Recounting the 2019 IAAF Track and Field World Championships

Former EO summer intern shares his experience in Qatar Sept. 20 – Oct. 8

By ALEX CASTLE
Around the UO

Photo contributed by Around the UO

School of Journalism and Communication students (left to right) Brett Taylor, Nate Mann, Brooklynn Loiselle and Alex Castle spent 10 days covering the IAAF World Track and Field Championships in Doha, Qatar.

DOHA, Qatar — As I left the too-small, too-crowded, but air-conditioned media tent and entered the sticky, sauna-like air of Doha, Qatar, my glasses immediately fogged. After wiping them clear, I checked the clock on my phone.

It was already a quarter to 1 a.m. — almost an hour into the women's marathon, the finale of the first day of the 2019 International Association of Athletics Federations World Track and Field Championships.

I had already spent eight hours at Khalifa International Stadium covering the first day of track competition with three of my classmates, Nate Mann, Brooklynn Loiselle and Brett Taylor, before catching a bus with Mann to the women's marathon venue.

We walked the short path from the media tent to the Corniche, the waterfront promenade along the Persian Gulf, which had been transformed into a road course. As we waited at the marathon finish line, watching as runners looped their way around the course six times, exhaustion began to set in.

But we weren't done yet.

We finished watching the marathon unfold in humid, 90-degree weather, conducted more interviews, rode the bus back to our hotel and wrote our stories in the lobby. When our instructor, Lori Shontz, finished editing our stories, our day was finally over.

I checked the clock on my phone again. It was 5:30 a.m.

"Talk about getting thrown into it," Mann said.

Less than a week prior, we had boarded a plane for a place none of us had ever been, to do something none of us ever thought we'd get the chance to do. More than 7,000 miles and a full day of travel had landed us halfway across the world, where we covered the track and field world championships for 10 days, from September 27 through October 6.

We had this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity because we are enrolled in the School of Journalism and Communication's Sports Bureau, founded by Shontz. The popular sports journalism course has sent students to cover all major track and field events at Hayward Field since spring 2015.

From classroom to professional field work

Shontz, a former sports journalist who specialized in covering intercollegiate athletics and Olympic sports, began teaching what's known as "track class" at the end of her first year at the university.

"It's obviously a class in sports journalism," Shontz said. "But it's really a class in advanced beat writing, in deadline reporting, in working as a team. And it's a chance to cover something that is a vital part of our local community."

Students start by reading about the history of track and field and its connection with Eugene and the university. They learn about the technical parts of the sport from coaches, athletes, administrators and exercise physiologists.

Then they cover early-season meets for the class website, writing on deadline in the media tribune at Hayward. By the end of the term, they are covering events like the NCAA Track and Field Championships as paid freelancers for professional news organizations.

Shontz uses her connections through Associated Press Sports Editors to get assignments for the students, who have published 138 stories in 37 professional outlets nationwide over the past few years.

With the World Athletics Championships coming to Eugene, the four students who traveled to Doha are laying the groundwork for what will be a full-sized student news bureau, directed by Shontz, in 2021.

Career-launching experiential learning

During our 10 days in Doha, we published 51 written stories, including daily coverage for two Oregon newspapers, *The Oregonian* and *The Register-Guard*, and for DyeStat.com, a track and field website. We also posted 58 athlete interview videos for DyeStat, plus two podcasts and a broadcast package on our SOJC Track website.

Mann, a journalism major, worked as the daily reporter for *The Register-Guard*, while fellow journalism major Castle served as the daily reporter for *The Oregonian*. The two were primarily assigned to cover the performances of former UO athletes and others with connections to the state.

After days of watching and interviewing the same athletes, they had the valuable experience of developing trust with their subjects and reaped the benefits of the stories that came with it.

"I had to carry the conversations," Mann said. "I couldn't rely on the other journalists to fill the air. But after this, I feel qualified to ask the questions I want to ask and tell the stories I want to tell."

Taylor primarily shot video interviews with athletes, working shoulder-to-shoulder with videographers and reporters from news outlets around the world. The videos were posted to DyeStat, where they were heavily viewed. One interview with Donavan Brazier, who broke a 34-year-old American record while winning the world title in the 800 meters, has received more than 170,000 views.

"I never realized how difficult it would be to shoot video and try to interview an athlete all at the same time," Taylor said. "Trying to balance the camera and make sure everything looks good while also trying to formulate questions was an interesting experience."

Loiselle is a public relations major in the SOJC. In addition to writing daily stories for DyeStat, she managed the Sports Bureau's social media accounts on Twitter and Instagram. While she had some previous experience managing accounts for Oregon Track Club and during the bureau's trips to Portland and Stanford, Doha brought pressure to boost exposure.

"The trip was one of the first times I had to really be proactive on Twitter in order for our stories to get coverage and readers," Loiselle said. "I had to learn how to manage hashtags, and what type of posts people like to see."

While the clicks online and clips in the newspapers were validation, the group had to work hard for them. Days at the track began at 2 or 3 p.m., and all stories and videos for the day often weren't filed until after 2 or 3 a.m.

But the consistency and hard work paid off when it came to finding and telling the event's best stories.

"Ten days of event coverage was by far the most daunting and challenging thing I've ever done," Castle said. "But there was nothing more rewarding than feeling like the work was getting easier and the stories were getting better each day."

For Taylor, who is pursuing a career in sports broadcasting, the two weeks' worth of reporting made him more comfortable handling difficult situations.

"I think this experience has helped me a lot with interviewing people under a tremendous amount of pressure," Taylor said. "I feel way more confident coming up with questions and asking them without feeling nervous."

Mann feels more confident connecting with others and representing himself professionally.

"I think it will give me confidence with new experiences," he said. "I don't feel nervous filling the air and projecting myself as someone who is confident and knowledgeable."

The meet was a bucket-list item for Loiselle, who relished getting to share the experience of a major sporting event with some of the world's greatest athletes.

"I never thought I'd have the opportunity to cover an international sporting event," Loiselle said. "As a track fan, the meet was incredible. But as a journalist, I loved getting the opportunity to write about something that is so important to the athletes. They have been dreaming of this moment for such a long time, and we get to share that story."

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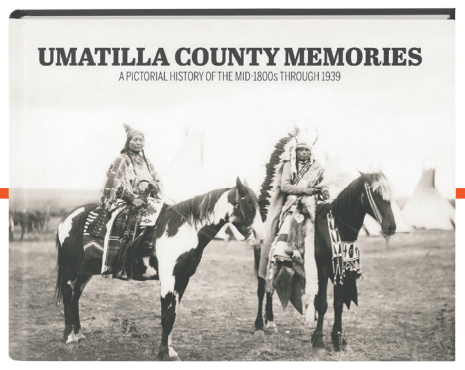

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