



Netball World Cup 2015 fan engagement outside Sydney's Allphones Arena.

# Fun. Free. Fabulous.

Blair Hughes looks into the success of the recent 2015 Netball World Cup FanFEST



**F**un. Free. Fabulous. was the slogan for the recent FanFEST held in August at Sydney's AllPhones Arena as part of the 2015 Netball World Cup (NWC2015) and what a spectacle for the senses it proved to be for fans who travelled far and wide for the sport's premier tournament.

The sport of netball in Australia is a success story that continues to set new benchmarks as a result of record-breaking crowds in the ANZ Championship, an ever-expanding number of corporate partnerships, huge rises in memberships and participation numbers along with the hosting of iconic events such as the World Cup.

However, a significant and underrated highlight of all of these achievements surrounding netball in Australia was the success of the recent NWC2015 FanFEST. I recently interviewed one of the brains behind FanFEST, Netball World Cup Fan Engagement Manager Haley Keays who shed light on the origins and planning of FanFEST, the importance of providing unique experiences for fans of all ages and the subsequent outcomes of FanFEST.

'Memory maker' Keays, whose background includes roles in ticketing and fan experience with the Sydney Kings, AFC

Asian Cup and South Sydney Rabbitohs highlights that the FanFEST fan engagement goal was to create a number of innovative, interactive and fun netball themed digital and hands on experiences within NWC2015 FanFEST during tournament time.

Keays noted that it was all about creating authentic memorable moments for fans and that while for netball fans





FanFEST was the ultimate fan social hub, activity zone, meeting point and entertainment home of the NWC it was also about “the fun away from the game.”

The idea behind the FanFEST came from the Major League Baseball’s Fan Festival along with a vision to make a fan experience and in turn a fan zone that was unprecedented in Australian sport.

Keays states that creating the fan experience started long before the tournament with the website offering fans the chance to choose the official on court music playlist, bib bunting for the fan caves of those who could not attend and the establishment of a netball fan dictionary to educate new comers to the sport. A three month trophy tour to netball clubs across Australia and the positive social media call out of ‘#MySecondTeam’ where Australian Diamonds fans were encouraged to support another nation were also integral in creating excitement amongst fans in the lead up to the tournament.



Taking a tour of FanFEST on day one proved to be an incredible fan experience as upon entry I immediately witnessed hundreds of fanatical netball kids enthusiastically dragging their mums and dads around this enormous, colourful and sprawling fan zone. The event ended up seeing over 65,000 fans pack into the FanFEST location over the 10 days to sample in excess of 25 interactive, digital and netball themed activations ranging from a nail and hair salon and chill out lounge to skills zones, daily netball fitness sessions and digital lip sync battles that were so popular that every national team squad ended up joining in and doing their own rendition to Taylor Swift’s hit tune ‘Shake It Off’.

Keays highlighted that while you “can’t control the match result, you can control how much fun a fan has at an event” and with young fans and families having

loads of fun and participating in all these free activities there was no doubt that this was an exceptional fan site.

FanFEST included digital activations from The Creative Shop such as the fan’s MVP where fans could select their player of the tournament on a digital touch screen, ‘Cover the Court’ where fans could test their footwork, the virtual reality ‘Perfect Pass’ game which tested fans passing skills and the ‘Cheer Cam’ which enabled fans to record their celebrations to Australia’s previous Netball World Cup wins.

Each of these interactive experiences were fully Wi-Fi enabled, which allowed fans to immediately share their user-

generated images and videos to their social media channels via a personalised eDM.

The importance of producing high quality user-generated video content was highlighted by the fact that the Cheer Cam and Lip-Syncing activations produced over 10,000 additional views from the sharing of the original content that fans created.

Further adding to the fan experience was the Fan Mail area where fans could write and then post a letter to their favourite team with some of these then being read out by the teams on social media. The #GetGameReady make up and nails station also had lines stretching out the door as young fans got kitted out in team nail designs and face paint. Fans could also participate in various competitions to win a bedroom makeover and other prizes, the Australian Diamonds had a photo booth where fans could get their own picture printed out with their choice of Diamond’s players. Supporters were able to participate in bingo with mascot Nettie and also have their make-up freshened up at the ‘House of Wellness’, which also featured free massages. Designated sponsor marquees had free merchandise packs with a range of free items, all while being surrounded by live screens to sit back, relax and watch the matches while enjoying gourmet healthy food choices.

With the FanFEST being a hive of activity over the 10 days of the tournament, Keays emphasised that the fact people who had paid for full tournament passes were coming every single day to FanFEST to see what was on offer, participate in the daily themed events like ‘Family Day’ and ‘Schools Day’ and soak up the atmosphere proved that the fan zone was a total success with fans of all ages.

In a year with so many high profile sporting events and fan zones across Australia there is no doubt that this was one of the year’s most well attended showcases of innovative and interactive fan engagement that fans had been able to sample. FanFEST and the outcomes that the NWC2015 fan engagement team delivered were exceptional and should be used as an example of how to provide a genuinely entertaining fan area for all fans that attend sporting games.



**Blair Hughes is Head of Operations AUS/NZ for audioBoom, the world’s leading spoken-word audio platform.**