

Games Journeyman

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Finding out who is fastest, strongest, highest, farthest and most accurate is the bottom line in sports events such as the Commonwealth Games. Branimir Rokvic, an American who specializes in obtaining, recording and reporting sports results brings to New Delhi his experience from five Olympics and other international sports events.

Branimir Rokvic calls himself a journeyman, moving from one destination to another as an information technology specialist for a new multiple-sports event every few years.

Currently in New Delhi on a half-year assignment for the Commonwealth Games, Rokvic, an American, is head of the team that delivers the results to officials and the media.

"The challenge is to prepare systems ahead of the Games, to have the technology ready to respond to the needs during competition. When the events get under way, we seek to make it a routine exercise," says Rokvic.

"It's been a charmed life and a great experience. I like going to live in new cities and countries," says Rokvic, popularly known as Brano in the sports technology fraternity.

His home is Colorado Springs, in Colorado, where the mountain air and scenery are reminiscent of his birthplace, Sarajevo. That's where he worked on his first games, the 1984 Winter Olympics in what was then Yugoslavia. He became a U.S. citizen after moving to America in 1993.

He has worked at five Olympic Games and two FIFA World Cups as an information technology specialist, perfecting the craft of real-time results at showpiece events.

"Given another opportunity, I'd choose the life of a journeyman again. I quite enjoy this kind of work, moving from city to city, from one sporting event to another," he says. "At each of the places I lived in during the course of the Games' preparations, the cities were trying to change for the better. All cities were looking to improve their infrastructure when they went about preparing for the Games. It was fascinating to see what was happening around me wherever I went."

Rokvic also worked for Calgary Winter Olympics in Canada in 1988, after which he became a consultant with a U.S. software company, Electronic Data Systems, and was deputed on a four-year assignment to do the spadework for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics in Spain.

"My most memorable period working at a Games was the four years in Barcelona," says Rokvic, whose good work there earned him a full-time job with Electronic Data Systems.

He was then moved to Los Angeles in 1993 and was assigned to oversee work at several venues across the United States for the 1994 FIFA World Cup. "Soccer was not very popular in the United States, but it was an amazing experience to see a record number of spectators thronging to the stadiums," says Rokvic.

After spending two and a half years in Los Angeles, the Rokvic family decided to move to Colorado Springs. His wife, Rada, also from Sarajevo, has worked as a special education teacher for 25 years. "Our two daughters studied in Colorado and have now moved to different cities in the U.S. pursuing their respective careers," says Rokvic.

He missed the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia as his employers did not have a contract with the organizers. It was only in 2010 that he again featured in the Olympic Games technology team in Vancouver, Canada last winter.

However, Rokvic's association with FIFA continued, as he worked for France 1998 World Cup. Deciding to go freelance in 2004, he was contracted to the Asian Games organizers and spent year and a half in Doha, Qatar before signing up with Vancouver's Winter Olympics team. While there, he received the offer that brought him to New Delhi for the Commonwealth Games.

"India was an absolutely new world for me. For starters, the vehicular traffic on the roads was something for which no one could have prepared me. You have to experience it to believe it. I wonder how these drivers manage to wriggle their way through," says Rokvic.

He arrived in India on an assignment as Director for results in the Sports department, but was moved to the Technology division as Deputy Director General for Timing, Scoring and Results. "It wasn't unexpected as I spent all my working life in results technology," he says.

Under his charge in New Delhi are 25 information technology professionals, Swiss Timing team, and 700 volunteers.

"When I started at Sarajevo, the volunteers were mainly high school kids," says Rokvic. "It's amazing how fast kids could learn. They had basic skills; we just had to train them about the technological nuances.

"The difference in New Delhi is that [it] has not had a big multiple-sport event for more than a quarter of a century. In 1982, when New Delhi staged the Asian Games, technology was not as developed as it is now. Due to this, there was a lack of experience with sport-related technology, but they're catching up quickly," Rokvic says.

After the Commonwealth Games, he will return home for five months before resuming his journey, this time heading to the Russian city of Sochi that is to host the next Winter Olympics, in 2014.

"Sochi's Winter Olympics will be the last of my sporting ventures. I will then retire and look to indulge in my passion for fishing and photography," he says. "I've been a photography enthusiast for 35 years, collecting images from my journey across the globe. They're all catalogued and filed, but retirement will give me a chance of cherishing the memories and living through those times yet again," says Rokvic.

"From what I have managed to see in New Delhi, India is a photographer's delight. I only regret not having enough time to go around clicking pictures."

