



Interview ▶ We talk to Albert Domínguez, physiotherapist at the Principality in hand therapy



ALBA
Cladellas

@albacladellas

Albert Domínguez Arasa was born in Barcelona in April 1990. His father is from Uruguay and his mother from Barcelona and his maternal grandmother is Galician and his grandfather is Catalan. So, as he says, we can say that he has a little bit of genes from everywhere! He grew up in a small town in the Ebro Delta, l'Ampolla. It is the place he considers his home. He is a lover of sea sports, such as light sailing, surfing or windsurfing, although since living in Andorra he has fallen in love with mountain sports, cycling and running. He loves going for walks in the mountains with his dog and his partner, Sonia. He loves to travel. The pandemic robbed them of a trip to Indonesia that they couldn't make and still have pending. His profession as a physiotherapist has taught him to be patient, to know how to listen and to empathize with people. The three words that most define him, said by himself, are: enthusiastic, empathetic, and very clueless.

–Where did you study physiotherapy?

–During my university years I lived in Barcelona. I did my physiotherapy degree in Sant Cugat, at the Escoles Universitàries Gimbernat (EUG), which is a center attached to the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Studying at this university has always changed my view of my profession, I am very grateful to my colleagues and teachers. I graduated there in 2011.

–Why did you decide to study this degree?

–My maternal grandfather suffered from a neurodegenerative disease when I was a teenager. A physiotherapist came to our house to mobilize him, make him walk and keep him active. I thought those sessions were really fun, I loved them, and I thought that helping people has added value. It is also true that I have always really liked the world of sport, and I must confess that my dream when I started my degree was to go to the Olympic Games as a physiotherapist.

–If you studied in Barcelona, why did you decide on Andorra when looking for a job opportunity?

–The fact is that in 2014 due to personal circumstances I came to live in Andorra. At that time I had been working for a year and a half and I was training in France, in Grenoble at a center where only hand physiotherapy was done. When I arrived in Andorra, however, I was not able to establish myself as a hand therapist, and I started working with all kinds of pa-



Albert Domínguez

Physiotherapist

“I discovered hand therapy at university and fell in love with it”



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tients. It has been over time that I have been able to gain more patients until now I only treat pathologies related to the hands.

–How is the world of physiotherapy in Andorra? Are there many professionals?

–The Andorran health system works, if it does or not, in the same way as in France. It was easy for me to adapt. In both France and Andorra, the use of the public health system in the field of physiotherapy is very high, therefore, this demand leads to the fact that there is a high number of physiotherapists in the country. Even so, the waiting lists are long, and in some cases there are patients who have to wait several weeks to be treated. It is quite a complex issue.

–One of the features that sets you apart from the rest of the physiotherapists in Andorra is your specialization.

–It's like this. Unwittingly I came across a specialty of physiotherapy that is very little known. Physiotherapy specialties are very 'vertical', let me explain; there are specialties such as physiotherapy in pediatrics, neurology, sports physiotherapy or traumatology, among others. These 'vertical' specialties are the same ones that exist in medicine and that everyone knows. They are very focused on a specific type of pathology always with the same origin. On the other hand, hand therapy is a more 'horizontal' specialty. Hand therapists treat all pathologies that affect the hands, whether they are of traumatic origin, such as fractures or dislocations, of rheumatic origin with arthritis or arthrosis, or neurological effects such as spasticity or sequelae of a stroke, for example. In short, we treat all pathologies that affect the hand regardless of the origin of the disease.

This is due to the great anatomical and mechanical complexity of the hand, and to the fact that the hands are one of the most important elements of the body at a functional level. With them we do all kinds of tasks, and some of them are basic; we eat, we dress, we caress our loved ones, we even communicate! As the philosopher Aristotle said, the hands are the instrument of the instrument. Hands are a very important part of our everyday life.

-Why the hands?

-I came across the specialty by chance, hand therapy was a subject in the degree, and the teacher who taught it was Vicenç Punsola. He, along with the Hand Therapy BCN team, were the ones who made me fall in love with hand therapy. I immediately began to understand how the specialty worked, and saw that through exercises with the Canadian table (hand table), making splints, and manual therapy, I could bring out my full potential as a physiotherapist. Suddenly the other specialties stopped attracting me and I focused professionally on hand therapy.

