



FCS ADA | CORNER

FCS — WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE?

With the ever changing landscape in intercollegiate athletics, where all you hear about is conference realignment, billion dollar TV deals, or million dollar multi-media rights transactions in the FBS subdivision ... FCS Institutions must ask the questions “What’s our next move?” and “How do we plan to remain relevant in the industry?”



Stacy Danley

I recently celebrated my first year anniversary as the director of athletics at Alabama State University (ASU). During the course of the last year, I assessed Alabama State’s position among other college athletics departments not only in the state of Alabama, but across the country. I quickly realized that there are five FBS programs and three FCS programs just in the state of Alabama alone. “Keeping up with the Jones” is difficult enough — let alone competing with the other programs in our own backyard.



As athletics director, I have to continuously look for ways to put Alabama State in position to remain competitive and relevant in the college athletics industry. Moreover, it is significant that we position ASU to take advantage of opportunities that will allow us to further develop and expand our programs. As we seek to recruit and retain the best coaches and prospective student-athletes in the state, often times we cannot compete with Auburn or Alabama. However, we will compete for the same student-athletes with FBS programs Troy, UAB and South Alabama, not to mention our FCS peer institutions, Alabama A&M, Samford and Jacksonville State.

After assessing our current position, I determined that our next move is to strategically position Alabama State to become the premier FCS institution, while continuing to build upon the rich history and tradition of ASU. It is important to understand the role of athletics within the context of higher education, as well as face the brutal fact that money is a key factor in the overall success of intercollegiate athletics programs. Maintaining the proper balance between athletics and academics is key. I have always viewed intercollegiate athletics as an “Educational Enterprise.” While education is our primary mission, there are parts of us that must and do operate as a business. Accordingly, as part of that strategic position, we were charged with focusing on our facilities — the ‘bricks and mortar.’ In order to be competitive and keep up with the Jones, we had to enhance our facilities.

Fortunately for me as athletics director, I have a university administration that actually believes athletics is the front porch to the house, and identified \$65 million to polish and shine our front porch. During the last year, our football program moved into a new \$7 million

athletics complex that houses our football coaches offices, state of the art locker rooms, equipment room, new weight room and most importantly a new Academic Lab. We believe this facility is second to none and will give us a chance to be the best.

We brought our baseball program back to campus to compete for the first time in 15 years when we opened the new Wheeler Watkins Baseball Complex. We have opened a new soccer/intramural field/grass football practice facility, and this spring, we will compete in a new softball complex. These three projects were constructed at a cost of \$5.3 million. We also initiated a \$150,000 men’s and women’s basketball meeting and locker room renovation project. Last but not least, the crown jewel of all ASU athletics facilities, a new state of the art 30,000-seat, \$50 million football stadium, is scheduled to open on Thanksgiving Day, 2012.

We believe that all of these moves were critical to stay competitive in the ever-changing college athletics landscape. In the last several years, we have seen FBS conferences realign like never before, and the domino effect of those decisions directly affects our FCS membership. The most recent announcement of two FBS leagues merging into one football conference is another in a series of significant occurrences which all FCS schools must ask themselves “are we doing enough to stay in the game?”

Here at Alabama State, we have made the commitment to do just that. In addition to the new facilities, we have hired individuals we believe are top coaches, administrators and staff to help us achieve our goals. Head baseball coach Mervyl Melendez and head volleyball coach Penny Lucas-White are among 32 new hires in Alabama State Athletics in the past year. We have concentrated our efforts on academic compliance, business affairs, internal operations, strength and conditioning and sport medicine. These hires give us a chance to be the best but that’s only part of the puzzle.

Now we are focused on money matters — marketing and fundraising. We have hired sports marketing firm GSP/Bruno Event Team to evaluate, price and sell our sponsorship inventory in our new facilities. We have identified more than \$14 million in inventory and have begun to sell our catalogue of products.

Now more than ever, FCS member institutions must continue to push the envelope to identify new ways to stay relevant in the larger picture of intercollegiate athletics. Gone are the days of the status quo of ‘doing the same things to get the same results.’ Athletics as we’ve known them continues to evolve, and as realignment continues to dominate our landscape, we as FCS member institutions must position ourselves to answer the question, “What’s our next move?”

Stacy Danley is the director of athletics at Alabama State.

