



**Abby Ritter**

**USF**

Assistant AD/Development

## USF Athletics Stampede for Women

USF athletics believes in the power of sport in the lives of young women and in the experiences that prepare female student-athletes for success as an athlete and beyond. As a former USF track & field and cross country female student-athlete, it was always a dream of mine to take charge and enhance the female student-athlete experience. That dream came true in the fall of 2019 when I spearheaded this initiative with the support of powerful women leaders and philanthropists in the Tampa Bay community, that came together on a mission to enhance the collegiate experience by raising the bar for support for USF's women's athletics programs.

The Stampede for Women initiative allows alumni, Bulls Club members, and the community to offer their talents and resources for student-athlete development during an important time in their lives. In addition to growing financial resources, Stampede for Women enhances the female student-athlete experience through mentorship, professional development, and community through female empowerment and networking opportunities and events. The goal of Stampede for Women is to raise awareness and empower female student-athletes in sport and in life. Any gift to the Stampede for Women fund supports 11 women's sports programs and over 200 female student-athletes within USF athletics. Gifts specifically support operational expenses that improve the overall female student-athlete experience. With the generous support of many donors through the Stampede for Women initiative, we have been able to provide the resources our female athletes need to be successful:

- Fully funded all scholarships for women's sports
- Teraflex Court and bleachers for women's volleyball
- New track surface for track & field
- Turf in batting cages and bullpens for softball

- Increased charter flights for women's basketball travel
- Hired first ever women's lacrosse staff
- Added three full-time staff positions for all women's teams
- Released first ever master facilities plan to capture the vision for women's facility needs
- Hosted first ever professional development event for female student-athletes and staff
- Provided each women's team with leadership and team bonding experiences
- Each women's locker room received a team specific enhancement

As we celebrate the impacts and moments of over 50 years of Title IX, it is my honor to continue working with colleagues, community members and donors to continue pushing the Stampede for Women initiative and raising support for female student-athletes. After all, if they had settled for status quo 50 years ago, we wouldn't have had opportunities. If we settle for status quo now, we won't get any better. USF athletics is competing for championships, developing leaders, breaking barriers and building a community around women's athletics!



**Shekia Smith**

**University of Virginia**

Director of Ticket Operations

Last year, I attended my first ever professional conference, the NACDA & Affiliates Convention in Las Vegas. As one of the recipients for the 2022 NAATSO Diversity Initiative Stipend, I was eagerly anticipating attending the sessions and interacting with countless professionals thriving in this industry. Not only did I get to meet an immense number of people I greatly respect, but I was also able to build connections and expand the depth of my knowledge. Even though I was kind of nervous as the only individual attending within the ticket office from the university, I had to go in with an open mind.

The sessions were spread out over several days and there were endless opportunities to network with all NACDA & Affiliates members as well as sponsors and exhibitors. It was my first time in this type of environment, and I

realized that I had to be present and assertive. Each morning, I'd walk around with a smile on my face, initiating conversations with others all while embracing the energy surrounding me. During the sessions, I'd engage in dialogue with the panel, and I was very optimistic about acquiring the best experience possible. It was also easy to approach panelists after the sessions to make introductions and exchange contact information. Therefore, with this perspective, I have added more than 100 LinkedIn connections from over 40 institutions to my network.

There were also social gatherings that were hosted each night by many different organizations. I had the pleasure of attending the NAATSO, Paciolan and ACC mingling events, which were amazing! It gave me the opportunity to finally put names to faces after a long season of corresponding via email or phone. It was such a great welcoming atmosphere, and I really enjoyed it. I have met some phenomenal people who have since become influential mentors and great friends of mine. Establishing valuable friendships in this industry is vital for your success and long-term goals.

The advice I would give to all who will be taking part in the NACDA & Affiliates Convention this year would be to take advantage of the resources provided and to connect with others prior to your arrival in Orlando. Scheduling small time slots to really indulge in meaningful discussions with professionals who have years of experience can really contribute to your personal growth and development. Putting yourself in a vulnerable space will allow your journey to be more rewarding and it will give you a sense of comfort as you continue to strive and thrive. Additionally, I'd advise anyone to insert themselves in spaces that they may be slightly uncomfortable with. I know attending the Convention alone is not ideal, but you would be doing yourself a disservice if you keep to yourself. I think it is important to make your mark! You must be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Overall, the NACDA & Affiliates Convention has played a substantial role in my career this far and I am extremely thankful.