-Do you think that having a specialization opens up more doors for you?

-Being a specialist in a field always opens up more doors for you at a professional level. But in my case, if your area of specialization is scarce, even more so. When leaving the course, all my colleagues wanted to study Osteopathy or sports physiotherapy. In fact, nowadays it is much easier to find an osteopath than a hand therapist. The problem with my specialty is that it has to be known. There are few doctors and patients who know the figure of the hand therapist, but thanks to the national associations, both in France (GEMM-SOR) and in Spain (AETEMA), this fact is slowly changing.

-In addition, it also gives you the opportunity to deal with professionals from the world of sport.

-Yes, of course! Andorra is a country of athletes. Both amateur and professional athletes. Andorra is one of the places I know, where the most professional sportsmen live, both from the world of motorcycling, as well as cyclists and triathletes. I have been fortunate to be able to treat injuries of some professional cyclists. Personally, it's a lot of fun when you have the cyclists you see on TV in front of you and they come with me to treat each other. I have also been able to deal with some professionals from the motorcycle world. All this thanks to other professional colleagues, such as Sebas Schwarts, who, knowing my specialty, often refer me to their patients. Not forgetting a great and illustrious sportsman from the country such as Albert Llovera, who trusted me to treat

his last thumb injury. With Albert the sessions are always a lot of fun, I am very grateful to him for trusting me.

-And as for athletes, which sports suffer more hand injuries?

-In Andorra, as I mentioned, we have a large number of people who practice sport. The hands are not an anatomical region that is characterized by being injured in a specific sport, it is true that in all those sports where there is contact or a lot of speed, the hands are more susceptible to injury. In sports such as cycling or motorbikes, the hands suffer mainly from falls and, therefore, what we can often find are traumatic injuries such as fractures. The same would happen with skiing, people get injured by falling on their hands. Racket or paddle sports, such as padel or tennis, can also suffer injuries. In this case rather due to poor management of muscle and tendinous loads that can lead to tendinopathies and overloads. Rugby and basketball are other sports that can suffer injuries due to hand contact with the ball or contact with opponents. In fact, almost every professional rugby and basketball player has suffered some sort of finger injury.

-With your specialty being the hands, what type of injuries do you treat the most?

-I think the pathologies I treat the most are those of traumatic origin, that is to say hand and



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wrist fractures, finger dislocations, and some tendinous injuries. Hand stiffness after an accident is one of the most common sequelae, and hand therapists are specialists in treating stiffness. On the other hand, I also treat many pathologies of functional origin such as tendinopathies or arthritis of the thumb. What I also like about my specialty is that every day is a bit of a surprise, you don't know what the next patient might come to you with, they could be the aftermath of a serious burn or the hand of a child or a person whose fingers are completely numb.

-Your job is being updated and requires constant training. Tell us what training you have done.

-Continued training in hand therapy is essential. Injuries are not treated the same way now as they were 20 years ago. In my particular case, when I left the degree, I did some voluntary stays at a hand center in Barcelona, I learned a lot there, and at that time I also did several training courses in the field of hand therapy. In 2013, following my scientific vocation, I did a master's degree in physiotherapy research. It has nothing to do with hand therapy, but it was a training that allowed me to enter the scientific world and which I have since used extensively in bibliography review and critical reading of scientific articles. In 2021 and after many attempts, I was able to enroll at the Université Grenoble Alpes,

