

Clemson fan helps Dabo Swinney build BYOG brand

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Like many Clemson fans, Allison Van't Hof watched the broadcast from the comfort of her couch. Like many Clemson fans, she jumped off that couch after the Tigers' sealed a riveting 24-22 victory against Notre Dame. Like many Clemson fans, she jumped even higher when she heard coach Dabo Swinney's postgame interview.



“We give you scholarships. We give you stipends and meals and a place to live. We give you nice uniforms. I can’t give you guts. I can’t give you heart,” Swinney yelled hoarsely into the microphone on Oct. 3, 2015. “And tonight, it was BYOG— bring your own guts.”

Van't Hof knew the phrase would catch. Partly because it instantly resonated with viewers all the way on the West Coast.

Unlike many Clemson fans, Van't Hof lives in California.

“I said, ‘Oh my gosh, I bring my own guts every day,’” she recalled. “BYOG, it kind of became my mantra the rest of the night. I was just like, ‘I hope somebody is doing something with this.’”

Van't Hof did not know then that she would be that somebody.

Van't Hof owns and operates Out of the Box Promotional Marketing. Through a chance encounter and an impromptu business proposal, Van't Hof partnered with Swinney and planned to develop BYOG into more than a catchphrase.

A year later, BYOG is a full-fledged brand and clothing line. Van't Hof manages the marketing, trademark, merchandising and website (byoggear.com). The four-letter mantra is emblazoned on hats, shirts, sweaters and other items.

A portion of the proceeds from sales are allocated to Swinney's All-In Foundation, which supports breast cancer awareness and educational initiatives.

“BYOG, it's a way of life. That's the brand messaging Clemson has taken on through Coach Swinney's impassioned directive,” said Van't Hof, who grew up in Belmont, North Carolina before venturing west to attend Pepperdine University.

“I work with clients all over the world,” she said, “but this has reignited my Southern roots. Working with everybody around Clemson, I feel like the luckiest girl in the world.”



Luck initiated this partnership.

Van't Hof shares an office with the public relations firm that manages a charitable foundation for Arizona Cardinals coach Bruce Arians. At a business event, Van't Hof was introduced to Arians' agent, Mike Brown. During their cordial conversation, Van't Hof learned that Brown manages another popular, charismatic coach, Dabo Swinney.

"I just stopped in my tracks," Van't Hof said. "You mean that coach at Clemson?" From that point on, Mike Brown could not get a word in edgewise. I just went off going, 'I bring my own guts every day. It's a way of life. It's a lifestyle. What are you going to do with that? Do you know what I do?'"

Intrigued by Van't Hof's enthused inquiry, Brown agreed to a follow-up meeting over an NFL game.

"I wrote up a business plan on cocktail napkins," Van't Hof said. "I told him what Coach Swinney could do to make BYOG a mantra and brand for Clemson University outside of football, because Clemson is such a unique institution.

"You bring your own guts to go to Clemson. You bring your own guts to get through a final. You bring your own guts to pledge a fraternity or sorority or try out for the band or stand up for sexual assault."

Two weeks later, Brown called with four more words.

“Allison, we love it.”

“It was Thanksgiving of last year,” Van't Hof said. “Coach Swinney was on board. He loved my business model. He appreciated my passion. He appreciated my experience. Since then, we have been on this journey, developing a brand and creating this very special message.”

Through her partnership with Swinney, Van't Hof smoothly secured licensing rights from Clemson and the Collegiate Licensing Company. The new partners also negotiated the transfer of all trademarks of “B.Y.O.G.” and “Bring Your Own Guts” from Fan Base Sports Pro, a company based in Athens, Georgia.

Fan Base Sports Pro applied to trademark the phrase three days after the landmark game. Three days after that, Brown encouraged Swinney to apply for trademarks as well, through Swinney's company, Katbo, LLC.

“They hadn’t done anything with it,” Van't Hof said of Fan Base Sports Pro. “They were super supportive and had no reluctance to signing over the licensing to us.”

In addition to the online store, Van't Hof's BYOG merchandise is sold in local shops throughout the Upstate and around the stadium during home games. She said her company also is pursuing partnerships with various Clemson student groups to support campus causes.

“Brands aren't built overnight,” she said. “We're building a lifestyle brand. We're building a brand that has meaning that has purpose. It is a slow build, but we're very happy with where we are in our journey.”



Van't Hof said the dynamism of the mantra and Swinney's magnetism have forged a community around the brand. She asserted that community and the daily affirmation of the spontaneous message compelled her to persevere through personal tragedy.

"I have met so many people and have heard so many stories about their trials, tribulations and triumphs. It's inspiring. It attracts. It wants you to be a part of it. It draws you in, and it's intoxicating," she said. "My mom recently died. September 1. The stories I've heard, the people I've met, I don't know if I would have been able to get through the way I got through if I wasn't a part of Bring Your Own Guts and this lifestyle and this constant reminder of getting through.

"We're survivors. Whether it's blocking the offense in an impassioned game or doing what you have to do tomorrow to pay your bills, you 'Bring Your Own Guts' in every move you make."