

Sydney 2000 Olympics

The Sydney Olympics were spectacular. This was the first Olympiad with two chiropractors on the Australian Olympic Team: Dr. Andrea Bizas with the tennis team, and myself, with swimming and the overall medical team.

Australia's golden boy, 17-year-old Ian Thorpe, with George Dragasevich, DC, BSc. The swimming phenom, dubbed the "Thorpedo," ended up with three gold and two silver medals. He also helped set three relay world records and lowered his own mark in the 400 freestyle.

For me it all started two weeks prior to the games with our swim team assembling in Melbourne for a two-week camp in preparation for the Olympics. Melbourne was chosen for several reasons: the team wanted to be away from the hype so that they could focus on the job ahead, and the pool at Melbourne Aquatic Centre bore many similarities to their own.

There was the usual testing and treatment given, as in all the other meets with which I have been involved, but this time it was a very different atmosphere. We had two security guards assigned to the team at all times, and were treated like rock stars. We were honoured as the special guests at the AFL Grand Final with a capacity crowd of 96,000 people, which was a great precursor to the opening ceremony.

Australian swimming team co-captain Chris Fydler. Fydler swam on the gold medal-winning 4x100-meter relay team.

As a team, we knew of the growing anticipation of the games and were very excited. When we arrived in Sydney a week prior to the opening ceremony, there was an electricity on the team like I have never seen. Head Coach Don Talbot and the senior swimmers spoke to us before arriving in Sydney about what we should expect and the "vibe" that would be there. On the day of our arrival, we had an induction ceremony, with our official blazers given to us. This was like a graduation ceremony, but on a much grander scale. My wife and daughter were in the crowd - what a proud moment when I received my blazer.

The night of the opening ceremony was like none I have ever experienced. Our opening-ceremony uniforms were fantastic and very hip looking - designed by Mambo. As we walked onto the track to the cheering of the crowd, we were overwhelmed by the publicity. It is very hard to describe the emotion, but it was like being hit by a tidal wave. I am not ashamed to say I had a tear in my eye, as I know many other participants did. I guess it was because of many years of hard work it took to get here, and now I was walking around the track having the time of my life. "The lighting of the cauldron," a colorful exhibition of effects, was very dramatic, and we all held our breaths in anticipation of its eventual ascension.

Swimming started the next day, and what an opening night! Ian Thorpe got us started with a gold medal and world record. Just when I thought nothing would top the opening ceremony, our boys won the 4x100-meter freestyle event. I have never seen coach Talbot jump up and down as he did. The rest of the swim meet was great, with our team winning five gold, nine silver and five bronze,

medals. There were some upsets, but that is the nature of competitive swimming.

When the competition finished, it was like a huge emotional tire deflating, because we all were so busy for eight days. Our staff of two physiotherapists and three massage therapists worked fantastically as a team. We have known each other now for many years, and our respect for each other was quite evident.

The Olympic Village was great and the food, volunteers, and atmosphere of watching international athletes was inspiring. The experience I have gained will stay with me for the rest of my life. As John Devitt, the assistant chef de mission said to me, it was a great day for the profession of chiropractic to have someone on the Australian team, and he said he hoped it was the start of a great relationship.

I thank Don Talbot for letting me be a part of a great swim team - and for selecting me to be a part of an unforgettable experience. I will be continuing my involvement with swimming, and I look forward to working with the swimmers and support staff in the future. I was very privileged, along with Dr. Bizas, to represent our profession, and as I have always stated, it has taken many years of hard work to get to this point.

I propose that we, as chiropractors, start targeting individual sports and build a mutual respect, as Dr. Bizas and I have developed with our respective teams. If we do this, I believe more chiropractors will be involved Olympics in Athens in 2004.

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