

Athletes rev up crowds at dance marathon

By **John Miller**

Thon 2008 coverage written for Comm 460

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - Even though they could not be there in person, the Penn State women's basketball and men's baseball teams still found a way to perform at the traditional Saturday night pep rally before thousands of dancers and their cheering supporters, as part of a two day non-stop dance marathon during THON weekend at the Bryce Jordan Center.

Hundreds of dancers and participating THON families stormed the makeshift picket line to high five some of the most recognizable Penn State athletes as they marched onto the floor.



Returning for the first time since the opening ceremonies was the Nittany Lion, Penn State's mascot, sparking a massive roar from the 15,000 spectators in attendance that could be heard all around the concourse.

Using a satellite relay, the teams competed in the first annual Athlete Music Awards show, the main event of the hour-long celebration, which began shortly after 10 p.m. The show featured appearances by members of the Penn State football team, men's ice hockey, golf and tennis as well as the women's field hockey, Soccer and national champion volleyball squads.

Each team was divided into one of three musical genres: popular music, hip-hop and the best of the 1980s. After performing a pre-selected number the audience would be called upon to vote for the winner by rally co-host Joe Battista, executive director of the Nittany Lion Club.

“Because after all Penn State we are doing this for the kids,” Battista said.

In the end, the women's soccer team, men's tennis and men's golf walked off the diamond shaped stage with bragging rights as winners of their respective categories. The gathering concluded with a salute to the Lion Ambassadors organization and a performance by the Penn State Blue Band.

The Penn State Interfraternity Council (IFC), the largest student philanthropy of its kind in the world, runs THON. A 46-hour dance marathon, held annually in February, marks the end of a yearlong campaign to raise funds for children afflicted with cancer. The proceeds raised in 2007 will be donated to the Four Diamonds Foundation based out of Hershey, Pa.