



**Marianka Swain** reports on the Cleveland Gay Games

**W**ho better to kick off a competition than the leader of the free world? President Obama sent an opening message for the 2014 Gay Games (August 9–16), “speaking from the heart about diversity, human rights and the great strides the US has made towards equality,” recalls Bradley Stauffer-Kruse. “He encouraged athletes from other parts of the world, where being gay is still a struggle, not to give up hope.”

It wasn't the only American touch at this year's event, which included cheerleading, country-western and line dancing alongside ballroom styles. Tori and Yvonne Settle, who, with Bradley and partner Sören, flew the flag for the UK, were impressed by the number of



California-born Bradley Stauffer-Kruse was supported by family and friends at the Gay Games

contests packed into four days.

It was also comfortingly familiar, notes Tori: “Parts of Cleveland are like Blackpool, so it felt like being at home! The Renaissance Hotel was stunning, and it was bliss to just take the lift down to the ballroom in the morning and be back in a hot bath literally minutes after prize-giving.” Sören enjoyed the reception: “Everyone knew about the Games and was very curious. The whole city was decorated and the top of City Hall illuminated each

night, plus there was a laser rainbow that ran across the entire skyline.”

However, Yvonne notes the competition itself lacked depth. “The level is generally higher in Europe, and the European teams were small in numbers.” Nevertheless, reigning standard champions Caroline Privou and Petra Zimmerman from Germany extended their unbeaten record, “and the men's Latin, almost exclusively American and Canadian, was really strong”.

The US finished top in men's standard and men's and women's Latin, through Eddie Alba and Daniel Buhala, Ernesto Palma and Nikolai Shpakov, and Sunny and Heather Brockett-Williams respectively. Unfortunately, the DJ lost the US national anthem during one medal ceremony, “so we sang it instead. It was actually really moving,” reports Tori.

She and Yvonne triumphed in Senior ten-dance and standard, but problems with the Latin – organisers belatedly decided to combine men and women – meant they finished third behind two male couples, rather than with women's gold and a world championship title. “The audience... did their best to rally us, and our male competitors were very understanding.”

California-born Bradley had an entourage of friends and family cheering him and Sören on in their showdance. “It was great to get silver, as the Americans are always strong,” says Bradley.

With London's 2018 bid losing out, the Gay Games' next stop is Paris. “We were on the bid committee, but there are no hard feelings,” promises Sören. “It may well be our swansong, and Paris is a wonderful way to go out!” ●