

Fine-tuning an Olympic athlete takes more than hours of training and practice and good nutrition. Behind the scenes and across the sports spectrum, athletes are being tweaked in not so obvious ways.

“Chiropractic gives you that little extra edge,” said Sydney McLaughlin, 17, of Dunellen, who competed at the Games in Rio in the 400-meter hurdles. In a sport that measures the hundredth of a second, athletes need every edge they can get.

“I don’t think we’d have gotten where we are without chiropractic,” said her father, Willie McLaughlin, himself a semi-finalist in the 400 meters at the 1984 Olympic Trials. “We didn’t know this stuff back then. It was, ‘Here’s two aspirin.’ “ Even the “fastest man in the world,” Usain Bolt, attributes chiropractic care to helping him deal with scoliosis as a youngster and stay in peak form today. And a chiropractor, Dr. Bill Moreau, is now the managing director of sports medicine for the U.S. Olympic Committee, overseeing all of its world-class training facilities and the official medical staff at the Games.

Lauren Schmetterling from Moorestown brought a gold

medal home from Rio as part of the famed women’s eight rowing team. She said, “I can’t remember the last time I was injured. The combination of chiropractic and PT (physical therapy) keeps me balanced. It keeps me as loose and flexible as I can be.”

Schmetterling, 27, said the U.S. Rowing Team chiropractor Dr. Anthony “Skip” Soriero of Trenton travels to Princeton every week to work on the team members who practice four hours every day, crouched in the same position. “All your body weight is leaning forward,” she said. “I row on the port side. It’s a fundamentally uneven position.”

As a result, Schmetterling sometimes *(continued)* notices one leg feels longer than the other. Spinal adjustments correct that, she said.

She’s not alone. Willie McLaughlin can take one look at his daughter and know she needs an adjustment. “One time Sydney put on a dress to go out, and I looked at her and her hips were crooked. I said it’s time to go see Dr. Bonsall. Hurdling is so rigorous that they need constant maintenance.”

Bill Bonsall is a Westfield chiropractor who has served

on the U.S. Track & Field Sports Medicine Team for five straight Olympic trials. This year, he said four of his patients, including McLaughlin and Maplewood’s Olivia Baker, competed at the trials.

He said each sport and event takes a different toll on the body. “A lot of it is just being i

in touch with what sport they do,” he said. “Treating track athletes takes a team approach. I try to program my athletes to come in for a tune-up before big races and not wait until symptoms show up. Then it takes a lot longer.”

Soriero, who has treated the men’s and women’s U.S. rowing teams since 1984, agreed. Problems arise from pressure building up, he said. By maintaining the spine, pressure doesn’t have a chance to build, and the body can function at its optimum.

About 80 percent of the rowers on the national team rely on him for regular maintenance, he said. “I can count on one hand” the number of rowers who were forced out of competition by injury in his three decades of caring for them.

