

MAN MOUNTAIN

With over 15 years of top-flight rugby and 84 England caps under his belt, nobody knows how to keep going better than World Cup-winning rugby legend Martin Johnson, the face of Elastoplast Sport

For someone who's survived being mauled by some of the most fearsome men ever to walk the planet, it's an irony that it's Martin Johnson's army of fans that have recently caused him most discomfort. "The epic amount of handshaking I've had to do since Australia definitely doesn't help my hand," he laughs. "It's the 'big grip' that I fear and of course you can't complain or people will think you're miserable!" Johnno first broke his wrist at the back end of the 1996/97 season, captaining Leicester against Harlequins. "I finished that match and then had a cup final the next weekend, so I had no choice but to keep going," he says. "By spraying it to ease the pain, taping it up correctly and understanding my limitations, I finished the season lifting the League Cup with that broken scaphoid." Following surgery, 12 weeks of rehab and using the full range of Elastoplast Sport products, the wrist came good for the start of the next season. "Once you've been taught how to strap up a wrist properly, it helps protect the entire joint at the same time as providing great feel – now I wouldn't go on a pitch without it." The lesson: "If in doubt, strap it up."

Shoulder the blame

As any Leicester Tigers fan knows, it's Johnno's left shoulder that's really plagued him over the years. "The problem back in the 'dark ages' of rugby, before we went professional, was that when you had an injury you seldom had the right support network or time to get things back on track," he says, referring to his juggling act of holding down a full-time job at HSBC at the same time as training every morning, lunchtime and evening. "I first did my shoulder back in 1991," he recalls, "but didn't get it properly diagnosed and played an entire season with it in pieces." After surgery to put the joint back together, he explains he simply didn't do the necessary rehab exercises and got injured again the following season, leading to more surgery – but he'd learnt his lesson. "I got some specialist advice," he says, "and rather than just chucking myself around a gym, I had a detailed plan on exactly which muscles to strengthen and how." It was the following January that arguably the best forward of his generation got the first of many England caps. The lesson: "Get the best possible advice you can as soon as possible – these injuries don't get better without specialist help."

