

### ICSC International Sports Chiro Module 10

### ICSC10\_International Sporting Events Part 2

Instructor Christine Foss & Jon Wilhelm

Video Lesson: 33:50

**Dr Foss:** Dr. Jon Wilhelm is one of my favorited sports chiropractors who has done a multitude of high-level events, and low-level events. Today we will be giving you the opportunity to listen to some of Dr Wilhelm experiences, some of his wisdom and insight being a sports chiropractor internationally, which may help accelerate your success or avoid some of the pitfalls of being a sports chiropractor whilst working at an event. Before we started this lecture, I was talking with Jon about some of the mistakes we both have made.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** When Christine asked me to do this lecture, I was excited about this. I have had some wonderful experiences with FICS and being a sports chiropractor and I am happy to share, and hope what I have to say is helpful to you all.

**Dr Foss:** Now, A little bit more about Jon's background. He has travelled with Team USA to a multitude of events, Bobsled, track and field and Olympics with Team USA. He has travelled internationally and a multitude of consulting work with athletes from all over the globe. He has a lot of insight and wisdom, and he has done a great job at navigating his career and is a good model for us to look forward and appreciate.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** I am looking around for who the person is that you are talking about. But in all seriousness, it has been a wonderful journey and wonderful ride and I want to acknowledge all of us here whether you are in this class listening to Module 10, and people like Christine and myself stand on the shoulders of those who have worked hard before us. No matter what stage you are within your career, you need to remember the people who have created these opportunities for you. There were times that chiropractors could not be at events, had to sneak in the back door of events and athletes had to advocate for us and still, they would not let us come. The wonderful experiences, the people I have met, the places I have gone to, athletes I have helped, and I think Christine would probably feel the same way, those things are special but they are not from our own doing alone and so we carry the torch, and we pass it on. As you sit here and listen to this and if you are a student, it makes tingles go up my back just thinking about the path chiropractic has come, and I hope it does for you too. I am happy to be here.

**Dr Foss:** Yes, you are right, Jon, that is something which is really significant, and we should think about that we are here because of the people before us. Then also, we must think about the athletes that have asked us to be there. They have stood up for chiropractors and a lot of times it is not the administrators or the heads of any sporting federations asking us to be there. It is the athletes speaking up and that is something to be said for our treatment methods and the way the athletes are feeling under our hands, as well as the time and energy that we are putting into the helping them. Well done to all the chiropractors out there on the ground doing good work. Jon, tell us a little bit about your 1st travel experience and what that was like and how you got that opportunity.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Great question. I was 6 or 7 years into practice and unlike many students that know the end from the start, I was just happy to be a chiropractor working in Bozeman, Montana, that is where I grew up. I came back, hung my sign on the door and I was working. I was at a Kinesio Taping seminar and Dr. David Parish, who was teaching the seminar got up and started giving a little bit of his background and he talked about how he had worked with the Paralympic team and the Pan American games.

I remember sitting there, just this small-town chiropractor from Montana going, "Wow, you can do that?" I had no idea. Most of the students in their chairs are ahead of where I was, but I caught him on a break and asked him about it. Don't be afraid to go out of your shell and talk to these people that have done these events, because they want to help you and share. I sat down with him on a break, and he said, "Well, you can go do a volunteer rotation at the Olympic Training Center in the US." That is the road to work with Olympic sport often is to get the qualifications to get certified to do the background checks and there is this whole list of things you need to go through. Anyway, I started on that road and 2 and a half years later, there I was. It was 2013, and I was at the Olympic Training Center, and I thought Christine honestly, to this day, I still remember my thoughts. I did not think, "Oh, if this happens well, then what happens with this?" I just thought, "Oh, my goodness, there is a triathlete, and there is a weightlifter and there is a wrestler." and "I know that person from TV." They tell you, "Do not be a fan and do not ask for autographs." Of course, we were professional, but I got home from that event and, like I said I thought I would just go back to work. A few days after that, I got a message from one of the athletes. We could not exchange phone numbers, we could not ask him for any personal information, but there was Twitter in 2013 and I had followed a bunch on Twitter, they had seen me following them. Anyway, they reached out and said, "We really liked what you did, we think you will be great.", and he was a Bobsledder. He had been a previous gold medallist as a Brakeman, they are the pushers and he said, "We really like you to come on board with us to the World Cup tour. Would you like to?"

