



**Wrestlers WithOut Borders (WWB) Report
Gay Games VII wrestling tournament
SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES – Roger Brigham**

I make these notes based on my observations as:

- past chairman and delegate of WWB to the Federation of Gay Games (2003-04) during the selection of Chicago
- past HAB member (2004-05) during negotiations and early contacts with CGI
- consultant and participant within the wrestling Host Advisory Working Group (HAWG) during 2006
- WWB media liaison during the wrestling weekend and WWB negotiator during media contracting discussions
- coach and participant during the clinic and tournament
- recipient of post-Gay Games comments from numerous other participants
- designer/author/producer of marketing support materials (T-shirt, booklet, trading pins)

There were key elements of the tournament I was not first-hand party to (e.g., moving of the mats, contacts with local wrestling community during 2005-06, tournament pairings); I leave it to others to speak to those matters more directly. Any comments I have in those matters are merely informed second-hand observations and intuitions.

Also, please note that although I have past experience in mainstream wrestling and have been involved with LGBT wrestling since 2003, I have never been involved in a previous Gay Games. For comparisons to those events, I rely on available documentation and reports of others who have been to the events.

Working group

I wish to extend my thanks and congratulations to my colleagues on the HAWG – Gene Dermody, Rob Smitherman and Steve Roth – for their tireless, thorough and patient efforts. They helped to make up for the lack of a local LGBT wrestling club to call upon

and facilitated the advice of WWB in the best possible ways. A critical juncture was when sufficient local registrants had been identified so that we were able to arrange a meeting between members of HAWG and the local wrestlers. That opened the door for ongoing local training and outreach to the local university and officials. The follow-up coaching clinics Dermody provided to the wrestlers resulted in an extremely good showing by the local wrestlers and much enthusiasm for the Games.

Facility

By all accounts, Welsh Ryan was the best facility the Gay Games were ever held in. There was adequate room for the wrestlers to sit together, there was ample room with good visibility for spectators, there was enough room for the three-mat mechanics. It is imperative those three standards are duplicated in future Gay Games.

The Red Book called for locker rooms, showers and changing rooms for the athletes. We were told with the Chicago bid these were available at Welsh Ryan, and Welsh Ryan does indeed have such facilities. One of the most prevalent complaints of the athletes (largely from newer wrestlers) was the lack of such facilities. It should be ensured that future Hosts negotiate the use of such facilities into the venues they choose and use.

Air Conditioning

The other prevailing comment was the lack of air conditioning at Welsh Ryan. The Red Book calls for air conditioning, and if ever a Gay Games needed it (temperatures hovering at 100 degrees Fahrenheit, humidity at more than 70 percent, clear skies bombarding the building with direct light), it was Chicago. We were told after the LA was signed that Welsh Ryan does not have air conditioning. The reality is that it does have air conditioning; that conditioning is turned off on weekends. Had we known that, we could have considered having the powerlifting, physique and wrestling competitions all be scheduled one day later in the week. The Monday (which would then have powerlifting and the wrestling clinic) would still be hot, but the conditioning would have begun and the extraction of humidity (more important than the actual cooling) could have been started, making the tournament the next day far more tolerable and safe.

This needs to be looked at from PR/athlete recruitment standpoints and from safety standpoints, and their relative importance weighed against economic considerations and mission (Participation, Inclusion and Personal Best) considerations. Under extreme summer conditions (such as were in Chicago), safety and PR would suggest having the air conditioning. I did not survey, but I know we had two registered athletes who have had heart attacks in the past. One wrestled and won gold; the other realized he was too much at risk and did not wrestle at all. We were very, very, very fortunate that every effort was made by the host to procure hydration fluids (belatedly but adequate once they arrived), we had informed wrestlers to be wary of dehydration in advance, and the medics were on alert (possibly too much) to the dehydration danger. As to the quality of the wrestling, it deteriorated throughout the day and took its biggest toll on the heavily contested middle-heavy master's (25-49) weight classes.

If there is no air condition at future venues, that needs to be publicized for participants well in advance and necessary preparations made. If there is air conditioning – great. If there is the possibility of having air conditioning but economic conditions suggest that it may or may not be turned on, the possibility should be kept open, participants notified of the possibility of hot conditions, and the final call should be made by a safety committee just as professional and elite amateur sports make calls on rain conditions, low temperatures for winter events, etc.

