

## Olympic Athletes Give Thanks for Chiropractic

Steven Horwitz, DC, CCSP, CSCS

At last year's U.S. Olympic festival, weightlifter Thanh Nguyen signed a picture of himself doing a snatch on the front page of the Denver Post, like this:

"To Dr. Steve: Thank you for your help on my back. I know that I cannot lift without it. I hope to see you at the Atlanta '96 Games.

"Thank"

I read it and thought, "I would sure like to be there and see you as well." Well, I just completed the most exciting, exhausting, and rewarding month of my professional career as the sole chiropractor of the 44 person 1996 United States Olympic Team medical staff. The staff is appointed through a series of evaluations performed at the Olympic Training Centers, United States Olympic festivals, and international events. Individuals were evaluated on their clinical skills and ability, efficacy in meeting the demands of elite level athletes, adaptability, and willingness to be part of a team.

I arrived in Atlanta on July 6, 1996 about 6 p.m., and was met by USOC representatives. I am glad they were there because the airport was busy. We were taken to a building to receive our credentials. These credentials, two plastic cards, one with a photo, and another with a computer chip, were to be worn around the neck at all times. The card with the computer chip was part of a hi-tech hand geometry system used throughout the Olympic Village. Each time you entered the village you placed your hand on the hand geometry reader, which had to match the pattern on the card you were wearing.

Once I received my credentials, I boarded a bus with the Slovakian rifle team and U.S. 10m platform diver Patrick Jeffrey, and headed toward the village. What normally should have been a 15 minute drive took over two hours. Our bus was denied entry to the village because the driver did not have the proper credentials, and the bus was not sanitized, i.e., checked for bombs! We tried every access gate to the Village, but were refused entry. Finally, we convinced one of the head security guards to meet us at the main gate. He summoned a properly credentialed driver, checked the bus from top to bottom, and let us in. During this fiasco, I learned a great deal about 10m platform diving from Patrick Jeffrey. He became my first patient that very night.

The Olympic Village was on the campus of Georgia Tech University. The Village was set up into different zones: blue, gold, purple, green, and red. Each zone housed different teams. The Village was home to over 10,000 athletes and 5,000 coaches, medical personnel, and staff from 197 countries. Home for the next 30 days would be a 8'x 8' dorm room with bunk beds in the dormitory of the U.S. Olympic Team.

On my first full day, I went through processing. Each member of the U.S. delegation (about 1,100 people) was given clothes, luggage, shoes, sneakers, and assorted odds and ends from official Olympic sponsors. As one athlete said, "It's Christmas in July!" During processing, each delegation member also had to complete a medical history form which was reviewed by our medical staff. If there were any red flags, the person was given a full examination.

The next day, I reported to the U.S. Olympic Team medical clinic which was on the ground floor of the U.S. dormitory building. Our clinic consisted of 14 therapy tables, 10 combination electrical stimulation units, a large hydrocollator unit, an ice machine, and two Zenith chiropractic tables (one Hi-Lo, and one flexion-distraction). The hours of our training room were 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., with one trainer and one physician on call each night. Each trainer and physician were assigned specific sports, while I was responsible for any athlete who needed chiropractic care. We all worked 15 hours or more each day, everyday. We were responsible for approximately 700 U.S. athletes.

Working with professionals whose egos were checked at the door and whose common goal was the well being of the athlete was a joy. The foundation of our care was the hands-on approach. This hands-on approach was made the focus of an NBC national news story on our clinic.

The trainers, many of whom were also PTs, used myofascial techniques, soft tissue and joint mobilization, and stretching techniques. Ultrasound and the many different forms of electrical stimulation complemented the approach. Interferential was often used, with microcurrent coming in a close second. Medications were used, but only when absolutely necessary. Hydrocollator packs and ice bags were the daily mainstays.

Most of the injuries we treated were overuse injuries: tendinitis, sprains and strains. Numerous athletes had facet syndromes, nerve root irritation, and trigger points which I treated with chiropractic adjustments and myofascial techniques. I found that many athletes received regular chiropractic care, especially during the heavy training just before the Olympics. They wanted to continue this care during the games because they felt it helped injuries heal, and enhanced their performance and feeling of well being. Many athletes were introduced to chiropractic care for the first time due to injuries which had not responded to other types of care. Successful results with these injuries caused athletes to tell other athletes; needless to say this kept me busy.

