## Backcountry Ankle Trauma: What to Do and When to do it

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## **QUESTION 1:**

• A low energy Pilon fracture is characterized by:



## QUESTION 2: Who am I?

- I have no muscular attachments
- I have no tendinous attachments
- 70% of me is covered by cartilage

## QUESTION 3:

• What is an impediment to bony fusion?





## Summary: 5 Topics

- 1. What to do in the field
- 2. Specific injuries around the ankle joint
  - Tibial Pilon fractures
  - Talus fractures
- 3. The Sequelae of these injuries
- 4. Cutting edge treatment and research

# A special thanks to my mentors....



## 1. What to do in the Field

## The Outdoors are Beautiful...





## ...but things happen...





- Non sterile environment
- Medical professionals far away
- Remote locations
- "Don't go out alone"



# If you or your friends are injured, then you need to learn how to survive!



The HORRIBLE Cerro Torre Mountain Climbing Wa TRAGEDY 2022

Watch >

## Here are the most important things to do!

## Do a rapid Assessment:

• Inspection



- Inspection
- Open Wound



- Inspection
- Open Wound
- Pulses



- Inspection
- Open Wound
- Pulses
- Deformity



## Treatment

## **Open Wounds**

 Remove foreign debris





## **Open Wounds**

 Put a clean liquid on the wound to flush out bacteria



#### Wound Contamination 4 Classes

- No 1. "Clean"
- No 2. "Clean-Contaminated"
- No 3. "Contaminated"
- No 4. "Dirty"

Based on general surgical incisions

#### No 1: Clean Wound

- No 1. "Clean" when the skin has been cleaned and readied for suturing
- Uninfected
- No inflammation



## No. 4: Dirty/Infected Wound

- Dirty, dead tissue
- Purulence
- Foreign objects, wood grass, dirt, urine, manure
- > 4 hours of initial wounding



## Infection rates correlate with severity of wounds

- Clean: 1.5-3.9%
- Clean contaminated: 3.0-4.0%
- Contaminated: 8.5%
- Dirty wounds: 28-40%

Treat a dirty wound by irrigating it with a cleaner solution

## Does Irrigating help?

- Remove debris
- Hydrate wound
- Remove surface pathogens



- Remove necrotic tissue
- Shown to decrease infection rate

## **Ideal Solution**

- Isotonic
- Non-hemolytic
- Non-toxic
- Transparent
- Easy to sterilize
- Cheap
- Readily Available



## Normal Saline

- Isotonic
- Lowest Toxicity
- Used most
- Does NOT cleanse dirty wounds as well as other solutions
- Wound infection similar with potable water



## **Sterile Water**

- Prepared by distilling water
- Hypotonic
- Causes cell swelling/lysis
- Used in developing countries



## Potable water

- Water that is safe to drink
- 89% of the world has access
- As effective in reducing bacterial counts as normal saline



#### lodine

- Broad spectrum antibiotic
  - Kills bacteria
- Works against Staph Aureus
- Similar wound infection rates cf. Normal Saline
- Cytotoxic to normal skin and wounds
- Discolors wounds/desiccant



## Hydrogen peroxide 3%

- Commonly used
- Effectiveness in doubt
- No negative effect on wounds
- Ineffective in reducing bacterial count



## Use whatever you have on hand!

- Wound soaking
- Ineffective in reducing bacterial counts

• Pour it on!


#### Volume of Irrigant

- No evidence that any specific volume is correct
- Rule of thumb: irrigate until the wound is clear of debris



# Cover the open wound with a clean sterile dressing



### Hemorrhage



#### Major hemorrhage can cause death in minutes!

#### Hemorrhage

• Control it with compression



# If bleeding doesn't stop: Use a Tourniquet



# If you don't have a tourniquet, make one!

Improvised

 CANNOT use on trunk or neck



#### Tourniquet: How long can I keep it on?

- 1.Applied for over 6 hours:
- 2. Permanent nerve damage (numbness and muscle fibrosis)
- 3. Ischemia
- 4. Gangrene and loss of limb



#### Tourniquet: How long can I keep it on?

Arm: 1.5 hours
Leg: 2 hours



#### Tourniquet: How long can I keep it on?

- 1. Longer than 2 hours:
- 2. Permanent nerve injury
- 3. Muscle injury (contractures, rhabdomyolysis, compartment syndrome)
- 4. Vascular injury
- 5. Skin necrosis





Wakai A, Winter D C, Street J T. et al Pneumatic tourniquets in extremity surgery. J Am Acad Orthop Surg 20019345–351.