I remember dropping my phone and saying yes. Just like Christine was saying earlier, the athlete advocated. He said, "Well, hang on. I know what to do." He was on his way to his 3rd Olympics; he was one of the leaders of the team. He sent a letter to the head medical director and the director of sports and a bunch of important people in the USA Bobsled skeleton and said, "We want Jon Wilhelm, I have done this enough, he has got what we need." That fellow, of course, is really good to me and then I got really scared, like, do I have what they need? But after a few months, I was on my first trip. It was not an international trip because we went to Canada, but it was a North American trip. I went up to Calgary and worked a World Cup for Bobsled. This is the year right before the Sochi Olympics, so as they were leading into Sochi, that was December and then the Olympics would have been in February. Then, we went down to Park City, so we do 2 stops, I was with the team for 2 weeks and I was beside myself excited about how great it was. That was my first trip.

During that time, I remember getting my hands wet, getting my hands dirty, and working with what I knew, but I also watched really closely for what the athletes liked and needed that I could not provide. I remember taking mental notes on that. I was okay to tell them that I did not know something or could not do something, which I think is a mistake and we might get to that later. That some newer younger or people trying to make their way, they try to do more act more than they are. I took notes of what I wear I was deficient. Then that next summer, that next year, I filled the gaps. That was my first trip with them, and the next year, they took me over to Europe and I did my first Intercontinental overseas trip with them, but yes, that is my little story on how I got into it.

**Dr Foss:** That is exciting. You alluded to it a little bit, tell us a little bit about some of the errors you made early on that if you could help somebody avoid, what would they be?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Well, I already touched on it a little bit, Christine. I think you do need to operate with confidence in what you know, but certainly do not purport to be more than what you are, do not try to do more than what you're qualified for, and really fit in as part of the team. Our team consisted of an orthopedic surgeon, several athletic trainers, and one physical therapist, and I was the chiropractor. Even though my skills overlapped sometimes with what the athletic trainer did, they could do the taping, I could do the taping. They could do soft tissue work, I could do soft tissue work. There were areas where they have shown and I have shown and it was not anymore about my ego or my resume, it was about what we could do for the athlete working together. I would say, one of the biggest

mistakes I see is people try to either go too fast into the process and they miss something important because they are just trying to climb the ladder or they try to do things that they should not be doing because they are not qualified or are unsure of. Sometimes, you are going to go into a situation, you just got to do your best. It does not mean you need to hold back and not do what is best for that athlete but do not step on somebody else's toes that are more qualified than you. We are humble enough to learn from them. I think that is really important. Those are a couple of the little things.

Yes, mistakes? I made tons of mistakes, Christine. Do you know what I mean? But nothing big enough where they did not invite me back. I think you must be confident, careful, and considerate, all at the same time. It is really a balance and the chiropractors that excel at this have this social awareness where they understand the circumstances around them, where they fit, and they are willing to fit into that mould until they are asked to do more.

**Dr Foss:** Great, that is great insight because thinking about the different roles you have been in, you had to be different things. If you are with a group like traveling with a physical therapist and athletic trainer, maybe your role is different than when you are by yourself or maybe with a team.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Yes, absolutely, Christine. There are times if I am on contract with an athlete and I am working with him at a training camp for a week or 2. I may be everything right into them, I am doing everything with them, doing rehab and doing soft tissue work, I am doing assessments, movement analysis, functional screens, all sorts of things. There are other times when I have a very specific role within that team and we appreciate communicating with each other but there are times I have to step back even when I think I might do something better or in my own mind, may feel more qualified after you have proven myself. It is okay to take that step back and be part of the team and then realize if they fumbled the ball and they need you to carry it next time and maybe sometimes they would not ever, but you must be okay with that in working in a team. You do not have to be the Michael Jordan all the time, sometimes, you got to pull down the rebounds and be Dennis Rodman, that is it.

