

# The Olympics: From the other side of the camera

*Editor's note: Farmington resident Duane Carling spent two weeks helping NBC cover the Olympics. Here's his eyewitness report from the side of the camera the viewers never see.*

**BY DUANE CARLING**

*Special to the Clipper*

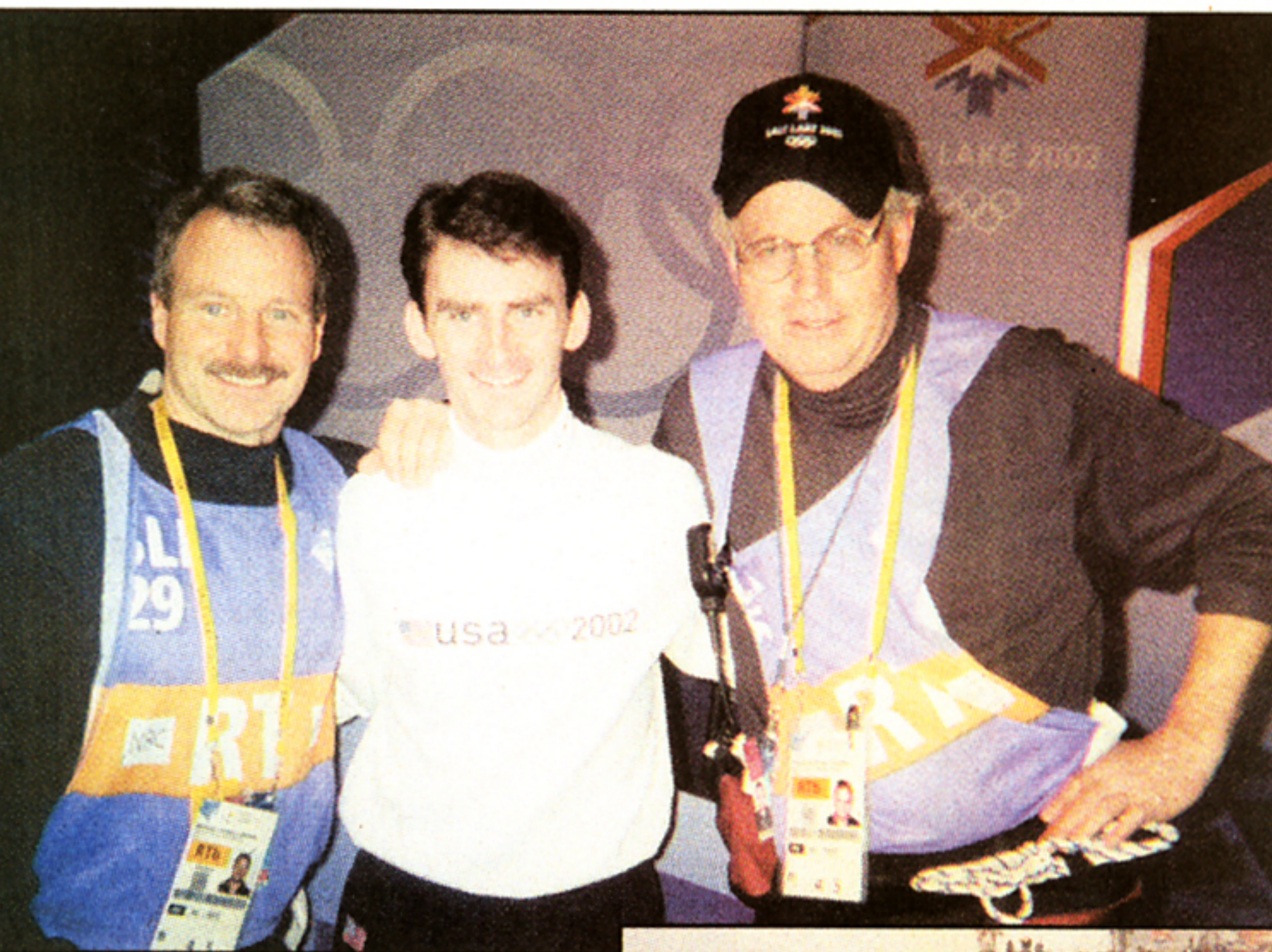
"Would you like to work on the Olympics for NBC?" A friend of mine knew the construction business was slow, and offered a phone number in New York that I could call to perhaps get a four-week job as a "utility" person pulling cables for NBC during the Olympics.

"Sure" was the answer, and thus started a new adventure for my son Michael and I. When we arrived at the Salt Palace, which had been totally transformed and was now known as the International Broadcast Center (IBC) I couldn't believe my eyes. What used to be a wide open exhibit space was now packed with offices, cafeterias, TV studios and control rooms, temporary air-conditioning ducts, power cables, and everything else necessary to bring an Olympic games to the entire world. The IBC had its own ZIP code, and was the 12th largest city in Utah. Our credentials had been sent to us from New York, and as we checked in we saw a Secret Service agent sent away to get his credential upgraded. This was going to be different.

Michael was assigned to the prime-time set with Bob Costas, where the main show was coordinated with live feeds from all the venues, live and taped commentary, and celebrity visits. I left for Rice-Eccles Stadium to practice with the camera men for the Opening Ceremonies. What we thought would be pulling electric cables through buildings and across fields was actually pulling video and sound cable behind cameramen.

