

MOAA | CORNER

LOW IN MONEY, HIGH IN CREATIVITY

All of us have encountered the electronic survey in our e-mail inbox and have chosen to read or delete it based on available time in our day or topic interest. Not long ago, there was a survey in particular that stood out from the rest that came from a collegiate coach pursuing her graduate degree. For her master's thesis, she was gathering information in a questionnaire regarding adjustments in programmatic strategies due to the tough economic times. When asked if my university or department made any changes in scholarship funding, program expenses and personnel, I clicked "no" to everything. This gave me a sense of pride that we stayed the course in our department despite the economic climate. Then I paused and said "What else is new? We are always in a financial challenge." It is the norm for many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) to face budget challenges, below average alumni support and hardly any scholarship dollars for our talented student-athletes. As a result, we are constantly looking for innovative ways to not only stay afloat financially, but to maintain success in the classroom, hit targeted graduation rates and high expectations in competition.



China L. Jude



Many HBCU's across the country rival the top conferences in graduation rates and classroom performance even with tight budgets making lemonade from lemons. In addition, they have produced legends that have played professional sports in the NBA, NFL and MLB. When the Fortune 500 companies are looking to hire the best and the brightest and a diverse employment pool, they turn to HBCU's for recruitment. The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA), founded in 1912, is one of the oldest conference offices servicing HBCU's followed by the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference in 1913. The CIAA has one of the largest and financially successful basketball tournaments in the United States. This success story began in 1946 with a budget of \$500 and in 2010 the CIAA basketball tournament is expected to generate up to \$2 million in scholarship funds for member colleges and universities. Not to be remiss, however; Cheyney University is the oldest HBCU, founded in 1837. Cheyney has one of the most storied basketball programs in NCAA Division II history. Both the men's and women's basketball programs have managed to participate in national championships with less than adequate funding under the direction of John Chaney and R. Vivian Stringer.

It is said that when a person loses one of their senses, the other senses are heightened; this can also be true that from shrinking budgets and limited funding sources comes increased creativity. Eliminating sports programs, downsizing staff and minimizing travel expenses can only go so far in cost-savings within an athletics department. In this economy, we are forced to perform our due diligence to turn lemons into lemonade to ensure sustainability of our athletics departments, student-athlete welfare and staff morale. Athletics administrators are turning the clock back to the "good ole days" when our creativity, not our money, generated excitement and victory in collegiate sports. Collegiate sports and sports in general have been the catalyst of change and growth during tough times. Our professional triumphs from our long hours, bowl games and national championships will leave a legacy for the entire university community to enjoy. It will have the ability to then reap the benefits through enrollment, faculty recruitment, regional or national recognition and graduating the best student-athletes in the country.

Is the student-athlete experience only about how much money that we can shower in our programs or is it the memorable experience that includes a chuckle about the bad food on a road trip, the stadium that only has one operable bathroom stall, the community service project that influences the change of a major, or befriending an opponent after a four-year battle on the court or field?

Remember the child who set aside a new toy to spend more time building a fort, boat or car with the box that the toy came in? That plain cardboard box helps to establish his creativity at such a young age. Think about your innovative projects as administrators. It is in our nature to be creative and it should continue to be nurtured, especially during these economic times. So, here's to all of the extremely low-funded departments who have weathered the storm and to those departments that are feeling the budget pinch. I commend you on your creativity while maintaining great facilities, competent coaching and support staff, passionate alumni and a great educational opportunity. We find a way each and every day to give that student-athlete a positive experience regardless of the funding issues.

Regardless of how we slice it, the economy will get worse before it gets better, so let's keep playing with those toy boxes to find more innovative ways to use them.

Thanks for this article to China L. Jude, director of athletics at Cheyney University of Pennsylvania.