

Final Four 2012: The Four Women Covering the Men's National Championship Game

By Ali Binney, Sports and Wellness Assistant Editor

On Friday, March 30, I entered the Mercedes-Benz Superdome as a Media Intern at the 2012 Final Four in New Orleans. The Final Four, part of the 2012 NCAA Men's Division I Basketball Tournament that began on March 13 and concluded on April 2, pitted the final four surviving college basketball teams against each other to determine the champion. This year, the Kentucky Wildcats beat out the Kansas Jayhawks and Louisville Cardinals to claim the championship title in an intense two-day event. As a Media Intern, my major role during this tournament included getting statistics to all of the media present (400+ reporters, camera people, TV personalities and analysts, and more), holding the microphone for the reporters and various press conferences and aiding the press in any way I could.

At Wellesley, it's easy to forget that immature, rude men exist in the world. Lucky for me however, throughout the day, I was reminded that these specimens permeate much of the country. When I entered the interview room, a curtained-off section of the workroom, one of the many white-washed rooms in the bowels of the Dome, I was almost always the only woman in the room. I felt like I was on a stage and every man in the room, including the players, were watching my opening act. As though being contacted by various 20-something male producers and reporters asking if I was free for dinner didn't make me feel unprofessional enough. As one of maybe 15 interns working the event which was attended by a record-setting 70,000+ people, you become a spectacle as a woman, whether you like it or not. On several occasions when I was passing out statistics sheets to writers around the court, I encountered the sexist Kentucky University fans that used cheesy pick-up lines and inappropriate comments throughout both games. At one point, fans even grabbed at me from their seats and accompanied this action with extremely lewd comments.

Throughout these incidents, you feel an overwhelming sense of sexism. However, the saving grace was entering the media workroom, a large room filled with various media outlets, and speaking with notable female reporters on being women in the sports world. For me, this is where I found the real stars of the event.

Keri Potts, Director of Communications for ESPN, and I talked about how even the most minute things are analyzed when you're a woman, but when you're a man, it's okay to wear camouflage pants and show up disheveled. Potts commented, "That would never fly with my boss."

ESPN College Basketball Chief Writer Dana O'Neil talked about the importance of familiarizing yourself with sports if you want to be in this business. She said that too many times women make mistakes which hurt the other women who are trying to make it in the business.

ESPN Reporter Erin Andrews talked about the importance of connections and networking and how being ballsy in this business is important. She even complimented me on coming up and talking to her because she said people miss an opportunity because they feel intimidated. Then we talked about your image as a woman and how it's a constant juggling act.

Rounding out the lineup was Rachel Bachman, Sports Writer for the Wall Street Journal, who said that it's all about building a portfolio and your resume.

Having the opportunity to speak with these premier pros in the field I want to go into was a once in a lifetime opportunity. After hearing their experience and advice, I began to feel an overwhelming sense of pride. Not only was I fortunate enough to be chosen to work the event, but I was only one of 15 women doing so. It wasn't based on my looks, but because I performed well and excelled at the tasks given to me at the football bowl games over winter break. I felt accomplished and I wouldn't have gotten here without the female mentors I now have. I was the one female intern, the only woman in general, standing on that court, and although I hadn't won the National Championship trophy that day, I felt a renewed sense of pride being a female sports reporter and that was a prize in itself.