Medical treatment

Overall, the medical plan for Chicago worked well and the three notable injuries requiring hospital visits (none of the injuries threatening) were handled well. However, **the emergency medical technicians on hand were NOT sports injury medics, they did not bring the necessary understanding of the treatment of such injuries to ensure smooth operation of the tournament, and they did not have the necessary equipment to handle some very routine cuts that are to be expected in a major tournament.**

- On a routine nose bleed, they treated the wounded wrestler with ice for his heat exhaustion before being yelled at by one of the officials to stuff cotton up the kid's nose to stop the bleeding and get him back on the mat. In the meantime, the other wrestler was on the mat sweating in the heat with no relief. It was unfair to him and made us look like idiots with the officials.
- On the first of two head injuries, the medics were going to stop the bout because of a routine abrasion. They had not brought the proper adhesive bandages that could stick with the sweat. It was only through the intervention of the same official who acted previously and the wrestler himself that a makeshift bandage was wrapped around the head and more bandage added as blood began to seep. The mat went forward.
- The next head injury, a true one-inch laceration, was not so lucky. A proper elastic bandage could have held it safely while the match finished its final seconds (the wrestler was winning; it was in the semifinal round; the wrestler knew not to get his head in a risky position again). Had it been there, the wrestler would have earned a silver even if he could not have wrestled the final match, and would have had a shot at the gold. Instead, he was eliminated. We erred on the side of safety, but with proper equipment and medics, this would not have been necessary.

I believe this is a matter of better recruitment and communication of the sport's needs through the Host and local clubs in the months leading up to the competition. Athletic trainers with the local universities should be able to provide recommendations of specific medics to recruit.

Wrestling-trained volunteers

These folks saved the day. There were numerous wrestlers who knew coming in they would not be able to wrestle or who were late scratches who were in Chicago because of the direct recruitment of WWB and its wrestling contacts. They kept the operation of the tournament running smoothly and made the tournament day the great experience it was.

To the degree possible, we trained many of these recruits (Roth, Trey Sheldon, Rick Weeks) specifically at local events before the Gay Games. That saved a lot of headaches for the tournament itself.

Untrained local volunteers

On paper, the Chicago plan would have worked had everyone shown up on time and done the work they were assigned. The reality was that this was an almost total failure. This failure placed an undue burden (once again) on the wrestlers for the physical moving and set up and break down of the mats. That's bad enough before the tournament; it is borderline inhuman after the tournament.

Sydney, by all accounts, had an outstanding volunteer effort. The difference there was that SPORTS individuals and SPORTS organizations were the recruitment targets rather than LGBT organizations without sports investment or understanding. Future hosts should recruit through partnerships that match local LGBT sports teams and their mainstream sports counterparts. This will be of enormous benefit to the tournament and its participants, and leave a bridge-building legacy of value to local mainstream and LGBT communities alike.

Bout managers

In some cases, these worked very well. In many cases, bout managers were nowhere to be found. I worked the coaching corner for at least one dozen matches and in none of those cases did a bout manager escort the wrestler. I walked all of my wrestlers through everything. This needs to be done. Lack of bout managers slows down the tournament by delaying proper paperwork.

Officiating

Officiating at GGVII was outstanding: stellar. This was due to the personal and long-standing contacts within USAW and FILA of WWB representatives and their outreach to the local wrestling officials organizations. This should be replicated in all future Gay Games; it was the failure to do so adequately that led to many of the problems at GG III and V and failure to do so endangers the safety of the participants.

Novices

We promised a novice tournament for those unsure about entering the main tournament. Lack of air conditioning, the extreme heat-humidity conditions, travel time to the venue and the failure of the volunteers to show up and prepare the mats properly all combined to make this logistically impossible. But the clinic itself, run by Northwestern Head Coach Tim Cysewski, was so well conducted and inspiring, and the involvement of the experienced wrestlers helping the newcomers so rewarding, that across the board the novices agreed to enter the main tournament. This was a saving grace.

