

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Molly Solomon
Ato Boldon
Rowdy Gaines
Nastia Liukin

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's NBC Olympics conference call. The Opening Ceremonies of the Tokyo Olympics is just 10 days away, next Friday, July 23rd, on NBC.

Joining us on today's call are analysts from three big Summer Olympics sports: Track and field analyst Ato Boldon, a four-time Olympic medalist; gymnastics analyst Nastia Liukin, a five-time medalist who won the all-around in Beijing in 2008; and swimming analyst Rowdy Gaines, a three-time Olympic gold medalist. And we are joined by our NBC Olympics executive producer, Molly Solomon. She will have a few opening comments and then we will take your questions.

MOLLY SOLOMON: Good morning, everybody, from Tokyo, a very early morning. I'm probably waking up someone in the room next to me. But I'm glad this is an audio rather than a video call at 6.00 a.m.

But we're getting a very early start here for an important point. We've been on the ground eight days. Right now, NBC has nearly 900 folks working in Tokyo, including our primetime host, Mike Tirico, who landed yesterday.

And as the world emerges from these challenging times, we really believe the Tokyo Olympics will be the most meaningful games in our lifetime. And we've got some once-in-a-generation athletes and some incredibly compelling storylines. And that's why we have our outstanding and insightful analysts on this call today to talk more about what we're going to see here in Tokyo.

Couple of notes from here, as we begin. We visited the brand new swimming venue yesterday. It's spectacular. Along with gymnastics. We stopped by skateboarding, beach volleyball -- and they actually have a new sports



pavilion. So it's really, really cool to see the sport-climbing wall and the 3x3 hoops court.

We understand the decision of the Japanese government for there to be no fans, but of course we wish the fans of the world had an opportunity to cheer on their athletes in person.

That being said, NBC and OBS, which is the Olympic Broadcasting Service, which produces the world feed, we've been preparing for this potential outcome for some time.

We've created sound-design plans with this in mind. We believe there's an opportunity to bring viewers closer to the action than ever. And it's sports like swimming, gymnastics, track, basketball, beach volleyball, you're going to hear the sounds of the games like you've never heard them before -- from the thrashing and splashing in the pool to those intimate conversations between competitors and coaches.

You look at gymnastics and think about the distinctive intricacies of each apparatus, and we really feel like we'll be able to bring the viewer closer to the athlete's experience here in Tokyo than ever before.

As we planned these, we look back on some of our past Olympic experiences. When you look back at the downhill, the women's downhill and the super G races in PyeongChang where we showcased Lindsey Vonn in that start house, and viewers could very clearly hear her breathing as she prepared for her runs. It was incredibly dramatic, and we plan to access those kinds of sounds and moments in Tokyo.

We've also been making plans to connect the U.S. athletes to their relatives back home and inject reactions and energy into the broadcast by integrating watch parties from the U.S.

We're treating friends and family, as we call it, like a sports venue in our strategic planning. The coordination of cameras each evening in prime time is rolling out with a team of athletes, bookers and technical support in Tokyo and stateside.

Our largest footprint will be at Universal Resorts in

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sports

Orlando. We alongside the USOPC are putting together a two-week long watch party in prime time where family members of Team USA will attend and be able to watch coverage and cheer for their loved ones together.

We're going to have a reporter there, Kerith Burke, and the ability to connect relatives with athletes. We're hoping for some chants, some spontaneous chants of "USA, USA!" To erupt each evening each day as these invested fans band together and support their loved ones.

Additionally we've also had -- Olympian's relatives have reached out to NBC. For example, BMX world champion Hannah Roberts' dad, he's hosting a watch party on a big screen in an outdoor park in Buchanan, Michigan. We're also excited about two watch parties that Simone Biles' gym in Spring, Texas, they're creating an event for budding gymnasts who train there. They're actually hosting a sleepover because it starts rather early in Texas.

So they're going to have a big screen. All of the budding gymnasts will spend the night, and then wake up the next morning and watch the women's team final -- and the women's all around. Really exciting stuff.

We're also working on international reaction as well. So a lot still to come, but the bottom line is if Americans can't travel to Tokyo, we intend to bring America to Tokyo.

