

CONFERENCE REVIEW

US Sports Congress

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Conference **US Sports Congress**

Dates

Dec. 8-11, 2019

Host Destination

Columbia, SC

Reviewer

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IRONMAN Group

I'll fully admit that heading into US Sports Congress for the first time this year, I certainly had my questions. The idea of a sports tourism conference without the built-in guarantee of scheduled appointments was different. I wasn't sure what to expect, nor the potential impact I could make for my company. Though hesitant, I knew

this conference had over a decade of experience, so look out Columbia, I was coming.

Arriving around noon on Sunday, I headed straight to Colonial Life Arena. Columbia Sports had invited rights holders to join them at the USC basketball game against the Houston Cougars. The Columbia Sports team proved a great host as they made their rounds ensuring everyone in the suite knew one another. Off to a good start.

In my book, there are a few things that can make or break a conference, and food is definitely one of them. Lou Mengsol, President, US Sports Congress, spared us the typi-

cal convention gray meat and mystery sauce. I'm pretty sure I left Columbia with a bit of extra baggage. Not only did they ensure we were treated to delicious local chef creations throughout the weekend, sponsors stepped up and had their local favorites shipped in. Buffalo's wing sauce, spiked cider from Richmond, and a little bourbon cream from Lexington. I am no foodie, but good food is good food, and this team knocked it out of the park.

Waking up Monday, I realized how excited I was to NOT worry about appointments. I looked at the event schedule in a new light. I had an option to completely customize exact-



ly what I wanted my conference to be. It's the end of the year, everyone had a schedule stacked with travel and "getting it done". Now here we were, a small select group, in this amazing walkable downtown, with the freedom to connect at will. There were speakers I wanted to see, round tables hosted by people I wanted to meet, people I just wanted to goof off with, and I could actually do so because there was a schedule that did not have us cranking 15 hours a day.

THAT I believe is the magic of this conference, and it's well-positioned placement in the calendar.

This is your connection conference, the long conversation conference. This conference reminds us all to get out of our little bubbles and remember how "in this together" we all really are. Blame it on the southern cooking or the Christmas music, but this conference just gave me the warm and fuzzies. After 4 days of getting to just casually talk with dedicated members of my eco-system, I left this conference re-energized about the amazing people I have the potential to work with.

So in a nutshell, if you have a chance to go, this conference is the perfect way to wrap up your year. Don't come in guns a blazing ready to make a sale. Instead, do your homework, spend some time and come ready to ask a few great questions and have some quality conversation. You will not be disappointed with the company you find yourself surrounded.

Conference Highlights

Columbus Sports, thank you for being an AMAZING host, and please tell the Blue Marlin to keep the collard greens warm, I will be back soon!

If you ever get a chance to see Lee Kitchen speak, do it. Better yet, bring your whole team.

Next time you see Kristie Hoover's (Kayak Bass Fishing) name on a list of conference attendees, find her and introduce yourself. She's amazing and is raising the bar for everyone.