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The Tricks of Tweets – Why My Coach Tweets: Twitter Best Practices in Intercollegiate Athletics

An interview with:

GREG BYRNE, University of Arizona AD

RENEE JIMENEZ, Cal State Monterey Bay women's basketball head coach

MARK HUDSPETH, Louisiana-Lafayette football head coach

JOE GALBRAITH (MODERATOR): Twitter is basically a blank slate in terms of its application within college athletics. I think having these teleconferences and getting feedback and other ideas is a wonderful thing for all of us.

Just to get started, before I introduce everybody, I figured I'd let you know my day today started when a couple of our assistants started sending out 5:00 tweets before the team run. It's a part of our every day. That's one of the more fascinating aspects of it, is that there's no formula

or proper way of using it. That's what we'll talk about, try to get a few different perspectives.

Joining us on the call, I'd like each of them to talk about their experiences with or philosophies about Twitter before we answer questions.

First we have Greg Byrne, director of athletics at the University of Arizona. Greg has more than four thousand followers on Twitter himself and has done some interesting things there.

Greg, thanks for joining us this morning.

GREG BYRNE: Thanks for having me on.

I wasn't so sure about it right at the beginning when it first started. I've been tweeting for a little over a year now. It was just something that I quickly discovered. I really wasn't into Facebook a whole lot because I felt like it was a lot of two-way communication, which isn't all bad.

As an athletic director at a Division I school, you're going to have a lot of fans want to become your friends. You could spend a good chunk of your day answering Facebook questions.

What I saw with Twitter is it was a lot more one-way communication. It was the ability to get your message out, promote your program, talk about different and unique things we get to do on a daily basis that keeps people engaged.

The reality is there's so much competition for people's time and resources, what they're doing, if we don't stay out there and communicate on a regular basis, they're going to pay attention to something else.

So I found not only from a fan perspective, but I have student-athletes that follow me and communicate with me through that. I see them in the hallway, mention something that's been tweeted out, and faculty, donors, the media, a lot of media members that follow me through this. I've just found it to be a very useful tool that's worth spending 10 to 15 minutes a day communicating on different things because of how many people it can touch.

Even though I was a little skeptical at the beginning, I'm sold on it 110%.

JOE GALBRAITH: Thank you, Greg.

Also joining us this morning is Renee



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Jimenez, women's basketball coach at Cal State, Monterey Bay. Her team has a 22-2 overall record this season.

Thanks for taking a few minutes to be on with us this morning, Renee. If we could get a couple comments from you.

RENEE JIMENEZ: Good morning, everybody. For us, being a small Division II school, the best part for us is it's free. We don't have the same marketing budgets as a lot of people do. It's really allowed us to send out really great content, strong messages on the same platform as BCS schools essentially with having little to no marketing money. It's given us a great opportunity to promote and engage and extend our brand not just to our fans but when you look at the Internet it's almost to the world.

I use it to talk about daily activities with our team, awards that our kids receive, how practice went, the assistant coach that tripped and fell at practice, anything we can put out there to give a personal touch.

In terms of it's a huge recruiting tool, the biggest thing with recruiting is changing with times. Now for kids these days everything is kind of instant. That's been the most important thing in terms of recruiting, Twitter has allowed me to bring a personal feel.

Recruits, they really don't care about your bio online as a coach or the media guide you send them. My goal is to create a real person with them. They want to know what I'm doing, if I'm spending time with my family, what I'm having for dinner, what kind of music I listen to, what movie I went and saw. It's really all these little things that are helping recruits make judgments about whether they're going to be the right fit for you.

Obviously your record and your rankings and stuff like that speak for itself, but kids these days, they really want to connect with you on a personal level. So we really try to put a lot of stuff out there. We've connected it to our YouTube site. We show highlights, team activities, so we've been able to get that out as soon as we can.

I want recruits to know when I'm heartbroken after a loss, excited about a big win. As soon as that top 25 ranking comes out, I'm tweeting that. As soon as we win a big game, I'm tweeting the story our SID put up. We're on top of it. My assistants and I spend a lot of time on it, especially when we're on the road trying to connect people and our fans, our people on campus, our university, they're really starting to jump on the bandwagon with this Twitter.



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It's given me a great way to connect with people who as a young and up-and-coming coach, I probably wouldn't have had relationships with a lot of people that I have on Twitter now. I've been able to share some XO stuff on there, ask coaches questions that essentially I wouldn't have any contact with if it wasn't for Twitter.

It's really helped us in terms of the biggest thing has been marketing a small school, a small program here at Cal State, Monterey bay. We're excited about it. Like Greg, we were skeptical to start, now it's taken off. Our kids thought it was cheesy at first, but now they love when I put a picture or video of them up. We're kind of riding this whole Twitter wave with it.

JOE GALBRAITH: Thanks, Renee.