# Call 911 for help!

- Two Bear Air
- Kalispell, MT



# (406) 758-5610

# 2. Specific Injuries About The Ankle Joint

# The Ankle Joint

- Tibia
- Fibula
- Talus



#### **Closed Fractures**

#### **Definition:**

#### A broken bone in which the skin is intact

#### Chief Complaint:

17 yo male jumped off a gymnasium balcony...







#### **Open Fractures**

#### **Definition:**

#### A broken bone in which the skin is not intact

#### **Chief Complaint:**

34 yo male fell from a height...





# Specific Injuries

# **Tibial Pilon Fractures**

# Pilon Fracture: What is it?

A fracture of the tibia near the ankle

Pilon means pestle in French





## Characteristics

•Very challenging fractures to manage

•Outcomes unpredictable

Soft tissue management is paramount in optimizing

outcomes

## **Problems: Pilon Fractures**

Anatomy difficult to restore



## **Problems: Pilon Fractures**

- •Surgery associated with poor
  - wound healing
- •"There is not a lot of meat around
- the bones"





#### Case Example

# W.B. is an 53 yo male with Right ankle disfigurement

# History of Present Illness

Working at home Fell through the ceiling 16 feet onto cement floor below him





His Jeans were entrapped in open fibula fracture

Irrigation and Debridement x 2



#### Ex fix

#### talar osteochondral defect microfracture



#### ORIF pilon



Bone infection developed
#### 1&D

Antibiotic bead placement

Wound VAC placement

Free flap placement



Repeat fibular I&D

Repeat Fibular I&D--again Hardware removal I&D tibial pilon Antibiotic Bead placement

Pilon external fixture removal, cast placement

# Post Ex Fix





# Healed Pilon







# New Fracture



RM

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# What next?

He has had many many surgeries...

# He had too much pain and disability...



# **Tibial Pilon**

- First described 1911 by Destot
- Less than 1% of all LE fractures

# Anatomy

- 1. Distal tibia articular surface shape: irregular rectangle
- 2.Wider anteriorly
- 3.Concave coronal and sagittal





# Anatomy

Metaphysis: thin cortex, dense cancellous bone, strongest bone near subchondral plate



# Mechanism of Injury



# Mechanism of Injury

•Vertical compression and dorsiflexed foot: anterior impaction





# Mechanism of Injury

### Vertical compression and plantarflexed foot: posterior malleolar fracture



### Mechanism of Injury: High Energy

- Metaphyseal comminution
- Displaced articular
  fragments
- Soft tissue injury



### Mechanism of Injury: Low Energy

- Associated with torsion
- Spiral fractures
- Decreased comminution
- Less soft tissue injury





Topliss et al analyzed 126 pilon fractures patterns Plain XR and CT

Six major articular fragments identified: anterior, posterior, medial, anterolateral, posterolateral, and die-punch





### CT Scans





# Coronal Split



Two main fracture groups identified:

# Coronal fractures occurred in older patients with low-energy injuries valgus angulation

### Sagittal Split



# Sagittal fractures occurred in younger patients, high-energy injuries varus angulation

# Goals of Treatment

- Reconstruct articular surface
- Restore mechanical axes
- Allow for early joint range of motion



# Historical Treatment

1969 Ruedi and Allgower classic technical principles:

1. Reduce and restore length of the fibula

2. Correct distal tibial valgus

3. Reduce Chaput fragment

4. Reduce Volkmann fragments

5. Restore tibial articular surface

6. Use autologous bone grafting in metaphyseal defects

7. Buttress plating of tibia to prevent varus angulation



# Anatomy

Anterior tibiofibular ligaments arises from the tibial Chaput tubercle anterior to the fibular notch

Inserts on the Wagstaffe tubercle of the distal fibula



# **Evolution of Treatment Options**

Ruedi and Allgower did not discuss soft tissue injuries

With increasing highway speeds, higher energy pilon fracture incidence is increasing



### 2023 Current Treatment Options: Initial Ex Fix

- •Simple A frame, delta with calcaneal transfixion pin
- Multiplanar unilateral frame requires medial half pin with one in the talar neck and one in the calcaneus



# Swelling...

Schatzker and Tile: surgery in the setting of massive swelling is hazardous—must be avoided

Wait up to 3 weeks



# Surgical Timing

ORIF performed too soon usually leads to skin necrosis and wound healing problems:

# 1980s to 2000s literature: Immediate ORIF leads to wound complication rates of up to 100%

Sirkin M, Sanders R, DiPasquale T, Herscovici D Jr: A staged protocol for soft tissue management in the treatment of complex pilon frac

Patterson MJ, Cole JD: Two-staged delayed open reduction and internal fixation of severe pilon fractures. J Orthop Trauma 1999;13(2):85-91.

