**One woman, three years, 51 half-marathons**

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Thirteen pairs of shoes and 668.1 miles later, former student-athlete Sally Smith accomplished her goal of running 51 half-marathons, one in every state and the nation’s capital.

An NCAA University cross country alumna, Smith started her journey in Long Beach, Calif., in October of 2012. “I wanted to see the country and have fun doing it,” Smith explained.

After three years and 160,000 frequent flier miles, Smith ended her remarkable cross-country trek in August of 2015 with a final race in Tucson, Ariz.

Despite completing a mere two races in 2012, Smith gained momentum from 2013 to 2015, finishing 17, 20, and 12 half-marathons respectively. “I set smaller goals toward [achieving] the end goal,” Smith said of her climb to 51. She earned her personal record in Dearborn, Mich., with a time of 1:39.

“I felt so happy and blessed to have such a great support base,” Smith said.

The backing from her family and friends played a pivotal part in keeping her motivated to finish the monumental task she began over three years ago.

In spite of the physical and emotional strain Smith encountered, she met her goal. “I would [support] others who wanted to do this because of my own experiences,” she said.

Smith now joins an elite pack of U.S. citizens who have experienced their homeland farther than their textbooks and globes could ever allow. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, less than 14 percent of Americans have visited all 50 states, let alone run 13.1 miles in each.

While on average 79 percent of runners suffer injuries at least once each year (U.S. Census Bureau), Smith sustained no injuries during the completion of all 51 races.

After shelling out $25,000 on travel expenses, Smith reaped the benefit of seeing all 50 U.S. states and the nation’s capital on foot, while conquering a feat the majority of dedicated runners will never add to their resumes.

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**Why is strategic communications important to a national governing body?**

Strategic communications is essential to the success of a national governing body in order for it to clearly articulate its vision and mission for the organization, both internally and externally. Embracing strategic communications ensures that the policies established and guidance provided remain uniform between all sections of the organization. It is also valuable to have a strategic communications plan so that the brand and message of an organization is consistent and reliable. A governing body as expansive as the National Collegiate Athletic Association must ensure that every division, department, and position within the organization is equally presented, and is consequently run with the same level of integrity and standards.

When a situation arises – both positive and negative – individuals look to the organization’s foundation and core principles for guidance which is why it is important to have a strategic communications plan in place. Inevitably, the fundamental goal of communications is to connect people through information by creating awareness and shaping attitudes.