**Dr Foss:** Going along those lines, what skills do you think are the most important for a sports chiropractor to attain early on? What would you say should be their foundational skills? Things that you cannot travel or go without.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** I think that the skill that will move you forward the most is your ability to communicate and that takes time to develop, and I think if you rush that, if you are new in practice and you never give a good report of findings or have a rapport with your own patients, you will really struggle with an elite athlete population, with interacting with coaches and other providers. I always say my answer for this is 100% communication, your ability to communicate to let the athletes know and to understand, so communication is a two-way street. Most of it is listening not always talking. I think that is number 1 and then I am always a proponent and I have told students that have asked me this or other chiropractors that want to do similar things. Something that I have learned along the way is what you know, gets you to the first door and usually opens it. So, for instance, these modules get you a certificate, once you test and learn those, that will open some doors for you.

So that is what you knew. Then the relationships you have, you could say, who you know, but really the late relationships you can foster, open the remainder of the doors because, at a certain point, you get where everybody is really smart and really good and has a lot of initials behind their names. The thing that separates is typically personality and your ability to communicate. So those would be the things, Christine, I would say that are really important, both of those.

**Dr Foss:** You know what? I am surprised you said that but in reflecting on it, you are 100% accurate and even thinking about the smartest doctors that maybe the valedictorians of the class, they did not have the ability to communicate to be successful in practice and I think that carries over as you said,

just having that ability, if you do not have it in practice to communicate with an athlete is just another level higher than that, too so I think you are exactly right.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Thank you, Christine. Yes, I mean there could be lots of answers about which techniques and things like that.

**Dr. Foss:** Tell us then, when you travel with the team, what do you pack in your kit? What is your go-to items that are in your travel kit?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Yes, that is a great question. I wish I knew this from the start because, on the first trip, I probably took way too much, a whole extra suitcase with all these things I did not need. I have pared it down to a little low pro camera bag. By the way, here is a little tip, I love those camera bags because they are really sturdy, they are made to protect expensive camera equipment. I have a little bag that works with the backpacks, got a rain fly on it, and I will always use it to carry my IT instrument assisted tool, whether it is a Graston tool, or a factor tool, or the other tools you may carry.

I have cups in there because like decompression of myofascial techniques, I have floss bands in there, I have my dry needles with my electric stim pointer and the clips with the portable stim unit in there as well. I carry an assortment of tapes. Now, I do not carry 30 rolls of each because it is just not viable. Most of the teams I am with, they have totes, they have some things with them, but if I am in a situation, I like to have the tools with me that I like. I carry 2-inch and 3-inch dynamic tape, both in the regular and in the strong black color. I carry kinesiology tape, I like rock tape, nothing against any of the other tapes. Katie makes a good one, all these other ones make good ones, too, but I like rock tape, the best for me. Then, I always carry a little bit of bass and Leuko tape for rigid taping if I have to do an SPRT, or a tadpole, or something like that. What else do I have in my kit? Usually 2 tools. Yes, that is the majority of the tools that I bring with me, those are the base in my kit. You might see another 1 or 2 things that are more specific sport dependent, but I feel like that gets me most of what I need. My best tool are my hands. I think for a chiropractor means hand. If I feel like if I lost my kit, I would still be okay because I have my hands.

But I like having those other things. Certainly, where I can and where I need it, if it is not there, I like to carry my own portable table. There is a comfort with that, it is the right size, sturdiness, and height. Christine and I were in Austria together and I brought a table, and Christine had a table assigned to her. Christine comments were, "this monstrosity of a terrible table" but my table was good as it was my own. We still laugh about that experience to this day. I am going to track it down and give it to Christine as a holiday gift, which I am still going to try to do. But I like the chiro lux table, a portable table. It was the Astra light before, that one has gone with me around the world, several times to lots of different countries. If I need something a little more rigid, I use an arson table. Those are my choices, there are lots of good choices that are better sports chiropractors than me may use something else, but those are what I like.

