



Zach Sepanik, '15
Tour Media Official, LPGA

Zach Sepanik chose Gaylord College's graduate program in part to develop his skills for a career in sports media. He took advantage of the connections and opportunities available to him on campus, and even co-founded GameDayU, a pre-and post-game Oklahoma football show produced by current students. The 2015 master's graduate, who now works as a tour media official for the LPGA, recently shared about the strong relationships he built in Gaylord, how his time in the college prepared him for the communications field, significant moments from his career and more.

What is your favorite memory from your time at Gaylord College?

Some of my favorite memories during my two plus years at OU centralize on the relationships that I formed, with professors and peers. As a graduate assistant for Ken Fischer and Lynn Franklin, I learned from the best teachers (at any institution) in the

(range and tee) and other practice to aid our social media team in taking people behind the scenes. The LPGA Tour is a very diverse organization with its members, so we also conduct native-language interviews to send to our numerous international media partners. I spend roughly 20 weeks on the road, domestically and internationally.

In my previous role as the Symetra Tour Media and Public Relations Official, I did the job of six people on the LPGA. On the communications side I produced tournament notes, recaps, feature stories and conducted all the interviews. When it came to producing, I shot video highlights and snapped photos, editing along the way. I also posted content to the website, updated all social media platforms, answered any media requests and was on the road about 30 weeks. I was able to build recognition for the Tour, grow the brand and being the only media official

classroom then shared the knowledge through my work around Gaylord College, especially with OUTV and The Wire. I was thankful to be provided creative freedom to explore my passions and that eventually led to the creation of GameDayU. I had a back-of-the-napkin conversation with undergraduate students (and friends) Malik Carter and Mason Prince about a pre- and post-game show from every Oklahoma football game. Over the summer of 2014, it came to life. I'll never forget our trip to Morgantown, West Virginia, late September that year as the Sooners faced the Mountaineers. A group of five (the three co-founders along with Reagan Ledbetter and Drew Farley) by this time, we ventured east on a roughly 1,200-mile trek, alternating drivers to arrive early Friday morning. We took in the gorgeous scenery (John Denver was right) and explored, then GameDayU on Saturday morning followed by some tailgating with the local crowd and game that evening before heading back to Norman on Sunday. We captured highlights, we worked, we laughed, we enjoyed each other's company. It was a road trip we'll never forget. A few weeks later we were at the Cotton Bowl for OU-Texas. I could go on and on. The show, through Gaylord College, provided opportunities, and still provides those same opportunities to the next wave of broadcasting hopefuls.

Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member at Gaylord?

I worked closely with both Lynn Franklin and Ken Fischer throughout my time at OU, serving as their graduate assistant (Ken for OUTV and Lynn with The Wire). They both welcomed me into the Sooners family with open arms and took a chance, but I was eager to learn. They both have a special place in my heart. The Franklins opened their home to me on several holidays that had a quick turnaround, when I wasn't able to go see family in Michigan. Lynn always exhibits such kindness and generosity. Since graduating, I have regularly stayed in touch with Ken and we talk baseball, the latest happenings around Gaylord College and much more. It was also an honor to be invited to a reception in Chicago where Ken received the 2017 Ed Bliss Award. His sense of humor is unmatched, while the passion he has for teaching and care he showcases in cultivating students' futures is second to none. Lynn and

allowed me to form strong relationships, instilling trust with the players and tournament staff at each of our domestic events. It's wild to think back on all I was responsible for but it was thrilling. In my second year with the Symetra Tour, I implemented the Opendorse platform to share content directly to a player's social media channels. That pushed us to greater than \$20 million in media value branding (for one season).

