

Dr. LaVacca

Keeps Hawks' Smiles Razor Sharp

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— Dr. LaVacca

Hockey is not commonly thought of as a fluffy sport. Despite the helmet; skates; shoulder, shin and elbow pads; and all the other protective gear - as well as the equipment - that adds 25-35 pounds to a player, most people picture hockey players with missing teeth. The Chicago Blackhawks professional ice hockey team doesn't just have one dentist to aid in fixing dental injuries; they have three. Anthony LaVacca is one of the three dentists. Located in Naperville, he is able to assist players living in the Chicago suburbs. He came to Chicago five years ago from New York and started working for University Dental Associates, which provides support for the team. Dr. LaVacca, a 1995 graduate of Temple University School of Dentistry in Philadelphia, has been a Blackhawks team dentist for four years. Not all three dentists attend all the games, though. There are about 40 home games in a season.

"We divide the games between three doctors. There needs to be a doctor at each game to treat the Blackhawks and the visiting team. When they're away, they are covered by that home team [dentist]," Dr. LaVacca explained.

Dr. LaVacca arrives at the United Center early to talk to the trainers to see if all the players are in good shape dentally before they play. He then watches the game and looks for possible dental trauma amongst the players.

"After the game I usually stick around to make sure all is well, and then I head home to my kids and my wife," he said.

With a puck traveling close to 90 mph on the ice, it can shatter teeth when it hits the face. The dentists see trauma cases about every two weeks. At the games, minor repairs may be needed for chipped or broken teeth.

The worst hockey injury Dr. LaVacca has ever seen was when one player fell on another player and his skate cut his neck; there was an enormous amount of blood. The injured player was rushed to the hospital.

But it's not always work and no play. Dr. LaVacca also likes to go to the games just as a fan.

"With a winning streak, there is so much excitement in the arena that the crowd just comes out of their seats when a goal is scored. The place just stands up and screams, high fives everywhere - pure excitement," he described.

At the end of the day what makes the game for him is, "winning of course," Dr. LaVacca said. —Written by Rachel Azark and Featured in the Daily Review

Visit Dr LaVacca at Naperville Dental Specialists & General Oral Health Care, 55 S. Main St, Suite 241, Naperville or call (630) 848-2010 or visit our website: www.NDSCare.com.