

Background on Dr. James Nicholas*

James A. Nicholas was a pioneer in the treatment of athletic injuries and was best known for performing four knee operations that saved the celebrated career of Jets quarterback Joe Namath.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Dr. Nicholas was among the best-known orthopedic surgeons in the United States as a physician for three New York professional teams: the Jets, the Knicks and the Rangers. He was also a consultant for baseball players and professional dancers. But his work extended well beyond the high-profile patient.

Dr. Nicholas and the staff at Lenox Hill Hospital's brace shop developed the Lenox Hill derotation brace to protect chronically unstable and surgically repaired knees. The brace, designed for Namath, has aided many other athletes. And it has been worn by thousands outside the sports world.

In 1973, Dr. Nicholas founded at Lenox Hill the world's first hospital-based research and clinical center for the treatment and prevention of sports injuries, the Nicholas Institute of Sports Medicine and Athletic Trauma. The center, named for Dr. Nicholas in 1986, is now directed by his son Stephen, an orthopedic surgeon, who succeeded him there in 2001.

"In 1972, more than 17 million people required a physician's services for leisure-time injuries, more casualties than there were in all the wars our country has fought," Dr. Nicholas once told Dave Anderson of *The New York Times*, recalling how he came to create the center.

Dr. Nicholas was a member of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports during Jimmy Carter's presidency. He was a founding member of the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine and the first president of the Professional Football Physicians Association. He was the Jets' orthopedist through the 1991 season, then became chairman of the team's medical department.

Dr. Nicholas used sophisticated photography to analyze body movement in throwing, running, kicking, and jumping. He also studied body types to determine vulnerability to injury – discovering, for example, how loose-jointed and tight-jointed people were prone to different types of injuries.

*adapted from the *New York Times*, Obituaries. Published: July 17, 2006, Accessible at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/17/sports/17nicholas.html>