Before I turn it over to the analysts, I just want to say I went to the swimming, track and gymnastics Trials and saw up close how much the Olympics means to these athletes. And the unique circumstances of these games have really given us an extra sense of purpose to make sure we're connecting them with their supporters back home.

I've also been asked about artificial sound. And NBC will not be adding artificial crowd noise to the audio mix that America hears. We're told that some of the sports venues may experiment with ambient crowd noise to generate atmosphere for the athletes. That will be a work in progress and you'll hear that on the mix that NBC uses.

In closing, we're going to have more in-venue audio than ever before to share the sounds of the competition. And we're going to be using technology to bring cheers and support of many of the athletes and their biggest fans to viewers at home. So that's a look at what our plans are considering all of the circumstances. And I'd like to throw it on Ato Boldon to give us a preview of what he expects at track and field, Ato.

ATO BOLDON: Thank you, Molly. The U.S.A. track and field Trials were very eventful some two weeks ago. And I was privileged enough to be in Eugene, Oregon in the

blistering heat for most of it.

I have to say that having covered now the U.S. Olympic team going to Summer Olympics for quite some time, I think this is maybe the most balanced USA track and field team that there's ever been, certainly in my short career.

Allyson Felix, who of course is one of the faces of the entire United States Olympic team, is trying to create history. She's already made some history in qualifying for her fifth Olympics Summer Games.

I think of some of the younger ones that made the team, somebody like a Sydney McLaughlin who set the world record at the Trials, becoming the fastest 400-meter hurdler ever. She could emerge as one of the big stars from Tokyo. Noah Lyles, the 200-meter world champion and Trials winner. Ryan Crouser, who set a world record at the Trials as well in the shot put.

What about Gabby Thomas? That's a name that a lot of Americans don't know going into Tokyo. But she just became the second fastest 200-meter runner in history, behind only Flo-Jo, and that's before we start talking about some of the international stars like (indiscernible). I remember explaining to reporters five years ago when Usain Bolt was making his exit. And they were worried about who would fill the void. I said, it's a global sport; somebody is going to fill the void.

So there are a number of very compelling stories. I think that for somebody, like myself, who was never supposed to be an Olympian; I started off in soccer -- it's funny that the Olympics have become such a part of my life. These would be my tenth Olympics as a broadcaster and athlete, four as an athlete, six as a broadcaster. But I remember Olympics the way I remember the birth of my children. They're that important in my life.

I'm extremely excited to be getting on a plane at the end of the week to go to Tokyo.

NASTIA LIUKIN: I think, obviously, with gymnastics, Simone Biles is, of course, the favorite amongst, I think, not just in gymnastics but the favorite amongst many people, all across the U.S. and the world. There's no doubt she's going to be amazing. She's favored to win five medals, possibly all gold, and further solidify her status as the greatest ever.

Personally, I already believe that's the case, but five more medals would certainly prove that even more.

And on the men's side, the U.S. men look to have a new star with Brody Malone. He's really the great new face of

Team USA for the men and came into the National Championships and kind of took everybody by storm. Won his first national title. Went on to the Olympic Trials and secured a spot there. And then the team also still has a veteran leader like [inaudible], has already been to multiple Olympics.

Very excited to see them in Tokyo as well as some incredible gymnasts from around the world, especially Russia and China, and of course the home team in Japan will include kind of the Simone, if you will, on the men's side, which is Kohei Uchimura. So we're really looking forward to a lot of action. But, as we all said, on the balance beam, it's going to be pretty quiet when there won't be any fans there.

This will be, echoing Molly, we're just looking forward to having an Olympics and for the athletes to compete especially after a year of postponement and to be able to see their dreams come true as they step into that Olympic arena will no doubt be special.

ROWDY GAINES: As Ato and Nastia will tell you, at the Olympic Trials it was exciting on the swimming standpoint as well. As most of you know, this will be the first Olympics since 1996 that we haven't had the GOAT, the greatest of all time, Michael Phelps. He will be joining Dan Hicks and I in the booth on a lot of races. And I know he's going to offer some incredible insight on especially those races that he has won so many gold medals in.

