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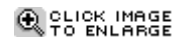
Sports marketing gains speed as career

12:00 AM CDT on Sunday, August 17, 2008

By JEAN NASH JOHNSON / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

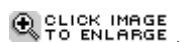
When Katrina McGhee began her accounting career in the early 1990s, sports was not a part of marketing studies.

Two years into accounting, she needed a change. "I've always been a people person," says Ms. McGhee. Today she's vice president of marketing for the high-profile cancer organization Susan G. Komen for the Cure.



KYE R. LEE/DMN
Katrina McGhee, marketing vice president of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, pins a ribbon on Jeff Brundage, a senior vice president of American Airlines, at an event Monday celebrating AA becoming Komen's first lifetime sponsor. She also handles sports sponsorships.

She left accounting to work on her master's degree in business administration at the University of Texas at Arlington. After some research, she figured out she could use her marketing credentials in sports. UTA, like most college marketing programs, did not have a sports marketing component, but Ms. McGhee was on to something.



BOB JORDAN/The Associated Press
NASCAR's Bobby Labonte makes a pit stop in his Komen-pink No. 43 car during a race in New Hampshire in October (Breast Cancer Awareness Month) 2007. Partnerships with sports entities are part of Katrina McGhee's marketing job.

"It sounded like fun," she says.

Almost 15 years later, after years of selling tickets, marketing sports events, promoting goodwill for sports giants such as former Dallas Cowboy Emmitt Smith and running her own company, she now oversees sports partnerships with NASCAR and Major League Baseball as part of her job as Komen's marketing executive.

"The industry has expanded so much [since the early '90s], and that's the beauty. How far you want to go in the sports marketing profession depends on the person," Ms. McGhee says.

Sports marketing is serious fun, says Dan Migala, publisher of the *Migala Report*, a publication that tracks trends in the field. Ten years ago, Mr. Migala could have counted on two hands the number of colleges offering sports marketing courses. Now, he estimates, more than 500 U.S. colleges and universities offer at least one, including New York University, which recently hired him to teach a course.

The late 1990s superstadium and sports arena boom led to the job explosion, Mr. Migala says. "Teams are in pressure mode to replenish the debt from new stadium construction, which leads to owners being more proactive in the marketplace. The more they formulate business plans, the more jobs created."

In any new stadium project, it will be somebody's job to coordinate and work with the major sponsorships from industries such as telecommunications, airlines, clothing and food. That coordinator will need more out-of-college account executives, he says.

In the Baylor University program, for example, the curriculum includes courses in law, ethics and finance.

"It prepares students better, gives them a much broader picture of what's going on in the sports world, whether they are working in the professional, collegiate or semiprofessional areas," says Andrew Pittman, coordinator of Baylor's sport management program.

Baylor's program has been established for more than 10 years and is in the process of seeking accreditation, says Dr.

Pittman.

Reality check

The strengthening of college programs since Ms. McGhee's mid-'90s epiphany indicates that young career seekers demand more training. But entry-level students need a realistic view from the bottom, says Scott Wysong, a professor at the University of Dallas.

Dr. Wysong, who's the academic program director of the Sports and Entertainment Management program in UD's Graduate School of Management, says most of his students aspire to work for a team in one of the "Big Four" – the National Football League, National Basketball Association, National Hockey League or Major League Baseball.

"Our program is designed to prepare students for a variety of careers in all aspects of the sports and entertainment industries. The problem is that these jobs are unbelievably competitive. Teams receive hundreds of résumés a month."

Hands-on experience is essential, and opportunities to get it are abundant, Dr. Wysong says. "Dallas has three minor league baseball teams, two arena football teams, horse racing, auto racing and many other fun runs."

Students benefit from getting involved at the ground level and directly applying the concepts learned in class, he says. "They have to learn how to sell. That is what sports marketing is all about: selling tickets, selling group nights, selling suites, selling sponsorships."

Paying dues

A willingness to start at the bottom generally leads to success, says Ms. McGhee of Komen. In grad school when she figured out that sports in Dallas was fertile ground, she made a cold call to Dallas sportscaster Chris Arnold and told him she wanted to go into the business.

He put her in touch with Advantage Marketing Group in Irving, where she interned without pay during her last year of graduate school.

One of Ms. McGhee's big successes came last fall with a NASCAR and General Mills partnership.

For sports marketing, "NASCAR is the perfect storm," she says. "It cuts a wide swath across America. [Even] people who are struggling, every household loves NASCAR. If they support Tide, people are buying Tide."

It's her job to get pink out there on view along with Tide's orange and red. Last October, to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, NASCAR fans saw pink racing around the oval in Concord, N.H.

Ms. McGhee likes pointing to another groundbreaking moment under her Komen tenure – the day Major League Baseball turned baseball bats pink. "The MLB had never changed the bat color before. They now do this once a year exclusively for breast cancer awareness."

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