

WISCONSIN SPORTS NETWORK AWARDS CEREMONY

by Karla Sommer and Chris Willette

What an honor it was to be invited to attend the Wisconsin Sports Network awards ceremony and participant in awarding the UW-Madison Men's Basketball Team the College Team of the Year Award!

To provide you some background, Chris received an email less than 12 hours before this event was to begin indicating that the Wisconsin Sports Network was looking for a couple of "stenographers" to attend their awards ceremony that evening in Kohler. This was an opportunity we could not pass up, so we immediately began making our plans.

We had no idea what we were getting into, but it was quite an amazing evening! There were more than 600 people in attendance, many of whom were famous sports figures. We met so many wonderful people and got to hang out backstage and chat with people we would never have imagined meeting.

Since our last minute addition to the itinerary was to be a surprise to Nigel and the other players, we were asked to keep our presence a secret until the awards ceremony. We were allowed to anonymously mingle in the pre-awards reception which was a full-scale promotional event including tons of amazing appetizers, beverages, photo booth, DJ, sports games, etc.

The awards process was similar to the awards ceremonies that you would see on TV, except instead of a "thank you" speech, the winners were invited to sit on couches on the stage for a very brief interview. Nigel had received an award earlier in the evening. During that award, the MC asked him if he had words he could share with the audience, after which the conversation turned briefly to stenographers and the positive media attention his comments garnered for the stenography profession. In that conversation Nigel said something like, "I guess it's a big deal. I don't really know why. I just said a few words." We were very impressed with his genuine personality.

The MC for the award with which we were there to assist was Mark Tauscher, a former Green Bay Packer. We got to strategize with him about the presentation. Once they were settled on the couch, Mark started ribbing Nigel about the stenographer comments and presented him with our prepared WCRA Go Badgers poster that was written in steno. Tauscher asked him to read it and then said something like, "Oh, wait. We have your own personal stenographers here to help," at which time we entered the stage with our machines and sat down and started writing. We were then to have open conversation with the team, make it lighthearted and fun. On the stage were Coach Bo Ryan, Sam Dekker, Nigel Hayes, and Josh Gasser.

Chris then took the mic and congratulated the team on behalf of all stenographers, court reporters, CART providers, and captioners across the United States on their great season. She then turned to Nigel and said something like, "Nigel, earlier you wondered what you had done for our profession. Let me just tell you that we are in the process of a nationwide campaign to recruit more students into our profession. After your words, schools right here in the State of Wisconsin -- Lakeshore Technical College and Madison Area Technical College -- have seen increased enrollment. Your timing was impeccable and we thank you for that. We would like to thank you by making you an honorary court reporter for the next few minutes." Karla then put her machine in front of Nigel and he started writing. Sam Dekker then wanted to try it, so Chris gave him her machine. They sat and wrote and had a conversation about

the words that were coming up. Chris interjected and told them they should perhaps give up on the whole basketball thing and consider a career in court reporting! Sam is entering the draft, so that got a good laugh.

Both of us got our machines autographed by Nigel. We were able to present our prepared poster to the team for their locker room. We also brought along one of the Badger t-shirts with "the words" on it, and Nigel and Coach Ryan both signed it as well. We will be donating it to our raffle at our fall convention to raise money for the Wisconsin Chapter of Reach out and Read ~ Where Great Stories Begin, a nonprofit organization that advocates for child literacy.

The evening was not finished yet. We then attended the after-party at The American Club in Kohler with another full spread of food and beverages and a dance. This is the time that we really had some great promo of the profession. We were recognized by a ton of people as, "Oh, you're the stenographers?! How does that machine work?" Interesting fact... when we said we were court reporters, they look at you like, what's that? When you say "stenographer," there was recognition. There seems to be a bit of a disconnect, which we thought was very interesting. Random people would walk by and give a shout-out, "Awesome job, stenographers!" We described the opportunities that exist in our profession and the shortage to many interested people.

The awards ceremony will air on Wisconsin's major networks in June. We will keep you posted.