So excited about him being a part of the broadcast this year. Even without Michael, USA Swimming has been number one in the world of swimming for 65 straight years. The last time they were not the best country in the world in the sport was back in 1956, when Australia won the most medals and the most golds at the Melbourne Olympics.

This team will be no different. This will be a great team. It's a young team. We have 11 teenagers on the U.S. team. So it's going to be a young team. But a lot of those teenagers will be in the hunt for medals. No question about it. If you're looking for big stars, like a Simone Biles, we have them on the U.S. side, obviously.

I know everybody is very well aware of Katie Ledecky, and in my opinion, just like Nastia said with Simone, the greatest female swimmer in history. I don't think it's even close. But she would certainly add to that legacy by winning a lot of medals in Tokyo.

She could be the first American woman in history in any sport to 10 gold medals. And of course she has to run the table in order to do that. But if anybody can, it's Katie.

And then we have a bit of a Phelpsian-like swimmer in Caeleb Dressel, from the University of Florida, Gainesville, born and raised in Jacksonville. He has a chance to swim seven events, guaranteed to swim six events, and will probably be the favorite. I don't want to jinx anybody here, but certainly be the favorite in five of them. And the sixth and seventh are certainly toss-ups, if he swims a seventh event, which is the 800 free relay. It's not known yet. But I was with the U.S. team in Hawaii this past week and spent three days with them down there. And he literally personally told me, I would love to be on the 800 free relay. That could certainly be a possibility.

A lot of other Olympians returned from 2016, gold medalist Lilly King, Ryan Murphy, Simone Manuel, Allison Schmitt, who won gold back in 2012. They join a lot of youngsters like Michael Andrew, who is going to swim five events, potentially.

And we just have a lot of really cool stories. It's from Katie Grimes, who is 15 years old; she didn't even have a cell phone when she made the team. They had to make sure she had a cell phone. To Lydia Jacoby, who is 17, the first swimmer -- second Olympian in history to even be from Alaska. It's cool; we've got great stories across the board. And, of course, there are some amazing international swimmers as well.

Q. Molly, what do you mean when you say we really believe the Tokyo Olympics will be the most meaningful Games of our lifetime? And I know obviously you don't make the decision about whether to go forward with the Games, but NBC is obviously a big player. And what do you say to people that say going forward with the Games is a question of greed overcoming common sense?

MOLLY SOLOMON: When I talk about the most meaningful Games, you look at what brought the world together. We're all emerging from this pandemic. And there are a lot of -- all of these athletes have been training a lifetime. And for so many of the athletes, the Olympics is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

So to have that dream deferred for another year, we really feel like, as a broadcaster of the Games, if there's going to be an Olympic Games we'll be here to chronicle it.

We also are following the strict and rigorous pandemic protocols that the ISE and the Japanese government have put in place. So we're fully confident that we can responsibly produce these Games.

Q. But you don't feel that it's, as some people say, that it's greed overcoming common sense?



MOLLY SOLOMON: If there's an Olympics Games that's happening, as the American broadcast we're going to be here to chronicle the stories of the Games.

Q. You mentioned ambient noise that the broadcasters are putting forward at some of the events. And you said NBC isn't doing its own crowd noise. What exactly is going to be happening there? I didn't understand what that noise might be.

MOLLY SOLOMON: Sure. So right now the Olympic Broadcasting Service, OBS, the world feed provider, works with Sports Presentation in the venues. And so right now they are working to inject through the PA and create really an atmosphere for the athletes so they're not competing without any crowd murmur or presence. So that is being worked on right now.

And we will track that and you will hear that in the mix on television. But we are not going to layer on on top of that swells of applause or anything like that. At the Olympics, there's 369 distinct events, all of which have a really different cadence and pace, which makes it impossible to be authentic and reflect the spirit and sound of what's happening now.

For example, Rowdy can elaborate on this, but in the breaststroke races, knowing that fans whistle during those races, we didn't want to create an inauthentic experience. So instead we've pivoted to know that we've got access to all of these fields-of-play microphones. So we really feel like we can enhance the sounds of the Games. But you will also hear any crowd presence that is actually being injected into the venue. So you'll hear it as the athletes hear it.

