



USC UPSTATE SPARTANS
2023-24 NACMA "BEST OF" AWARDS SUBMISSION
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



GAMEDAY ACTIVATION

Bringing the Community Together Through Athletics

SEASON-LONG INVOLVEMENT



From fall to spring, USC Upstate used its platform as a megaphone for organizations performing critical work to serve communities in need. Throughout the season, these organizations received the opportunity to engage fans on game day,

recruit volunteers, collect donations, and forge meaningful connections with the campus and local community.

USC Upstate intentionally sought connections to organizations serving every sector of the community, including tending to issues of:

- Veterans needs
- Special needs
- Hunger
- Public Health
- Housing
- Mental Health
- Poverty
- Women's Empowerment
- Mentorship
- Foster Care

In total, USC Upstate hosted **more than 120 representatives, volunteers, program members and beneficiaries of more than 20 charities and nonprofits** in the region.

WALT'S WALTZ STIGMA FREE CAMPUS

An upstate South Carolina-based non-profit organization with the mission of defeating stigma surrounding those with mental health struggles, Walt's Waltz deploys a three-step action plan to educate communities, promote equitable approaches to mental health care, and to empower communities to engage in stigma-free discussion. In February 2024, USC Upstate became the first university nationwide to receive the Walt's Waltz Stigma-Free Environment designation. USC Upstate chancellor Dr. Bennie Harris and Walt's Waltz co-founder Susan Crooks, alongside numerous university ambassadors, celebrated the achievement during an on-court ceremony during the Spartans' homecoming men's basketball game.



EDUCATION DAY

USC Upstate hosted its annual Education Day women's basketball game in December 2023, hosting **more than 700 students** across six Spartanburg county elementary schools (*G.B. Hodge Center capacity: 818*). Upon entry, students received activity booklets, blending educational content, fitness and nutrition tips, discussions about future preparations, and bio content of Spartan

student-athletes, foldable into a commemorative poster. In-game programming featured on-court competitions for both students and teachers – one teacher even hit a blindfolded logo three! Attendees were treated to a post-game photo and autograph session with the women's basketball team.



YOUTH SPORTS OPPORTUNITIES

Recognizing our platform to promote participation in sport to the next generation, USC Upstate engaged the youth sports community through programs allowing young athletes immersive experiences side-by-side with their favorite Spartans. The men's and women's soccer ballkid program gave youth soccer athletes the opportunity to retrieve balls out of play, witnessing every moment from the Upstate sideline, while the Field of Dreams program, hosted by baseball and softball, paired youth stars with a Spartan student-athlete to take the field during starting lineup introductions, remaining on the field through the national anthem. In total, USC Upstate hosted **more than 200 youth athletes** in 2023-24 via these programs.



ANTHEM & HALFTIME GROUPS

Leveraging relationships with school-based and private performing arts groups in the Spartanburg area, USC Upstate packed its men's and women's basketball schedule with live national anthem and halftime performances, granting young performers the opportunity to showcase their talents on the grand stage of Division-1 college basketball. From choirs to step teams to dance troupes, even a nationally-famous 11-year old violinist, the G.B. Hodge Center was the place to be for young talent in the upstate region. In total, USC Upstate hosted **nearly 450 performers** during the 2023-24 basketball season.



MORGAN SQUARE MADNESS

Hoops in the Heart of Downtown Spartanburg



South Carolina's only outdoor basketball tip-off party, Morgan Square Madness captures the excitement of a traditional Midnight Madness event, against the backdrop of one of the nation's most historic cities. Located in Morgan Square, the heart of downtown Spartanburg, Morgan Square Madness gives Spartan fans an exclusive first look at the upcoming season's men's and women's basketball programs – the event featuring live music, player introductions, interviews with head coaches, basketball skill demonstrations, and interactive competitions which allowed fans to go head-to-head with their favorite student-athletes.

More than 1,000 fans attended the 2023 edition of Morgan Square Madness, the athletic department utilizing the event's high-profile platform to recognize and include various groups within the USC Upstate campus and greater Spartanburg communities in the event's programming.

KIDS CLUBS OF THE UPSTATE

More than 30 members of Kids Clubs of the Upstate, an organization providing comprehensive afterschool and summer programming to underserved youth in the community, were invited to attend Morgan Square Madness as VIP guests of the USC Upstate men's and women's basketball programs. Attendees were given premium seating, and each child was paired with a Spartan athlete during pre-event team introductions. Kids Clubs of the Upstate members, as well as the program's director, were included in multiple elements of the event's entertainment programming.

