

Student-Athlete Development

It is imperative that our athletes have the best possible collegiate football experience. The best aspects of football often have nothing to do with what happens on the field on game day. My memories of football surround my interactions with coaches, teammates, and support staff. They are memories of the locker room, traveling on the bus, and practice. Developing strong student-athletes on the field first starts with developing relationships. We must have strong relationships with our student-athletes from the moment they send in their deposit through walking across the stage to get their degree (ideally for life). We must build trust and care within these relationships. Once an athlete knows that we care about them, and they trust us, we can ask them to run through a brick wall, and they will do it because they know we want what's best for them.

Once we establish that relationship, we can truly develop our players. First, we must instill our values, standards, and culture. Once we have buy-in, we can hold them accountable to everything that we stand for. What is best for the individual is always what's best for the team. From there, we must establish that no matter what we do, we do it with great effort, intensity, and passion. If we can get our players to buy into those elements, the technique, fundamentals, and scheme will come.

One of our primary modes of student-athlete development is goal writing. At the beginning of each pre-season camp, each player will write down a set of goals. A copy of each athlete's goals will be given to the head coach and their position coach. We will use these goals to track their progress and hold them accountable to their actions on and off the football field. Below are the prompts that each player will write goals on:

1. Two team football goals
2. Two individual football goals
3. Two strength and conditioning goals
4. Two academic goals
5. Two personal goals

These goals must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time restricted. Goal writing does not matter if they are simply written down as quickly as possible. They must be thoughtful and purposeful.

Finally, freshman year is going to be tough. As coaches we need to remember that we recruited these student-athletes to campus. We've been entrusted with their well-being and development. We must work to help them mentally, emotionally, and physically process the change to being a collegiate athlete. At the conclusion of the fall season, each position coach and/or the head coach will meet with each freshman and go through the following prompts:

1. What was your favorite part of your first college football season? First semester in college?
2. What was the hardest part of your first college football season? First semester in college?
3. How/what can we learn from that situation?
4. Was your first season of college football and first semester of college what you expected? Why or why not? This is extremely important! Many freshmen transfer or drop out because what they expect college to be, is not reality. We don't know for sure what kind of guidance they've received prior to arriving on our campus. Work through this and probe for more information.
5. Build towards the future. Talk through their goals in football, academics, and for the future. Create excitement about moving forward and building on all that they've already accomplished.