Our final panelist is the first-year head coach at the University of Louisiana, Mark Hudspeth. Coach, how is it going with the new technology?

MARK HUDSPETH: It's going really good. Right now we've had a lot of success with it already.

The one thing I found out was the difference between Twitter and Facebook. We were a big Facebook team when I was at Mississippi State, all the assistant coaches all utilized Facebook as much as they possibly could obviously on a daily basis. Now you can start seeing Twitter starting to get in there. More people are Twittering each day.

The thing I found out, down in Louisiana, there's not as many recruits on Twitter. They're working that way, just like they worked their way to Facebook. Now they're working their way to Twitter. It's more obviously for us people that want to support or follow your program, your fans, your students, your alumni all across the country are getting most of our Twitters, then obviously the recruits are still for us mostly on Facebook. I think they're making it that way.

What I've been able to do, I've got Twitter linked to Facebook and Facebook linked to Twitter and both of them linked to our website. Whatever I Twitter, it goes out on Twitter and also pops up on Facebook and on our website. So if somebody is working in their office has our site up, there's a Twitter box on the left that keeps updating from what I say on our website. They're getting my tweets three different ways, whichever way they may be on.

That's been a great way for me to send

something out. The alumni get it, the students get it, and the recruits, if they're reading Facebook, it's popping up on their Facebook site from the Twitter site. It's been a great way for me to get the message out there quickly.

JOE GALBRAITH: Thank you for joining us, all three of you. We'll get started with questions.

The first question I have is, I know Renee and Mark, you do your own tweeting, I would assume. Greg, any of your coaches, do you have an institutional marketing or media relations, sports information person that does anything like that for the coaches?

GREG BYRNE: Yeah. Right now our football and men's basketball coach do not tweet. I've kind of become the spokesperson for it. We do have some of our individual sports that have Twitter pages or Twitter accounts.

But one that's followed pretty extensively by our fan base is Arizona athletics. That's an SID assigned to the sport, some better than others, give us updates throughout their events they're covering. As the athletic director, that's helpful for me. Like this past weekend, we had eight of our sports, nine of our sports, competing. It was great to be able to keep up to date with them on who was doing what. That's what we've had more is team reports than we have individual coach's reports.

JOE GALBRAITH: At this time we'll start taking questions.

One of the questions we got sent in is: How do you deal with an abundance of negative tweets to coaches after they lose big games?

Our philosophy is you just ignore them. But it is a way to get instant feedback. I know, Mark, this is your first year. Renee, I don't know if you've had anybody tweet anything after a loss at you. Either you or Greg, would you like to deal with any kind of negative tweets?

GREG BYRNE: Go ahead, Renee.

RENEE JIMENEZ: When you're 22-2, people don't have a lot to say about you (laughter). We don't deal with a whole lot of that. Like I said, with the new, up-and-coming program, we've had a lot of success. We haven't really gone down that path.

But just like you said, it's something you ignore. It's something we talk about with our kids in terms of if they're on Twitter, Facebook, something like that, they're actually getting a lot more kind of random people that want attention or are trying to contact them. We're asking them to

be a little bit more conscious about who and what's out there, what people's intentions are. That's really the biggest message we're sending.

In terms of negative feedback, we haven't had to deal with much of that, so...

GREG BYRNE: I've dealt with it quite a bit. You do ignore them. At the same time, too, one of the things you kind of consider is, I don't sit and look at every person that mentions my name or my Twitter name in a tweet, but I do look at some. If it's somebody that has like two followers, I don't think you're too worried about it. But if Pat Forde put something out there, has 30,000 followers, that may be a little different response that you want to do.

I think it depends a little bit on what it is. But if Pat is retweeting something, you're certainly not going to get in a public match with him, but at the same time, too, may give you a reason to pick up the phone and call him, say, What's the issue, talk about something. Gives you an opportunity to communicate, get a pulse on what's going on.

Like I said earlier, Facebook, it's two-way communication much more so. Twitter, you don't have to do that. But at the same time, too, it's not bad to at least have an idea of the pulse of what people are feeling.

MARK HUDSPETH: Greg, when you are monitoring your site, do you ever take things off you feel deemed inappropriate or are you able to do that?

GREG BYRNE: On Twitter, you can block people. Yeah, we've done that before. Our student-athletes through our compliance office, we're not perfect at this by any stretch, they put on the security measures to where they have to accept anybody that wants to follow them, that's both for Twitter and Facebook. And in our compliance office, they spend quite a bit of time monitoring what's out there taking place.

I actually follow our higher-profile student-athletes, and I tell them, I say, Hey, guys, women, whatever you put out there, I'm looking at it, too, so keep that in mind when you're ready to put something out there. The reality is, we know some reporters will choose to retweet whatever they put out there.

