

By Chris Moody – VAS Contributor

The challenges for the medical personnel at the Commonwealth Games can always be boiled down to keeping the athletes safe. The Medical Board that serves the Games made plans for excessive heat, lightning or other risks that can be anticipated.

Prior to March, no one could have predicted the issues 2020 would bring. Once COVID-19 was an inescapable reality, tough decisions had to be made. Protocols had to be followed and risks had to be mitigated.

For Angie Witt, the head athletic trainer for the Commonwealth Games, the recently concluded 2020 Games were a unique challenge.

“We wanted there to be games in some fashion. We wanted to do as much as we can, but safely. Safety was the key,” Witt said. “People want to play. We wanted to do everything we could to make it possible.”

Many people, many Zoom meetings, many discussions, research, and consultation went into the decisions on how to move the Games forward.

“It was a team effort to make it happen, for sure,” Witt said.

Despite the lower number of participants overall, Witt was encouraged by the numbers who came out for the diamond sports.

“Numbers were high for softball and baseball,” she said.

The best news: there have been no known cases of COVID-19 transmission at the Games.

“We didn’t have any issues as far as we know,” Witt said. “We haven’t had anyone call back and say ‘We got covid at Commonwealth Games. Chances are we came away pretty good.’”

The first decision that had to be made was whether the Games would even happen. That decision was made by the entire leadership of Virginia Amateur Sports. It also hinged on the phase of re-opening that Governor of Virginia placed the state in when the Games were held.

“We were in Phase 3. If we had still been in Phase 2, we could not have had the Games,” Witt said.

“We knew early on there was no way we could do basketball,” Witt said. “It brings in the most fans and there was no way to keep everyone far enough apart.”

COVID-19 is hardly the only challenge Witt has faced. She works at Liberty University as the Athletic Training coordinator for Club Sports. When the Games moved to Lynchburg, she took on the role of leading the trainers brought in for the event.

“The first year we had five, then there were 10, then last year we were up to 25, but that number was down again this year because of fewer events,” Witt said.

The reduction of events caused a reduction of trainers, but precautions for those who were working added to the normal list of duties. Protocols and guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and the state had to be maintained. A list of new procedures was in place to this year's Games.

The current pandemic is hardly the first situation that called for new protocols. Heat related illness is at the forefront of medical concerns for athletes in the summer months. Witt said VAS purchased large plastic tubs that are filled with water – ice can be added – as triage for athletes suffering complications from overheating. The fact many athletes have greatly reduced their own training this year made Witt fear that they would not be acclimated to the heat, but there were no issues involving heat illness in any competition.

Witt is part of the Local Organizing Committee as well as the Medical Board that directs the Commonwealth Games. She has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Games since Liberty became the host venue.

A native of Amherst County and graduate of Liberty, Witt has been in her current role with the university for 10 years. She enjoys the challenges of her role and, in an opinion shared by everyone, looks forward to future Games when the pandemic is over and normalcy returns.