Wyrsch B, McFerran MA, McAndrew M, et al: Operative treatment of fractures of the tibial plafond: A randomized, prospective study.

Conroy J, Agarwal M, Giannoudis PV, Matthews SJ: Early internal fixation and soft tissue cover of severe open tibial pilon fractures. Int



Pay attention to:

- 1. Timing of your intervention
- 2. Patient Risk Factors
- 3. Soft tissue management
- 4. Plating Techniques
- 5. Post operative soft tissue management



RESULTS: Is articular reduction or injury pattern more important?

### NEITHER INJURY SEVERITY OR FRACTURE REDUCTION CORRELATES WITH CLINICAL OUTCOMES

Articular reduction does significantly correlate with future ankle arthritis

### Outcomes are not predictable

DeCoster TA, Willis MC, Marsh JL, et al: Rank order analysis of tibial plafond fractures: Does injury or reduction predict outcome? Foot Ankle Int 1999;20(1):44-49.

# Best predictors of clinical outcomes:

### Patient socioeconomic status

# Level of education

Marsh JL, Weigel DP, Dirschl DR: Tibial plafond fractures: How do these ankles function over time? J Bone Joint Surg Am 2003;85(2):287-295.

Williams TM, Nepola JV, DeCoster TA, Hurwitz SR, Dirschl DR, Marsh JL: Factors affecting outcome in tibial plafond fractures. Clin Orthop Relat Res 2004;(423):93-98.

# Outcomes High Energy Pilon

# 35% persistent stiffness 33% ongoing pain

# Many get arthritis

Pollak AN1, McCarthy ML, Bess RS, Agel J, Swiontkowski MF. Outcomes after treatment of high-energy tibial plafond fractures. J Bone Joint Surg Am. 2003 Oct;85-A(10):1893-900.
## Conclusions

- Very challenging fractures to manage
- Outcomes unpredictable, often poor
- Outcomes related to socioeconomic status and level of education



## **QUESTION 1:**

• A low energy Pilon fracture is characterized by:



- 1. An axial compression mechanism of injury
- 2. Significant comminution
- 3. A torsion mechanism
- 4. Lower socioeconomic status



#### **Talus Fractures**

## The Talus: What is it?



- The talus is the key in the transition of forces between the foot and the leg and body
- Has no origins or insertions of any musculotendinous units
- 70% of the talus is covered with articular cartilage





## **Talar Fractures**

- "Aviator's astragalus"
- Anderson described 18 talar neck fractures WWI pilots
- The impact of the rudder bar on the foot during a crash is the mechanism of fracture











## **Talus Fractures**

- Results are highly variable but are dependent upon initial fracture displacement
- As such, operative intervention should be considered for displaced fractures



#### **Talus Fractures Complications**

## Avascular necrosis

- Nonunion
- malunion



## Anatomy - Blood Supply

- Talar neck and head: Artery to the sinus tarsi (peroneal and dorsalis pedis arteries)
- Talar Body: Artery of the tarsal canal (posterior tibial artery)
- Posterior Talus: Posterior tibial artery through calcaneal branches



#### Anatomy - Blood Supply

Preservation of at least of three major

extraosseous sources can allow

adequate circulation via anastomotic

channels



 Fracture type associated with prognosis

• Type I: NONDISPLACED vertical neck fracture



• Type II: Displaced fracture with subluxation/dislocation of the subtalar joint



• Type III: Displaced fractures with dislocation of the talar body from both the subtalar and ankle joints



• Type IV: (Canale and Kelly) Rare variant of type III in which the head of the talus is also dislocated from the talonavicular joint



- Type I fracture: fracture through the middle and posterior subtalar facets
  - 1 of 3 talar blood supplies injured—anterior lateral neck



- Type II fracture
  - Two blood supply sources injured
  - Medial blood supply usually left intact



- Type III fracture:
  - Talar body dislocated posterior medially, between posterior tibia cortex and Achilles
  - All three sources of blood supply interrupted
  - 50% open injuries



- Type IV fractures
  - Rare 4% of all fractures
  - All with unsatisfactory results



#### Most Worrisome Complication:

Osteonecrosis



## Complications

- Osteonecrosis is the result of disruption of the blood supply to the talus
- The Hawkins'class of fracture is related to the probability of osteonecrosis
- Type I 0 to 13%
- Type II 42 to 50%
- Type III 84 to 91%

