

Sports Vision Practice of the Year

Sport is a serious business these days. For world class sportsmen and women commitment is crucial and only the best will do. This is no different in eye care and the winner of the 2010 *Optician Sports Vision Practice of the Year Award* shows the same steely resolve.

'Developing a new specialism in a practice requires much more than the practitioner simply going on a course,' says Gavin Rebello, director of Sports Vision, Braintree. He is clearly delighted at scooping this prestigious award and isn't worried about letting others know how much effort he has put in to becoming a specialist in the field.

Sports Vision, part of Patrick and Menzies in Essex, became involved with sporting eye care as a way differentiating itself as an optical retailer. But taking this path has brought the practice into contact with a totally new range of clients.

Becoming a sports vision specialist has also proved to be a great way of demonstrating and valuing its professional optometry skills, says Rebello. Another positive spin-off is the range of quality ancillary products that stem from that consultative work, with the obvious commercial benefit to the business.

But it didn't happen overnight. One of the first commitments Patrick & Menzies made was a move in 2007 to a four-storey building to house the new discipline. Since then it has developed a range of sports vision services for everyone from the full-time Olympian to the club player and individual family skier.

Range of services

The practice offers a range of services from on-site vision screening for sports clubs to full binocular vision assessments and management within the practice. It also provides advice on safety and performance products and above all commits to helping individuals achieve their full potential in their chosen sport.

Having committed so fully to the discipline, the victory in the *Optician Awards* was all the more sweet, says Rebello. Sadly he had been unable to attend the glittering black tie presentation ceremony at the Hilton Hotel Park Lane as he was attending

This year's Sports Vision Award was won by an eponymous practice from Essex. **Chris Bennett** reports



Sports Vision receptionist Sue Pavitt, (far left) with dispensing opticians Natasha Rathe and John Day on Awards Night

a wedding in Australia, but key practice members were able to attend. 'My team had kept in touch by text, then I got the photo through on my phone, at 4am Western Australian time, of the trophy – great to share with the stragglers from the wedding party. I was absolutely over the moon – we have worked extremely hard to develop the business and it was brilliant to have the recognition. It was a great feeling that the hard work to develop the brand had been recognised.'

Rebello says sports vision is a small world and he knew the other shortlisted practices very well, and that the competition was extremely tough. 'I knew we had a solid business and that we were thinking out of the box.' But, he says, 'specialist services need specialist training – managing elite athletes is not the same as dealing with Joe Public. The training we have put in place, including Harvard, gave me some confidence.'

And confidence is something the practice is not short of. Sports Vision's

parent, Patrick and Menzies, is no stranger to awards having won four regional customer service awards in the last year alone. Rebello says his customers are not surprised the practice won another award and he says they are pleased on its behalf. Only fair, given that the practice was encouraged to enter the *Optician Awards* by the feedback its clients gave. Winning awards also looks good on the practice CV and is a more tangible endorsement than testimonials, he says.

Feelgood factor

Rebello says the Awards presentation event itself, in such a top-notch venue, adds a feelgood factor and creates a special night for the practice staff. The trophy now has pride of place in the practice and Sports Vision promotes the win through its public relations activity.

While Sports Vision continues to spread the active eye care message out through branding, PR, its website and most of all word of mouth, the victory transmits its own signal. It sends clear messages out to the patient base, he says. 'A better understanding that we do more than just NHS tests'.

Rebello concludes that winning an *Optician Award* is a great way for a practice to differentiate itself and it is something he would encourage others to do. 'If your business brand is quality and excellence,' he adds. ●

SPORTS VISION PRACTICE OF THE YEAR

● **Winner** Patrick and Menzies, Braintree, Essex

● **Shortlisted**

Black & Lizards, Glasgow
2012 Sports Vision, Sheffield
Flint & Partners, Wolverhampton