SPARTY'S KIDS CLUB

New for the 2023-24 season, USC Upstate established Sparty's Kids Club to engage its youngest fanbase. Members who participated in early registration for Sparty's Kids Club were rewarded with exclusive access to a pre-event shootaround on the Morgan Square Madness court the evening prior to the event, and a surprise appearance by USC Upstate men's basketball student-athletes. During Morgan Square Madness, select members of Sparty's Kids Club participated in a junior dunk contest, just prior to the main dunk contest that served as the event's showstopper finale. Incentives tied to Morgan Square Madness helped USC Upstate register 80 members during the early registration period of the program's inaugural year.

STUDENT FAN SHUTTLE

In order to better serve and engage the USC Upstate campus community during one of the university's signature events, the athletic department arranged for its campus shuttle to transport students the five-mile trip from USC Upstate to downtown Spartanburg.

PUBLIC FIGURE & BUSINESS LEADER APPEARANCES

In addition to giving fans a first look at the 2023-24 basketball rosters, Morgan Square Madness also allowed the Spartanburg community exclusive face time with some of the most important and influential individuals in the city and county. From local media personalities to business leaders to City of Spartanburg Mayor Jerome Rice, dozens of prominent individuals addressed the crowd, mingled with event attendees and participated in the event's entertainment programming.



CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

Creating Larger Platforms and Deeper Relationships

SPONSOR INVOLVEMENT

USC Upstate leveraged multiple corporate partnerships in furtherance of the department's community engagement efforts.



INGLES

In partnership with Ingles Markets, the official supermarket of USC Upstate athletics, Spartan athletic programs could directly earn donations for local nonprofit organizations via their athletic performance.

MEN'S & WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

For every made three-point field goal by the Spartans, Ingles donated \$3 to the Gibbs Cancer Center & Research Institute at Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System. USC Upstate made a total of 402 three-pointers in 2023-24, resulting in \$1,206 raised.



BASEBALL & SOFTBALL

For each strikeout recorded by the USC Upstate baseball program, Ingles donated \$1 to Kids Clubs of the Upstate, an organization providing comprehensive afterschool and summer programming to underserved youth in the community. To date, the baseball program has recorded 358 strikeouts, resulting in \$358 raised.



Strikeouts recorded by the USC Upstate softball program, benefitted Christmas in Action, a non-profit that rehabilitates the houses of elderly, disabled, and otherwise disadvantaged homeowners to provide for their continued safety and independence. To date, the softball program has recorded 206 strikeouts, resulting in \$206 raised.



INGLES I-26 RIVALRY



USC Upstate further partnered with Ingles and Big South Conference opponent UNC Asheville to introduce the Ingles I-26 rivalry – the annual winner of which would be determined by a points system based predominantly on head-to-head athletic competition, while also including elements of community involvement. Each program could earn an additional three points for their side by encouraging fans to participate in a month-long food drive campaign, benefitting organizations select-

ed by each program. Special donation bins were placed in each school's athletic venues, as well as at participating Ingles locations in the programs' respective communities. USC Upstate selected Miracle Hill Ministries, South Carolina's largest and most comprehensive provider of homeless services, as its beneficiary, and collected more than 339 donation items in total.

BUDWEISER SPOTLIGHT ON SPARTANBURG

Throughout the 2023-24 season, USC Upstate partnered with Budweiser of Spartanburg to highlight impactful community organizations as part of the "Spotlight on Spartanburg" series. Each month, a different organization would be highlighted at an on-campus athletic event, recognized in-game, and given opportunities for concourse tabling and information distribution to better connect with the Upstate campus and Spartanburg community at large.



AUGUST

Spartanburg Humane Society

As part of "Pups on the Pitch" pet adoption and donation drive event (women's soccer)

SEPTEMBER

USC Upstate Counseling Services

As part of mental health awareness and suicide prevention event (women's soccer)

OCTOBER

Gibbs Cancer Center

As part of breast cancer awareness and prevention event (women's volleyball)

NOVEMBER

P.S. I Love You*

*Organization cancelled appearance

DECEMBER

Gibbs Cancer Center, Kids Upstate, Hope Center for Children

Recognition of 2022-23 Ingles nonprofit beneficiaries (men's basketball)

JANUARY

Miracle Hill Ministries

As part of Ingles I-26 rivalry food drive (men's basketball)

FEBRUARY

Walt's Waltz

In recognition of USC Upstate campus-wide Stigma Free Pledge (men's basketball)

MARCH

HALTER Equine Assisted Services

(baseball)

APRIL

Big Brothers Big Sisters Spartanburg

(softball)