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THE EYES HAVE IT



He may be fat, bald and four-eyed, but AOC editor Andy Afford was now in a position to change things. After a personal invitation from Professor Dan Reinstein at the London Vision Clinic, at least one thing was going to get sorted. And with the gym membership 'in the post' and the phone numbers of chief rug-wearers Gooch and Warne set to speed dial, you have to ask yourself, is a full blown mid-life crisis imminent?

I want to say from the outset that I am not now, nor was I ever vain, about wearing glasses. I had no problems with wearing them and no issues with using them. In fact, many of my friends, colleagues and family members said that they are the thing that most define me. Unquestionably, when I am uncharitably sketched by my children, plonked across the middle of what is supposed to be my face (yet looks more like a potato growing cress from its crown) are my over-sized 'designer NHS specials'. The choice of large, confident and contemporary frames seemed the perfect metaphor for the large, confident and contemporary person behind them. I WAS my face furniture. Now I'm not.

I have only worn specs for the last 16 years of my life and as attached to them as I am, playing sport as a glasses and contact lens wearer was the worst thing I had to contend with during my 13-year first-class playing career. Not the dreaded reverse-sweep, not

skewed umpiring, not even limited ability, never even a hostile crowd - the wearing of lenses was the most bloody miserable experience of the lot.

As a sportsman, glasses look particularly unathletic and geeky - those Barmy Army wits still refer to New Zealand's spec-wearing spinner, Daniel Vettori, as 'Harry Potter in disguise'. For me, poor eyesight and specs rendered the wearing of sunglasses a non-starter, something that would have made the fielding side of

the sport much more pleasant. And on a hot day, with a few overs under the belt, eyewear was

downright uncomfortable. But having said all this, I found them a hundred times better than playing in contact lenses!

I suffer from astigmatism - put simply, rugby ball-shaped eyes instead of round - a defect that has rendered me both short and long sighted. As complicated as it sounds it is easily corrected by glasses and correctable in contacts by using

An initial meeting saw me visit the London Vision Clinic on Devonshire Place for a three-hour consultation. During that time, my eyes were measured, calibrated and checked for anything that may have precluded me from being a candidate for surgery. After these exhaustive tests, a date was booked for my return. I was told that the operation to correct both of my eyes would take 20 minutes

'APART FROM A FRANKLY RIDICULOUS RESIDUAL TAN-LINE RUNNING ACROSS THE BRIDGE OF MY NOSE, I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER' SPECCY AFFORD: CHANGED MAN

specialised 'weighted' lenses. Most contact lenses spin whilst on the eye, cleaning and clearing them of debris as they do so. Mine, as a piece of more specialised kit, sat in one position to compensate

for my astigmatism and didn't self-clean. This made them incredibly uncomfortable to wear and after five or six hours in the field, particularly on a hot, windy and dusty day, I would have happily scratched out my own eyes.

So this was my starting point for undergoing elective surgery. I liked the look but not the feel of my glasses. I hated wearing contact lenses. I liked the idea of wearing sunglasses again and love the outdoors. Looking back now, I would have to say

and that I would need to bring with me a pair of sunglasses and stay in London overnight, in order for me to rest and make another consultation check the following morning.

The day came. I dusted off an old pair of Oakleys and headed down to the smoke to meet 'Dr Dan' Reinstein, my surgeon, an 18-year industry veteran, holding professorships and consultant posts in New York (Weill Medical College of Cornell University), London (St. Thomas Hospital - Kings College), and Paris (Centre Hospitalier National d'Ophtalmologie des Quinze-Vingts).

Reinstein is a bronzed and gregarious American - the type of American you would recognise without having to actually meet. He is confident and lively to the point of distraction, and almost evangelical in his belief in what he does and what the clinic delivers for its clients. And Dan's ebullience is alright by me. Someone wise once said, on the subject of confidence, that 'no one wants the surgeon with the shaky hands' - safe to say that when in Reinstein's care, nerves seem unlikely to play a part in the outcome.

After a lunch-time appointment and a further pre-op chat, head massage and post-operative 'warm down', I was back at my hotel for 3.00pm. The



Daniel Vettori, Kiwi, and one of world cricket's most prominent speccys.

that laser surgery has to be one of the best things I've done in support of my sport.

procedure took 20 minutes and was pain-free. All through the process, a step-by-step commentary was maintained, each change of light, laser and set of circumstances was pre-empted and prepared for by Reinstein. A 30-second period when a level of 'dentist chair' discomfort was reached was the only stage that even approximated the feeling of surgery. For the rest of the time, although literally in my face, it felt more like a trip to the opticians than a medical practice.

An afternoon of hotel rest and quarterly eye drops followed. And then up with the larks for a 9.15am consultation back at Devonshire Place; the last stage of the initial intervention. As I walked along the road wearing sunglasses for the first time in years, I was convinced that on this now beautiful summer morning that I could see, easily as well as with my glasses - and this was less than 24 hours after the operation. Sat back in the chair, according to the reading chart, I now had better than 20:20 vision. It was even better than 20:16 vision: the eyesight required to fly F14 fighter planes. I now had 20:12 - SUPER-VISION. Able to easily read 4point text on a hand-held card. Text so small, in fact, it fell into the territory of 'legalese small print'.

And what of the downside? Firstly, the procedure isn't cheap at £4,200, all up. Two days on, although life returned to normal almost instantly, the eyes feel a bit dry and although not uncomfortably so, they are yet to return to absolutely normal. And that's pretty well it - apart from a ridiculous residual tan-line running across the bridge of my nose, I couldn't be happier.

And would I have considered this procedure when actively playing cricket? Most definitely - but only via the London Vision Clinic. Boasting a flawless safety record of not a single problem from, as the Americans might put it, '12,000 at bats', Reinstein has to be considered the pre-eminent consultant ophthalmic surgeon working in the UK today. From screening to treatment to results to aftercare, the whole process was flawless - much like the current state of my eyesight.

With athletes nowadays looking to find advantages in every area of their sport, I can think of no better field in which to be top of the class, than clarity of vision. With the support of Reinstein that is possible - metaphorically and physically.

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