Hit the floor

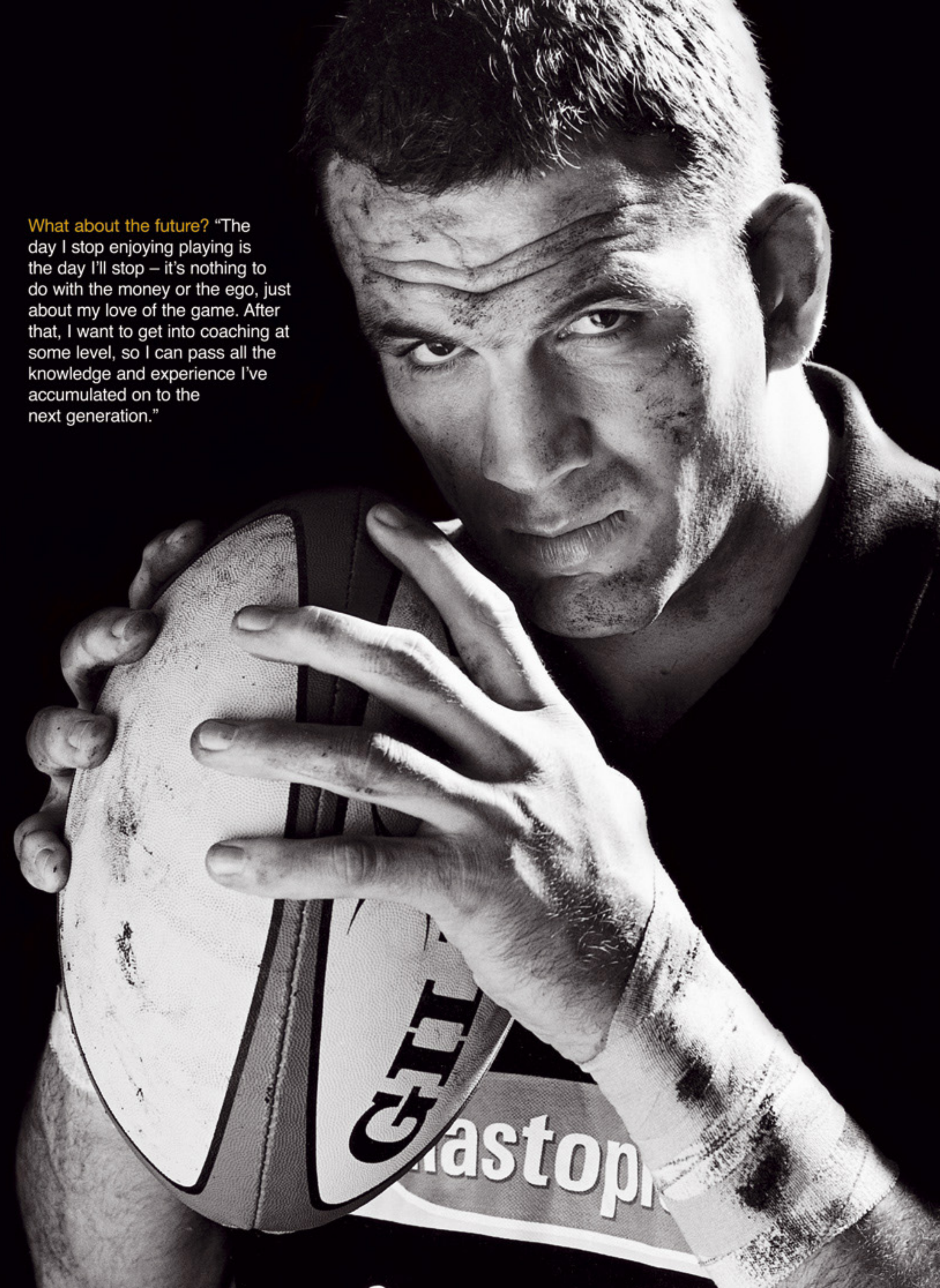
Although he's lucky never to have suffered any of the career-threatening knee injuries so common in rugby, Johnno's still had his fair share of knocks. In one off-the-ball incident six years ago, he over-stretched the stabilising medial collateral ligament running down the inside of his right knee. He instantly sought advice from the Tigers' chief physio, Mark Geeson, who strapped him up prior to each game. "As well as providing the support, these Elastoplast Sport strappings also keep the joint warm, which encourages bloodflow for faster healing," Johnno explains. If you really want to make sure you're on the pitch come the final whistle, concentrate on 'prehab' rather than rehab, he advises: "Preventative strength training is key and that means working on the areas where you know you're likely to suffer injuries before they occur – that's definitely the case with my legs." The lesson: "Pre-empt injuries before they happen by working on your strength and stability before you get injured, not after."

Your advice on coping with injuries?

"Take it slow, use the appropriate sports supports before, during and after your recovery and complete the full rehab programme – you might feel fully recovered, but your physio knows best."

Get some support: Whatever your injury, Elastoplast® Sport has the answer to keep you in the starting line-up week in, week out. Elastoplast Sport Elasticated Ankle/Knee/Wrist Support (from £7.49) gently compresses joints to help prevent and protect sprains and strains, as well as enhancing sensory feedback from the skin, so you're more aware of your joint's position, further helping to prevent injury. Reusable and machine washable. Elastoplast Sport Neoprene Knee/Ankle/Wrist Support (from £12.99) provides protection from further injury by supporting weak areas and retains body heat to relieve pain and keep muscles warm, as well as increasing bloodflow to speed up the healing process. Adjustable, machine washable and reusable. Elastoplast Sport Elastic Adhesive Bandage (from £4.79) provides compression and security, at the same time as allowing full muscular movement. Like the regular elasticated support, it stimulates awareness of joint position, so you're less likely to injure yourself again. Elastoplast Sport Rigid Strapping Tape (£7.49 for 5cm x 10m) controls bleeding and swelling in the first few hours after an injury and protects a joint by limiting movement. Elastoplast Sport Cold Spray (125ml can for £4.49) contains the added soothing ingredient of menthol to instantly relieve pain – a must for any sports kit. For more injury advice go to: www.elastoplastsport.co.uk

What about the future? "The day I stop enjoying playing is the day I'll stop – it's nothing to do with the money or the ego, just about my love of the game. After that, I want to get into coaching at some level, so I can pass all the knowledge and experience I've accumulated on to the next generation."



Art Direction by David Godfrey

