

Becoming an Olympic

Jim Kurtz, DC, DACRB

Earlier this year, the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) selected five chiropractors as part of the U.S. Olympic sports medicine team headed to Beijing, China. Four of these chiropractors, Ted Forcum, DC, DACBSP of Beaverton, Oregon; Amor Adams, DC, DACBSP of Oakland, California; Ernie Ferrel, DC, CCSP of Santa Barbara, California; and Mike Reed, DC, DACBSP of the USOC, Colorado Springs, Colorado served Team USA at the 2008 Olympic Games. The fifth chiropractor is myself, and I will be Team USA's chiropractor to the 2008 Paralympic Games.



Jim Kurtz, DC, at this year's U.S. Olympic Trials in track and field in Eugene, Oregon.

Primarily responsible for overall health of the athletes, the U.S. medical staff administered care during competition, practice, and in the Athlete Village. Members of the staff were also located at the USOC High Performance Training Center (HPTC) at Beijing Normal University and at USOC Head Quarters at Beijing Hilton. I know that all these chiropractors were excited and honored, as I am, to be chosen to represent our profession and our country at these games.

The road to both the Olympics and Paralympics Games is a long one for athletes as well as chiropractors, but the journey is a rewarding one. My personal road to becoming an Olympic chiropractor began in 1988 while I was attending Western States Chiropractic College. In 1988, the USOC selected Dr. Jan Corwin to be team USA's chiropractor to the Summer Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea. After reading an article about his involvement I became interested in pursuing sports chiropractic and my own Olympic experience. Before I describe some of that journey,

I want to give a little history of chiropractic's involvement in the Olympic Games. Chiropractic's role in the Olympics began with Dr. Leroy Perry in 1976. Dr. Perry was not part of the U.S. Olympic medical team, although many prominent athletes had requested this. Instead, he went to the Games with the country of Antigua. While there, he worked with many high profile U.S. athletes who had been using his services prior to the Games and recognized the benefits of improved function and performance chiropractic provided them.

In 1980, Dr. George Goodheart went to the Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid, New York to treat U.S. athletes, but chiropractic was still not yet an official part of the US Olympic medical staff. In 1984, Dr. Eileen Haworth became the first chiropractor to be selected by the USOC as part of the official medical team for the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in L.A. After the 1984 Olympics, the USOC asked Dr. Haworth and Dr. John Danchik to form a chiropractic selection committee. Since 1984, there has been a chiropractor at all the Summer Olympic Games.

In 1984, Dr. Tom Hyde was selected to be the first chiropractor to participate in the U.S. Olympic Training Center's (USOTC) volunteer medical staff program for chiropractors. This sports medicine internship program is the starting point for any chiropractor, medical doctor, physical therapist, athletic trainer, or massage therapist seeking selection to an Olympic or Paralympic Games. There is an application process and the application form can be found at <http://teamusa.org/content/index/1787>. Volunteer chiropractors, physicians, PT's, ATC's, and LMP's, together with the USOC's full-time medical staff provide healthcare services to athletes registered at the Olympic Training Center at Colorado Springs, San Diego and Lake Placid. From this pool of volunteers, medical staff for USOC-sponsored competitions is selected.

There are four levels to this selection process: Level one is two weeks at one of the Olympic Training Centers. Level two is a national/international appointment by USOC invitation, and requires three or more weeks of service at a national championship event. Level three is an International Games appointment by USOC invitation. This could be a Pan American Games or Parapan American Games requiring three or more weeks of service. Level four is an Olympic Games or Paralympic Games appointment by USOC invitation and this requires eight or more weeks of service. At each of these levels, the chiropractor and other healthcare providers are evaluated by USOC medical, administrative, and coaching staffs along with athletes. They are evaluating your medical skills, rapport with athletes/coaches, and adherence to policies of the USOC and its Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, along with your interaction with sport and administration officials. This all helps to assure selection of the most qualified and compatible medical team.

There is never any guarantee of advancement to the next level, and there are more applicants than the USOC has space for, so it is recommended that sports chiropractors acquire as many skills and tools as they can to be able to handle the wide variety of different sports injuries you will see both



Chiropractor

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—Jim Kurtz, DC, DACRB

in the Olympic and Paralympic athlete. I can say from personal experience that after 18 years of practice and acquiring the following credentials: DACRB, CCSP, CSCS, CES, PES and certifications in Active Release Technique, Graston Technique, Kinesiotaping, extremity adjusting, and a certification from USA Weightlifting as a Sports Performance Coach, I still have much to learn. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on the sports medicine staff of the PGA tour for two years and be a part of the chiropractic staff at multiple events such as USA Track and Field Championships, Ironman Triathlon World Championships, U.S. Figure Skating Championships, 2002 Winter Olympic Games, U.S. Olympic Trials in Track and Field, Pro Rodeo, volleyball, martial arts, U.S. Masters Swim Championships, and performing arts. I have also been exposed to some bright and talented chiropractors and medical providers who have taught me a lot.

The road to these Games has been a rewarding experience. Last summer, I had the privilege of being selected as Team USA's chiropractor to the Parapan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, while Dr. Ted Forcum was Team USA's chiropractor to the Pan American Games. The Parapan American Games follow the Pan American Games and, like the Paralympic Games, are an international competition among each nation's elite athletes with physical disabilities. While in Brazil, I, again, had the privilege of working alongside some talented and dedicated healthcare professionals who work with athletes with physical disabilities on a regular basis. This experience exposed me to some of the unique challenges that Paralympic athletes face on a day-to-day basis. Most chiropractors do not get the opportunity to treat a wide range of people with disabilities. I felt fortunate to be able to expose them to chiropractic care and to help them in any way I could. It is not often that a DC gets the opportunity to care for 20 to 30 athletes in a day who have Harrington rods in their spine and are suffering from neck and shoulder pain, which is a result of overuse or shoulder impingement from being in a bent forward posture for long periods racing in a wheelchair. Some suffer from having to run on prosthetic limbs, which alter their gait and alignment and are not always the most comfortable things to wear all day. Others deal with cerebral palsy, which leaves their extensor muscles inhibited or weak and their flexors facilitated and hypertonic. This creates chronic muscle imbalances which place a tremendous amount of stress and strain on their joints.

Truth is, I was impressed by the courage, attitude, and heart of these athletes. They did more for me than I could ever do for them. Most of us complain about all our little aches and pains, and we make excuses for why we cannot do this and that in life, but not Paralymians.

The Paralympic Games follow the Olympic Games. They are held in the same venue, and are second in size only to the Olympic Games. More than four thousand athletes from one hundred and twenty countries will participate in the 2008 Paralympics. The Paralympics feature 22 sports, 29 of which are also contested in the Olympics. They offer competition

to athletes who are blind or visually impaired, have amputated limbs, spinal cord injuries, motor impairments due to cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury or stroke.



Dr. Kurtz with two members of the Gold medal winning women's wheelchair basketball team that competed at the 2007 Parapan American Games in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil.

Working with Paralymians has challenged me clinically and truly inspired me personally. I've realized that able-bodied people are often times more disabled than the disabled. We so often judge others by what we see on the outside, like skin color, a birth defect, a missing limb, a wheel chair, etc. and fail to look any further. Paralymians have taught me that it doesn't matter that you can't walk, that you can't see, that you can't hear, or that you are missing a limb or multiple limbs, because strength comes from the heart, the soul, and the spirit, and there are no limits to those."

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