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Doc: How Ashe could've aced AIDS

During the last 10 months of his life, Arthur Ashe wrestled with the possibility of breaking away from the medical establishment to seek alterna-

tive treatment for AIDS.

"He was real close," says Doug Henderson. "He just ran out of time."

When Henderson, a long-time ally of Jimmy Connors, met Ashe in 1974, a friendship blossomed. "I knew he had AIDS," Henderson says. "I knew it before he made his announcement. I never said anything to him, but I began to give him information. I just wanted to make sure that he knew as much as possible. He didn't say anything about himself, but when I told him some of what was being accomplished with alternative medicine, he was surprised. He said, 'If what you say is true, that ought to be on the front page of The New York

Times.'"

In April, Ashe told the world what Doug Henderson already knew. Less than two weeks later, Ashe began the chase for information at the Walter Reade Theater in Lincoln Center. That day, Henderson had arranged for a special showing of a documentary film made by nutritionist Dr. Gary Null. Just as the house lights dimmed for the showing of the film, Ashe slipped into the theater and took a seat in the last row. The film was called "The Pain, Profit and Politics of AIDS." After seeing the film, Ashe met with Null. "We must have spoken by phone at least 20 times," Null said yesterday. "And we had about five personal meetings. He promised to give blood so that it could be examined. He wanted to do it, but he would say, 'What will I tell my doctors?'"

"The film got into what the mainstream treatment — AZT and ddI — does to the body," Henderson said. "Everyone who takes that treatment dies; that's what Arthur found out, and that's the reason he was talking with Gary, and that's why he

was so close to breaking away from his doctors." Both Null and Henderson knew how loyal Ashe was. For him to walk away from his doctors would not have been an easy thing. But both of them are sure he was — however slowly — moving in that direction.

Yesterday, Null spoke of the volumes of material he sent Ashe. "I even sent him case reports on a number of persons who had advanced AIDS and were treated successfully. He read everything; he studied what we gave him and asked lots of questions. He just never made it to the point where he was ready to try this treatment."

Would it have made a difference? Says Null: "I believe it would have saved his life. A hundred times he said he was going to come into the office and start a program. Every time, his fear caused him to delay."

For 27 years, Null has been involved in alternative medicine. He has a doctorate in human nutrition and public health science. He has written and lectured widely on alternative treatments for AIDS. He also has been one of the leading critics of

the treatment offered by the medical establishment, which centers mostly around AZT (which he calls a failed cancer drug) and ddI — both of which, he says, are so toxic they tear the immune system down instead of building it up. Null's alternative approach, by contrast, seeks to bolster the immune system with massive doses of vitamin C and various other nutritional approaches. He cites cases where persons with advanced AIDS adopted his approach and were brought back to full health.

"With AIDS," Null said, "I am saying that we could be saving 90% of those who are HIV-positive and 50% of those who have AIDS from ever dying. What we have now is AIDS by prescription. It is the biggest scandal of the '90s. But by the end of the '90s, we are going to wake up and see that this is prescription AIDS — where every symptom can be produced by the drugs we are giving (AIDS patients)."

Null sees Ashe as a victim. Instead of healing him, Null says, conventional treatment let Arthur Ashe down — and eventually cost him his life.