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By Livi Simone Grant

The date was April 30, and the temperature was below 40 degrees. I grew up in Atlanta and went to college in Florida, so the chill in the air was more than I anticipated for this time of year.

As I stepped off the plane in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I was uncertain of what my next two months in the "cheese state" would look like. Warped together were nerves and excitement, but it was hard to tell which one overwhelmed me more. In the face of my uneasiness, I never questioned why I was there. I had competed successfully for an internship with the United States Golf Association (USGA) and earned the chance to spend two months preparing for and executing the 117th U.S. Open at Erin Hills.

I was determined to make those two months a time to learn. Not only to learn more about the golf industry and the nuances of operating a major championship, but also more about myself and my interests. I vowed to work diligently to help the event be a success, and at the same time grow my professional and personal network. I knew I had to do a great job - go beyond what was expected of me so that I could pave the way for other students at my university and represent Women of Color Golf (WOCG) - the organization operated by Clemmie Perry, who played a pivotal role throughout my internship and has been supportive of me from Day One.

It all began when I was a few weeks into my second semester as a freshman at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). I learned from the career services portal associated with my business school about an internship opportunity with the USGA for the summer of 2017. I had challenged myself prior to my freshman year to seek an internship that would allow me to supplement my academics with real work experience (paid or unpaid), as well as further develop my personal and professional skills.

The interview process with the USGA included a phone call, a video interview conducted online and then another call. I was thrilled when I received that one last call from the USGA's Kamille Ramos notifying that I'd been selected as one of the 2017 interns.





Livi Grant (second from left) was one of four interns onsite at the 2017 U.S. Open.

It was after that when I became familiar with Ms. Perry, a FAMU alumni and the founder of the WOCG. The organization's root mission - to promote and facilitate the inclusion of minority women in golf - drew me to the non-profit. Ms. Perry's undying enthusiasm for that mission and authentic support of goals upon landing the internship inspired me to get further involved. I elected to become a WOCG Ambassador, which I found extremely beneficial and fulfilling. I believe to whom much is given, much is expected. I embrace the role of trying to increase the involvement of minorities and women, like myself, in the game and business of golf. Through my position with the USGA and as a WOCG Ambassador, I encourage others to learn more about the game and seek opportunities within the field.

Prior to the internship, admittedly, I was oblivious to the impact the Open would have on the small rural town of Hartford, Wisconsin. Located 35 miles northwest of Milwaukee, this hidden jewel has green pastures that stretch for miles inhabited by grazing farm animals.

Upon my arrival, the merchandising staff welcomed me to the team. The next day, I was able to visit the 39,000-square foot merchandise tent that I would be assigned to work at during the championship. Although it was still under construction at the time, I recognized in that moment the magnitude of the operation.



Once I learned the tasks I'd be responsible for prior to, during and after championship week, I knew there would be long hours of work ahead of me. Although I had to wake up at 3:50 a.m. to work 13-hour days during championship week, I embraced this awesome opportunity to be a part of something bigger than me, something truly exciting.

One of my roles during championship week was to manage and assist volunteers that were assigned to me during each of my work shifts. Working with these volunteers was one of the highlights of my internship. I interacted with people who traveled thousands of miles from their homes in Australia, Brazil, India and the Netherlands to be part of the U.S. Open. They worked side by side with individuals who traveled less than 10 miles from a nearby town in Wisconsin, all to take part and contribute to a historic event. They were all unique in different ways, and I loved communicating with these diverse visitors and learning about their cultures.

The dynamic internship allowed me to explore the different facets of successfully planning a large-scale event. I was introduced to the management and financial component of the operation, learned how to work with vendors and interacted with some of golf's top clothing and accessory brands. Although the task was large, I was prepared to apply the skills I learned at the FAMU School of Business & Industry.

Tournament week went by so fast, too fast in fact. I don't know if it was the lack of sleep, long hours, exciting storylines or my ever-present excitement. It was an amazing experience and something I'll never forget.

Something else amazing happened during the weeks we were breaking down. During the tournament, I connected with Mr. Craig Kirby - Founder of Golf. MyFuture. MyGame. and a member of the World Golf Foundation Diversity Task Force. Mr. Kirby introduced me to a recruiter from a top sports and entertainment agency called Octagon. Unexpectedly, that introduction led to an interview and a second summer internship that would start immediately after leaving the USGA.

On June 28, I sat in the General Mitchell International Airport waiting to board my flight to return home for a few days before heading off on my second summer adventure. Reflecting on my experience in Wisconsin, I recognized how much I learned and how I'm more prepared to pursue a career in the world of sports business. There is so much more to learn, and now I better understand how valuable first-hand experience is to gaining knowledge and discovering my interests.

With Octagon, I'm working within their golf division and helping manage the relationship with BMW - one of their major clients. The luxe car brand works with Octagon to conduct the BMW Golf Cup - which is a series of amateur golf tournaments across the globe, culminating with the top performers competing in a championship event.



It's difficult to describe just how blessed I feel to have secured two invaluable opportunities this summer in a field in which I have interest. I cannot go any further without thanking Kamille Ramos and my entire USGA family; Clemmie Perry for her support and mentorship; and Craig Kirby for helping make the 2017 summer even better. With my experiences over the last few months, I am much better prepared to make decisions about my professional direction and to secure a job in the sports business field post graduation.

Today, I find myself on a train from NYC to Connecticut (headed to Octagon) having dozed off, but now I'm coming upon my stop. I wonder if I dreamed all of this or whether it is really happening? I just pinched myself. Yep, it's real!



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