

## Transcript: What's Up, College Station? (Season 4, Ep. 23)

**Grace Hollowell:** What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hollowell, and today I'm joined by members of our parks and recreation team, Samantha Holland and Amy Teufel. Welcome to the show!

**Samantha Holland:** Hi, thank you for having us.

**Grace Hollowell:** You're welcome. It is your first time being here on What's Up College Station, so it's very exciting. To kick it off, we always start talking a little bit about yourself and what you do. So we'll start with you, Samantha.

**Samantha Holland:** Yes, so I'm Sam Holland. I am the tourism supervisor for our parks and recreation department. I'm essentially the primary liaison between all of our external stakeholders, like tournament organizers, any vendors, and our internal stakeholders, like our operations team, our marketing division, risk management, PD, FD, any other departments that we may need to work with.

**Grace Hollowell:** Awesome. And what about you, Amy?

**Amy Teufel:** My name is Amy Teufel. I am the event specialist. I work under Sam and then also our athletic supervisor, Cole, and I just do a little bit of everything.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yes, and I know we were talking a little bit before we started, you started here full-time about three years ago. How did your journey working for the city and the parks team start?

**Amy Teufel:** So I moved to College Station middle of COVID, got into A&M, and I moved up here. My mom told me that I needed to get a job in something that was going to be related to my degree, which was RPTS. So I—well, actually she found the part-time position for me, which was a wreck assistant, and I applied and I got that. I worked under Sam and Casey for two, two and a half years, and then just kind of waited it out until a full-time position opened up, and then I applied and got this position.

**Grace Hollowell:** We love to hear that. And I'm sure that was kind of a crazy time to come to a new city during COVID. What is something that you've noticed that has changed in College Station since then? And I know we—I mean, even just in the last year, College Station is very different.

**Amy Teufel:** I would definitely say when I first moved here, I moved into a little apartment and it was kind of close to Northgate, but it was walking distance. I used to walk my dog there, but I would say now just driving through the Northgate area, there's so many more apartment complexes, skyscrapers, that have just been put up. I definitely think that the

college campus is really—not engulfing the city, because that kind of sounds bad, but kind of embracing our city with more student housing and stuff like that.

**Grace Hollowell:** That is a—that's a good answer, that's unique. So what is one thing that you wish more people knew about the area of sports tourism and how that all connects?

**Samantha Holland:** Yes, so sports tourism is a very—is a niche market, but is a very fast growing market. Youth sports is booming. And that was one of the—in COVID, it was once Abbott declared that we could open, we—I believe we had a tournament that Saturday. He made the announcement Friday, and we had a tournament Saturday, I believe. But that put us on the map as a premier sports destination. It keeps people, you know, keeps families busy, gives children an outlet outside of school, builds confidence, sense of community—not just traveling, but the teams themselves. So it's—it's a great, it's a fun industry to be in, and just the camaraderie between all the teams that are coming in, all the people that work together for all of these tournaments, it's great to see whenever they come here.

**Grace Hollowell:** Absolutely. And did y'all play sports growing up? I'm assuming you did if you went into this field. What sports did you play?

**Samantha Holland:** Yeah, so the only sport that I actually did competitively was track and field, but I dabbled a little bit in other sports. I actually competed in our recreational volleyball team and our volleyball league, and I've supported some softball and kickball teams. Or actually, we tried to have a kickball team, but then COVID happened and we had to cancel a bunch of programs at the time. But yeah, just track and field growing up.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yeah, awesome. What about you?

**Amy Teufel:** I went to a itty-bitty 1A school growing up, so you kind of get thrown into everything. I pretty much did the more common sports. I didn't do bowling, golf—I didn't like basketball, but I love working with it now, it just wasn't my forte—but I did volleyball, track, cheer, softball, all your really well-known sports.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yeah, I was not a sports person growing up. I was a choir, vocal ensemble, fine arts kid. And while I didn't necessarily travel for sports competitions, I went to a lot of choir competitions, things like that. And I remember those cities that would host these competitions—shout out Hermitage, Pennsylvania, for those of you that know where that is—and it always left a lasting impact going to these different places. And that is what your team tries to do for the visitors that come in for these tournaments. And there are a lot of moving parts. As you said, you coordinate with different departments. What is a typical day-to-day when a competition is here look like for you?

