



ATHLETICS DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

Throughout history, athletics competition has helped young people grow and develop strong character and leadership skills. Whether student-athletes are studying to deliver peak performance or discovering that, to win, they will need to “pass the ball” — athletics is a precursor to other fantastic achievements. Also, it is athletics competition that allows young people the chance to hone skills in teamwork and leadership; to develop discipline and perseverance; and to take calculated risks and stay focused on the goal — all skills that will serve them well throughout life.



Tim Hall



This speaks directly to the strong power of athletics to produce individuals who are well-rounded in every facet. I really believe it also describes the philosophy at our I-AAA institutions where values-driven athletics programs promote academic, athletics and personal success. Why do I feel confident saying this? I say that because every facet of our program reflects an overarching, institutional commitment to student success; a commitment that is articulated clearly in documents such as university missions and strategic plans. These are communicated and widely accepted. More importantly, it is a commitment that is widely practiced. In short, all of our programs are fully aligned with the university's broader mission. Our programs are student-centered programs — ones that seek to win, but never at the expense of core educational values.

At our place, like many others, our programs operate under the basic premise that each individual and every department within intercollegiate athletics is expected to follow all institutional standards for academic performance and personal conduct. In the words of my former boss and mentor Laing Kennedy, director of athletics at Kent State University: “quality plus character equal success.” We all know — and fans views might differ — that an emphasis on core values like academic success and personal accountability is a distraction from on the court and field success. We can all validate and prove that adherence to core values is not a distraction from competitive success.

I know the vast majority of us are fortunate that we report directly to presidents and chancellors. Here at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), it is clear that the ultimate responsibility for athletics rests with our chancellor; however, he feels all major decisions about intercollegiate athletics must be shared decisions. They must be the byproduct of continual communication between him and me, a member of his cabinet. Through inclusion with this group, I have built strong bonds with members of the university's leadership team. In fact, because our athletics department is so intimately aligned with the university's larger mission, I am viewed much like a dean of a large academic unit, with coaches serving as the equivalent of department chairs.

Speaking of continued institutional expectations, we all know — as do our coaches — that we stand accountable for the

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academic performance of our teams. Toward that end, we must all be proactive in communicating the absolute seriousness in academic oversight. For example, upon learning a student-athlete is behind in a course, our coaches are expected to ban a student-athlete from practice until a plan of remedial action is developed and implemented.

We also are keenly aware that our coaches and administrators are subject to the expectation that our attitudes and actions must reflect our commitment to gender equity and Title IX. At our universities, male coaches must understand the institutional position that an investment in women's sports benefits the entire athletics program and institutional culture. At UMKC, we have discovered crafting acceptance of this key fundamental value starts with the example set by our staff — attending and supporting men's and women's initiatives and events equally.

It is true we all believe that a strong commitment to operating a comprehensive athletics program is something that we should not only take great pride in, but work at unflinchingly to create. Of course, big spending on athletics is not an option for the vast majority of us at the I-AAA level. Despite this, I know many of us are determined to continue to offer all our constituencies the excitement of well-coached, well-played men's and women's intercollegiate athletics — including a respectable share of successful seasons and league championships — while also holding strong to our highest priority, offering our student-athletes every opportunity to reach the academic “finish line” and go on to being one of the future leaders of tomorrow.

As you all know, doing just that has become a difficult and daunting challenge. We are all conducting our business in a different manner in light of the uncertain economic climate. We will all be successful in the end because of the strong resolve each of us possesses and our unwavering commitment to our young people.

Despite all of our collective challenges, we remain confident that our institutions will not just meet, but exceed our visions for our respective programs. The I-AAA group is second to none and our institutions have leadership and student-athletes that never cease to amaze us with their diversity and depth of talent — without question an undeniably strong foundation for which we can continue to build.

Perhaps more than anything, my optimism about the future of I-AAA is unshakable because I know the caliber and commitment of my colleagues. As we proceed on our individual campuses in our “strategic leadership huddles” about where we've been and where we want to go, I will challenge each of you to continue to think about meaningful ways you can further translate your commitment into action.

Thanks for this article to Tim Hall, director of athletics at the University of Missouri Kansas City and member of the I-AAA ADA Executive Committee.