

Behind the Olympic Hoopla, FICS Doctors Have Staffed IOC-Sponsored Training Centers the Past Four Years

Clayton Heatley

The South has risen again. Hotlanta, as some call it during its average 94 degrees, 40 percent humidity days, hosted the Olympics with a unique blend of commercialism and down home Southern hospitality. There were a number of chiropractors there to help the athletes: chiropractors who came with their country's teams; those with the Federation International de Chiropratique Sportive (FICS); the ACA Sports Council; and Life College. A host clinic organized by the Atlanta Sports Committee was made available to the doctors and athletes.

Some of us, like myself, in the weeks prior to the Olympics, had the additional joy of working on athletes at international training grounds like La Grange College, 60 miles south of Atlanta. Here, the attitude of the local people was friendly and hospitable to the athletes. The folks threw two street parties for the athletes, and a dinner which included some of the best gospel singers I've ever heard.

Because there were more than 10,000 athletes, various teams and smaller country contingencies were assigned to smaller training areas spread from Florida to North Carolina.

At La Grange, the largest of these IOC-sponsored training centers, had been FICS staffed for four years come rain or shine, usually by Drs. Dan Fortrin and Chris Toppel. The four weeks prior to the Olympics were a busy time. Weekly rotations of two to five chiropractors treated some 650 athletes, mostly from Africa, Europe, South America and Arabic countries. We treated mostly athletes of track and field, boxing, softball, volleyball, women's basketball, including coaches and La Grange support staff. We were very well liked and sought after. We were treated with true southern hospitality in La Grange. The South African track and field team came back to La Grange after assignment to Atlanta, returning only when their events required them to be there.

Although some chiropractors were assigned a team afterwards and could therefore gain access in the Olympic village and venues in Atlanta, others were restricted to two clinics outside the village gates. This was a result of political maneuvering by the usual suspects. I have been asked not to go into great detail, but suffice it to say there were those who made sure to exclude chiropractors from the venues and village.

One cannot help but feel we were unfairly treated, and the bottom line was that many athletes did not have the opportunity of our care merely because we were largely made invisible.

Oh, yes, and let's not forget that "officially" the IOC does not recognize chiropractic (never mind the tons of research showing the efficacy of chiropractic, or that we are in demand by the athletes themselves).

Meanwhile, there were noticeable numbers of MD ACOG accredited volunteers in the village and venues, and on the TV an endless retinue of junk food, drink, and drug ads, and even a vignette of an orthopedic surgeon doing a "manipulation" on an athlete. But, alas, no mention of or coverage of the several chiropractors who gave of themselves to help the athletes at their own expense. Does this sound like a familiar scenario?

This production seems like the same mentality that killed the AHCPR as a research group because they didn't agree with the preliminary findings that manipulation is superior treatment to drugs for headaches.

The good news for our profession was that most of the sports chiropractic leaders in national and international organizations were present and had a major symposium in Atlanta. It was good to see cooperation and unity among these organizations. However, being politically invisible by the powers that be, left a sense of powerlessness and unfair rejection to access to the athletes themselves. Numerous times both in the village and outside, athletes asked me, "Where are you chiropractors located?"

Overall, we had a good time and your profession of chiropractic was there treating athletes, although our representation was not as strong as it should have been.

I must state that although I was happy to see American athletes often win the gold, I found myself rooting for the little countries like Grenada, Vanuatu, Sierra Leone, Panama, and Vietnam, to whom an Olympic metal would mean a great boost for their national pride.

Feedback from foreign athletes varied from a sense of fun and international comradeship to a sense of being served a disagreeable plate of hyperamericanated Olympomania (coke and McFries included). Coverage of foreign athletes was scant by comparison and those of "3rd world" countries was rare to nonexistent.

We have nothing but high praise for the athletes of all countries, and we hope that the Olympics and Para-Olympics will continue to bridge international friendship through sports.

For our profession it was a step ahead, but definitely a learning experience. Our leaders in the field of sports chiropractic will dissect this Olympiad to learn from our mistakes and be better prepared to serve the athletes in Sydney in 2000.

Our best wishes go out to the para Olympic athletes and the chiropractors who will be there to serve them.

Clayton Heatley, DC, CCSP
Menlo Park, CA

SEPTEMBER 1996