Q. Since you've been on the ground for a little bit and just covered lots of Olympics, what is the general feel with less press there and less presence? Is it kind of eerie? Give us a sense of how it is different, atmospheric-wise, this time around?

MOLLY SOLOMON: I think it's difficult right now to say that because this early, this many days before a Games, you wouldn't feel that much atmosphere because they're still finishing up applying paint, they're still putting up posters and things. So, the venues are still closed to public and athletes. So you really don't get any sense this is any different from any other Olympics at the current time.

Q. What about packages that bring Tokyo to American viewers aside from the Games itself? NBC does a great job with feature packages and showing people the city. Are you going to be able to do that? Or do

you do it in a different way?

MOLLY SOLOMON: That's a really good question. Mary Carillo traveled to Tokyo two and half years ago. So we do have some profiles and sense of place that we will use. There's also the Japanese baseball tradition, a terrific piece. There's some pieces on Peacock that reflect Japan and the cultural ties to the United States. Those will all still be a part of it.

And I think how the U.S. audience will experience Japan and Tokyo, one of the world's great modern cities, is through the Phoenix, is through these beautiful drones that we have going across the city. So you will still experience Tokyo and Japan. But as always, we do focus on the drama on the field. And that's where our focus always is.

Q. Nastia, I've recently started covering gymnastics and I'm focusing on rhythmic gymnastics for my story. My question is do you think there's a problem in that the conversation in the U.S. around gymnastics is always around artistic? Why don't our rhythmic gymnasts get as much support as they do in Russia?

NASTIA LIUKIN: I guess just because the interest level. It's, like, my parents have two gyms in the Dallas area. And in Texas and in a lot of other states, it's really just not as popular. And I've kind of actually felt the same way.

My mom was a rhythmic gymnast, competed, and was a world champion. It was -- a lot of people have always asked me why I didn't even consider rhythmic gymnastics. To be completely honest, I think literally just because the attention and the popularity of, when you say the word "gymnastics" you kind of think flips. So I think -- I would love, I'm also commentating the rhythmic gymnastics, so I'd love to bring more awareness and also just make it become a little bit more popular.

But I think it having to do with the fact that when a little kid watches the Olympics and specifically watches gymnastics, they kind of watch artistic gymnastics. They look and they say, mom, dad, that's exactly what I want to do. And for the most part it is flips.

And I think it's mostly just popular kind of on each coast. So I know in California, and also in New York. But to be completely honest, I don't exactly know why it is kind of on each coast that the popularity of it. But I'm kind of with you. I think bringing a little bit more awareness to a sport that is so beautiful would obviously be wonderful.

Q. What role do you think social media can play in raising awareness and rallying fans for rhythmic gymnastics?



NASTIA LIUKIN: It's interesting because social media obviously has taken such a big part in the Olympics as a whole -- the way that everybody watches it, the way that people consume whether it's scores or results. Competing in the 2008 Olympics, not to outdate myself, but I didn't even have an Instagram, which seems so crazy to live in a world without social media.

But I think, yeah, the more that people can talk about it and share, and -- like every Olympic sport, every single athlete that is competing in Tokyo, they put in the exact amount of hard work, effort, determination, dedication. Like, every single thing that you have to put into becoming an Olympian, like every single athlete in every sport puts that in. I think just being able to share more about it is something that can easily at least be spread among social media. But I'm also very excited to be covering it on NBC after we do finish artistic.

Q. I'm wondering about the look of the opening ceremony. Has it been decided how many athletes are going to be allowed to march? If that has been decided, how many, and have those athletes been identified for the United States? And how would the look of it, when people tune in at 6:55 next Friday, how would the look of it be compared to other Opening Ceremonies?

MOLLY SOLOMON: Well, they keep a lot of it secret, as you know. We haven't had a preview of the creative or what it looks like. I would check in with the USOPC, because of the pandemic protocols, you're only allowed into the Olympic village a certain number of days before an athlete competes. Therefore, there will be less athletes eligible for marching.