That said, we should continue to strive to run a novice tournament the day before the main tournament. As good as GG VII was, it would have been better had we been able to give the novices that experience before throwing them into the cauldron.

Tournament pairings

The procession of the tournament brackets was not always clear to the participants, and I suspect part of this was because of the bracket sheets we used, which used a shaded

background to designate different rounds. (My design flaw.) They were fine when printed out, but when photocopied they were too dark to use. This delayed the process of posting the subsequent rounds, and I believe added unnecessarily to the task of sorting out the bouts by the pairings officials. Under WWB guidelines, every bracket with three or more competitors is supposed to end up in a round robin. We ended up in the larger brackets with a kind of hybrid between round robin and double elimination that was not clear and did not result in the head-to-head bouts we seek in a couple of the weight classes. No protests were made, but this needs to be sorted out and re-examined so we do not have avoidable protests in the future and can ensure the fairest outcome.

The sheets have since been redesigned and we should not have a problem with them again in the future.

Color-coded paper for the bout sheets were advised but were NOT used; we should try for color-coded bout sheets as recommended in the future. It was what any major tournament of this sort does.

Veterans (50-plus) age group

We had 13 veterans entered (one was a late scratch) and bouts held in 5 weight classes. Based on the demographics of anticipated wrestlers, that number should hold true again in GG VIII. It made our event more inclusive and far, far safer.

A suggestion that I am making now for the first time for consideration is this: schedule the veterans competition on the novice day. It would ease tournament day logistics and make a larger pool of volunteers available for the open and masters tournaments. And the veterans could spend tournament day coaching newcomers and club teammates.

Community outreach

It was a very positive thing having a community representative from one of the sponsors presenting the medal. It put the stamp on the Games as being more than an intramural exercise and was sorely lacking at some other sports events I witnessed.

There was no LGBT wrestling club in Chicago when we signed the LA with Chicago. There is now thanks to the Gay Games. I think it is imperative that future Hosts early on encourage dialogue and interaction between their LGBT wrestling club(s) and individuals and the local mainstream wrestling, and Host should do whatever is possible to nurture such exchanges. This will build a last legacy of benefit to the total community and make the actual solicitation or volunteers for the running of the tournament much better. Had Chicago engaged mainstream wrestling sooner, we would have had better volunteers across the board at wrestling.

Media relations

What media relations? There were supposed to be media liaisons from the Host for both days of wrestling. There were none. It was left to WWB reps who were manning tables, wrestling, coaching or all three to check credentials, inform media of acceptable procedures, answer questions and steer them toward the correct locations. At the last

minute, CGI reassigned those liaisons to other duties at other venues without informing the wrestling tournament organizers.

I would recommend that all Gay Games credentialed media be required to check in at wrestling registration desk the day of the clinic or tournament to get a wrestling specific credential given to them (with instructions) by a WWB representative or designated person. Any media spotted without proper credentialing or who does not comply with our rules should be escorted from the facilities by security.

Results

A dedicated computer available someone with computer competence to input bout results in real time to be uploaded to the web would be great. Results from GG VII went up late simply because of the failure of Host's volunteers to follow through with media support, mat moving, etc., leaving others already working to start on results reporting only when every other task was done.

Post-tournament events

Traditionally there has been a follow up roll-around session on a local mat and also an opportunity for WWB representatives to meet face to face. The failure to identify and publicize the locations and times for both of these events well in advance essentially caused their failure. Only a handful knew two days after the tournament the time and location of the wrestling session; nobody was informed of when and where WWB would ever be able to meet. Hence, we are now left to scramble to try to tap into the energy and enthusiasm generated by the tournament on a makeshift basis.

I suspect these were low priorities to a Host concerned with surviving and organizing the tournament per se. However, they are duties they owe the wrestlers, WWB, the sport and future Hosts.

Overall

The wrestlers themselves were the stars of GG VII. I have heard wonderful comments from representatives of the participating clubs of the enjoyment and learning they had during the clinic and even in the grueling heat of the tournament competition itself. I think most of the wrestlers did not compete at their technical best – the weather inhibited that – but they showed their resiliency and competed with a fulfilling sense of empowerment and accomplishment, and interacted very successfully with newcomers to their sport. The model GG VII provided should be adopted and built upon.

Respectfully submitted,

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