#### Treatment

- Prompt reduction of dislocations
- Prevent skin necrosis
- Evaluate vascular status



#### Treatment - Neck and Body

ANATOMIC REDUCTION of the fracture is the preferred method of treatment





## General: Talus Fractures

 Consider Titanium screws to evaluate for post operative avascular necrosis with MRI scanning



# Save or discard extruded talar body?

- Marsh et al.:
  - With saved talus: deep infection 38%
  - 71% poor outcomes
  - ??? Explant the talus if no soft tissue remains attached in a contaminated wound



## Talectomy: Salvage

 Talectomy - shortens the extremity and makes shoe wear difficult very poor results



SOLUTIONS: Why not maintain the joint and replace the Talus?

## Talar Replacement

- Takakura 2015
  - Total talus replacement
  - N = 55
  - All had pain improvement
  - All had functional improvement







## **Ceramic Total Talus Kyocera**

## **K**YOCERa



#### **Kyocera** Copiers

Improve your office with award-winning Kyocera technology. Photocopiers, multifunctional printers, printers, software solutions and more...

KYDCERa Ecosis



- Hit it big making ceramic semiconductor parts
- Kyocera = Kyoto Ceramics
### **Ceramic Total Talus Kyocera**



- Preoperative CT scans from contralateral limb
- 2 mm cuts

## Topography Kyocera Total Talus









## Ceramic Total Talus Kyocera



- There is no way it will be exported from Japan
- Serious concerns of getting sued

### U.S. Case example

- 65 yo F failed STAR.
- Can no longer fully bear weight.

• She is miserable.







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#### Case 3



### QUESTION 2: Who am I?

- I have no muscular attachments
- I have no tendinous attachments
- 70% of me is covered by cartilage

#### 1. A human tooth

- 2. Calcaneus
- 3. Carpal Navicular
- 4. Talus
- 5. Odontoid
- 6. Tibial Sesamoid







Sesamoid

1<sup>st</sup>

Metatarsal



# 5. Cutting Edge Treatment and Research



The sequelae and final common pathway of many pilon and talus injuries

Ankle Arthritis

### Arthritis Basic Science

- Begins with cartilage damage
- Cartilage apoptosis



### Arthritis Basic Science

Osteophytes grow



### Arthritis Basic Science

 Progresses until raw bony edges touch each other



# How do Patients walk with Ankle Arthritis?



- Ankle arthritis patients have as poor a quality of life as those with hip arthritis...
- ...worse disability than heart disease



• The Long Accepted surgical intervention has been a fusion

### • What is fusion?

 Arthrodesis: The procedure in which two bones are brought together to eliminate the joint itself.

• Fusion: The physical process in which two bones form one solid bone.







### Ankle Arthrodesis



How do people walk with a fusion?







Here is another one...





**Results of Ankle Fusion** 

Generally good!

Pain typically is eliminated when the ankle joint is solidly fused






**Anterior Plating** 

3 recent papers:

90-100% fusion rate

Fusion occurred 12.2 to 15 weeks

## How To Achieve a Fusion?



# **Recipe for Fusion**

 Rigid, stable fixation enhances early bone formation

 CONSTANT COMPRESSION leads to stronger bone



# **Recipe for Fusion**

• Need small gaps < 0.01 mm

- Need the right amount of strain 1000 µstrain
- Need loads of 300-700 N

• Need loading at the appropriate time—NOT TOO EARLY



# How to Achieve a Good Clinical Result?

Pay attention to proper alignment...

the alignment of the entire limb





### Make a Plantigrade foot

### What is a Plantigrade foot?





Barograph

Harris Beath Mat



- Plantigrade refers to those animals who walk with the metarsal bones flat on the ground
- Digitigrade: walking on the toes with the heel off the ground
- Unguligrade: walking on a hoof

## Example: Plantigrade foot







## Make a Plantigrade foot



### Make a Plantigrade foot

Dorsiflexion/Plantarflexion: neutral

Varus/Valgus: 5 degrees valgus

Rotation: equal or slightly more externally rotated





# QUESTION 3:

• What is an impediment to bony fusion?