**Dr Foss:** Tell us about when you travel with the team, what does your day look like? You are assigned a team. Rather than talking about a large event, let us talk about a regular event. What is your schedule, what can they expect, because they are traveling out with a team for the first time?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Yes, really great question because I did not know this when I went in for my first trip. I showed up at the airport in Calgary for that very first assignment, and I did not even know who I was supposed to meet, it was terrible communication like I got there having to catch somebody out of the corner of my eye I recognized and latched onto them, but that is a really good question, Christine.

Number 1, expect to work. Now, there are different levels of that. Sometimes, you are surprised in the assignments are easy and you have a half day off here and there and it is not too demanding. More

often, you are at an event, and you are up early, whether you are an early riser or not, that does not matter because there is breakfast to eat, transportation to go somewhere, and training to happen, typically. Sometimes the days are long, where you are eating lunch out or you are packing something with you, preparing for a second training session. Maybe you have mixed groups, and the females are going and then the males after that, and then get ready for treatments where those may be in the morning, those may be an afternoon, often in the evening.

Most athletes like to get their treatments in the evening before they go to bed, which can mean you treat after dinner from 6 P.M. until 8 P.M. or it could be until midnight. There have been a lot of days where I have started up at 6:00 and the last treatment at 11:30 P.M. No, fortunately, they are not all like that, it is not a prison sentence, but understand that you are going to work and usually that work is a lot more than the remuneration you are going to get, or often, you are doing it for free to move sports chiropractic forward, move your relationship forward.

A normal day would be, to get up, have a morning training session, have an afternoon training session, or lift or whatever, it is different with different athletes and sports, of course, and then evening treatments until who knows when usually about 10 P.M. There are long days, we always say that the days are long, but the weeks are fast when you are on tour because seems like you are up, and up, and up, and go, go, go, but then you look back and two weeks flew by just like that.

**Dr Foss:** When you are traveling with a team, you are going to all the practices and all the lifts with them so you are in full contact with that team for the day, is that how you have found it works for you?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Typically, so yes however sometimes, it varies. If they have a sprint coach and if you are splitting assignments with another provider, say an athletic trainer, you will divide up those duties, and we will have to do them all, but sometimes, you do them. A full schedule would include all of those things. There may be days where you just go to morning training, you do not go to the lift or the sprint session and then you will do treatments in the evening. I will also be clear, and this is if we go back to the mistakes I have seen providers make, do not expect that you are going to be in the Czech Republic and you get two days off to explore Prague, just as an example.

Sometimes, it works out really nice and you have a half-day or a day to enjoy the sights and some of the neat things around you, I have had some of those experiences. I have had more experiences where I go to a lovely place and did not get to see anything like that. You just see the venue and the hotel, the training center, the hotel, and back and forth, but you still get the experience of driving to a place, going to the airport and seeing the beauty around you and interacting with the people and eating the food and all those experiences. Sometimes, you get that day off where you can go explore and enjoy but don't go with that expectation and never ask for that. Nothing upsets the providers that have proven themselves and given their time more than another provider who is new that comes in and says, "When do we get to ski for a day?" Do not be that person. It is just not the etiquette; it does not represent you or the profession well. You are not there for vacation; you are there for the athletes and for the teams that you are with. That is something I have learned along the way, not because I asked for that, I never did, thank goodness but I saw people make that mistake.

**Dr Foss:** Can you compare that to working at a large-scale event like the Olympics? What was that experience like in contrast to traveling with the team internationally?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** First, it is like the greatest thing ever, and I have been fortunate to work at World Sport Games, The World Games but the Olympic games, it is just everything times 10. You are more hours at training, there is more interaction, there is more stimulus all around you, and you are wanting to soak in the experience so you are staying up later to grab an hour or two where you can explore this or go out, and go outside the village, or see things that even in the cafeteria or wherever you are at and

