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## Chiropractic at the Winter Olympics

DRS. SOLOMON, SHAPIRO CARE FOR OUR ATHLETES

Dynamic Chiropractic Staff

The chiropractic profession has had an official presence in the care and treatment of American athletes at the Olympic Games for more than a quarter-century. In 1980, due to the efforts of the U.S. Olympic Committee's Athletes Advisory Council, Dr. George Goodheart was named the first official chiropractor for the U.S. Olympic Medical Team at the XIII Olympic Winter Games in Lake Placid, N.Y. The efforts of Dr. Goodheart and the chiropractors who followed after him have played an integral part in the success of America's Olympic athletes, helping the U.S. to win more than 750 medals since 1980, including 314 gold medals.

For the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, the U.S. Olympic Medical Services Staff includes two doctors of chiropractic, Ira Shapiro and Jeffrey Solomon. The only doctor from Florida selected to participate on the 32-member medical services staff, Dr. Solomon is the current president of both the Florida Chiropractic Association and the American Chiropractic Association Council on Sports Injuries and Physical Fitness. Dr. Shapiro is the first chiropractor to serve on the medical services staff for more than one Olympics, and the first DC to treat athletes at both the Winter Games and the Summer Games.



## **Drs. Ira Shapiro (left) and Jeffrey Solomon are serving on the U.S. Olympic Medical Services Staff at the Winter Olympics in Torino.**

Before embarking on their journey to Torino, *Dynamic Chiropractic* spoke with both doctors about the different paths they took to become members of the medical services staff, and how they will work with the medical doctors, athletic trainers and other health care providers on staff to ensure our country's athletes reach their full potential.

*Dynamic Chiropractic (DC):* How did you get involved with the U.S. Olympic Medical Team?

Ira Shapiro (IS): There's a lengthy consideration process as well as the fulfillment of certain professional criteria that includes references from numerous sports team coaches, athletes and governing directors. Once these criteria are met, the opportunity is then available for an internship with the U.S. Olympic Committee. Then, after carefully evaluating the doctor at this level, the committee accepts three or four chiropractors a year over a four-year period for a two-week internship at one of the USOC training centers, usually in Colorado Springs. Commonly referred to as the "Sweet 16," these chiropractors are then evaluated in terms of clinical expertise, as well as the ability to work with coaches, athletes, trainers, physicians, administrative staff and dignitaries. Whereas you might be able to hide your personality for a day or two, it's nearly impossible to hide for two weeks. This is imperative to see how well you fit into their model as a health care provider, while working with world-class athletes.

After accepting these four doctors a year for four years, only the top three or four highest performers are brought back for additional consideration. This time the stage is an international competition, where the emotional levels are exceedingly high and the athletes are working under

pre-game and game-time conditions. The emphasis is on dealing with the athletes, coaches, trainers, medical staff, administrative staff and dignitaries operating in stressful international competition conditions. And, all the evaluations are confidential because you don't even know the evaluators.

Once the entire evaluation process is complete, it's time for the real honor, because only two or three of the highest scoring chiropractors are chosen as members of the United States medical staff for either the Pan Am Games or the Olympics.

Jeffrey Solomon (JS): It began my first day of chiropractic school. I wrote a goal down on a piece of paper that one day, I would be the chiropractor for the U.S. team at the Olympics. I was an athlete back in my college days and got injured, and was inspired to follow sports chiropractic as a student, when I learned that there was such a field as sports chiropractic. Achieving this would have been the ultimate career goal.

When I got out of school, I got involved with local athletic teams, high school teams at first. We had a police football team, and I got involved as their team physician. One thing led to another where I continued to participate through my career, either as a team physician or a member of the medical team of different athletic events.

There are postgraduate certifications and diplomates in sports chiropractic. I pursued both, and earned a DACBSP [Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians] in 1995. I knew that they had internships at the Olympic Training Center where chiropractors could do a two-week program during the summer. I got on the list to be selected for that, and after a few years, they picked me. In doing that, you put yourself in the position of being considered the team chiropractor for a U.S. Olympic event. They do the same thing for athletic trainers and medical doctors and such. I did my internship three summers ago in Colorado Springs. They grade you when you're there, and if you do a good job, you get picked - so I guess I did a good job, and my dream came true.

DC: Overall, how long would you say you've been involved with the medical team, from the training up to working in the Olympics?

JS: I first applied back in about 1995. I believe it would have been the summer of 2002 that I did my internship. It's been three years since then.

IS: I first applied to the U.S. Olympic Training Center in 1995. I was selected for my internship in 2000. My next level event was 2003, when I worked with the U.S. team participating in the Titan Games in San Jose, California. From there, I was chosen as a member of the medical staffs working with our athletes at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens and now the 2006 Winter Olympics to be held in Torino, Italy. This is especially important since you only have a four-year window of opportunity. For instance, if you're not selected within four years of your internship, you're probably not going to be selected because the next group of chiropractors is already under evaluation.

DC: What type of criteria does a DC have to fulfill to be considered for the medical team?

IS: There are several criteria. You have to have a certain level of expertise working with professional and amateur athletes, as well as a practicing chiropractor for five or more years. In my case, I've been practicing chiropractic for more than 20 years and have worked with numerous athletes competing in such events as the Gatorade Ironman Triathlon World Championship, World Championship of Free-Style Wrestling, World Sport Aerobic Championship, U.S. Figure Skating

Championship, National Collegiate Tae Kwan Do Championship and the Garden State Games.

