

in the circle

with Michele Smith

The Olympic Experience from 30 Rock



During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for the first time ever, NBC decided to establish an Olympic Broadcasting Center at their home Headquarters in New York City. While some broadcasters did travel to China to report on the games, most of us were camped out at Rockefeller Center, or "30 Rock." It seems like I have received just as many emails and messages asking me about what it was like to be the Softball Analyst for the Olympic Games as I have about the games themselves!

A typical day for me was to arrive at 'work' at 9:30 p.m. and swing by the cafeteria for some fruit (and coffee!) and then head straight to the hair and makeup department. Although we were 'audio only' for the actual games, the idea was for me to be ready to go on camera if there was a rain delay, a short game or, basically, time to fill. During those times, I would be rushed upstairs to the main studio for short interviews. On those nights when I didn't have to go in front of the cam-

eras, I felt kind of silly sitting there in full makeup and wardrobe. But, like my manager reminded me, I was in relief! Ready to be called up if I was needed.

The broadcast booths were actually set up on the Saturday Night Live sound stage. It was amazing to see how a sound stage with so much comedic history could be transformed into a sports broadcasting center. Basically, they set up about a dozen mini sound proof booths across the stage. Each booth could accommodate two people and each one was assigned a different sport. Any of the Olympic sports that were aired on the NBC cable channels (CNBC, MSNBC or USA Network) were broadcast out of NYC.

Almost all of the USA Softball games were played at 12 noon Beijing time. So, that meant the games went live here in the U.S. at 12 midnight EST. (I have a new respect for anyone working the night shift!) But, there was much to do before we

actually started calling the games. There was always the possibility that the game being played before the USA game would go long. Because of that, my broadcast partner, Joe Castellano, and I would get settled into our booth early to watch and study the preceding games. We had to go 'live' at midnight no matter what, so we had to be prepared to pick up the coverage of those games if necessary. In other words, Joe and I spent a lot of time in our little booth.

Throughout the night, we were receiving many pages of information and stats from both of the teams playing. Because we were not in Beijing, we were never positive that changes were not being made at the last minute. So, we would wait for line up cards from both teams and 'guess' at their respective line ups and put that information in our score books. Most times we 'guessed' correctly, but a couple of times the eraser had to come out. Doing your homework and keeping up with all of the information that is needed during a broadcast is definitely challenging. It is also a little confusing to be talking and writing at the same time--especially when it is an exciting game!

At midnight EST, the game would finally start and it was all about Team USA and their opponents. NBC was very adamant that as professional broadcasters, we were to call a neutral game. In other words, we are Americans and were broadcasting to an American audience, but we had to be neutral and not 'cheer' or call the game with a bias towards one team or the other. Therefore, no 'we,' no 'us'...stay in the middle, stay neutral and just report the game. I have to say that at times it was VERY difficult to be neutral after having played for Team USA for 12 years and in two Olympic Games!

When the USA game was over, it was time to rap up with my broadcast team, get some advice from our producer Jennie Silverstein and, finally,





head back to the hotel. I usually got back to the hotel and to bed by 3 a.m. On a couple of nights, due to rain-outs, or rain make-ups, I did not get to bed until after 4 a.m. For someone who is in training and values sleep, the schedule was a killer! Also, it was impossible to fall asleep right away. My brain was too active from digesting so much information and my body was awake from walking back to the hotel along the exciting streets of NYC.

I tried to sleep for 6 to 7 hours each morning and then it was up and off to Central Park for some pitching. My pro season was starting back up in a week and I needed to be game ready; so that meant I had to pitch. A good friend and wonderful ballplayer, Kristen Havdoglous, would ride the train in from Long Island every day to catch for me. It was amazing to be in the middle of NYC throwing in Central Park! Even more amazing was to see how much softball is played in Central Park every day--at all times of the day. I think that is the best part of the city!

I am sure you know by now that Team USA turned out a phenomenal performance and dominated throughout most of the Olympic Games. They were on fire! Unfortunately, they suffered a very disappointing loss to Team Japan in the final game to win the silver medal. All of the teams, especially the USA, Australia and Japan, have been working very hard over the past eight years to build a winning team and they should all be congratulated for their efforts. It's important to remember that no matter how good a team is, it is very difficult to beat the same team three times in one event--especially when we are talking about the best teams in the world! Team USA was without a doubt the best team in the Games. They won 2 of the 3 meetings with Japan and simply lost at the wrong time.

Team USA has worked very hard to represent our country and I am proud of the way they did it...not just in Beijing, but all year long. The color of a medal will not change that. The journey for them began in September of 2007 and ran all the way through the Olympic Games. They all sacrificed a lot to be out on that field and I am thankful for the way they represented the sport and the program. I could not be more proud to be a Team USA Alumni. Winning an Olympic medal is something very few people will ever have the opportunity--or ability--to experience; and my hope is that every member of Team USA Softball knows that America is proud of our team! Go Team USA!

• Keep up with Michele as she finishes up the Japan Pro League season, cheer on the Toyota team, check out the Michele Smith Holiday Camp dates, grab a Rip-It bat, pick up a DVD or one of Michele's new books, or better YET, get your Christmas list going early, both for the joy of giving and receiving for all the favorite fastpitch players on your list!

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