Usually the U.S. team is in the vicinity of 650. So I think there will be probably about 200 or so eligible to march, but traditionally swimmers or gymnasts also try to save their energy because they're competing the next day.

I think it's a good question for the USOPC to tell you how many athletes are going to march. But we're confident that, with theatrical lighting and the creative and it's in the evening here in Tokyo, there will be some really spectacular moments because this really is an amazing moment when the world truly comes together for the very first time as we begin to emerge from some really, really challenging times.

Q. Molly, what is the responsibility of NBC Sports when it comes to discussing Japan's state of emergency and potential public health consequences of hosting this? Not necessarily talking about if

anything happens during the Games, but certainly early on in the Games and prior to the Games, what is NBC's responsibility in discussing those issues with the public?

MOLLY SOLOMON: I think you'll see it in our very first broadcast in the Opening Ceremony in the evening and prime time. Lester Holt will set the stage and explain what exactly is happening, what is the state of emergency and what does that mean here locally and then how are the Olympics operating within that. And really the [inaudible] created for athletes and broadcasters.

And I would say going on, I can also talk for the analysts as well, our policy and our coverage of news has always been, how does that impact the athletes, how does it impact the Games, how does it touch the Games going forward? So as news around any of these issues comes up, of course, we will cover it.

Q. For the analysts, particularly Rowdy and Ato, given how many Games you've covered, you're obviously going to go and cover the sport, it's what you do. You work for NBC, obviously the U.S. domestic rights holder. But do either of you -- and Nastia, you, too -- do you have any anxiety of heading into this environment? Because the reality is, at least health-wise, it will be unlike any other Olympics for anyone entering the country of the Olympics?

ROWDY GAINES: I'll start real quick. I have zero anxiety. And I sincerely mean that, just because -- and I have no knowledge of anything on the ground there. I know Molly's reconfirmed everything's going to be great, we're looking forward to it and all that.

I can tell you that I worked for a Japanese company for seven years from 1989 to 1996. And I spent about six months a year in Japan during that time.

So I've been to Japan probably at least 50 times. They are some of the most genuine, sweet, hardworking, dedicated people I've ever met on the planet.

And if anybody can pull this off and make sure that all the athletes are accounted for and everything is safe, it will be the Japanese people, the IOC, the JOC. So, I'm completely confident in my safety. I have no anxiety. I've gotten the vaccine, all that. So I feel really good. And I couldn't be more excited to hit the ground.

ATO BOLDON: And from me, I can be as cynical as they come, but I remember when this country was plunged into mourning after 9/11. It was sports that helped to bring everybody back to normal.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

If you know your history, you know that Japan is very good at overcoming adversity. And, obviously, the polls indicate that not everybody is thrilled that the Games are coming. But I have no reservations and no anxiety, because I remember when we were going to London and they said, well, there could be terrorism. I remember when we were going to Rio. And they said Zika could be a problem. I didn't see a single mosquito in Brazil.

So I am not getting on this flight Sunday with anything other than, okay, I know this is not going to be a typical Olympics Games, but I still feel like it has its purpose in not just the sporting landscape this year, but in the human landscape.

Q. Molly, considering the pandemic and all of the travel restrictions and obviously we've highlighted many of the U.S. athletes. Of course over the years an integral part of NBC and ABC Sports' coverage have been the international, up-close-and-personal features on athletes like Karsten Warholm and Federica Pellegrini that the U.S. audience doesn't know too much about. Has NBC been able to shoot and produce any of these features? If not, how will you guys highlight some of these relatively unknown international athletes? And a brief question, any bells and whistles in regard to the golf coverage, whether it be from the world feed and obviously NBC's embellishment? I know that's very dear to your heart, the second international Olympic golf tournament over recent years.

MOLLY SOLOMON: That's been really complicated. As you said, the heart of our coverage is the storytelling around not only American athletes but international athletes. And when the world came to a stop and athletes really went into their homes and they closed down their training and access to it.

But I'm really proud of the team and how we've really pivoted. We've been working, for example, with a lot of the world broadcasters like the BBC and others in order to get the coverage and the profiles of the different international athletes. I'll give you a couple of examples.