- 1. Rigid stable internal fixation
- 2. Constant Compression
- 3. Early loading
- 4. Small gaps <0.01 mm
- 5. Loads of 300-700 N



# Sometimes both joints around the talus become arthritic...



# Treatment: Nail it!!!



### Evolution of IM Nails Generation 1



Surgeon provides external compression By malleting the nail

Static fixation

Calcaneal and tibial locking screws

### Evolution of IM Nails Generation 2



Compression via external fixation Steinman pins placed through slots Static fixation

### Evolution of IM Nails Generation 3



1. Internal compressive mechanism placed within the heel of the nail

2. External compression built into jig

Compresses the soft tissue of the heel

# Modern Nails

All have in common:

**UNSUSTAINED** compression

#### 90% of the compression is lost with 1 mm of bone resorption

Yakacki CM, Khalil HF, Dixon SA, GallK, Pacaccio DJ. Compression forces of internal and external ankle fixation devices with simulated bone resorption. Foot Ankle Int. 31(1), 76–85 (2010)



# problem with Tibiotalar calcaneal Arthrodesis

Either the ankle joint or the subtalar joint goes on to nonunion

Nonunion = "It really sucks" "A lot of work to fix it"



# TTC Nonunion rates reported:

# Up to 24%

Kim C, Catanzariti AR, Mendicino RW. Tibiotalocalcaneal arthrodesis for salvage of severe ankle degeneration. Clin. Podiatr. Med. Surg. 26(2), 283–302 (2009)

#### NiTiNOL

• 1959

• Nickel-titanium

 Nickel Titanium-Naval Ordinance Laboratory = NITINOL



#### Nitinol

 Paperclip placed in hot water



# Nitinol Nail



#### **Key Features:**

Maintains active post-operative compression across the joints

Stiff in bending and torsion, axially compliant

Offers immediate and continued dynamization





#### **ACTIVE COMPRESSION**

Same pseudoelastic NiTiNOL Technology that allows for post-operative compression to be maintained for up to 6 mm of bone resorption.<sup>1</sup>



# What is the TTC fusion rate with non nitinol?

J Foot Ankle Surg. 2018 Jan - Feb;57(1):74-80. doi: 10.1053/j.jfas.2017.08.010.

Evaluation of Midterm Results of the Panta Nail: An Active Compression Tibiotalocalcaneal Arthrodesis Device.

<u>Griffin MJ<sup>1</sup>, Coughlin MJ<sup>2</sup>.</u>

Lack of sustained compression with continued bone resorption and loading

N = 16

Fusion of both ankle and subtalar joints: 65%



# Nitinol Nail Study





# Study Design

Prospective

N= 29 Age 18 years and older Diabetics and smokers included

Follow up: 2,4,6 weeks 3,6,12,24 months

CT scans obtained at 3 months

### Nitinol TTC Nail

N=29

N=29 who have completed 3 month CT scans

93% joints fused (54/58)

Includes both subtalar and tibiotalar joints

tibial stress fracture
 wound infections

## NITINOL TTC Nail

Tibiotalar fusion: 28/29 = 97%

Subtalar fusion: 26/29 = 90%





#### Summary (Similar Idaho patient population)

Gen 2 nail:

Fusion of both ankle and subtalar joints: 65%

Fusion of both ankle and subtalar joints: 93%

Dynanail





# Case #2

69 yo male. 2 year history progressive hindfoot 8/10 pain
## Exam

2+ DP and PT pulses

10 degrees hindfoot valgus

Pain medial, anterior, lateral tibiotalar joint

Pain medial and lateral subtalar joint







# What would you do?













## Conclusions

Nitinol TTC has a higher fusion rate Gen 2 Nail: 65% Dynanail: 93%

Benefits of external fixation (without ex fix complications)



### Summary: Five topics

- 1. What to do in the field if you are injured
- 2. Specific injuries around the ankle joint
  - Tibial Pilon fractures
  - Talus fractures
- 3. The Sequelae of your injuries
- 4. Cutting edge treatment and research

## **QUESTION 1:**

• A low energy Pilon fracture is characterized by:



- 1. An axial compression mechanism of injury
- 2. Significant comminution
- 3. A torsion mechanism
- 4. Lower socioeconomic status



#### Answer:

- 1. Axial compression mechanism of injury-NO, this is a high energy pilon injury
- 2. Significant comminution-NO, high energy pilon injury
- 3. A torsion mechanism-YES, low energy injuries yield spiral fractures
- 4. Lower socioeconomic status-NO



## QUESTION 2: Who am I?

- I have no muscular attachments
- I have no tendinous attachments
- 70% of me is covered by cartilage

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Sesamoid

1<sup>st</sup>

Metatarsal



### Answer

- 1. Calcaneus-NO-The Achilles inserts on this bone
- 2. Carpal Navicular-NO-80% is covered by cartilage
- 3. Talus-YES
- 4. Odontoid-NO-the alar ligaments attach
- 5. Tibial Sesamoid-NO-80-90% is covered by cartilage



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# Thank You

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