



By Tom Schuman

STRATEGIC FIT

Sports Organizations at Home in Indy

The story of Indianapolis becoming known as the amateur sports capital is a well-documented journey that began more than 35 years ago. The leaders of four Olympic national governing bodies (NGBs oversee all aspects of their individual sports) are first-hand witnesses to the special qualities that still make the city a desired destination.

Getting to Know the Players

- **USA Diving (www.usadiving.org):**

Established in Indianapolis in 1981; 10 local staff members. The organization has approximately 8,800 members.

- **USA Gymnastics (www.usagym.org):**

Established in 1963; in Indianapolis since 1983; 56 staff members. Nearly 160,000 members, including 3,000 businesses (gymnastics clubs). Programs include artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, acrobatic gymnastics, and trampoline and tumbling.

- **USA Synchro (www.usasynchro.org):**

Established 1977; in Indianapolis since 1983; four local staff members. Nearly 6,000 members with an additional 10% growth projected for this year.

- **USA Track & Field (www.usatf.org):**

The Amateur Athletic Union governed the sport from 1878-1979. Became The Athletics Congress/TAC in 1979 and USA Track & Field in 1992. In Indianapolis since 1980; 50 local employees (others in New York and Atlanta offices). More than 120,000 members (65% youth); sanctions over 6,700 events each year.

Indianapolis (previous page, top center) is home to the national governing bodies for athletes such as gymnast Sam Mikulak (*USA Gymnastics photo/John Cheng*), track star Alan Webb (*USA Track & Field photo*), diver David Boudia and the 2012 synchronized swimming U.S. National team.

“This city, not only has it benefitted from the sports effort that it put forward, but it has contributed to a lot of great sports moments for our country,” says Steve Penny, president and CEO of USA Gymnastics. “We had our first female world champion (Kim Zmeskal) crowned here in Indianapolis in 1991. That’s something people around the world remember for our sport. There is a tremendous amount of knowledge, respect and admiration for what Indianapolis has achieved on a national and global basis.”

Linda Paul, in the same position with USA Diving, is an Indianapolis native who has been part of the sports story through various community roles, including a stint at the Indiana Sports Corp. During the selection process for the 2016 Olympic Trials that were eventually awarded to Indianapolis, others on the committee wondered about the city’s persistent desire to host the event. The direct question: “Why would this community go to such lengths?”

“Lindsey (Hendren, national events director and also an Indianapolis native) and I both looked at each other and said, ‘That’s what we do here.’

“This is the fabric of our community; all these things have woven together over time. It’s really genuine; it’s not phony. Almost my whole career has been in this in some way, shape or form. It will be nice to see all that come together. We want to give Indianapolis and our state something to be proud of.”

Penny, who has attended 10 of the past 13

Olympic Games, has been involved with national and international sporting events throughout his career. Asked what sets Indianapolis apart, he offers, “What makes a city special is when you feel like you own the town. Indianapolis has done it with Final Fours and the Super Bowl. They’re (NCAA, NFL) used to owning the stadium and used to having a presence, but it’s another thing to own the city. You can showcase sports here because you can own it. That’s not always the case in bigger cities.”

Indy landscape

There are 39 Olympic sports with national governing bodies. Twenty-two are located in Colorado Springs, Colo., home of the U.S. Olympic Committee. Indianapolis ranks second with the four NGBs, with USA Track and USA Synchronized Swimming (USA Synchro) joining gymnastics and diving in the same downtown building. Other sports-related organizations (NCAA, USA Football and American College of Sports Medicine to name a few) are also headquartered in the city.

The Indiana Sports Corp. shares the following numbers since its formation in 1979: host of more than 450 national and international events, 17 Olympic Trials and world championships in basketball, swimming, gymnastics and rowing. (In addition, Indianapolis will host the NCAA Men’s Final Four for the seventh time in 2015 and Super Bowl XLVI in 2012 resulted in a direct economic impact of \$176 million).

“Olympic sports were the cornerstone of Indiana’s sports movement when several national governing bodies chose Indianapolis as their headquarters city,” says Indiana Sports Corp. President Allison Melangton. “Today, Olympic sports remain a large piece of the reputation Indiana has built as a sports leader.