Luckily we went down to Australia a couple of years ago. So we have a really amazing piece on Ariarne Titmus that helps frame the USA-Australia swimming rivalry. We also found a way to get into Russia over the past two months because Nikita Nagornyy is a huge story that first weekend.

But really key to all this has been our partnership with other international broadcasters in order to tell the story of Dina

Asher-Smith and how we could go safely and responsibly shoot in a park in London and get more information on her.

So I'm proud of the team on how we've pivoted, but we will have all of that, because as you know, it's so much a part of the Olympics is the story of these athletes and also what they've overcome to get to this moment.

And then on the golf side, very excited about this parkland course. I was talking to Mike Tirico last night, who has visited out there. Because of the pandemic, I've not been out to the golf course, but I hear it's in great shape, a terrific field. And we really saw golf resonate in 2016 when it returned to the Olympics. So very excited to see all of that coverage in a couple of weeks.

And when you look at the U.S. women's team in golf, I think it's a really formidable group. But you've got to say the fundamental favorites in golf are two of the Japanese entrants in Hideki Matsuyama and Nasa Hataoka. Can you imagine if they would win a gold medal here in golf? It would, going back to the international storylines, I just think there would be -- there's some amazing host-country stories here.

Q. Considering Japan's love of golf and fantastic technological and digital enhancements, what about the technical side of the golf coverage, what can we expect?

MOLLY SOLOMON: It really does represent major championship coverage by tracer. It's all of those elements that really bring to life golf tournaments. It's what you would expect at a major championship.

Q. Molly, let's talk Peacock. This is the new wrinkle with NBCUniversal's coverage of the Olympic Games. I'm wondering how you're positioning Peacock in the [inaudible] of Olympic coverage. The sense you get from Peacock executives, this has been building over the last year -- Peacock started year two this month -- is that this is going to be the ultimate viewing experience for the Olympics, calling up live, paid coverage highlights as much as you want. Less than five minutes of commercial time for maybe interactive ads. We can talk more about the products. And maybe interactive features where you can call up stats, medal counts and that kind of thing. How do you see Peacock in the firm? Is it going to be the ultimate consumer experience for the Olympics?

MOLLY SOLOMON: When we announced that Peacock was going to be seeing Olympics coverage time, it really was a producer's dream. You have a blank canvas to say what are we not providing viewers and what can we do



differently, how can we give them everything and anything?

And so if you're a consumer of Peacock, there are so many different options, because in the mornings you're going to have some of the most popular sports live, if you want to get up early and watch live women's gymnastics. The second week you've also got live track and field. It's going to serve the super fan. You can also go find U.S. men's basketball games there as well.

But also we wanted to have a curated experience for the viewers. So we tapped into some amazing personalities to anchor those shows. I've always wanted to do the ultimate Olympic highlight show when the competition day ends. And so Rich Eisen will be hosting that. If you missed anything, you can go find that.

Similarly, in the evenings there's a companion to prime time. And that's going to be with Kenny Mayne, Cari Champion and Jac Collinworth, as things are happening in prime time they'll have quick turnaround highlights. They're going to have interviews with athletes. You can get the best of both.

So we've really engineered Peacock to be everything for everyone.

Q. Is there any possibility for interactive features, let's say calling up anytime you like on Peacock or through Peacock medal stats or highlights or athlete profiles or things like that?

MOLLY SOLOMON: I'll take that. You also have to look at it through the lens of our other apps. Because NBCOlympics.com actually has all of that. But you'll also have quick turnaround highlights and be able to get a lot of that on Peacock. I would view it through the lens of both of them.

Q. Rowdy, how do you see the physical and the mental emotional competitive status of Simone Manuel going into the Olympics? And for Nastia, Simone Biles frequently gets, I think, perhaps, downgraded by some people because they do not see her as an artistic gymnast in the same sense that you were an artistic gymnast. Her response is she finds artistry in power. How would you gauge the artistry of Simone Biles in gymnastics?

NASTIA LIUKIN: As she said, there's artistry in power. I think no gymnast, no person should ever be defined by really any single thing, any single accomplishment, especially something like artistry.