interact with new people. I would say the demands when I was at the Olympic games in Pyeongchang in South Korea, a couple of years ago, were all the more. We worked more hours, there were more days where I had less sleep even than when I was on World Cup tour or doing these other big events, but you did not feel it because there was so much excitement in the air. It was not like, you are crying because you were too tired, but there are more demands and there are more demands, just mentally. I would say physically, it is about the same. There might be a few more hours of training or a few more assignments but mentally, there is more load on everybody. There is more stress on everybody and if you can have that awareness and be a person that is a giver at that point, not sucking from the team, or the athletes, or the coaches. Because look, I have said this before, be somebody that you would want to travel with. If you're, "I am cold, I don't like the food, I am hungry, I am so tired.", and then you are telling this to athletes, any negativity, even though if I might be honest, which you are sometimes cold, tired, hungry, ready for a nap, and want to go home. Even at great events, if you are just saying that and putting that energy out there, that takes away something from somebody. So if you can understand that, and be just the opposite where you are like, "Wow, we are ready to go. It is 6:00 A.M. and let us get some coffee." I mean, people like that, being somebody, you would want to travel with, I think is a really important thing.

**Dr Foss:** Do you think everybody is liking the 6 A.M. pep talk, though?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** No, that is actually a really good point, Christine, because there are certain athletes you would never say that to. That is in general. I would say err on the side of that energy rather than moving down to breakfast and saying, "I slept terrible. I am so tired; do we have to go to training today?" I would say it in general, you have that social awareness of who you can fire up and who you cannot. But yes, that is not for everybody, that super energy bit, but some it is and that fires them up, too, so you understand who that is, that is part of your job and give what they need to them.

**Dr Foss:** Yes, that is a great device. Is there some advice you can give to a young new doctor or even a doctor that is just getting into treating athletes on how to connect with a team? How would you say even if it is somebody in their town or locally, what would you say would be the steps that you would do retrospectively to try to start securing your career being a sports chiropractor?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Do not be afraid to start from the bottom up and I did that. Often, we think, "I got to get in with that NTAA school that is down the road.", but really you might start with a small high school, that is what I did to get my requirements to work at the training center, going back to that after I talked with Dr. Parrish at the seminar, I volunteered for small Amsterdam, Montana. This is a Class C school in Montana and they graduate about 40 in their graduating class and that is the team I volunteered with, but I was their everything. I was in the training room twice a week, I was a sideline for volleyball, basketball, all sorts of different sports, track, and field. I travelled with them.

One of the teams won a state championship in class C. I mean that was huge for them and I was part of that. How had I secured that? I talk to people, I was not afraid to go talk to the athletic director or to know that, oh, this patient is a potato farmer, but he knows all the people there so maybe he can leverage that and help me with that.

I would say, do not assume you have to start at the top and have a gleaming resume, right away. Be okay with being at the ground floor level, you will probably get better experiences where you do not have your hands in your pockets as much, you have your hands on people when you are willing to start from a lower level. Pay your dues and then when you finally get to touch an Olympian or the highest-level athletes, you have seen that thing 50, 100, or 1000 times and you are confident with it rather than, "I shot up the ladder but I do not know what I am doing.", and then you maybe flub your opportunity. I would say that you can do it and get in on the ground floor, just by talking to people and not being afraid. Somebody told me once, "Do not be afraid to make the ask.", and that really

resonated with me. So do not be afraid to get yourself out there and make the ask, usually your patients know somebody who knows.

**Dr Foss:** One final question. We have heard a lot in the media about doctor-patient relationships and problems, how would you or what is your advice to best navigate that? Setting boundaries on your time to treating until 11:00 or 12:00 at night and trying to be flexible with the team, trying to be there for the athletes but also trying to set professional boundaries. Sometimes, when you are traveling with the team, you are with them for two weeks, then you are all immersed. What would be your advice in that instance?

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Yes, this is a really important question because this is something that, when you travel with a team you really do have to learn to navigate and it is also a changing playing field where the rules are changing, the etiquette is changing, something, maybe that was acceptable like treating out of your own hotel room in 2013, absolutely, is not now. Making sure that you are aware of what the standards are in the country you are treating for safe sport or in whatever country you are in and also the expectations of those athletes.

