

WHAT MAKES A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

If all goes as planned, one never sees what goes on in making an ASA National Championship successful. The host committee works tirelessly behind the scenes to provide a first-class operation. We caught up with Chattanooga ASA Junior Olympic Commissioner Kim Swafford whose staff recently hosted the largest Junior Olympic National Championship in 2011, the ASA/USA Softball Girls' Class A 16-Under Fast Pitch in Chattanooga, Tenn., with 172 teams.

B&S: “What are the top three key factors to hosting such a large tournament?”

KS: “I think there are actually four key factors. 1) Communication with coaches, 2) Experienced and diverse tournament directors, 3) A cooperative host hotel and CVB/Sports Committee 4) Good weather. The first three you can control but if your tournament is east of the Mississippi, having an entire week without rain is just pure luck. However, if information needs to be disbursed regarding weather or time changes, communication with coaches and managers is key. We had one person assigned to keep the website updated and we had a mass texting system in place through Google Docs which allowed me to send one email that generated a text message to 342 coaches, team mom’s and managers. We also had every coach in a mass email box through our Chattanooga ASA website. Trying to make phone calls to 172 teams would have been impossible and the mass texting and mass email system made constant communication simple. Having people in place like a great host hotel and CVB/Sports Committee to assist with the logistics of umpire rooms, Team Check In and the Managers Meeting/Meal are also important.

B&S: “What advice would you give to others hosting a tournament with over 150 teams?”

KS: “Organization is the most important aspect of this process. From our first committee meeting over a year ago, I told everyone involved that with a tournament this size, we had to be organized or at a very minimum, appear to be organized. I selected tournament directors who were experienced softball coaches, players and managers. All had been to ASA National Championships before and all had a touch of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. People with OCD want things done perfectly and

in an organized fashion. We probably had the most diverse group of tournament directors ever assembled and they came from both the private and public sector; both male and female, age range from 19 – 55 years old. We had four college students who had recently played in GOLD Nationals and 16U Nationals. We had directors who had coached in every age group at ASA Nationals and we also had local Parks and Recreation Directors. But the common thread among our staff was that everyone involved loved youth fast pitch softball and became vested in making the tournament a success.”

B&S: “Anything you and your team did to make ensure the tournament was a success and enjoyed by all parties?”

KS: “We sat down and brainstormed ideas about aspects of past tournaments that were performed effectively and efficiently and we incorporated those various ideas into our event. At Team Check In, we made sure every team got in and out quickly with no long lines or standing out in the heat. We made the Manager’s Lunch and Opening Ceremonies last no more than 90 minutes so everyone had time for practice games. We did the pool draw in advance so all parents and college coaches could plan when to be in town. We did not have a three-hour draw for bracket play, our staff worked tirelessly all day in one room and allowed each pool to draw as their pool games completed. All our tournament directors and our ASA Rep and UIC’s were visible and accessible to all the coaches, parents and players. Despite some extreme heat early in the week, we stayed outside. I told our directors that we cannot hide in air conditioned offices and run a tournament of this size. We also had plenty of volunteers provided by our Parks and Rec Department who manned information tents and made sure fans

had rides into the park on our bus golf carts. Our Parks and Rec Directors on our ASA staff made it easy to resolve any field issue.”

B&S: “Any fires you had to put out that attendees did not see?”

KS: “On Wednesday, we noticed a couple mistakes on the bracket which had to be adjusted but fortunately, the four games involved were not being played until Friday so we caught it in plenty of time. My biggest heartburn came Wednesday morning when we got a call from our directors at the Summit Complex who said they did not have enough softballs despite the fact that we had counted and re-counted numerous times. I immediately called our supplier who informed me that it would cost \$2600 to ship in more softballs. We called all over town and came up with about ten dozen softballs. However, later in the day, the directors at Summit found the missing softballs in the umpire room. Apparently the case of softballs was being used to prop open a door.”

In closing, it was Chattanooga ASA’s privilege to host the ASA/USA 16U National Championships. We did our best to make ASA shine as we are cognizant of the fact that there are those who covet ASA’s position as the National Governing Body of Softball. Our event was unique in that it was done with a public/private partnership and a diverse group of tournament directors. We were fortunate to have a seasoned and pleasant ASA Representative on hand to guide us and two outstanding UIC’s who were helpful, flexible and visible throughout the tournament. The umpires calling the tournament were outstanding and professional. If I had it to do over again, there is very little I would change....except maybe make the weather about 10 degrees cooler.