“The national governing bodies here in Indiana feature some of the nation’s top sports leaders. These influential individuals bring great value to Olympic sports and to our community in general.”

In addition to some of their leading events, the four NGBs bring board members, coaches, meetings and other gatherings to the city. Approximately 1,600 track and field constituents came to Indianapolis in December for the organization’s annual meeting at the JW Marriott.

“The feedback we got was that it was one of the best annual meetings they ever attended for a number of reasons,” shares USA Track CEO Max Siegel, an Indianapolis native who returned home in May 2012 after 20-plus years in executive positions in various sports and entertainment industries. Siegel cites downtown logistics, the hotel facility and reasonable costs among the factors that made the event a big success.

Indianapolis, specifically the IUPUI natatorium, served as the training center for USA Synchro leading up to the 2012 Olympics and previous Olympic Trials have taken place in the city. Kevin Warner, chief operations officer, explains that the sport is divided



The Greensboro, North Carolina Coliseum Complex was the site of the 2014 AT&T American Cup (*USA Gymnastics photo/John Cheng*).

The Indiana University Natatorium “wall,” with the names of Olympic qualifiers, serves as the backdrop for the 2008 U.S. Olympic trials (Peter H. Bick photo).



Hitting ‘The Wall’ a Good Thing

David Boudia may have been born in Texas, but he grew up in Noblesville – with the Indiana University Natatorium being as close as one can get to a second home for the 2012 Olympic platform diving champion.

“Six days a week for seven straight years at the Natatorium,” Boudia reflects. “2008 was probably the biggest home field advantage when the Olympic Trials were in Indianapolis. That was one of the most special competitions I had ever been in because it was local, because of family and friends being able to come.

“And it was the iconic names of the Olympians on the back wall of the Natatorium. Every day growing up I went to practice and saw those names on the wall, and that’s part of the package of becoming an Olympian.”

In 2016, the 4,700-seat IUPUI facility (in need of an estimated \$17 million in upgrades) will host the Olympic Trials for the sixth time. Linda Paul, president and CEO of USA Diving, recalls the history.

“Anybody in aquatics would tell you some of their best memories were made, records broken and dreams happened at the Natatorium,” Paul shares. “On the swimming side, it was considered one of the fastest pools in the world; it’s been a big part of the history of aquatics in the United States for a long time.”

Regarding the famous wall, Paul notes that Olympic qualifiers “will not leave there until they see the artist paint that last letter. One thing we’re going to try and do (in 2016) is bring that wall to life.” She adds that a legacy project is also important for the organization in its hometown.

Boudia says he has benefited from outstanding coaching throughout his career from John Wingfield (the 2008 Olympic coach) and Adam Soldati when he entered college at Purdue. It also didn’t hurt to have the national governing body and its national training center nearby.

“It’s just easier access. Instead of knowing someone through email, you see them face-to-face and those are the people who support your sport. It’s been extremely helpful to know them by name and have a relationship with them,” he offers.

The just-turned 25-year-old graduated in December 2013 with a communications degree. The relationships and the studies come in handy as he seeks sponsors and endorsement deals as a professional, while also speaking to different organizations. Just over a week after our mid-March conversation, he competed in a FINA Diving World Series event in Beijing – one of six events in a three-month span.

“This will make or break me as I go into the 2016 Olympics. Diving went from something I liked to do as a hobby to doing it as my career,” he summarizes. “When I was younger, the dream was to become an Olympian. Now, if I’m not practicing hard, not working as hard as I can, my family won’t eat.”



David Boudia is an 18-time national champion and 2012 Olympic gold medalist in the platform event (Hans Deryk photo).

geographically into four zones, talent is starting to be more disbursed throughout the country from its previous stronghold in California and that, “We like to bring things to Indianapolis as often as we can.”

Plenty of partners

City and state businesses benefit from the presence of the NGBs, maybe none more than Sport Graphics and its longstanding partnerships with the Indiana Sports Corp., the NCAA and other entities. Penny and Siegel identify additional business relationships for their organizations.

