Olympic Role

This past summer while the Olympics were being viewed on televisions around the country, and across the world, there was a University of Minnesota, Crookston connection that most would be unaware of. This connection came in the form of Alumnus Brock Anundson.

Anundson, a 2005 sport and recreation management graduate, has been working in operations with the United States Olympic Committee at the U.S. Olympic Complex in Colorado Springs since January 2011. The complex is an expansive, 34-acre training center used to train Olympic athletes and teams from the U.S.A. and other countries around the world. The facility is laid out much like a college campus, built on an old Air Force base, the complex includes five residence halls, a dining hall, an aquatic center, two sports centers with nine gymnasiums, an Olympic shooting center, and many other athletic training facilities. Here Anundson works as programs coordinator/operations specialist, in this position he sets up what is needed for athletes to come on the complex to train for their given sport or event. From where they will stay and what they will eat to when to where they will do their training, the operations department plans it all using the information given to them by the athletes. “The operations department is the core of everything that goes on; we are the center of it all,” he says. “When anyone wants to come on complex they have to go through us to make it happen.”

As is usually the case, Anundson started out small with the U.S. Olympic Committee, joining the team initially as an operations intern where he assisted a few program coordinators while learning the ropes. He credits networking with getting him into his current position. He first heard about the internship opportunity from a classmate in graduate school at the University of Colorado at Denver where he graduated in 2011 with a Masters of Business Administration in international business, marketing, and sports and entertainment management. “With the sports industry itself, networking is almost more important than what you know. You need to know your stuff, but you also need to know who can help you out,” Anundson explains. “It wasn’t until I was in and working on the complex that I realized how competitive it was to get in. I was definitely in the right place at the right time.”

Hockey has been a big factor in the path Anundson’s career has taken. Originally from Baudette, Minn., Anundson started playing hockey as a five-year-old and kept playing as he grew up. He even played junior hockey for awhile before deciding that pursuing a college education would become more of an advantage for his future. This decision led him to the U of M, Crookston in 2001 to play hockey as a Golden Eagle while earning a bachelor’s degree in sport and recreation management with a coaching minor.

During the fall his junior year at the U of M, Crookston Anundson met Kalene Verhulst, a freshmen soccer player, and the two began dating that winter. At the end of that year Kalene transferred from the Crookston campus to nursing school at Regis University in Colorado. The two continued with a long distance relationship for a year and a half until Anundson graduated and also moved to Denver. The pair was married on August 15, 2009. Kalene is currently employed as an Oncology Nurse at the University of Colorado Hospital and will receive a master’s degree in Nursing Education in December.

In Denver, Anundson decided to test the waters of his hockey career and signed with the minor league hockey team, the Colorado Eagles. Soon he decided to get into the sports field rather than playing and took a job working stadium operations and security with the Denver Broncos. During this time, Anundson was also working at Dakota
Ridge High School in Littleton, Colo., as the head hockey coach, and later the assistant athletic director and eventually started working on his M.B.A. at University of Colorado at Denver.

With so much exposure to the athletes and everything Olympics, Anundson says he has become a bit disillusioned with the public images of those he works with on a day-to-day basis. “When Michael Phelps was training at the complex, I would see him two to three times a day just helping him out with anything he needed,” he reflects. “The same thing I would do with any of the other athletes training here. Later I’d turn the TV on and see a commercial for some random thing and there those athletes are again. I don’t tend to relate them to what they are promoting. When I am working with them every day, it is easy to forget that around Olympic time these athletes really become stars.”

Working with these athletes is Anundson’s favorite part of the job, “I use the lessons I learned at UMC when working with the athletes because I have actually been in their shoes at the amateur level, and I think applying personal experiences to others helps the athletes out by giving them shortcuts and making their experience more positive.”

Though Anundson helped play a pivotal role in the training of many of the athletes that competed in the 2012 Summer Olympic Games he wasn’t in London to watch them live. “Only half the department goes, the rest stay back to take care of the things still going on around the center,” he explains. Anundson also had his own excitement at home; he and his wife are expecting their first child in November. “It has definitely been an exciting few months, but you better believe I’ll be in the crowd at the next Olympics!” he laughs.