

# The Brazilian Experience

Recently I had the opportunity to accompany my athlete, hammer thrower Karyne DiMarco to Sao Paulo Brazil for her to compete at their national championships. This is part of the Adhemar Da Silva scholarship conducted yearly by the Westfields Athletic Club. Adhemar was their greatest ever athlete winning gold medals in two Olympics and will be remembered by Australians for his achievements at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.

We set out on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June. At the airport the Aerolineas Argentineas flight to Auckland had been cancelled and we were transferred to Emerites Airlines which is a first class service. On arrival in NZ we were informed that our flight to Buenos Aires had been delayed by 8 hours and were given a meal voucher for \$12 which doesn't buy you much in an airport. We had the Whopper Meal from Burger King and both spent considerable time on the toilet! To make it worse my rugby league team the Tigers were beaten by the Titans and I had to watch it on TV to pass the time. Not a good day. The flight was supposed to leave at 11PM and finally took off at 12.15AM. There were some unoccupied seats at the back of the plane and that gave us a chance to stretch out. Our first win of the day. The aircraft had no in-flight entertainment and we were given a meal in the first two hours then they turned off the lights. No reading lights, so sleep or you lose!! The attendants spoke very little English but we managed to get by. It is a twelve hour flight to Buenos Aires but at least we were on our way.

We arrived in Buenos Aires at 9.00PM their time to the news that our flight had been cancelled and would not leave until 7AM the following morning. So back out through customs to collect our luggage and we were bused to a hotel in the city. In bed at 11PM to a wake up call at 3AM. This was beginning to feel like the flight from hell. The plane finally took off at 7.20AM for Sao Paulo. Coming in to land it was amazing to see the actual physical size of the city. It has a population of 19 million with 11 million in the city centre. The smog was very thick over the city. It took an hour and a half to clear customs and it was a precursor to what was ahead. The Brazilians are never in a hurry as they say Manyana which roughly translated I think means "there's always tomorrow!" Portuguese is the dominant language and very little English is spoken at all. The journey had taken 40 hours!! And we were here on Monday instead of Sunday.

We took a cab to the Lorena hotel in the city centre. It was surprisingly inexpensive by our standards as the exchange rate from our dollar to the Brazilian real was around 1.6. At reception it became painfully clear that English was not spoken even by the majority of staff. After a bit of confusion we managed to get booked in. At this stage most of the elite Brazilian athletes were also staying at the hotel, but again they smiled but no communication. Over the years Karyne and I have been fortunate to have traveled with our sport extensively throughout Europe and could always find someone who would translate for us. We did meet a girl from the Brazilian federation who gave us meal tickets but no English.

The next day Tuesday we tried to board the bus going to the track but after a lot of sign language and gesticulation we gathered that it was only for team members. No problem back to reception and more sign language and we got directions to the track. Cab fare was around \$5 Australian. We were fortunate to meet an athlete who had been to an American University and he checked in the hammer and told us that the final would be on Thursday. Karyne had an extremely good throwing session. I remember talking to Phil King about the preparation for his wife Debbie leading into the Seoul Olympics and as a general rule competing one day off the plane or at least five achieves the best results. The competition was three days after arrival and no matter how hard she tried she just couldn't put it together and finished 4<sup>th</sup> in a competition that she could have easily won. The standard in the sprinting and jumping events is about the same as in Australia but they are behind in the throwing events. They have a 17.70m male triple jumper and a 4.60 female pole vaulted that stood out. We went to the track for finals day and the crowd really get into it. Trumpets drums and lots of noise!

We met with Adyel Santos who is Adhemar's daughter. She was a charming host and showed us around in true Brazilian style. Adyel is a singer and has been nominated for a Latin ARIA in recent years. They have a drink there made from sugar cane that I know Fred O'Connor really enjoyed! I had the honour of meeting triple jumper Nelson Prudencio who won silver in Mexico and bronze in Munich. He asked after the Australian jumper Phil May. I sat on the official's bus with him next day and discovered that he spoke very good English. It was great to hear him relate stories of the Mexico Games and how the altitude was a big factor in the horizontal jumps. He also spoke about the late Peter Norman and the black power incident. Brazilians are great people who love to dance and as I said previously, time really doesn't matter much to them. ATM's are only situated in banks because of security reasons and we found our cards would only work in City Bank or HSBC.

Sunday came around very quickly and it was time to go home. The plane from Sao Paulo was supposed to leave at 8.00PM but didn't take off until 9.30PM and we were assured by the airline that the connecting flight to Sydney would be delayed. We arrived in Buenos Aires at 12.33AM and the plane was already on the runway. It left at 12.44AM and there were around fifty of us stranded. We found a passenger who spoke English, Portuguese and Spanish. What a God send. Back out through customs, collect the luggage and back to the flight desk where we were informed the next flight would be at 11.59PM on Tuesday night. We were taken to a hotel in the city and arrived at 4AM. The positive to come out of that was that we got to see Buenos Aires and the shops were great and inexpensive. Karyne had a ball there.

After more confusion we were finally booked on the flight to come home. The flight boarded at 12.45AM but didn't leave until 3.45AM. Same as before a meal then the lights went out, no in-flight entertainment! Back in Auckland we reboarded the flight at 7.AM and a disgruntled passenger had had enough and refused to go on so all the luggage was unloaded and reloaded and we finally took off for Sydney at 9.15AM. Back home at 12.30PM. What an experience. Karyne being a senior athlete and a veteran of three Commonwealth Games, World University Games and an Olympics handled the whole

thing in good spirits but was very disappointed in her performance, but as The Brazilians say “eat, drink, and dance and everything will be fine”. I don’t think they have a word for worry in their vocabulary. We would both like to thank all those involved in the setting up of the scholarship and the continuing support of the Westfields Athletics Club and I would personally like to thank Jeff Semple and also the State branch of AT&FCA. for their assistance in making my participation possible.

Lawrie Barclay  
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