

Palmer Alumni Find Olympic Spirit Alive in Atlanta

Editorial Staff

The Atlanta Games captured many inspiring moments on film for a worldwide audience, but away from the cameras, quieter scenes touched those who were there, including six Palmer alumni.

For Dr. John Anderson and his wife Cindy, that moment came when the Bosnian Olympic team asked to be godparents of the newborn daughter, Elizabeth Lee. Dr. Anderson was the official health care provider working with 15-member Bosnian team through eight weeks of training in his hometown of Pell City, Alabama, and then more than two weeks in Atlanta. During his more than 10-week tour of duty, he did everything from bandaging wounds and stretching out muscles, to chiropractic rehabilitation.

For Drs. Ronald Gefaller, Sherri LaShomb, and James Brockhohn, that moment was when a marathoner from Puerto Rico helped his competitor from Jamaica get back into the race after pulling a hamstring, and finished at least one place further back as a result. For Drs. Jessica Dietrich, and Jerry Nesseler, those special moments were working successfully with athletes in an interdisciplinary setting.

The Palmer chiropractors were among 29 DCs experiencing behind-the-scenes moments while working at the Atlanta Sports Chiropractic Clinic just outside the Olympic Village.

Of the 29 DCs selected by the Atlanta Chiropractic Olympic Committee, Dr. Sherri LaShomb was the only woman chosen. Like her male colleagues, she primarily cared for athletes with misuse and overuse muscle strains, and some acute, traumatic injuries. Dr. LaShomb recalls U.S. 5K race walker Alan James saying in front of an NBC-affiliated station's cameras that there were too few chiropractors in the Olympic Village. According to Dr. LaShomb, he asked the medical doctors to lift the blockade against chiropractors.

"His views about the wonders of chiropractic for athletes were completely unsolicited and unknown to us before he spoke," Dr. Lashomb explained. "When the Olympic athletes speak up on behalf of chiropractic, you know it's working."

Drs. Dietrich and Nesseler worked 12-hour shifts within the Olympic Village at an interdisciplinary hospital open to all athletes. The two chiropractors received separate, two full-day assignments and cared primarily for soccer athletes. That experience left them with fresh insight into how to work within an interdisciplinary team, a good experience for any chiropractor, especially as health care moves more towards offering patients choices in care.

"Of course, these athletes are competing on the world stage and chiropractic can give them an edge," said Dr. Ronald Gefaller. "Athletes are very receptive to chiropractic, which is a natural way to keep their timing and coordination in sync," said Dr. Gefaller. "They want to perform to their maximum capability. That's the way they'll win or at least perform to the best of their ability."

Treating the many Olympic athletes from diverse backgrounds and countries was an excellent

opportunity to spread the word of chiropractic to the international community. It was another example of chiropractic being an important part of any health care team. "The athletes were grateful to have chiropractors there along with other health care providers," said Dr. Brockhohn.

Drs. Gefaller, LaShomb, and Brockhohn noted the appreciativeness of the athletes for the chiropractic care. The athletes thanked the DCs with pins from their countries or tickets to events. "I didn't expect this much generosity," said Dr. Brockhohn.

Dr. Brockhohn remembers decathlon gold medalist Dan O'Brien visiting the chiropractic clinic and later sitting down to watch the Olympics on TV with the DCs. "He was just like one of us, except he's in a lot better shape than I am," observed Dr. Brockhohn, the master of understatement.

Treating the Olympians was memorable and maybe even life changing. Dr. Anderson and his family now have "family ties" to the Bosnia team. "We can never forget our daughter's godparents," said Dr. Anderson. "I learned to speak some Bosnian, found out much more about their culture and did some good work along the way for these athletes."

SEPTEMBER 1996