**Samantha Holland:** So when they're here, that's honestly probably the easier part, cuz all the pre-planning, all the planning stuff is not the harder parts, but the more moving parts. So once the tournament's actually happening, you get to see all of your hard work be put into action and put into place. During the tournament, our staff opens up the facility. They greet—we greet the tournament directors, any athletes that come in. They'll come in, start setting up the fields, opening up the fields, turning on any lights. We might have to put—just check on finishing touches on maybe some restrooms or field logistics. But after that, once games are starting, we're there for anything, last minute requests, prepping the field. So during softballs, our amazing crew members prep the fields in between games just so each—it's a well-maintained field, and it's still competition ready. It's worthy of a tournament of them paying to come to this city, and it's also showcasing our amazing facilities. And it's one of the main reasons why people love coming to College Station is because we have such well-maintained fields and our staff does an amazing job. They really do put their hearts into their work, and it shows, and people do really appreciate it.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yes, and I know somewhat recently—I mean, we've had a lot of rain, we've had critters, hogs come through, and your team, the operations team that takes care of the fields, were ready to step into action in a moment's notice. They really care about maintaining these fields for our competitors that come to College Station. And that kind of answers this next question here, but what makes our community so attractive for tournament organizers to want to come here?

**Samantha Holland:** In addition to our amazing facilities and our awesome people, our awesome staff, is the advantage of being in the Texas triangle. So we are in a very unique, advantageous location in the state of Texas that we are very close to—three hours or less between the major cities: Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Austin, and those airports. And so that's so we can attract people from not only all over the state, but all over the country.

**Grace Hollowell:** That is a very unique situation that I feel like a lot of communities don't have that advantage. And how important are our parks and athletic facilities in attracting these high-level events?

**Samantha Holland:** They are very important. That's one of the selling points. So we also work very closely with Visit Compete College Station. When their team goes out to these conferences, trade shows, and they're talking with different organizers, they already know what our facilities are like because of the word of mouth and how well we work with organizers on determining field needs, getting them prepped after any weather, or just coordinating in general. But our team does really well. As we talked about earlier, they really do put their hearts into it, and if they notice something, they'll jump in a moment's notice, even if a tournament director didn't notice it. Once they notice one small thing, they

are on it, and they're so amazing. So we're really appreciative and grateful for our operations crew.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yes, they are very passionate folks, definitely. And what is some feedback that you hear most often from visitors and teams about College Station?

**Amy Teufel:** I feel like the most feedback that we get is going back to operations and how well they maintain our fields and facilities. We're in prime time busy season right now, and our fields still look amazing, and they maintain them so well. And if they need a break, they make sure to let us know. Not necessarily with the weekend tournaments, but I also, working in athletics, we use the fields during the week, and operation guys will let us know like, "Hey, field five needs a break. Can we move these games to this other field?" I feel like they're just really good at spotting those kind of things to keep the integrity of our fields and maintaining our facilities.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yes, and this summer we have a bunch of major tournaments coming. What are some of the events that you're most excited about?

**Samantha Holland:** Yes, so I'm most excited about State 7-on-7 and Games of Texas. State 7-on-7 is actually at the end of this month, June 25th through 27, at Veterans Park, so that Thursday through Saturday. So also just wanted people to be aware of the increased traffic that will be around that area on both University Drive and Harvey Road during that time. But that attracts 128 teams to our town. And then Games of Texas is July 30th through August 2nd, and I'm just excited to have that for the second year of this bid that we were awarded. This will be my third Games of Texas personally, in College Station at least.

**Grace Hollowell:** I know I hosted—attended last year, and it is an incredible and I feel like unique situation because there is sports happening here in College Station, there's sports happening in at A&M's field, in Bryan as well, and it really creates a sense of community around competitive sports, especially for the state of Texas, definitely. So what types of tournaments tend to draw the largest crowds? Games of Texas, I'm assuming, is one of them.

