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Promoting social justice and diversity, equity and inclusion must be an ongoing and ever evolving pillar within intercollegiate athletics. From on-campus initiatives for coaches and staff, to alumni networking and relationship building activities as well as student-athlete affinity groups, the resources for both student-athletes and the staff and coaches who serve them must be all encompassing. We have learned that there are so many ways to approach this. Creating DEI education and awareness can be approached through leadership from your department, your alumni, and your athletes.

The University of North Texas (UNT) department of intercollegiate athletics has excelled in providing leadership through its staff. UNT established nine diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives promoting social justice. The initiatives are meant to be resources used as a starting point for conversations between student-athletes, staff, and the entire Mean Green Family: Fund, Vote, Read, Honor, Educate, Facilitate, Pledge, Listen and Empower.

Johns Hopkins University has learned how to lead through our current athletes and our alumni, and we are excited to collaborate as we continue this work into the next fiscal year.

As fundraisers, the heart of what we do is work with people. We meet with alums, we work alongside administration and we support our athletes. In the summer of 2020 at Johns Hopkins, the Black Student Athlete Association (BSAA), which had been in the works for awhile, was officially established. We asked what they needed, what they wanted and how we could help. What we learned was that their story was not ours to tell. But we had a platform for them to speak and be heard. We had alumni that they could connect with, who had walked in their shoes and could understand their experience. We had the means to host a Virtual DEI 5K to

raise awareness of their stories and the work they were doing. For this next school year, we have the resources to set up a mentoring program for all athletes of color, and host events with guest speakers who are leaders in the DEI space.

Together, we have learned that being fundraisers isn't an excuse to hear about racism in our community and ignore it. Being fundraisers means that we have a unique platform to advocate for change and show support so that our department will be an even better place for our future athletes. In the process, we learned that we have a staff and leadership that care and really walk the walk. We learned that we have athletes who are strong enough to step up and speak out, and alumni who are eager to support them. We learned that our Board of Advisors made this a priority and will do everything that they can to help. And we're excited to keep learning from other institutions about the programming they are doing on their own campuses. Seeing them take a leadership role in this space is so encouraging, and we are excited to collaborate with them.



Mike Majewski

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As seemingly one of the last pieces in college athletics to fully return in the start of a post-pandemic world, we as a ticketing industry have a blank slate to start from in 2021-22. Two takeaways we immediately see are that people are excited to get back to seeing live sports in person, and individuals were forced to become nimbler with their technology use during COVID-19. Both of these are great news for our industry.

Conversely, every other industry is anxiously awaiting the full capacity return of guests as well, from restaurants to performing arts. So how do we stand out to capture the excitement from spectators looking to return?

This feels like the perfect time to capitalize on the technological advances the COVID-19

pandemic has forced to the mainstream. Mobile ticketing provides an ease of use for consumers, and acts as a layer of

safety against fraudulent tickets. Mobile tickets won't get ruined or damaged in your wallet, you don't have to meet up with a friend at an agreed upon location to give them their mobile tickets, and you can't leave your mobile tickets in your dresser drawer at home. For many of the same reasons, we've seen the rise of NBA TopShot and MLB Topps NFTs, which are valuable commodities just like tickets are, and they offer so much more functionality and ease of use than physical tickets do.

Moving our fan base along the ladder of technology won't do it alone. Much of the rest is going to be on our in-person, game day staff. With the return of large crowds, there's two possible roads we can go down. We can be inundated with traffic and buried in our own work, or we can look at it from the perspective of new spectators and what can we do to offer the most accommodating environment to choose to spend their discretionary income.

One of the best slight modifications to our customer service came from a sign idea one of

the best ticketing professionals out there, Troy Kirby, gave me at the NAATSO Convention in 2015. A simple laminated sheet of paper taped to each ticket window, with a red X over the words "I don't know." We instituted a rule where any question you were asked by a spectator, you cannot answer with, "I don't know."

At the very minimum, if it's something a sales representative doesn't know, the standard answer is, "That's a great question, let me look into that a bit more for you." No matter if it was a ticketing, facilities, licensing or any question that pertains to our institution, we'd make it a point to try our best to assist our guests. This minor mindset change carried over to the rest of our gameday interactions, going above and beyond to ensuring our guests feel good about choosing to spend their time and money with us.

We should see this through the front door as well. We'll have a lot of new people looking to get out and experience new things, let's take some additional steps to do our best to ensure they're coming back again and again.