Most of my time was occupied treating athletes in our training room. I did cover synchronized swimming, diving, and water polo practices, and traveled to Lake Lanier to treat our rowers. Most of the last few days of the Games, I spent with track and field athletes, traveling between the warm-up track and the Olympic stadium.

Once again, developing a good rapport with the trainers was the key to my stay. I had worked with 12 of the trainers and one of the MDs while going through the USOC program. This left me 20 trainers and 10 MDs with whom I had not worked. They were all familiar with chiropractic care because of the fine DCs with whom they had worked throughout the program. This, combined with excellent results, allowed me to work the way I wanted to during the Games.

One of my patients had the fantastic idea of having the athletes sign the red, white, and blue Zenith tables after I treated them. The athletes loved this idea; the more the tables filled with names, the more they wanted to sign them.

Being at the Olympic Games was like being on an I.V. of epinephrine for one month. One of the biggest thrills for me was marching in the opening ceremonies. About 10 of our medical staff found out one hour before opening ceremonies that were chosen to march in them. The rest of the staff were given tickets to go to the ceremonies. We quickly dressed in the outfit we received at processing and were off to the Olympic stadium. When I turned the corner and started down the ramp with the rest of the U.S. team, the sight of 85,000 spectators was breathtaking. The crowd was roaring "USA, USA!" and the flashbulbs were blazing. The high was incredible.

The dining hall was one of the most interesting areas. An enormous air-conditioned tent was set up

to hold 3,500 people. To look around and see athletes from 197 countries was fascinating. Each country's athletes would sit together, usually by sport. The multitude of languages made communicating a challenge. Much fun was had with hand gestures and body language.

The events I did see in person were Matt Ghaffari wrestle with Russian Alexander Karelin, Wes Barnett set three American records in 108kg class in weightlifting, and Michael Johnson set the world record in the 200m. The entire U.S. delegation went to the closing ceremonies. Yes, I was one of the thousands of people running around on the stadium field.

There were many special athletes and many special moments. On August 3, 1996 I came back from the Olympic stadium and found the following letter on my table:

"Dr. Steve: Thank you so much for helping me get ready for my race. You are the reason why I'm going home with a gold medal and American record. I seriously don't think I could have performed to my best without your help.

Sincerely,

Sheila Taormina, '96 USA swimming 4x200 gold medalist"

The first day back in my office I received this letter in the mail:

"Dr. Horowitz: Closing ceremonies are this evening, wrapping up an incredible Olympic Games. One of the best parts of this experience has been the U.S. medical staff supporting the athletes. I have never been around such a hard-working, professional group of people at any event.

Thank you so much for your time and expertise -- I've never felt or fought better, and I credit the great staff at the U.S. medical clinic, particularly your treatments.

Best wishes for the future,

Marisa Pedulla, 52Kg, USA Judo"

Moments like these are what make spending all the hours worth it. Yes, chiropractic sure does work!

Ed Ryan, ATC, the medical coordinator and John Lehtinen, MD, head physician, did a fantastic job at organizing and running our medical staff. Working with these professionals was an honor and privilege. The physicians on our staff were: Mark Adams; Daniel Carr; Craig Ferrell; Sean Hanley; John Lalonde; Lawrence Magee; Bruce Mosely; Herb Paris; Brock Schnebel and Carlan Yates. The trainers were: Ruffi Alday; William Bandy; Wayne Barger; Kim Barrett; Steve Brace; Rigo Carbajal; Joe Fritz; Kerry Gatch; Ernest Golin; Woody Graham; Tony Harris; Emery Hill; Lisa Jesberg; Gina Konin; Tom Koto; Dawn Kurihara; Chip Ladd; Patty Marchak; Skippy Matson; Sally Mays; Karen McClellan; Ty McSorley; James Miller; Frank Novakoski; Dave Pawlowski; Barbara Pearson; Margaret Peter; Richard Quincy; Denise Richardson; Marcia Roschke; and Rene Shingles.

The chiropractors who will be selected to go through the USOC volunteer sports medicine program in the future have a tremendous opportunity to continue to expose the best U.S. athletes to chiropractic care. Give it your all! Each job well done will help chiropractic by leaps and bounds, and most importantly, will help the athletes you treat. I am happy to make myself available to any of you who wish to discuss the program.

Citius, altius, fortius!

*Steven Horwitz, DC*  
*Silver Spring, Maryland*

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