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Can she keep running Detroit's Final Four hoopla -- and her family, too?

BY ERIN CHAN DING • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • MARCH 31, 2009

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Keri Gaither gazes down at the vast, eight-sided NCAA Final Four scoreboard at Ford Field and breathes in awe, saying, "Isn't it amazing?"

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Looking commanding in a pinstripe skirt suit and red peep-toe heels from BCBG, Gaither juggles roles as head of the NCAA Final Four Detroit Local Organizing Committee and athletic [director](#) at the University of Detroit Mercy, not to mention wife and mother of two, with poise, finesse and friendliness.

She got some practice last year when Detroit hosted the NCAA Regionals, but the Final Four, she says, "is a whole lot more work and a lot more fun." Gaither, who lives in Pleasant Ridge, coordinates the games and manages Final Four events like Hoop City and the Big Dance.

With the Michigan State Spartans in the running for the championship, Gaither, 46, predicts the "energy level in the city will just be unbelievable." And as one of about 30 female athletic directors at NCAA Division I schools, pulling together the Final 4 is undoubtedly a highlight of her career.

She took a breather from a frenetic day last week to chat with the Free Press.

QUESTION: What are your thoughts as the Final Four approaches?

ANSWER: It's been six years thinking about it, and six years seemed so far away. But I'm excited for the events to actually start. I think it really hits you when the teams arrive, and you get to see the student athletes come in and walk onto the court for the first time, and it's an unbelievable moment for them and an unbelievable moment for me.

Q: What has been the biggest thrill of coordinating the Final Four festivities?

A: There are so many thrills. It started with -- I hate to be one of the people who focuses on the logo -- but it goes back to when they unveiled our logo, almost last year.

Q: You have a Final Four production to manage, a Division I athletic program to head, a husband



SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

Keri Gaither, 46, of Pleasant Ridge, head of the NCAA Final Four Local Organizing Committee and the athletic director of University of Detroit Mercy, during an interview at the offices at Ford Field in Detroit, Wednesday, March 25, 2009.

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and two kids to [parent](#). How do you juggle everything?

A: With no sleep. That's a joke. I'm not one who needs a lot of sleep. I have a very good support system. My family is great, my husband is terrific and understands my crazy schedule.

Q: You're in an incredibly male-dominated profession — just 10% of athletic directors at Division I colleges and universities are female. How have you been successful?

A: I think first of all, attitudes are changing, and it's becoming a bit easier. There are so many great support programs out there developing minorities and developing women, and the NCAA has been huge with that one. I'm one of the recipients of one of those programs, and I'm one of the success [stories](#). For me, the biggest thing was having great mentors. It didn't matter if I was female or not. They were committed to having me succeed.

Contact **ERIN CHAN DING**: 313-222-6696 or echan@freepress.com

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