

2012 DAAA National Games in Dallas, TX: Overview of Media Coverage

Submitted by Kendra Brogden
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Media Attendees Summary:

Pre-Games:

KRLD-FM

Basketball:

CBS & FOX

Football:

CW, ABC, FOX, NBC & Dallas Morning News

Track & Field:

WBAP-AM

Soccer:

CBS

Full Text:

Cowboys Stadium is a big hit for small athletes

WFAA-TV (ABC) – Video Included

By George Riba

July 2, 2012

<http://www.wfaa.com/sports/more/Cowboys-Stadium-a-big-hit-for-annual-Dwarf-Games-161149495.html>

ARLINGTON — You've all heard of the X Games taking place in Los Angeles this week; and the Olympic games which will begin in London less than four weeks from now.

But for 250 athletes, Monday's competition at Cowboys Stadium was their Olympics.

"To be able to put on our sporting events in a venue that is not only world class but top of the world class, definitely says a lot for what we're accomplishing today," says Ernie Lee, a board member of the Dwarf Athletic Association of America.

On Monday, these athletes were playing football at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington as part of the 26th DAAA National Games. It's the first time the organization has staged a contest in an NFL stadium.

"They made us a great offer," said Jim Eckenrode. "We had some time to raise some funds. A lot of people gave just out of their pockets at my work and made it happen."

TLC has a television series called "Little People, Big World." At Cowboys stadium, that phrase is ever so true.

"I felt like an NFL player," said Kevin Cekanor, one of the participants. "It was cool to finally be here after seeing it on TV so many times. 'Wow, I want to be there.' I finally got the opportunity to come, so it was awesome!"

"You walk in and you're like, 'Holy Geez! How do you play with all these seats filled?' I wouldn't be able to do that, I don't think," Zoe Meil said.

The organization provides a level playing field for athletes of similar stature and speed. The week-long event will include track and field, swimming, basketball, soccer, volleyball, bocce and badminton competitions.

Other venues being used include the University of Texas at Arlington, the Rockwall ISD Aquatic Center, and the Indoor Soccer Zone.

Football was a big hit this year. "We had more people play football this year than they have in the past," said Amy Andrews, the president of DAAA.

Zoe Meil summed up her day this way: "Thanks Jerry Jones for letting us come in here and play football," she said. "It was really awesome!"

The 26th DAAA National Games continue through July 4.

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Dwarfs compete in Dallas for annual games

My Fox 5

By Kelsey Speiser

July 2, 2012

<http://www.myfoxdfw.com/story/18936311/dwarfs-compete-in-dallas-for-annual-games>

Dwarf athletes are competing in their annual sporting events this year in Dallas.

The Dwarf Athletic Association of America (DAAA) [National](#) Games bring together short-stature athletes in a weeklong competition from June 30 to July 4.

"These are our national games that happen every year where dwarfs from ages 4 all the way up to masters above 60s get to compete in over eight different sporting events," said Amy Andrews, President of DAAA.

The athletes are from all over the United States and from Canada, Mexico, Australia, Great Britain, Netherlands and Holland.

The sporting events include: boccia, basketball, volleyball, soccer, swimming, flag football, and track and field.

Monday, the athletes were given the opportunity to play flag football at the Dallas Cowboys Stadium.

"The greatest thing about seeing them is that you get to see them compete and they can do anything an average person can do and sometimes better. They've got great form and technique and they love football," said Jim Eckenrode, Sports Tech for football.

DAAA is a partner to the Little People of America conference that provides the athletes and families with more information about dwarfism.

"We have not only sporting events but we have the opportunity to have workshops, see medical doctors, socialization and of course every night a dance," said Andrews.

Anyone who wants more information about the organization or to donate can go to DAAA.org.

"We may be short in stature but were just like everybody else, and this gives us an opportunity to compete eye to eye," Andrews said.

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Dwarf football players prove their skills on a level field at Cowboys Stadium

Dallas Morning News

By Marc Ramirez

July 2, 2012

<http://www.dallasnews.com/lifestyles/headlines/20120702-dwarf-football-players-prove-their-skills-on-a-level-field-at-cowboys-stadium.ece>

ARLINGTON — "One, two, three, Alphas!"

A cluster of smaller-than-average hands dispersed on cue as the orange-shirted members of Alpha Dwarves took the field under the lights at mammoth Cowboys Stadium.

In the process, one of the biggest arenas in football played host to some of its smallest teams as the 26th National Games of the Dwarf Athletic Association of America held touch football medal competition for only the second year.

For those who suited up, all of them 4-foot-10 or shorter, it was a chance to prove their athletic skills on a level playing field without the disadvantages posed by competition against average-size people.

“This is the most realistic it gets for us,” said Alpha Dwarves team member Fouad Makdessi, an 18-year-old from Tampa, Fla.

The touch football games were part of a week of athletic activity held in conjunction with the national conference of the Little People of America at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel.

More than 200 athletes were taking part in the National Games, some in preparation for Team USA competition at the Paralympics in London.

Football is a recent addition to the association lineup, joining activities such as volleyball, soccer, swimming and table tennis.

“It’s eye-to-eye,” said association board president Amy Andrews of the games. “A lot of these kids are competing against their [average-size] peers, and it’s very difficult.

“This gives them the opportunity to excel in their sport.”

And it was a chance for a guy like Zach McKay, a freckled redhead from San Diego, to be a hero.

