

FCS ADA



Jeremy Gibson

Merrimack College

Director of Athletics

Isn't it great to be playing college football again in the fall?!?

The leaves on the trees surrounding our stadium are just starting to turn, the 4th quarter breeze has a crispness to it that wasn't there at kick off, and it feels... normal.

Normal has been elusive for the past 18 months, and no years of experience or advanced degrees could have prepared any of us to confront the challenges we have all faced in trying to sustain the missions of our respective programs through a concurrent pandemic and upheaval in the world of college athletics.

The structures and systems that had been our norms were turned upside down. Alarm clocks were replaced by early morning calls from contact tracers; practice cohorts were formed and coaches "recruited" through a dead-period that was extended... and extended again.

We asked our fans and alumni to support us through an unfamiliar way of doing business. We did all we could to preserve some semblance of opportunities for our student-athletes to play the games they love and give them a taste of normal.

Many endured staff reductions through furloughs and layoffs and programs were cut at record pace. We managed remotely and became familiar with our colleagues' pets and wall decorations as we watched our own accelerated aging on one Zoom meeting after another. Then we managed the anxieties of returning to in-person work and the challenges our employees faced in trying to balance this with caring for dependents who were still going to school at their own dining room tables. We did all that we could to ratchet up the support of our student-athletes as they struggled more than ever with mental health and truly needed meaningful connections. Caring for our people with greater depth and empathy became normal.

We knelt with our communities in silent solidarity for eight minutes and 46 seconds against something that should have never been normal.

Normal became changes to transfer rules that stood as possibly the most impactful athletics legislation we had encountered... until student-athletes regained ownership of their name, image and likeness. Conference realignment advanced, and now we prepare for a Constitutional Convention with the expressed intent of reconsidering the governance and structure of college athletics. Complexity is our normal.

Now, weary from 18 months of navigating a tempest, our spirits are replenished by seeing our campuses repopulated; virtual meetings are being replaced with face-to-face (or at least mask-to-mask) conversations, and parents are (mostly) allowed again to see their children compete in-person. And as we reemerge into a new normal, let's be sure to pause briefly to remind ourselves of our enduring roles of educating our students, creating pathways for their success and instilling a unifying sense of pride on our campuses and in our communities.

The coming months and even years are likely to advance college athletics deeper into uncharted territory. But, for now, it feels great to be playing college football again in the fall... and it feels normal.

Campus. Community.



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