

Radical drug trial revives Walker's football career

By Alex Mitchell

A POTENTIAL new remedy for chronic knee pain has changed the life of Echuca's former AFL footballer Andrew Walker after the star took part in initial trials for an existing drug.

Pentosan polysulfate sodium is commonly used to treat osteoarthritis in horses and dogs, but hadn't been used to treat human pain until 2015 when the ex-Carlton star teamed up with pharmaceutical company Paradigm Biopharma.

And Walker, who was recently announced as Echuca Football Club's new playing-coach for 2018, couldn't have been more pleased with the results — the injections taking his pain levels right down.

"It was amazing. I first trialled it at the end of 2015 when my knee was at its worst," he said.

"I'd exhausted all of my options and it was an absolute nightmare.

"It's a German drug so it needed TGA approval and WADA approval being a sportsman. That was a four to five-month process to get that ticked off, but I'm really thankful I went through with it."

Walker struggled throughout his AFL career with osteoarthritis; he had five different surgeries on his knee, with 150ml of fluid causing the pain drained from his knee three times a week.

His playing career was impacted with just 23 games in his last two seasons at Carlton, but he found everyday tasks even more difficult.

"(The osteoarthritis was really bad) probably the last three years of my AFL career," Walker said.

"I had a really good year in 2013 but from them on it was an absolute battle.

"Things that used to be quite easy like walking from bed to the kitchen, walking to get the paper or a coffee — all those simple things you'd take for granted were a real battle.

"Every step I'd take, you'd be wondering what sort of pain you were going to feel.

"Weekly I was getting my knee drained three times, Tuesday, Thursday and game day. By

the end it was so normal, it was part of my preparation to get there three hours early, and it just wears on you."

Walker's pain level has dropped from "10 out of 10" to a "two or three", enough to see him play 15 games this year with Northern Football League side West-Preston Lakeside.

A 10cm oedema has shrunk to just 1cm, his knee not drained in more than 12 months.

And clearly the star has still got it, named 10 times in his side's best.

Walker said pentosan had the potential not just to lengthen AFL careers, but to help the everyday punter.

"If it becomes readily available to the general public it would definitely help clear up some pain," he said.

"I'm extremely active and doing all the things I love again."

“ Things that used to be quite easy like walking from bed to the kitchen, walking to get the paper or a coffee — all those simple things you'd take for granted were a real battle. ”

— Andrew Walker



Playing career revived: Echuca's new coach Andrew Walker was plagued with chronic knee pain during his AFL career, but a radical drug trial has improved his condition enormously.
Photo: Andrew Tauber/News Corp Australia