

UNIVERSITY WEEK

FEATURE ARTICLES

ETC.

CAMPUS CALENDAR

NOTICES

MYSTERY PHOTO

PHOTOS

ABOUT UWEEK

NEWS ARCHIVES

SEARCH UWEEK

HEALTH SCIENCES

HEALTH SCIENCES ARTICLES

HEALTH SCIENCES BRIEF NEWS



**CAMPUS
MASTER PLAN**



**PRESIDENT'S
ANNUAL ADDRESS**

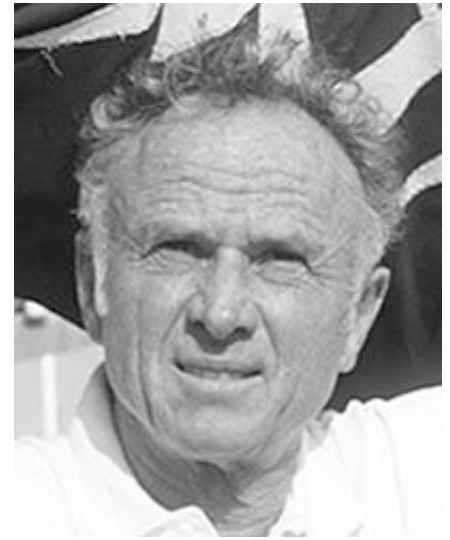
[◀ Back to Index](#)

Lowell North sails away with new shoulder

Pam Sowers

HS News & Community Relations

Former Olympic sailing gold medallist Lowell North of Point Loma, Calif., is back at the helm of a sailing yacht, after his painful left shoulder was repaired during a surgical procedure at UW Medical Center this spring. The 72-year-old North, founder of North Sails of San Diego, looked for the best care available when he first developed problems with the other shoulder five years ago due to osteoarthritis.



North Sails photo

“I researched the problem, and found that the best doctor for my problem was here,” North says. “I get along well with Dr. Rick Matsen.”

Lowell North

Matsen is professor and chair of the Department of Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine at the UW, and performed both surgeries for North. He says that certain people are predisposed to osteoarthritis, the disease that damaged North’s shoulder joints, just as some people are predisposed to heart disease or other ailments.

“Shoulder reconstruction surgery has the specific purpose of getting people back to what they enjoy most. In Lowell’s case, he’s back sailing,” Matsen says. “The purpose of this procedure is not just to relieve pain, but to provide a complete restoration of function, so each person can go on doing what they most enjoy.”

North notes his recovery from the first shoulder surgery was rapid. He and his wife Bea were able to resume a sailing trip where they had left their boat, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and sail successfully to South Africa through stormy seas about a month after the procedure was completed. North expects the same quick recovery this time.

“I first noticed that this left shoulder was getting worse when I went to the gym three or four months ago and the trainer suggested an exercise involving lifting a weight up to shoulder height,” North says. “I could lift 5 pounds easily with the right shoulder that had already been replaced, but with this arm, about 3 pounds was it – it was just too weak. Then it got to be harder to lift even the 3-pound weight.”

When North began to have trouble with his left shoulder to the point that it interfered with his ability to sleep without pain

killers and sleeping pills, he recognized the symptoms and made an appointment with Dr. Matsen. Subsequent X-rays and examinations showed that North’s left shoulder was suffering both from degenerative joint disease and related loss of cartilage in the joint, as well as a torn rotator cuff.

“Lowell moved sailing into the modern age by using computers to study the stresses and improve the materials used to make sails,” Matsen says. “In a similar way we are using the art and science of joint replacement surgery to help patients like Lowell return to the active lives they enjoy.”

After surgery, North and his wife headed for Sydney, Australia, to celebrate the wedding of her son, a resident of Shanghai. They plan to return to sailboat racing in the near future.

Bea recently sent Matsen a thank-you note that summarizes her husband’s recovery. She wrote, “Thank you for the rescue and repair – it’s like magic!”

For more information on Lowell North and his background, see the story from Sailing World magazine at

<http://old.sailingworld.com/northint.htm>

[◀ Back to Index](#)

University Week

The faculty and staff publication of the University of Washington

uweek@u.washington.edu

Uweek Vol. 19, No. 31 June 27, 2002