**Amy Teufel:** I would say Games of Texas and Seven-on-Seven, State 7-on-7, are our biggest attractions. State 7-on-7, it's large and in charge. It gets so chaotic over there, but it's very great organized chaos, I would say. We've got all these teams coming together to show off their skills and show off what they can do as a team, and with those players you get their parents, you get their grandparents, you get their aunts, uncles, cousins—their community comes in to support them, too. So it's our community welcoming in hundreds of other communities just to come and support their kids. And although it's very chaotic in the

moment, it is a very joyful moment when it's over, and being able to successfully pull off something like that, definitely.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yes, absolutely. And what makes Games of Texas such a significant event for College Station?

**Samantha Holland:** It is a huge economic impact—or it has such a huge economic impact on our community, not just College Station but Bryan, too. Last year, it was about 55,000 visitors and about 8 million in economic impact. I could be wrong, I haven't looked at those numbers in a while. But yes, it's 11 different sports coming, people coming to compete in our town, but also it's an opportunity for us to showcase what Bryan, College Station, Aggieland is about. And it's so fun, and it's very rewarding putting together this event with all of the different teams. But whenever we welcome these people into our town, that's the cherry on top for me is seeing how happy they are to compete, and that's—that was the work that we did. So it's very rewarding for me.

**Grace Hollowell:** Absolutely, and how do the local businesses benefit when these events come to town?

**Samantha Holland:** Yes, so those 55,000 or so visitors, whenever they come to town, they're spending their money in our community, right? So in our hotels, in our stores, and our restaurants, and just the sales tax. We get sales tax, we get hotel occupancy tax, and part of the sales tax, they go into our city's general fund. And the general fund can be used for capital projects, and those capital projects can range from anything around our town. One example that comes off the top of my head is improvements like the turf that was just recently replaced earlier this year at field seven and eight, or even the addition of pickleball courts at Anderson Park. So all of these tournaments, not just Games of Texas, whenever people are coming into our town and they're spending their money here in our community, that money is, in turn, used to improve our community and our parks and our facilities.

**Grace Hollowell:** Switching gears here a little bit, we touched on it, but what goes on behind the scenes that most residents or visitors never see when planning these events?

**Samantha Holland:** So one main thing is just the coordination between the different departments. So I work very closely, or Amy and I work very closely, with Visit and Compete College Station. So we're coordinating because we both get tournament inquiries—just for people that know what we have, they've been here and they want to bring their own tournament here—but they're also talking with Alex and his team. So we're having to talk to each other, making sure that we're not having any conflicting inquiries, that one, that we can do it, because we have so many recurring tournaments that love coming back to our facilities in our town. Coordinating with different stakeholders like fire, PD for additional

logistics like at State 7-on-7 or Games of Texas, risk management setting those certificates of insurance, and legal, and all those different departments. So it's a bunch of moving pieces, but it's really fun, it keeps me on my toes, definitely. And then it gives me an opportunity to delegate some of that to Amy so she gets that experience, is developing her skills and professional development on the tourism side. So it's really fun, and I kind of call myself essentially like a project manager, but of tourism, of sports tourism.

**Grace Hollowell:** And like you said, it's a very niche market, definitely. So what role do volunteers and community partners play?

**Samantha Holland:** So on my side, I don't deal with many volunteers. Sometimes Compete College Station, sometimes the tournament organizers will reach out to them for some volunteers. But definitely with community partners, we have several restaurants that love to either donate meals or in-kind meals or give us discounts, because we do feed our staff that are working the tournaments. Because they are there—we are there 12 to 16 hours a day depending on the schedule, on weather, on how many people are available to work that weekend. And since we're there and we always want to be there available in case anything were to happen, we always make sure that we have people on site. And so Amy and myself will get food for our staff, make sure that they're well taken care of, and we're greatly appreciative of all the community partners that we work with that help us take care of them.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yeah, absolutely. And is there a memorable moment from a tourism or a memorable story that sticks out to you from recent years?