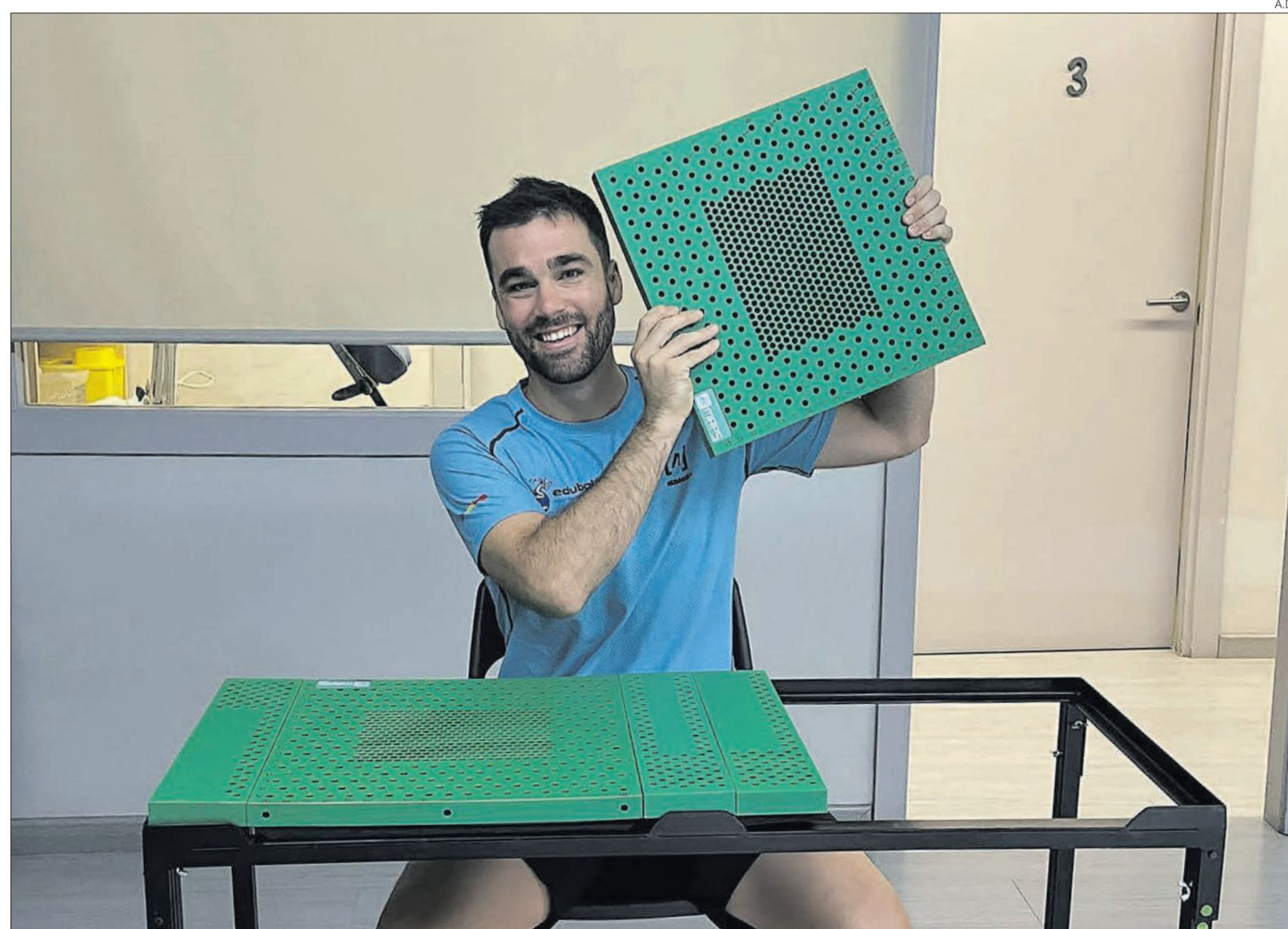
to complete the Hand Therapist Diploma in France. It is the title that officially accredits you as a hand therapist. It is a very powerful training that has lasted two years and that I am very pleased to have been able to do.

-What do you think are the reasons for the lack of professionals in the Principality?

-The case of Andorra is particular, there is a lack of professionals because the demand for physiotherapy is very high. What we have in the country is a high demand due to a public health system that covers a large part of the price of the sessions. This is why many people without perhaps having a very serious injury take physiotherapy sessions to do, for example, a back massage. Part of this high demand comes from the prescribers, who in this case are the doctors.

-Above all, specializations are also missing, aren't they?

-Physiotherapy specialties have existed for many years, but unfortunately neither in Andorra nor in Spain are they officially recognized. Personally, I think that physiotherapy should go towards a system like that of doctors who do a MIR exam, and then do a recognized specialty. Just as we don't want a non-specialist doctor to operate on our heart, we shouldn't want a non-specialist physical therapist to treat an injury. ≡



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