

# Nailed big trip to Lillehammer

## Local chiropractor heads to Norway with U.S. bobsled & skeleton team

By Tom Allegra

Mark Taczanowski was 8 years old when the U.S. ice hockey team shocked the world by defeating the Soviet Union in the semifinals of the 1980 Olympic Games in upstate Lake Placid.

But it wasn't the "Miracle On Ice" he remembers most. Instead, it was how his father Jack, an immigrant from then-Communist Poland, cried tears of joy watching the U.S. defeat his former oppressor.

"I'll never forget sitting in our basement watching that game. My dad, I never saw him cry, and that was one of the times that I saw him cry," he said. "That's when the Olympics became important to me—very important."

Dr. Taczanowski, 52, of St. James, has been selected as a volunteer member of the medical staff for the U.S. Bobsled and Skeleton team as it travels to Lillehammer, Norway for World Cup Games this February 10-16. The co-owner of True Sport Care in Nesconset, along with his wife, Hope, Dr. Taczanowski, a chiropractor, was chosen to represent Team USA for the sixth time in his career.

That includes a 2014 trip to the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, where the U.S. Bobsled and Skeleton team won six medals in five events—its best showing on foreign soil to date.

"The most emotional part of this journey is if an athlete wins gold and you hear them play the national anthem," Dr. Taczanowski said. "That is the ultimate goal."

The initial goal, however,

is earning a selection to the volunteer medical staff, a lengthy process in which several years of criteria must be met, not to mention nods of approval from the athletes themselves.

"With the USOC [United States Olympic Committee] medical volunteer program, they want you to have certain things in place, which include working with a sports team for five years, so I worked with Smithtown [High School] East for five years," Dr. Taczanowski said. "They want you to have certain techniques, certain credentials, and then once you're done doing that, you can put your name in to volunteer."

In 2010, Dr. Taczanowski was invited to Chula Vista, California for a two-week trial run during which he was evaluated by athletes, trainers and coaches. A year later, he was selected to participate at a Team USA Medical Clinic in, of all places, Lake Placid, where his techniques, size and leverage—he's a strapping 6 feet, 3 inches tall—proved to be exactly what the program was looking for.

"Bobsled athletes are big athletes, and I'm not a little person," he said, "so after working with them for a couple of weeks, at my exit interview there, the clinic director basically said that [Team USA] bobsled wants you to travel with them for the World Championships."

In 2012 and 2013, Dr. Taczanowski was selected to the medical staff for the World Championships in Lake Placid and St. Moritz, Switzerland, respectively. But 2014 was



**WALL OF FAME:** Chiropractor Mark Taczanowski at his True Sport Care Nesconset office (above) before leaving for the World Cup Games in Lillehammer, Norway February 10-16. During his many trips with the United States bobsled and skeleton team, Dr. Taczanowski, of St. James, has worked alongside current skeleton coach and former bronze medalist Matt Antoine (below left), bobsled assistant coach Michael Dionne (below right, at left) and Ben Towne (center), the team's current head trainer. -Tom Allegra photo (above)



the culmination of all his hard work and preparation, as he was selected to attend the Olympic Games in Sochi, which was preceded by three weeks of preparation in Austria, Switzerland and Germany—60 around-the-clock days of work without a single day off.

"The October prior to any Olympic year, the athletes, coaches and trainers get a questionnaire [asking them] 'Out of all the practitioners that you've worked with over the last four years, which one do you feel is going to give you the best chance of winning an Olympic medal?'"

Dr. Taczanowski said. "And my name came up more than anybody else's in 2013. That's why I met the selection."

In all, he spent eight weeks abroad for the Sochi Olympics Games from the end of December 2013 to the end of February 2014—unpaid time during which his wife held down the fort at their practice. It's something she's gotten used to, as Dr. Taczanowski spent another week in Lake Placid in 2015 as well as an additional two weeks in Park City, Utah and Whistler, Canada in 2016.

"I gave them 20 weeks of volunteer time over five years.

That's a lot of volunteer time, and one of the things that I always tell people is that I couldn't have done it without my wife also practicing here," Dr. Taczanowski said. "There's a lot of single practitioners who have the skill, they have the ambition, they have the drive [but] they can't do it because they can't [afford to] close their office for 20 weeks."

Despite the relentless expectations of his role—he also works on athletes from many other Olympic and world championship sports—it's been well worth it for Dr. Taczanowski... even though he's rarely if ever had time to travel throughout the Old World.

"People always say, 'How is Norway? How's Lillehammer? How's [Switzerland]? How's [Germany]?', he said. "I tell them I know where every laundromat is in all of these countries. Other than that, there's not a lot of sightseeing."

"So it's pretty cool to travel to other countries—you get a little bit of a taste of what it's like. But for the most part, it's not for the travel component... it's just for the love of sport."

And for his love of country. As his dad said, "everything and anything to beat the Russians."



**WALL OF FAME:** Chiropractor Marc Taczanowski (left) at the 2014 Sochi (Russia) Olympic Games, where he works with the bobsled team.