

HOOKED ON THE OUTDOORS

By Mike Johnson

As we are finding out as our years here in North Carolina pleasantly accumulate, people find an array of ways to pass the time during the winter months. While we haven't quite mastered the tolerance for the whole snow thing yet....one thing we have found comfort in is diving head first into watching college basketball. Hard to beat curling up with a few blankets and the dogs in the man cave and watching an ACC basketball game on the tube on a winter's eve. Of course if you can get out and actually see a game live and in person that is even better....but as we found out last year surely one thing tops all.

The ACC basketball tournament is held annually in March in Greensboro, and this is basically the chance to watch all the teams in the ACC compete on the basketball court over an extended weekend. We have been here 4 years saying that the tournament is something we should probably "do" one of these days....but my alma mater's (The U) unexpected good run during the regular ACC basketball season last year prompted us to finally not say someday anymore ...but let's do it now. I am so glad we did.

We bought our tickets last the last minute on-line, there are a host of different places to do this. We bought tickets for the session our team was playing in, which basically gives you the opportunity to watch 2 games. Our team's first game was on a Friday at 2PM....we decided to arrive at the Greensboro Coliseum a few hours early to "soak in the whole atmosphere". Having never done this before, we were surprised by the sheer number of cars and people at the Coliseum when we arrived....hey don't these people have to work?(Yes I needed to work too, but took a strategically placed vacation day). After seeing the massive of humanity and cars at the Coliseum, what struck us was how everyone was sporting their team's colors....it was literally a rainbow of colors surrounding and inside the Coliseum. My wife, who has avoided going to basketball games for years because she can't stand "those squeaky sneakers" said, "How cool is this?"...I knew we made a great decision.

Even before we entered the Coliseum to watch the game, we went into one of the annex buildings where a Fan Fest was being held. The FanFest is an interactive gathering of everything ACC basketball, you could get your face painted in your team's colors, shoot 3 point shots for a chance to win a t-shirt, have your picture taken with the ACC tournament trophy and so much more. We had such a good time in there we almost missed the tip-off for our game. Indeed FanFest is something for the whole family to enjoy, and it is really designed with the casual fan in mind. We hit a few 3 point shots and saved ourselves about \$30 from buying souvenir t-shirts after the game...like I said this day was better than we had even imagined.

Indeed the basketball games were great, all teams competing to be the last one standing in the single elimination tournament. The final game is played on the Sunday of that weekend, and with fans' teams dropping out all along the way let's just say there is a good "secondary market" for remaining tickets around the Coliseum all throughout the tournament. We have done a lot since we moved here to NC....but few things top the day we spent at the ACC tournament. This year's tournament will take place March 12-16th again at the Greensboro Coliseum...if you have never been give it a shot this year....I know like us you'll be back again next year.

Hope to see you at the tournament this year, and hopefully by that time winter is in the rear view window, and it will be just about time to get back outdoors again. Until next time my friends....Tight Lines!!!