

Athletic Initiative Sets Wittenberg Athletics Apart from the Rest

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The Wittenberg Athletic department has recently developed more bragging rights than just NCAC trophies; they now can say that they have a one-of-a-kind plan for all scholar athletes: The Tiger Game Plan.

The Tiger Game Plan, a new athletic department initiative meant to redefine Wittenberg Athletics was first brainstormed two years ago, and recently launched thanks to the help of Assistant Director of Athletics for the Tiger Game Plan Ali Teopas. The Game Plan consists of four areas including Global and National experience, academics and athletics, mentoring, and engaged learning environment and provides athletes with new opportunities and new expectations.

"This is the first of its kind," said Teopas. "This instills what makes Wittenberg so special."

The four areas of the program, which combine to spell the acronym GAME, set standards, goals, and a unified message for present and future Wittenberg athletes.

"G", global and national experience, pushes for athletes to gain global awareness through traveling and playing abroad as a team, and also encourages athletes to study abroad in their off seasons. Numerous men's and women's teams will be travelling abroad this summer, including women's basketball, who will travel to Italy; and the men and women's soccer teams will tour Europe in early August.

Athletics and academics, known as "A squared," focuses on athletes not only striving on the court, but also in the classroom. A newly established 2.0 GPA requirement for all athletes will go into effect beginning Fall 2011, and athletes must maintain this GPA in order to be eligible to play.

To help athletes stay above a 2.0, mandatory athletic department study halls will be required for all grades, and academic liaisons Cody Smith and Travis Swab will be available to help athletes who are struggling in the classroom.

"If students are on edge, we want to keep them eligible," said Teopa. "We will have writing center tutors at all athletic department study halls, and Cody and Travis are always around to help athletes stay on the right track."

"M," also known as the mentoring program, strives to connect Wittenberg alumni athletes with current athletes to provide networking for after graduation. According to Teopas, athletes will be paired with mentors who played the same sport while at Wittenberg. The mentors will serve as career councilors who check resumes, and provide interviewing tips to athletes.

Former Wittenberg women's basketball player and current Women's basketball head coach Sarah Jurewicz explained how she believes the mentoring program has the most potential out of the four areas of the GAME plan.

“As an alumni myself, I wanted to find a way that alumni could feel connected to Wittenberg without giving money,” explained Jurewicz. “I think the connections through the mentoring program can be so much richer since it’s not just about economics.”

“E,” the final part of the GAME plan, stands for engaged learning environment. Wittenberg teams are encouraged to re-engage with the Springfield community through community service projects throughout the year. Men and women’s team are already under way with this part of the GAME plan, with teams such as volleyball hosting a Big Brother, Big Sister clinic; women’s basketball players participating in the Tiger Pal’s program (a pen pal program with area elementary students), and the men’s basketball team recently participated in a Read-a-Thon at Snowhill Elementary.

The Tiger GAME Plan is the first of its kind for Division III athletics, and Wittenberg coaches see it as a strong recruiting factor, according to Jurewicz.

“I think this is a unified message for all athletes and they’re going to feel like they are being treated equally despite gender or sport,” said Jurewicz. “I like to think of this as tying a red ribbon on the package that you’ll get when you come here as a scholar athlete.”

Current Wittenberg athletes share mixed emotions about the new GAME plan, with some happy with the new opportunities and others saying they wish the athletic department would focus on other things.

“This new game plan isn’t much different than what we’ve had in the past,” said senior lacrosse player Charles Harreys. “I think the athletic department should focus their attention on buying things like new turf for the football field since it’s falling apart instead of putting a name on things we’ve already had.”

Not everyone shares Harreys opinions however, with younger athletes excited about the chance to play abroad and receive mentors to help them get their feet in the door.

“I can’t wait to play abroad this summer in Italy,” said sophomore basketball player Aimee Carpenter. “It’s going to be an experience of a lifetime. And on top of that, the new mentoring program will help me get a foot in the door to my career, and I am definitely grateful for that.”

The Game Plan will officially go into effect for all athletes beginning fall 2011, however it is currently being used for the recruitment of the class of 2015. According to Teopas, the athletic department “wants athletes to know that when they come to Witt they are not just a number, they are a person with a name that will make a difference.”