

**Davon Robb****Towson University****Assistant AD for Facilities
and Event Management**

In the words of Christopher Wallace, "It was all a dream ...". Okay so truthfully, I can't say that it was a dream because at the beginning of my career I never pictured myself working in facilities and event management. Honestly, you can say I volunteered my way into the profession. My career goal is to be an athletics director and with me starting off in academic advising and student-athlete development at Northwestern, I was constantly contemplating how I could navigate my way towards my goal. Along came the opportunity to volunteer at the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament which was made available through a good friend and mentor of mine, CEFMA Past President Andrea Williams. Little did I know that three years later I would join the staff at the Big Ten Conference office.

I was able to transfer various skills over into event management such as time management, effective communication, relationship building, and emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, I still had a lot to learn, especially in regard to managing large scale events. In just under four years, I grew to love and have a great understanding of event management; there was only one problem ... I missed being on campus. Then came the opportunity at Towson University which allowed me to be back on campus, continue in event management, and pick up a new challenge, which was overseeing facilities.

Facilities is one of the few staffs that play a vital role for literally everyone in the athletics department. Once again, I had a learning curve to overcome, not to mention seven months into my new job the world faced an unknown foe called COVID-19. By the end of my first year, like many athletics administrators, I was trying to juggle mental health and other challenges that came with COVID, while also trying to figure out how to prepare our facilities so that our student-athletes and staff could safely return. Thankfully, I had great friends in MOAA and CEFMA that I could lean on not only during hard times, but to brainstorm with as well.

One nugget of wisdom I've gained on this journey is just because you've never done it before doesn't mean that you can't do it, take a chance on yourself. Also, when hiring, sometimes interpersonal skills trump experience, so don't be afraid to take a leap of faith on others.

The landscape of college athletics is changing, but as long as we continue to work together and put others first then I'm confident the fruit we produce will continue to be life changing.

**Marques Cox****Rutgers University****2020 McLendon Fellow**

The impact the McLendon Foundation has had on the early portion of my career has been paramount. As a former student-athlete, athletics administration was an attractive field to me, but I didn't fully understand the potential success I could find in this area. Although I knew I didn't want to coach, I wanted to have a positive effect on future student-athletes, and after some research I came across the field of athletics administration. This is where the McLendon Foundation Minority Leadership Initiative (MLI) played a monumental role in setting me in motion. The program offered an opportunity to see all the aspects within an athletics department, and the various careers to be pursued. There was, above all, the experience of being an athletics administrator, but the Leadership Initiative coupled it with an

educational piece. You not only learned about all the nuances that went into you thriving in this role, but also shared a commonplace with your constituents and built your network.

I don't believe in coincidences, but through what can only be described as happenstance, I became the McLendon Fellow at Rutgers University, a Big Ten school, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when then-Commissioner Kevin Warren had decided to bring back all athletics events that spring semester. This working context proved to be pivotal in my direction moving forward, as my rotational program not only opened the door to the essentials of athletics administration, but did so during a time of crisis, where every little logistical component mattered. This taught me how those at Power Five schools and conferences work under strenuous circumstances and allowed me to take a more hands-on approach in my role. The Rutgers athletics department did a wonderful job incorporating me into their system, trusting me with responsibilities, mentoring and redirecting me when needed, and allowing me to thrive and become a contributing member of the department, acquiring priceless knowledge along the way. I had the advantage of not only knowing

how each department worked internally, but also their working relationships with other departments.

The McLendon Foundation has also helped in the aspect of networking, in more than one facet. First, there is the Annual Convention, where you have the opportunity to attend sessions presented by an all-star cast of individuals who have flourished in their respective fields, be it professional sports administration, collegiate athletics administration, finance, etc. Next, there was a special opportunity presented to McLendon Fellows to participate in the NCAA Men's Basketball March Madness, which actually put all of the Fellows in front of senior administration from a myriad of high-profile institutions. Being able to get a glimpse into their everyday life, responsibilities and journey, along with the possibility of them becoming a contact or reference in the future, was priceless.

Overall, I would say that the McLendon Foundation Minority Leadership Initiative was instrumental in the start of my career. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity and as the program grows, I hope more individuals, especially former student-athletes, take full advantage of the opportunities presented.