



Media operations: the keys to success in Nagano

by Ko Yamaguchi*



Fifty thousand spectators and the finest winter athletes in the world joined together in singing the chorus to the nostalgic Japanese folk ballad *Furusato* (“Hometown”), while lighted paper lanterns swung in the darkness after the Olympic flame had been extinguished. A magnificent display of 5,000 fireworks followed, and the Nagano Olympic Winter Games were over. It was only then that I allowed myself to feel satisfaction and relief for a job well done.

I have had time to reflect since then, and I am now convinced that the XVIII Olympic Winter Games were truly a great success, beyond many people’s expectations. Though they lasted only 16 days, the Nagano Winter Olympic Games were the culmination of years of hard work and dedicated effort, and without the support and encouragement of the International Olympic Committee and many people around the world and throughout Japan, they would not have been such a success.

But the reputation of an edition of the Olympic Games can be made or broken by the written press, and I believe that all of the nearly 3,000 members of the world press working out of the Main Press Centre (MPC) were very content and more than satisfied with their coverage and their stay in Nagano. One of my friends, a member of the IOC Press Commission who works for a world news agency, wrote to me after the Games: “It was a real pleasure to work in the MPC. It was a facility worthy of the Summer Games. Your staff and all the volunteers were really helpful and demonstrated the utmost kindness. This is an example for future Games.” IOC Executive Board member and Press Commission chairman Richard Kevan Gosper commented that, “the IOC Press Commission is very

pleased with the wonderful relationship we have shared with NAOC, and thankful for all the hard work that went into preparations for the media. In particular, the MPC was perfect.”

High praise indeed!

More than 3,700 athletes and officials from 72 NOCs, 1.44 million spectators, 8,300 media staff and 32,000 volunteers participated in the Nagano Games, helping to make these the biggest Winter Games ever. To assist the press in their coverage activities, the MPC featured a common working room with 600 seats; an image centre for photo services; 74 dedicated offices for news organizations, the IOC, NOCs, and OCOGs; a 24-hour cafeteria seating 400, including a bar area; a main press conference room (600-seat theatre); a sub press conference room (60 seats); two meeting/interview rooms (50 seats each); parking for 600 vehicles; and three lines for security check to effectively reduce congestion at the entrance, including use of bar-code scanners: X-ray equipment, and metal detectors.

A total of more than 300 press conferences were held during the Nagano Games, including 143 held at the MPC alone. I myself held 48 briefings, for an average of three per day.

Nagano Olympic News Agency (NAONA)

NAONA, the official agency of the Nagano Games, provided quick and comprehensive information to the media, members of the Olympic family, Games operations staff, spectators, and the general public via Info’98 terminals, the Olympic Newspaper, and Olympic Radio. The Info’98 intranet computer network was accessible through 1,000 terminals located in the MPC and SPCs, IBC, IOC hotels, and competition venues. Info’98 was accessed a total of 7,455,252 times, with the most popular sections being information on results (2,422,025 hits), followed by biographical information (1,514,298 hits), and news information (1,436,070 hits). The news section carried 2,338 articles in English, 1,971 in French, and 2,195 in Japanese.

NAONA also published the official Olympic daily, *Nagano’98*, with independently edited French, English, and Japanese features and articles.

Other information technology highlights included: a Video on Demand (VOD) service which provided quick and easy access to video footage of events, ceremonies, and press conferences for those who could not be there in person. The official NAOC Internet home page set world records for number of access hits to an event website, including total number of hits (650 million during the 16 days of the Nagano Games, number of hits in one day (56.8 million), and a peak of 100,000 hits per minute.



Work room in the Main Press Centre (MPC).

According to a survey conducted at the MPC, 84% of users rated the information and press services as “Excellent” or “Very Good”, and only 1% of the replies were negative.

Of course, not everything was smooth sailing, and when I joined NAOC as Head

of Media last April with just over 300 days to go until the Games, there were four areas of concern that I identified as needing particular and immediate attention. These were:

- a lack of information and awareness about the Nagano Games internationally;

- the necessity of creating an Olympic News Agency and information system that could efficiently deliver accurate results, news, and information quickly in three languages;

- a need to speed up the bureaucratic process at NAOC when dealing with the IOC and international news agencies;

- a need to instil flexibility into the organization so that it would be able to cope with any and all situations,

Flexibility: the key to success

With the support and effort of so many here at NAOC, and with the invaluable advice and encouragement given by our friends in the international media, I am proud that we did such a good job of resolving these issues. To give an example, during the Games we experienced difficulties with spectator and media transportation to Hakuba caused by the weather and changes in competition scheduling. In response, we were able to rush additional buses into service, extend shuttle bus hours at the Media Villages. reroute traffic, and deal with the problem in a prompt and positive way. This flexibility contributed to the smooth running of the Games, but we should not forget that this was only possible due to the rock-solid organizational base that NAOC had created in its six years of preparation,

In addition to a lifetime of memories, the citizens of Nagano have gained much more from these Olympic Games: splendid new facilities, a blossoming of the volunteer spirit, the know-how to stage world-class events, and many friends around the world. This is all part of the Olympic legacy that will be passed on to the next generation. For myself, the next issue to consider is how to transfer this experience and knowledge to the Sydney Games in 2000, and the Salt Lake City Games in 2002.

*Head of Media, Organizing Committee for the XVIII Olympic Winter Games in Nagano (NAOC).



Photographers braving the snow in Nagano.