifacts, autographs, and photos of superstars such as Mohammed Ali, Kobe Bryant, and Barry Bonds.

"I'm a big Dallas Cowboys fan, too, so I've got all kinds of Troy Aikman and Emmitt Smith items," Johnston adds.

As impressive as those memorabilia are, the crown jewel of the collection remains the gold medal Johnston himself captured for winning the 2001 World Masters championship in high hurdles, with a time of 14.9 seconds.

"I cherish this medal," he says, "for the reason that it confirms for me that I'm an elite, world-class athlete."

Taking the gold that day in Brisbane, Australia, gained Johnston considerable attention back home in Dublin—and, he says, it even helped make him a better orthodontist.

"The training, the competitiveness of the sport, the pushing myself to the limits of endurance—these have all equipped me to concentrate my mind and energies on making my practice a truly winning practice," Johnston says. "I make sure everything in my office is first class; I don't accept anything that's second rate."

Athletics, he insists, also taught him to be a leader.

"People have respect for leaders, and want to imitate the things you do as a leader in order for themselves to become winners in the areas of life that are important to them," he says. This plays out in his practice when patients are willing to "pay closer attention to what I tell them about compliance and hygiene technique."

The World Masters gold medal Johnston proudly displays is joined by about 500 other laurels he has won, beginning in grade school. "I've been competing right up to the present day," he says.

Johnston was at the peak of his youthful athletic prowess in 1975 when he attempted to qualify for the US Olympic decathlon team. He nearly made it, too, having scored sufficient points in each of nine track-and-field events. But the tenth event was his undoing.

"It was pole vaulting. I was terrible at it." The reason? "I had a fear of heights," he reveals.

These days, when not competing, Johnston coaches the students on the track team at nearby Foothill High School.

The drawback to the coaching gig isn't the time it takes (about 10 hours a week) so much as the energy it eats up.

"I go to the track meets with the kids and, after a long day of being in the sun and wind, I come back home totally drained," he says. "I'm so physically exhausted, I often can't do my own track workout the next day."

Johnston conducts his personal training regimen every other day. Mostly, it consists of treadmilling, a little light running and some easy hurdles. But on one day out of every week, it's full-bore, pedal-to-the-metal stuff.

"Because of my age," he says, "I can't go real heavy on the training each and every time."

But train he must. Johnston faces his next big contest in August, when the National Masters championships are held in Honolulu. Later that same month, he'll be competing for world honors in San Sebastian, Spain. Both times he's entered in the 100-meter hurdles. Johnston feels confident he'll do well.

"I expect to be in the top three," he predicts. —RS