

Native Students Experience Cougar Athletics at Sports Summit

by Edmund "Frazer" Myer

Visiting Native American middle and high school students from around the state attended a day full of activities at Washington State University during the 4th Annual Native American Youth Sports Summit on Jan. 10.

The day started with everyone meeting inside the Bohler Athletic Complex near the WSU Athletic Hall of Fame. From there, the group took part in a tour of the new football complex and viewed many of the amenities available to athletes here on campus. The tour was guided by Athletics Event Coordinator Sam Koken.

Koken showed them the WSU football team's locker room, weight room, and auditorium used for team meetings. In the locker room Koken explained, that in order to create brand awareness, WSU uses a specific font on everything they display.

After the tour, a panel of speakers spoke to the group about WSU athletics. The panel consisted of Bob Minnix, the Senior Associate Director of Athletics; Milford Hodge, Student-Athlete Mentoring Coordinator; two members of WSU's track team, and two WSU rugby players.

Minnix talked about the hard work it takes to be a college student, and described being a successful student athlete as a "diligent process."

Hodge, a former WSU football player who turned pro and played for the Patriots, 49ers, and Saints, is now back in Pullman as a mentor for WSU's athletes. Although, he played in the NFL, Hodge said that his greatest accomplishment was earning a master's degree.



"Native American Appreciation Day" lights up the scoreboard in Beasley Coliseum.



Participants in the Native American Youth Sports Summit get autographs from the WSU women's basketball team after their game.

Two of Hodge's mentees are track team members Lateah Holmes and Essence White. Both of them shared with the group their background stories, the impact school has had on their lives, as well as some words of advice.

Holmes said, "Managing school and sports, takes love and dedication." She said that being a student-athlete has taught her about the importance of balance, organization and dealing with different types of people.

White, who came to school for academics and then walked-on, encouraged the group to "try." She said, "As long as you try, nobody can take that away from you."

Giovane Rojas (Burns Paiute) and Anthony Choke (Nisqually) from the WSU rugby team also gave some words of advice. Rojas talked about having to make sacrifices, and good decision making. He said, "Grades come first."

To end the afternoon, everyone joined for lunch, and then attended the WSU women's basketball Native American Appreciation game. The students sat up close and watched WSU play host to Arizona State University.

Unfortunately, the Cougars lost 63-45, but everyone was able to enjoy halftime performances featuring Native singers and dancers, a welcome from WSU's Miss Pah-Loots-Pu Amandaree Fox (Colville), and twirler Valea Higheagle (Chehalis).

The Native American Youth Sports Summit is an annual event sponsored by WSU Native American Programs, in collaboration with WSU Athletics.