JS: At this time, the individuals who will be able to participate in the training center's internship program have to be a DACBSP. You have to earn a diplomate.

DC: Is there a lot of competition for the spots on the medical team?

JS: I would suggest in general that any chiropractor with a license would love the opportunity to be considered and to participate as the U.S. Olympic Team chiropractor. Whether they're willing to pay the dues and do the work that it takes to get there is another story. I'd say that during a period of time while someone's trying to qualify for the opportunity, many probably drop by the wayside, not willing to put in the time and the hours that it takes.

For example, to be a diplomate, you have three years of postgraduate studies. You also have a practical test and a written test. You have to do at least 100 hours of on-the-field and in-the-arena activities as a member of a sports medicine team. These are often things you don't get paid for. You also have to be published in a referred scientific journal. So, by the time anybody gets through all that, the field is fairly well weeded-out.

IS: Absolutely. Hundreds of chiropractors apply, but only four are chosen each year for an internship. That's what makes this such an honor.

DC: What events will you be providing care at? How will that be structured?

JS: Where I'm going to be is a town called Sestriere, at the Sestriere village. That's the alpine area. That would include me working primarily - and this is just my assumption - with skiing, snowboarding, sledding events, that type of thing. Ira's going to be in Torino; that's where they're going to have all of the blade/skating-type of events. It's my assumption that he'll probably deal with more of that, while I would deal with more of what we would consider alpine events.

The proximity to the event is how it's probably going to be determined. They've got us in two different places, 100 kilometers apart. Because of the lay of the land, that's up to two or three hours apart, so it's hardly practical to have somebody running from one place to the next while there are significant needs for our services. It's why they decided to take a second chiropractor and selected Ira.

In Salt Lake City, everything was close enough to where Robin Hunter, who was actually the first chiropractor for a Winter Games, she suited the needs for the team as a whole, because of the proximity of things. But this is quite different.

IS: I don't know. All I know is that I have been assigned to be in Torino throughout the month of February to work with any or all of the more than 200 American athletes participating in the 2006 Winter Olympics. Whatever events will be in Torino will be the events that I'll be covering.

DC: What's the relationship like with the other members of the medical team?

JS: It's incredible. It's like a smooth-running machine. That's the most notable thing when you first get to the Olympic training center to do your internship. They select the best of the best from around the country, people with experience, and things integrate instantaneously. Each individual knows the other individual's jobs; they respect each individual's responsibilities; and they know how to use each other as tools to get the best results for the athletes, which I would suggest has a lot to do with why we have such great performances with the U.S. when we go to the Olympics. It's not only that, of course, but I would suggest it's got a lot to do with our level of success. They've got a

great medical team.

Athletes are always on the edge of injury. They just ride that fine line, and when you have a good medical team, it keeps them on the healthy side of that line, with maximum performance potentials.

IS: The treatment is extraordinary. We are treated first-class, top-of-the-line. There is a great level of mutual respect among the entire medical staff. In addition, the USOC would have it no other way. The stakes are too high to tolerate petty jealousies or egos. That's why the evaluation process is so intense. You check your ego at the door. Your first and only priority is the welfare of our athletes.

DC: What's the general opinion of the athletes toward chiropractors?

IS: We would not be included if it weren't for the athletes. Chiropractic involvement in the Olympics started in the mid-1970s, when the Olympic team was preparing for the Montreal Games. Most of the track and field athletes competing in the 1976 Olympics were working with a chiropractor. However, at that time the USOC was not receptive to accommodating the athletes' requests for an official team chiropractor. So, many of the athletes worked with the chiropractor operating outside of the auspices of the USOC. It's really due to the athletes and the value they have placed on chiropractic over the years that we are now official members of the United States Olympic Medical Team.

JS: They're the reason we're there. As you're possibly familiar with, allopathic medicine has been very reluctant to embrace working with chiropractors in years past. Back in 1980, chiropractic became an official part of the Olympic sports medicine program. A lot of it had to do with Dwight Stones, the high jumper, who had utilized chiropractic. He made a lot of noise along with other athletes insisting that chiropractic become a part of the program. They're the reason we broke the ice. When we started to participate, the athletic trainers that were involved with leading the program got a feel for what we can do and how to work with us, and appreciated chiropractic a lot. Since then, we've become a significant part of the program. So, the athletes love chiropractic. They readily use us not just to fix a problem that they have, but often just for the sake of performance.

DC: Any final comments you'd like to add about your experiences on the medical team, or what you hope to accomplish in Torino?

JS: Well, on a personal note, this is really a cool thing for me, being able to serve the country. Aside from being a good, community-oriented citizen, I've never really done anything patriotic in my life. Now I feel really good about doing something patriotic for my country by contributing peacefully to the Olympic athletes. Hopefully, that will help bring some more medals to the U.S. Any way that I can contribute to do so is really big for me. I want to see the U.S. bring home medals - lots and lots of medals. That's good for the nation's reputation.

IS: It is such an honor. I cannot emphasize that enough. It not only provides the opportunity to represent our profession on one of the greatest athletic stages in the world, but also to play such an important role in our athlete's success. It's such a great feeling to work with someone and then see that individual exceed in their event. Again, I couldn't be prouder to represent this country, our profession and help support these athletes, who have worked and sacrificed for years for this opportunity.

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