Somehow I never imagined that shooting film at an event would require practice. During the final dress rehearsal, we plotted camera angles, "throwing" the shot from one camera to another and the general logistics of making about 15 cameras transport the viewer seamlessly into the heart of the action.

On the night of the opening we all dressed in black with hoods and face masks to become invisible to the camera, and I was assigned to Andy Allman, who with the lead cameraman Ken Woo and two other cameramen would cover President Bush and the celebrities on the field with hand-held cameras. Talk about a great seat! NBC estimated as many as



four billion people would see the show. That's more people than were on the earth when I was born.

President Bush came out to declare the Games open, and our little group was visited by six Secret Service agents who stood right in front of us and said "Don't anyone put your hands in your pockets." Yes sir. I guess we did look a little suspicious.

One of our camera operators told me later he had been on a stage with President Bush when a part of the set fell on the other side of the stage. He started to run toward the sound and a Secret Service agent grabbed him and said, "Don't do that!" When the operator asked why not, the agent said "Look at your chest." When he looked down there were five red dots of light from sniper scopes.

The closing shot as we were going off the air was Andy's. It was of a small boy about six-years-old dressed in boots and a cowboy hat, walking away from us with the Olympic flame in the background. Most camera shots only lasted a few seconds, but this one stayed a long time.

The next morning we all assembled at the Delta Center to begin coverage of the short-track and ice-skating events. The director told us NBC had guaranteed the advertisers a 179 share, which means 179 percent of sets in the country would be tuned to the Opening, and we got a "in the mid 20's." He told us "Keep getting those 'money shots'" and looked right at Andy. That afternoon the president of NBC flew out to Salt Lake and showed up on the prime-time set, bring-

not easy trying to be in the right place at the right time in a building the size of the Delta Center. Crowds, security, and all the physical obstacles get in the way of getting the shot you want. I was tired after each 12-hour day. Ice skating and speed skating controversies filled the news, resulting in increased "share ratings" and more happiness at NBC.

The morning of the women's figure skating competition, our director assembled the whole crew in the lunch room to give a little talk. The women's program typically draws more audience than even the opening ceremonies. David Michaels was the director for our venue. He is the brother of Al Michaels, the commentator for NFL football games.

David was hired especially for this event and has too many



**NBC'S "BROWNIE,"** figure skater Todd Eldridge and Duane Carling pose at the "Kiss and Cry" set (top photo) where skaters go to await their scores. Above, NBC crew poses for posterity before going on the air.

ing New York cheesecake and congratulations for everyone.

One day, my son Michael called my cell phone to say Conan O'Brien was taping on his set. The next day, Mike called to say he was working and suddenly the set felt different. One wall of the stage is solid glass with all monitors and directors on the other side. Mike turned around and President Hinckley and "about 12 men in suits" were in the studio observing the show. The day was different for everyone after that.

As the week went on, I worked hand-held cameras with different cameramen, and without exception everyone thanked me for helping them do their jobs. It's

awards to list. He is described variously as "legendary," "visionary," and many other superlatives. He told us we were averaging a 19.3 share, which is almost 20 percent better than CBS did with the 1998 Winter Games.

After appropriate applause, he got very serious and said "This is a once-in-a-TV-lifetime event. What we are doing here is art. I had a meeting with NBC in Park City last night, and told them I didn't want any commercials interrupting the last 30 minutes of the women's finals. They called the Mother Ship in New York and then called and told me yes/no/yes/no at least six times while I drove back to Salt Lake.

"This morning there was a note under the door of my hotel room door saying "YES." You are each hand-picked and the best there is. With all the moving parts it takes to do this, from tape to cameras to audio, everything, this project has run on greased rails. But more than that, there is something different about this. There is a love here that comes through on the screen. I have done lots of projects, but I am especially proud to be part of this one."

After that talk and on the way into the arena I asked some of the camera operators if they felt that way, if there was something different about this assignment. Each one said "yes," that normally at this stage of an event, there was fighting, back-stabbing, blame-placing, and everyone was sick of work and anxious to go home. This was definitely different. They were looking forward to home or their next assignment, but were sad to see everyone split up.

Sarah Hughes won the gold that night. If there was ever a sweeter more loveable gold medalist I don't know who it would be. Camera-pro Mike Brown ("Brownie") has developed a friendship with her, and after the final skater's score was in he was at the right place at the right time to tell her, "You got it." He got the shot of Sarah falling off the locker-room bench into her coach's arms, that the whole world saw. Brownie's voice came over the area, and the camera operator became the writer.

We drew a 26.8 share that night and NBC threw a small party for us. USA Today said this was the best TV Olympics coverage ever and Brownie was interviewed on the Access Hollywood show. No one could remember a camera man ever being on the other side of the camera, and we all gave him a hard time about being a movie star. Great guy, and a real artist.

The next night the skaters did exhibition skating. The Russian and American co-gold medalists skated a foursome together, and everyone watched in awe while Sarah skated a tribute to the 9-11 victims. When the lights were dimmed and the whole cast took the ice, I believed for one shining moment that there really could be love and harmony in the world, and maybe there was something different happening here.

The director of most of "my" camera men left right after the skating. I was transferred to the IBC to help dismantle it. The Games are over, and now it's back to the real world. It was a great experience for Michael and me, and whether NBC will ever call us again, I don't know.

But they do have my number.