

## N4A

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### The Evolution of Collegiate Athletics Facilities and the Future of Student-Athlete Welfare

As a student development professional other than a few classes in my Master's program, I was not very familiar with athletics facility projects and how they impacted the student-athlete. This was before I experienced three weeks from May to June 2021 with the Old Dominion baseball team that completely changed my outlook on capital projects and the student-athlete. Our team experienced unprecedented success during a conference title run, earning a #1 regional seed and advancing to the final game of the regional. Yet once it was all said and done, our student-athletes were exhausted, fresh off spending three weeks in Louisiana and South Carolina for the conference tournament and NCAA with little to no break in between trips. This was caused by our baseball stadium's inability to host a conference

tournament or NCAA regional game due to press box and broadcasting updates that needed to be done. It became

abundantly clear to our administration that facilities impacted much more than the casual fan, and we began to dive headfirst into the history and evolution of facilities and their impact on the student-athlete experience.

The history of athletics sports facilities has been well documented over time. From the early Roman coliseums to the modern marvels that we enjoy, stadiums have evolved to provide optimal fan experiences for one of society's favorite pastimes. Most schools have gone from having a simple multi-use outdoor space and fieldhouse to building extensive and intricate athletics complexes at the collegiate level. The college facilities arms race started initially to provide additional seating for fans as collegiate sports began to gain traction as demand increased for tickets and a Saturday family experience. We then moved into the era of providing premium seating and exclusive spaces for revenue generation and to give fans an optimal experience that they cannot experience at home.

Then came the focus on the student-athletes. Institutions started to add not only to their

stadiums but designed top of the line training complexes including weight rooms, recovery pools, training tables, nap pods, and players lounges not only for the current students to enjoy but to recruit athletes as they take tours of universities before making their final decision.

Before any steps are made, projects should be evaluated from two angles: how does this impact student-athlete welfare, and how are we improving the casual fan and spectator experience. After our three-week travel ordeal, we immediately jumped into action to perform a feasibility study and release a public proposal to upgrade our baseball facility. In this planning, not only did we aim to expand premium seating and the fan experience, but we spent ample time with the coaches on developing a facility where we could host postseason games and that would ensure the optimal holistic student-athlete experience. We believe this analysis and hard look at fulfilling the student's physical, mental, and academic needs is the next evolution of facility projects.

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### Building Strong and Healthy Relationships Between Coaching Staffs and Compliance Offices

Coaches and their programs are under tremendous pressure to win and they are going to push the envelope. However, along with this expectation to win is an expectation to operate under an atmosphere of compliance and within NCAA rules.

At TCU, the compliance staff assists coaches, student-athletes, staff and boosters with navigating the many difficulties and hindrances to success. Sometimes in college athletics, there is a preconceived notion that the compliance office is the "police." Although monitoring the actions of those we serve and investigating potential NCAA violations are a necessary part

of our job, the main charge of compliance is rules education. By focusing primary efforts on rules education, the compliance office can show coaching staffs that we are attempting to keep them out of trouble by providing adequate knowledge as they navigate the complex world of recruiting, eligibility, financial aid, etc.

If the only interactions between coaches and compliance offices are during instances of violations or suspected violations, there is a much higher chance that the relationship between both parties will be adversarial. It is important for compliance administrators to be visible to coaches, maintain consistent communication and show support when possible. By doing so, a healthier relationship can be maintained, which is crucial when monitoring coaches' activities (e.g., collecting recruiting documentation) or investigating violations. Additionally, coaches are more likely to be honest with compliance administrators about their questions (not hypotheticals), the guidance they are seeking and more likely to self-report NCAA violations when there is a healthy relationship with the compliance office.

Coaches will sometimes challenge the

compliance office, especially when a compliance administrator is tasked with sharing bad news. The most effective way to respond to coaches is to acknowledge the coach's feelings on the situation, convey sincerity and offer other reasonable or ethical solutions regarding the situation if they exist. For example, a coach may be aggressive towards a compliance staff member because he or she was prohibited by the compliance office from performing a recruiting activity which he/she was permitted to perform at their previous institution and which other coaches within the conference were currently performing at their institutions. Although the compliance administrator may be adamant that the recruiting activity violates NCAA rules, it would be prudent for the administrator to reach out to the other institutions in the conference, the coach's previous institution, the conference office or the NCAA to ensure the coach is not at a recruiting disadvantage. In this type of situation, the compliance administrator cannot have an ego. The only focus should be on getting the answer right. By the compliance administrator reaching out to all of the aforementioned entities to get the correct answer, it will show the coach that the compliance office is willing to ethically exhaust all options/resources for the coach's program to be successful.