I think in a sport like gymnastics, everything has always

been because of just the way that the sport works and the scoring system, everything is pretty subjective. So what one person might think as artistry, another person might disagree with.

But I think what Simone said is exactly right. That's the beauty of the sport of gymnastics. You can be the best in the world and be the most powerful, run fast, jump high and be strong and win an Olympic gold medal, or you can be flexible and I guess, quote/unquote, more graceful and taller at possibly 5'2" than the rest of your teammates and also win an Olympic gold medal. It's subjective.

I think the word "artistry" in itself is subjective. So I'm going to echo what Simone said there.

ROWDY GAINES: I'll follow up with Simone Manuel, and I'll say I was in Hawaii, as I said, last week, got a chance to sit down with her for about a half hour, Dan and I did. She went through a tough time.

I think the pandemic certainly affected her. She admitted that. It was tough to watch that 100. You're supposed to stay neutral, but I've always been a big believer in putting the very best people on our team and on the U.S. team.

And I think Simone represents the very best in the water but more so out of the water. And I think nothing is more evident with that than her being elected team captain of the U.S. Olympic swim team.

So I think -- I talked to her about this -- I think it's almost a blessing in disguise because now she can just concentrate on the 50. She's going to be right there in the 50 freestyle. She won the silver in '16. She's going to be right there. She doesn't have to worry about the 100 freestyle. She can concentrate on the relays. I think she's going to swim a lot of relays. I was talking to the coach -- of course they're not going to play their hand now -- but she's been looking so good in the water in Hawaii.

I wouldn't be surprised if she showed up on that first day in the 400 free relay and even the medley relays, mixed medley, the women's medley, the 800 free relay, there's a lot of relays they could plug in and put Simone in. I think Team USA is in great shape having Simone Manuel be on board.

Q. Question for Rowdy, I think there were nine former Georgia swimmers in these Olympic Games, wondered which in your mind has the best chance to win gold or medal? And if you could speak to the influence that Jack Bauerle, who is the U.S.A. assistant this year, has made in turning out Olympic swimmers throughout the years?

ROWDY GAINES: First of all, Jack is a very dear friend and literally is one of the incredible legends of our sport worldwide. If there's a Mount Rushmore of coaches, I'm pretty much going to put Jack on there because he's been that kind of coach over the years.

He's been a head coach of the Olympic team, now assistant obviously. He has a lot of swimmers on the team. And it's really hard to pick one to say, oh, my gosh, they're going to beat -- this man or woman is going to be on the medal stand.

Again, back to Hawaii, it was great because we got to be on the deck the whole time and watch a lot of the practices. I really liked the way Nic Fink looked. Nic Fink is going to be flying under the radar because the U.S. not predicted to win a medal in the 200 breaststroke. And I think he's got a great shot because he's just looking better and better as the camp has come along.

And this is his first Olympics. This would be something that he could really step up. And I think she's only swimming the relay, but Natalie Hinds, amazing story. Swam for Florida but swims for Jack at Georgia now. Took two years off. Was completely out of the water. Started swimming masters, pretty much had to beg Jack to even get on the team to be able to swim at Georgia. And I think she, along with Olivia Smoliga, have a chance to medal in that 400 relay. And there are others, of course, but those are certainly ones I'm going to be looking for.

MOLLY SOLOMON: Thanks, everyone. When I listen to these guys talking about their sport, it gets me pumped up to everything that's to come. Reflecting back on where we are in the world and what's happening, I really believe that people are craving a shared experience.

After all we've endured, what better way to come together than through the stories of the athletes that show us what's possible.

I think about the Olympics as your next-door neighbor, goes to the Olympics, you watch greatness emerge. And all of us at NBC really feel privileged to be able to bring these once-in-a-lifetime moments and these incredible stories of perseverance and resilience of these athletes and the world's athletes to the American audience.

We can't wait to get started. And we will not only see you for the softball and soccer early next week, but for the Opening Ceremony. Don't forget we'll have it in the morning live and again in prime time when more of the audience can watch.

But we're thrilled to be here and excited to welcome Ato, Nastia, Rowdy over here soon. For those traveling, safe travels. Thank you for your interest.

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