

## Aussie Olympic Swim Team Goes Chiropractic

May 20, 2000 is a day I'll remember the rest of my life. It was on this date that I was officially selected as a doctor to the Australian Olympic Swimming Team. It was a proud moment for me, but also a proud moment for my profession. It was an amazing feeling walking around the pool deck to the cheers of the crowds after the team was announced, and then shaking the hands of past Olympic swimmers, such as Dawn Fraser and others.

There are many people to thank: the persistence of team head coach Don Talbot; former head of sport science for the team, Wayne Goldsmith, who helped put chiropractic services in place for the 1997 Pan Pacific Championships; Peter Blanch, head physiotherapist for the team, who selected me for the 1997 Pan Pac Team; Henry Pollard, for setting up the masters of chiropractic sports science course at Macquarie University, enabling chiropractors like myself to obtain a university degree in sports science; Alan Thompson, our team manager, for making me feel very comfortable with my first team in 1997; and the rest of the support staff, in making being a part of the swim team an enjoyable and exhilarating experience.

I want to make special mention of the person who got me involved in chiropractic over 18 years ago. He was the first chiropractor I ever visited, and he is also the doctor who said that studying chiropractic in Australia was a good idea. Without him, I doubt I would have had the opportunity given to me in my adopted country of Australia. His name is Dr. Keith Innes. His fantastic programs at the Motion Palpation Institute (MPI) not only made me the chiropractor I am today, but his amazing knowledge has helped many others be the best that they can be. I would also like to make special mention of Dr. David Seaman, whose thoughts of what a modern day chiropractor should be have inspired me. Finally, I give credit to Dr. Mike Leahy for developing the active release technique used in the treatment of athletes. I wish all of them would come to Australia to lecture.

I have tried to explain how we can involve more chiropractors in sports teams at a state and national level. It took seven years of very hard work and diligence to achieve this. Approaching my local swim squads in volunteering to help them with different local and state meets took me away for many a weekend from my family and business. We also organized massage and chiropractic services at state meets at our pool. I began to converse with people, such as Peter Blanch, whom I met for the first time in 1993. As a result, recognition and trust began to slowly grow.

In our profession, and also in physiotherapy and massage therapy, some doctors believe that we just need to show up at a national final once in a while to be picked to treat a national team. It doesn't happen like that. We have to do the groundwork and get recognized for our work; only then will more chiropractors be chosen.

It's been pointed out to me is that we should not portray ourselves as gurus or pretend that what we do is better than what anyone else. Working with the Australian Team, there are no egos. We are there to help the swimmers in any capacity they choose, whether it's chiropractic, physiotherapy or massage. We cannot approach athletes on whom we have never worked, and tell them how much better they will swim or run if they get our services. There is no statistical evidence to suggest this. We are not the secret behind their success, and for any profession to suggest this is wrong. Should we take responsibility when athletes don't perform to their

capabilities? It's great when an athlete achieves success under our care, but I don't go around boasting that because I treated Ian Thorpe before his world record swim that it was my treatment that gave him the winning edge. It's the athlete's natural ability and competitiveness that "wins the day."

Treatment of athletes should come from a sound musculoskeletal philosophy involving the use of sound treatment modalities, including manipulation (MPI teaches this), myofascial therapy (active release) and rehabilitative care. Myofascial therapy, in my opinion, is very much needed when treating athletes. We should never consider it beneath us to do so.

At the games, my first responsibility will be with the swim team, and what a team it is! We have a fantastic group of young men and women; from veterans like Susie O'Neil and Kieran Perkins, to first-time Olympians like Ian Thorpe and Liesal Jones. The morale of the team is fantastic, and all are looking forward to the games. After the swimming events conclude, I can help out any other team or individual. Brian Sando, our head medical director, has said that if an athlete requests chiropractic, he or she can see me.

I feel honoured and privileged in being selected as the first chiropractor for the Australian Olympic Team, and I hope to make our profession proud. Chiropractors are an integral part of sports teams, as many articles in *Dynamic Chiropractic* have shown. But we must play as a team, work as a team, and use assessment techniques like the ones developed by the above-mentioned chiropractors. Only then will we have a legitimate role on a sports team.

Once the Olympics finish, I will be writing an article about my experiences at the games. Go, Australia, go!

OCTOBER 2000