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Former Wildcat basketball player Dan Ivankovich is now an orthopedic surgeon and blues guitarist. Photo by Tom Maday (G95).

BIGGER THAN LIFE

Orthopedic surgeon Dan Ivankovich mends the bones of Chicago's most underserved patients by day and plays blues guitar by night.

by Barbara Mahany

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If you happen to be counting floor tiles when Dan Ivankovich walks into the examining room, you might miss the way he has to duck to get through the doorway.

That's the way it is, though, when the hairs on your head are nearly 7 feet off the ground. And that's how it is for Dr. Dan, aka The Right Reverend, Doctor D, as the iconoclastic bone doc is called when he puts down his spine- or knee- or hip- reconstruction tools and picks up his six-string, fire-breathing Rodriguez Baritone Strat blues guitar.

Fact is, once you see the doctor's supersize shadow spill across the floor, you'll pay attention, all right.

Start with the boots — size 17, if you're measuring. They're heavy, black leather and studded with enough silver to set off the nearest metal detector. Then go up the legs, way up. He's decked out this day — and most every day — in black surgical scrubs, with Maltese crosses stitched into the thigh and across the right hip pocket. Beneath the black leather vest, you can read the words "Bone Squad" spelled out just above where his big heart thumps.

Then there's all the bling: Skull and crossbones on the middle finger. Hoop earrings. Maybe a chain, or two, depending on the day. And a black leather biker's cap, pulled on backward, with the bill behind him and riding down his neck.

It's not hard to be distracted by the getup.

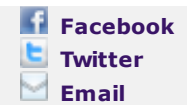
It's not hard to think this is just some bad-ass bone fixer who knows a thing or two about how to turn heads and take a star turn on the nightly TV news, say, when he air-dropped into Haiti after the earthquake of 2010 to see what miracles of mending he could pull from all the rubble.

Don't miss the point here: Ivankovich, who graduated from Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine in 1995, might not look the part of the polished orthopedic surgeon. Nor might he practice out of some spiffy Gold Coast suite.

But this good doctor, who knows through and through the agony of defeat and the thrill of uncharted triumph, has carried his surgeon's tools to the front lines of urban poverty and violence, and he's hell-bent on serving the most underserved.

That might be the little kid with the shattered elbow who never got a simple plaster cast and had to suffer through the pain. Or the old woman whose odd-angled knees buckle beneath her with cruel regularity, leaving her to whimper on the bathroom floor for one whole morning recently, before she found her way to Dr. Dan.

Or, more often than not, it's one of the shattered ones from what Ivankovich (FSM87, 95, GFSM02) calls "The Knife and Gun Club." That, he explains, is when the knife blade or the bullet "doesn't hit a vital organ" and leave the victim dead, but rather "it eventually penetrates a bone" that's going



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Barbara Mahany (GJ82) was once a pediatric oncology nurse who dreamed of opening an inner-city clinic. She graduated from Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications in 1982 and has been a writer at the *Chicago Tribune* ever since.

Tell us what you think. E-mail comments or questions to the editors at letters@northwestern.edu.

Check out the *ESPN The Magazine* feature "**Nobody Walks Alone**" on Dan Ivankovich and his work with former NBA player "Massive Mike" Williams who was left paralyzed after a shooting in an Atlanta-area nightclub. Ivankovich and Williams were also featured in an "**American Story with Bob Dotson**" segment on NBC's *Today Show*.



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to need the armament of plates and screws and pins and rods that is the everyday medicine of Dr. Dan.

One recent morning, in his red-walled clinic in Chicago's rough-and-tumble West Side Austin neighborhood, where in just one ugly summer's weekend a record-setting 75 felonies — that's murders, rapes, gunpoint robberies and carjackings — were committed in a mere three-block radius, Ivankovich wasted no time in telling his story.

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