USA Gymnastics has relied on City Securities and Faegre Baker Daniels for insurance and legal needs, respectively. The Three Sixty Group has focused on rebranding and advertising campaigns, with A-1 Awards providing medals and trophies for events over the past 15 years.

For USA Track, Matchbook is in charge of advertising and creating collateral material. Siegel terms it an example of a strong vendor/sponsor relationship, as is one with Hightech Signs in Fort Wayne – which assists with event production throughout the country.

An official partner of all four NGBs (and many other organizations) is St. Vincent Sports Performance. All the NGB executives value the medical expertise and assistance – both at home and on the road.

As executive director of St. Vincent Sports Performance, Ralph Reiff has seen the organization grown from seven employees in 1999 to 92 today. They include trainers, strength and conditioning specialists, sports psychologists, a dietitian and more.

“The consistent thread (of collaborations with the four NGBs) is that we are an access point for the athletes of each of those sports into a health care system,” he details, listing initial evaluations, procedures, rehabilitation and interactions with coaches among the various services. St. Vincent Sports Performance is on-site locally and beyond for track, gymnastics and diving events.

“Having organizations such as the Olympic national governing bodies, it adds a group of individuals who make their living from sport,” he adds. “The CEOs, communications, marketing people infuse your home community with people who have an understanding of the global landscape of sports. It adds a richness to our sports community.”

Reiff has been part of that community since the early days, managing the medical aspects of many national and international competitions. Of the growing impact of the St. Vincent entity, he says, “One of our goals was to make Indianapolis not just a destination for events, but teams and athletes to make Indianapolis a destination for training. And we’ve done that.”

Team effort

While focused on their own sports and the levels of competition from

youth to master’s, the NGB leaders value the opportunity to work together.

Paul notes that USA Synchro coaches have been helpful with the synchronized aspects of diving. Warner says, “It’s good to have that teamwork and share some resources. It’s very beneficial being together; instead of getting on the phone and calling, the person I need might just be walking by our office.”

Siegel, Penny and their USA swimming counterpart (in Colorado) are teaming on a marketing and promotional platform leading up to the 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil.

“We’re calling ourselves the Trio to Rio,” Siegel shares with a laugh. He values being able to talk to his Indianapolis colleagues about “best practices, growing memberships, grassroots. Not only is it convenient, but we lean on each other quite a bit to continue to improve our organizations.”

Special occasions

The four NGBs have each called Indianapolis home for 30-plus years. The chief executives grew up in the city (Paul and Siegel), nearby (Warner is originally from Anderson, Indiana and has been back in Central Indiana for 12 years) or have now been here 15 years (Penny, who was promoted to his existing role and became the father of three daughters on the same day in 2005).

Penny believes it’s time to move past the amateur sports capital label. “I’ve been all over rebranding this town as the sports capital of America. There is no city in America that galvanizes itself around sport the way Indianapolis does. They (other cities) may be able to do it every once in a while, but Indianapolis does it on a regular basis.”

The 2015 P&G Gymnastics Championships will take place at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in August. It is the fourth time Indianapolis will host the event, but the first since 2005. The National Congress and Trade Show is an accompanying three-day showcase for the sport.

“We want our P&G Championships to be a Super Bowl for this city,” Penny continues. “Indianapolis is home. Anytime you’re basically hosting people in your home, you want that to be the best. Let’s make sure people leave here ... saying that was the best championships ever. That’s the standard we have.”

Reiff and Siegel point out that other communities have recognized the many benefits of hosting sports events. But Indianapolis has responded well to the competition, according to Reiff.

For Siegel, part of the evaluation for site selection is infrastructure, as well as ensuring the best possible athlete and fan experiences. “But there’s no substitute for when the public and private sectors and the people who are passionate about it come together. It’s just a feeling like no other.”



The U.S. Age Group Championships (Riverside, Calif. was the site in 2013) are one of synchronized swimming’s major events (*Khai Le photo*).



Albuquerque served as host for the 2014 USA Indoor Track & Field Championships (*USA Track & Field photo*).