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

When you love what you do and the job doesn't feel like work, so many of the moments seem significant. Looking back on my time in television and now with the LPGA, several stand out. Grand Rapids is home to the Amway River Bank Run, which is the largest 25K road race in the United States. Meeting new people and telling their inspirational story is something I cherished as a sports anchor and reporter with WOOD TV8. The River Bank Run was the premier event to do just that sharing why an individual is running, who they are running for and/or what they have overcome to get there. Another moment that offered this glimpse into athletes as humans was features of local hopefuls for the 2016 Rio Olympics. Powerful, meaningful stories connect us and was one of the highlights of reporting career. I could also point to covering the 2017 AHL Calder Cup Championship run by the Grand Rapids Griffins and being there for the clinching win in Grand Rapids. A hometown kid covering the hometown team. On the golf side, covering the major championships is always special. The 2021 ANA Inspiration and 2021 Amundi Evian come to mind. What I accomplished as a one-man media team on the Symetra Tour might be the most gratifying. So many late nights, long weeks, but memories that will last a lifetime. I'll also be lucky enough to add to the resumé with the 2021 Solheim Cup over Labor Day weekend. All the different experiences have been a beautiful chapter in an amazing journey.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

The opportunities provided at Gaylord College helped me become well rounded and versatile. I grew as a broadcaster and took public relations and marketing courses. Serving as a

Ken are friends and mentors and helped me to where I am today.

How did your career path lead you to the LPGA?

It's funny how things work out. After graduating from OU, I received a job offer with WOOD TV8 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. To be a sports anchor and reporter, in a top-40 market at that, was exactly why I went to grad school and what Gaylord College prepared me for. I loved the job. It was fulfilling, challenging and I was able to learn from two local legends—Jack Doles and Larry Figurski—who had more than 50 combined years of experience between them. Whether it was Tom Izzo and the Michigan State Spartans in March Madness, Detroit Lions football or the local high school and college athletics scene, I was there telling the stories. As I continued to tell the stories, I realized that golf was at the forefront of my passion. I'd fill my weekend sportscasts with golf highlights and find a way to cover anything golf, including the Meijer LPGA Classic in town. Covering the tournament for two years allowed me to form relationships with LPGA Tour staff and when they had an opening, my contacts reached out and I applied. I started out as the lone media official on the Symetra Tour. After two years elevating its platform, I was promoted to the LPGA communications team in 2019.

Describe your role at the LPGA – current and former.

I'll start with my current role as a LPGA Tour Media Official. As a fan once eloquently put: "You enjoy the outdoors, chasing the sun and cover players chasing a little golf ball." It's really as fun as it sounds, I promise. In the role, I work closely with LPGA Tour professionals, their agents, the media at all levels (local, national, international), our partnerships team, sponsors and external public relations firms to promote the golfers and our tournaments. I get to know the players to learn more about them and share their stories. I work with agents and media to fulfill requests for players. Game notes, interviews, recaps and features are daily tasks. I will also gather video content such as swings

graduate assistant sharpened my mass communications acumen and strengthened leadership skills while practical experience in TV/radio further developed my writing and social media knowledge. I'll also always remember challenging, but impactful courses with Dr. Gade and Dr. Tsetsura that bolstered my understanding of research. The details and practices I still implement in my work to this day. There are so many brilliant minds and is outstanding collaboration at OU and especially in Gaylord, all of which prepared me for a professional career in communications.

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in mass communication?

I know it's difficult and we all want to climb the ladder as quickly as possible, but don't let salary drive the direction of your career. Especially in broadcasting and journalism, that takes care of itself over the years. Learn. Be a sponge. Go the extra mile. Enjoy the perks that come with the job (they're all around you if you keep your eyes open). As you gain experience, and develop in your profession, you'll notice different responsibilities and compensation that reflects it. There are times where it's a grind and times you may wonder "What's next," but remember what lit the fire. Stay connected with those who help advance your career. Be grateful. Relationships are everything.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

Outside of work, I really enjoy exercise and exploring a new city I am in for work. I work out on a regular basis, swimming and running five-six days a week. I recently completed my first half marathon in June 2021 at Grand Teton National Park. It meant a lot to put time and effort into an objective outside of work, but still execute my daily job responsibilities to the fullest. When on the road, I always try local cuisine and do as much sightseeing as possible. My wife and I purchased our first home last September in Florida, so when we are both home (she is a caddy for her sister on the LPGA Tour) we get outside as much as possible (grilling, biking, poolside).



OU Gaylord College of Journalism & Mass Communication
(405) 325-2721 | gaylordalumni@ou.edu | <http://www.ou.edu/gaylord/jaymac>
395 W. Lindsey Room 3000, Norman, OK 73019

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