I have been at events where a female athlete was treated outside. For instance, when we were in Poland at the World games, and working track and field, and you go to assess a shoulder and maybe, a female Italian athlete, who is maybe has a different expectation of privacy, just wants to take her shirt right off and that would not happen, usually with our American athletes. You have to be able to stop that from happening and let them know your boundaries as a provider as well. I think the important thing is navigating about that again. Have an awareness of what the expectation is, what the rules are, what the law says, listen. Then, you should let that guide you but deeper than that, you should have an integrity within yourself. We are professionals. We say an oath to not harm, and I think if we put somebody in a compromising situation, an athlete, especially a youth athlete, that harms them.

So, avoid the appearance of impropriety, communicate well, obviously, have treatments that are viewable and interruptible, so an open door, a number of people in there. I have navigated this a lot because I have worked with USA Gymnastics, USA Track and Field, Bobsled Skeleton, and obviously, there are different etiquettes between each of those and then, there are times on the road internationally and I may be working with a female speed skater, just one-on-one at a training camp and so I have to keep the similar boundaries and ask them what their expectations are. But beyond what they communicate, I have to hold my own compass. Each student that is watching this has to have personal integrity as a professional and be able to hold their own arrow on their own compass and not deviate from that because you are not just holding that for yourself, it is most important that you do that for yourself, but you are holding it for the rest of us, too.

They are going to put, "Chiropractor, does something." you know what I mean? or "Sports chiropractor does something inappropriate." So, that represents us all. I think that is the most important thing, that I have learned through all of that and you will get put in some situations where you just have to be in touch with your own integrity, not question that have resolved about that and it is not like every day is uncomfortable with that. It is just now, especially in our time, in our society, you must have an awareness about that. But you can still have fun and be professional. You can still have a great time and navigate these things, but there is a time to really know where you are centering your core is, and before you ever get on the road with the team, you should know what that is.

**Dr Foss:** I think that is great advice, Jon. Understanding that there are cultural differences of privacy as you alluded to is something, as you start to travel internationally, seeing, you know, some cultures are, they do have a different expectation of privacy and understanding that culture before you travel, is important. Know where you are going, know what people accept - socially acceptable and what is not

socially acceptable is something may be worthwhile to investigate before you travel somewhere and have a hard time.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Do a little homework. If I know I am going to a new country, so I am selected to go to the World Sport games in Italy, one of the first things that we did with FICS, I tried to study and learn how to say, "Can you lay face up? Face down? Turn right. Turn left." I thought about the things that I would say so I tried to learn it in the native tongue. Now, we ran into 25 different languages so that worked for just Italian. I think what you are talking about, just that social awareness, whether it is with boundaries and privacy issues with communication, or with expectations, have an understanding of the sport you are going to work and not that you have to have deep knowledge. You are going to learn more than more you do but have a basic understanding of how to navigate those situations and you will do so much better and you will have more fun because you are less stressed. I love to have fun, but I do my research before I get there, too, and that allows some of the stress to go away.

**Dr Foss:** Yes. Well, those are all my questions, Jon and I just want to say thank you so much for coming and helping all the students navigate the water and hopefully, avoid some of the errors that our predecessors and we also made, as we were starting out on this, trying to give them a foothold as we elevate our profession, and that is really the whole concept here. Thank you for being so great, for what you do and for being a good model for sports chiropractors, internationally. I appreciate it.

**Dr. Wilhelm:** Well, thank you, Christine. I really appreciate that, and I want to say to all the students, look at what you are getting into, I think the best profession in the world and especially in the specialty of sports chiropractic, you are going to be able to see and do some wonderful things to help athletes achieve that there is nothing to me better than that. You are really in the right place. I want to thank you, Christine, you said at the start that I was one of your favorited sports chiropractors. Well, I do not want this to seem disingenuous, but you really are not only one of my favourite people, and you are a great mentor for these students to follow.

There are lots of good mentors out there so if I can be helpful to any of you students, please search me out, I would be happy to help you. I am happy to do this, and I hope it was helpful in some way,

[END]