

Shoot for the 'Summitt'

2017 ISHA Conference Report

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In October, 2017, I was lucky enough to be given the chance to attend ISHA's annual conference. The conference was held in Knoxville, Tennessee, and coming from Australia, I readily admit to knowing very little about Knoxville and its place in the U.S. sporting landscape prior to arrival. By the time I left, though, it was a quite a different story. Over the course of the conference, the University of Tennessee Vols, Holly Warlick and Inky Johnson all became treasured memories instead of complete strangers, and I learned all about the legacy of the wonderful Pat Summitt. The way in which ISHA was able to integrate the conference with the town was fantastic, and was just one of the things which helped make for a very memorable four days in Tennessee.

For those of us who were in town early enough, the conference commenced with a pre-conference trip to the Great Smoky Mountains and the town of Gatlinburg. From the moment that lunchtime gave us a fleeting encounter with a tranquilised bear, it promised to be a day of interest and did not disappoint! The afternoon's activities entailed a visit to not one but two moonshine distilleries, complete with many tastings, and the town of Gatlinburg itself has to be seen to be believed. It was a great way to kick off the conference, and a fun early opportunity to connect with colleagues.

The following day saw the conference itself start in earnest, kicking off in the early afternoon with three very interesting sessions, all of which were provided some fantastic information and advice. In the first session, the Visit Knoxville team taught us how to 'TEAM Up' to maximise visitor business. In the second session, HistoryIT and the University of Indianapolis took us through their successful creation of a digital collection and what you need to actually do in order for such

a process to be effective. 1220 Exhibits and Silver Oaks rounded off the day's presentations by giving us all a fascinating insight into the development of a museum exhibit from the perspective of fabricators and designers. With all of that information buzzing in our minds, the day concluded with a tour of UT's Neyland Stadium and a welcome reception within the stadium itself, which spoilt us with spectacular views of this iconic 100,000+ seater stadium. Day 2 was going to have a lot to live up to!

Thankfully, it was truly up to the challenge. Day 2 began as a day for tough decisions, with concurrent conference streams meaning that it would not be possible to see everything that would be on offer. After experiencing some angst, I opted to start the day with a session on marketing, where I learned about psychographics, demographics, and the difference between simple and easy. This session was followed by an ISHA Member meeting, before we were again forced to choose between two different sessions to conclude the morning's activities. I attended the session on digital media publishing, where I learnt about the value of connecting emotionally with our desired audience and ways in which media can be used to get to the people as opposed to waiting for them to come to you.

After a difficult morning of decisions, conference delegates were rewarded for their efforts with a lunchtime treat as champion distance swimmer Kate Ziegler delivered a star turn as guest speaker. Kate's story left the crowd buzzing and inspired, and made sure that everyone was ready to hit the afternoon's content with greatly renewed vigour. The afternoon kicked off with a fascinating look at the UT's Center for Sport, Peace and Society, a global exchange program which teaches people how to use sport as an agent of social change. Following this, a second ISHA Member meeting discussed the recent state of the industry survey and provided the setting for the exciting announcement that ISHA would be heading to San Francisco for their 2018 conference. The afternoon concluded

with a fantastic tour of the East Tennessee History Center, which included a tour through the Center's archival storage areas as well as exhibit space.

Day 2, however, was not done yet. The evening saw delegates make for the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame for the gala event of the conference - An Evening of Champions. The night commenced with cocktails and a wonderful opportunity to tour the Hall and view their exhibits, before guests were invited to partake in a sit down dinner within the Hall's picturesque surrounds. The Silent Auction, Reverse Raffle, and ISHY Award presentations made for plenty of entertainment over the course of the evening, but for me the undoubted highlight was the inspirational presentation given by the evening's guest speaker, Inky Johnson. A star defensive back with UT, Inky was well on his way to an NFL career before a terrifying injury cut his career short and very nearly ended his life. Instead of dwelling on what might have been, though, Inky chose to be grateful for life. He completed a Master's degree in Psychology at UT, and has since become an inspirational speaker about the value of perseverance and faith. It was a privilege to hear him speak, and his story touched everyone in the room. It was a great way to end our second day.

The final day of the conference began with breakfast and an address by Holly Warlick, head coach of the Tennessee Lady Vols. Holly was another fantastic speaker, regaling us with the tale of her career and the experience of working alongside the great Pat Summitt. With stomachs and brains duly nourished, the open forum session that followed was a great chance for those of us with burning questions to pick the brains of the other delegates about issues such as digitisation, dealing with the induction of deceased players, successful exhibits, and the challenge of attracting a variety of visitors. Fittingly, the final session of the conference tied everything back to Knoxville, Tennessee, as the Pat Summitt Foundation spoke to us about the strategies they implement to engage and attract donors to help them in their mission to find a cure for Alzheimer's

disease. It was a telling example of the enormous social impact that an immense sporting personality such as Pat Summitt can have, and a reminder to us all that sport does have the power to effect meaningful societal change.

And with that, the fantastic, four-day Tennessee whirlwind which was ISHA's 2017 conference in Knoxville came to a close. Not only did the conference provide all of us with some fantastic information and inspiration to take back to our home institutions, but it was a great opportunity to meet and get to know a wide array of friends and colleagues, both new and old.

My congratulations to all of those involved in putting the conference together. The conference team did a great job in organising and constructing the conference program, and Dana, Josh, Ashley and the team at the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame were wonderful hosts to us all during our time in Knoxville – thanks guys! As a final note, I'd like to extend my very grateful thanks to ISHA for giving me the opportunity to travel all the way from Australia to attend the conference. I had a fantastic time, and definitely plan to be back – hope to see you all again soon!