The seemingly 3-foot-tall 18-year-old was a bullet on the field, zipping through defenders and leaping into the end zone after one catch for a singularly memorable touchdown.

Afterward, he bounced up and body-bumped a teammate in celebration, then sported a Michael-Jordan-like tongue wag as he juke and hot-dogged along the sidelines.

“He’s the Alpha Dwarf MVP,” said teammate Anthony Pepicello. “Can’t nobody mess with him.”

That the games were happening at all could be largely traced to Jim Eckenrode of Frederick, Md., who got involved in the athletic association through his 15-year-old son, Evan, who has dwarfism.

Eckenrode, who coaches high school football, made a pitch to the group: Why not? “Football is usually a sport not a lot of dwarfs get to play,” he said. “People felt like it was too rough.”

But Eckenrode felt there were ways to adjust the game. He proposed touch football contests that, among other things, feature no-zone defense, 15-minute halves and a 30-yard field.

The games debuted at a regional competition in Nashville complete with undersize jerseys and footballs provided by the National Football League, then became part of official medal play at last year’s National Games in Anaheim, Calif.

For little people, opportunities to play sports aren’t easy to find. Neither is acceptance from average-size peers.

“They don’t have as much faith in you,” said Bill Brogden of California. “You’re looked down on and judged before you even step on the field.”

The Alpha Dwarves had been put together by Willem Winkelman, a 20-year-old from Santa Rosa, Calif., who'd recruited a set of friends who'd grown up attending the Little People of America's annual conference, which was in Dallas this year for the first time in 21 years.

The group's deep-rooted chemistry provided heart that had propelled the Alpha Dwarves to bronze-medal wins in basketball and volleyball in the National Games' preceding days, despite the fact that the teammates only assembled once a year.

"They're the underdogs," said coach Bess Vrettakos, who got involved in the association through her daughter, a little person who will be competing in the event's soccer competition on Wednesday. "We've always taken teams by surprise."

Once the Alpha Dwarves had beaten East Coast 7-4 — each score was worth a point — McKay was on his phone, announcing the win on Facebook that would put them in line for the games' touch-football title.

"I'm hoping we get that gold," he said.

Afterward, the players iced tightened muscles or lay with their headphones on the turf, staring at the stadium's giant video screen.

In the title game, they faced the Towers, a slick powerhouse of New York-based guys with a knack for winning. "They're pretty much always undefeated," Vrettakos said.

Makdessi, with his black gloves and droopy black shorts, addressed a friend's video camera as they went into action. "We're going for it, baby," he said, flashing an index finger. "All or nothing."

But the Alpha Dwarves found themselves Beetles to the Mini-Cooper-fast Towers, their game cast into disarray as they struggled to keep up with player substitutions or their foes' suffocating defense.

The Alpha Dwarves immediately fell into a 2-0 hole and spent the rest of the game trying to catch up en route to a 7-4 loss and a silver medal.

But for a day, the teammates could strut with pride on the turf of one of the premier facilities in sports, knowing they'd been given a fair shot.

"I grew up playing with friends," said team member Jose Palomino of San Ramon, Calif. "But get hit by a 6-foot-guy, and it doesn't really make it fun.

"Here, everyone's at the same level."

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Dwarf Athletic Association football teams play for title at Cowboys Stadium

Dallas Morning News

Photographer: David Woo

July 2, 2012

http://www.dallasnews.com/lifestyles/headlines/20120702-dwarf-athletic-association-football-teams-play-for-title-at-cowboys-stadium.ece#slcgm_comments_anchor



Zach McKay (right) of the Alpha Dwarves made a catch and ran past Blaze Foster of the New York Towers during a touch football game Monday at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington. The game was part of the Dwarf Athletic Association of America's 26th National Games, held in conjunction with the Little People of America conference in Dallas.

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Dwarf Athletic Association's National Games Come to North Texas

CBS DFW - Video Included

By Sharrie Williams

July 1, 2012

<http://dfw.cbslocal.com/2012/07/01/dwarf-athletic-associations-national-games-come-to-north-texas/>

Hundreds of athletes are in North Texas for a week of events made just for their size.

It is called the Dwarf Athletic Association's National Games. It is a big athletic event designed specifically for little people.

The five day event kicked off Friday and will run through July 4th.

It gives dwarf athletes a chance to show off their skills.

"It's great," said Christopher Cassella, an athlete from New York. "It makes us feel like everybody else. It's hard to explain how it makes us feel to play with our own kind."

For the past 26 years this annual event has brought together little people from all over the U-S. This year's competition is being held on the [campus](#) of UT Arlington

"We have over 200 athletes from all over including international athletes from Canada, Mexico, Australia, The Netherlands, Great Britain and even Russia," explained Amy Andrews with the Dwarf Association of America.

The attendees are as young as 4 years old –as the association makes it a family friendly event. Eight year old Levi is here with his parents from Atlanta GA.

"It's really competitive everybody, like, goes for their team its really fun," Levi said .

But this competition isn't kids play—for the adults, this is serious business. Most of the athletes, like Trevor Weststeyn, train year round.

"It's very competitive, its extreme, its tough."

And although the event is centered around sports, it also helps spread awareness about the various illnesses that cause dwarfism.

The gathering is truly a time for this group of unique people to bond. Friendships are made and sometimes, it's even where little people find the greatest gift of all- love.

"Every night there is a dance," Cassella said . "We all hang out. It's where a lot of little people meet their fiancée."

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