**Amy Teufel:** I don't know if I have a big moment, but I just feel like recently we've gotten a lot of praise for, like during our soccer tournaments, having water out there for their players. Lots of parents will be driving by and they'll wave us down and they'll be like, "We just want to say thank you," because a lot of tournaments don't just give them that and they don't provide that simple water hydration station for them. And I feel like it's not about being a big memory, it's about like that's going to last with me forever cuz that's the simplest appreciation. Like, oh, I put water out for your kid, it's not a big deal to me, but to them it's a really big deal. I feel like that's going to stay with me for a long time.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yeah, and they're going to remember that and want to come back to College Station.

**Amy Teufel:** Yes, definitely.

**Samantha Holland:** One thing, I have so many, I know I have over seven years of experience, it's so hard to pick one. But I wouldn't say the biggest, it's just it's happened so often that people have stopped us just to compliment our crews and our facilities, and they

just love sharing how much they love coming to College Station. Because I see a lot of the same teams, families coming back year after year until they age out, because we have a lot of the same returning tournaments year after year, and we have some organizations multiple times a year. So we see a lot of those same people multiple times a year. So we've started seeing patterns, and a lot of those people have their go-to spots in town and they'll ask for recommendations, but they definitely love sharing the love and letting us know how much they appreciate our fields and our crew.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yeah, we become a home away from home for them. Okay, so speaking of homes for our residents who live here year-round, how can they help create a positive experience for our guests and visitors?

**Samantha Holland:** So the main thing is just the hospitality, just treating them like they're another, like one of our locals, because they're just visiting. Like you said, it's a home away from home for a lot of them. So College Station is known for being hospitable. We have some of the nicest residents in—I would say honestly, I would say America. I might be a little biased, but yes.

**Grace Hollowell:** That Howdy Hospitality that Visit College Station loves to talk about.

**Samantha Holland:** Yes, I was about to say, that was in my blog.

**Grace Hollowell:** Before we wrap up here, if people are curious about more information regarding sports tourism or tournaments in College Station, where can they go to find out more information?

**Samantha Holland:** Yes, so they can definitely go to our website [cstx.gov/parks](http://cstx.gov/parks), contact me directly, Sam Holland, or even our team at Visit Compete College Station, so Alex and Sydney and Maddie and their team as well. We work very close together, so they're more on the sales side if you want to know more about numbers, hotels and all that, but we work very closely together, so either one.

**Grace Hollowell:** Awesome. Well, before we go, we have a fun little game of lightning round questions. I'll ask you, Sam, first and then go to Amy. Are y'all ready?

**Samantha Holland / Amy Teufel:** Yes.

**Grace Hollowell:** Okay, indoor sports or outdoor sports?

**Samantha Holland:** Indoor.

**Amy Teufel:** I would say indoor also, yes.

**Grace Hollowell:** Me too. If you could attend any sporting event in the world, what would it be?

**Samantha Holland:** Right now I would love to go to F1. Yes, that's become pretty popular in recent years. I loved seeing drag races growing up, the hot rods, all that stuff, so F1 would be amazing.

**Amy Teufel:** I would say the Kentucky Derby. I feel like that's just a very unique experience. I feel like that atmosphere might compare to Kyle Field on some specific game days, so that's a good one.

**Grace Hollowell:** The best game day snack?

**Samantha Holland:** My go-to is nachos.

**Amy Teufel:** Nachos, too, nachos.

**Grace Hollowell:** Favorite season for sports tourism?

**Samantha Holland:** It's hard. I would say the fall, the fall. I mean, I love Aggie football, so that's part—even though that's not directly with us, I mean, love Aggie football, but also, it's the cooler weather, that really cool weather definitely.

**Amy Teufel:** I would also say the fall, but I'm also liking the spring because I love watching some Aggie baseball, too.

**Grace Hollowell:** Yes, I went to my first Aggie baseball game a couple weeks ago, and it was a lot of fun, yeah. If you could describe College Station in one word, what would it be?

**Samantha Holland:** Hospitable. Hospitable.

**Amy Teufel:** I would say lively.

**Grace Hollowell:** Lively. Those are good ones. Well, thank you so much for joining me today.

**Samantha Holland:** Yeah, thank you for having us.

**Amy Teufel:** Pleasure.

**Grace Hollowell:** It was awesome. And that's what's up!