JOE GALBRAITH: We have a question: What do you think is more successful, a coach's Twitter page or a sports-specific Twitter page?

I'll guess I'll get started with the answer. Renee touched on the benefit of expressing a

personality, showing a real person side. I think through our website, everybody's institutional website, you have an idea of generic news or happenings or wins and losses, but to put a personal face on it is obviously beneficial.

That said, I think having a presence on Twitter, whether it's the actual head coach or somebody from the department providing that insight, I think either one can be beneficial.

Any of you have any thoughts on that as it pertains to a coach doing it themselves compared to a sport administrator person doing it?

GREG BYRNE: I think they both have value. When I'm looking at the Arizona athletics one as a whole, I'm looking for the updates on the team. If you take that up to a level to each individual team, if your sports have it, like what Renee and Mark are doing.

At the same time, too, I think one of the values of Twitter, what we try to do, every once in a while, I'll put something out there about my family or something that I'm doing personally. I got to drive an IndyCar in Phoenix. I put that out there. You're humanizing yourself, letting people know you have feelings and interests and everything else. Renee talked about the coach tripping and falling.

One of the things you can do is get people to realize you have a sense of humor, you enjoy different things in life. It feels like they get to know you. That's one of the values that it brings, not just a softball team beat another team 3-2 this weekend.

RENEE JIMENEZ: Absolutely. I think especially on the women's side, young women, they want a relationship with their head coach on a different level than it just being a business. I was at the Division I level at San Diego State for three years. We were just kind of making that transition to kind of use more social media stuff.

When we got here with our kind of lack of financial resources, we really took off with Twitter, Facebook, whatnot, and ran with it. Recruits, they really look at this stuff. I would tweet something, and all of a sudden with any of those kids we already signed, I get a text message back right away about a win or something that was funny or, Hey, coach, I saw that movie. It just automatically engages something else in them.

That's what I said on the women's side, there is a lot more emotional involvement kind of tied into that. It's been a huge help for us. Like we say, we've kind of attached it to our YouTube. We have a lot of team videos and stuff. They want to

know that your kids are having a fun time where they are. It's not just about basketball and academics. They want to know they're going to go there, have a great experience, they're going to get to laugh and joke. They do see a very personal side of myself and my assistants.

Of course, we're very careful. We talk a lot about with our kids, ourselves, in terms of never saying, We're here right now. It's something we've already done. There is a big safety issue, of course, when you're coaching young women.

I know our university website and our athletics website is getting a lot more hits because of our coaches, not just myself, but other coaches on campus using Twitter. We've gotten a lot more hits on our website. For a small school like Monterey Bay, it's kind of up-and-coming, this free social media has been absolutely huge for us here.

JOE GALBRAITH: That gets into our next question: How do you control your athlete's use of Twitter? Do you coach them on the potential negatives of having this open forum?

I never thought about it, Renee, in the way you put it, safety aspects. I would be interested if anybody else has any different - trying to think of the right word - scenarios in which things can be negative, what you do to prevent or educate before that happens.

Renee, what do you do prior to the season, aside from just telling them about Twitter?

RENEE JIMENEZ: Yeah, we actually have a set of guidelines that is specific towards social media in our team notebook. Any type of pictures that are posted, I mean, we go as far as if I see something, there's a game suspension. I'm really, really strict with it. And it has absolutely nothing to do with me trying to just be the boss; it completely has to do with their safety.

I think our kids at first, sometimes they didn't understand that. This actually came up because we were on a trip. A kid said, Did so-and-so request you? 16 women said, Yeah, I did, I accepted him. Do you know who he is? They're like, No. It was kind of a joke. We actually sat down afterwards and I said, Guys, you can't do that. You have pictures up there of you and your family. I'm asking them to be really conscious about what goes up there.

We do check their Facebook accounts. They are responsible for anything that they post or someone else posts. That's been the biggest one. I know you can delete it, I know you can take it off.

They're responsible for anything on their Twitters, their Facebooks.

So we do have a whole social media expectation and guidelines that we expect them to follow. They're not allowed to put what hotel they're at. They're not allowed to put what dorm room they're in, anything like that.

For young women, it's so much more of a concern that we do have a heavy hand and quick trigger with it in terms of nipping that stuff in the bud right away. We've been very conscious of it. We've tried to more tell them it's about, I have a kid that's doing ESPN radio, I don't want her picture. These are pictures that come back later on, when you're 30, 35, you're in your prime, there's a picture on ESPN because someone found it of you.

We try to make them really conscious. It's not what you're doing when you're 17 to 22; that picture is still going to be out there when you're 30 to 35, you're in your prime, trying to start your career.

That's the way we've approached it. I think they've really accepted that. I'm not saying we're perfect at it, but we're definitely getting better at it. We're asking their parents to be more involved in it.

Now parents are on Facebook and Twitter. They're following their kids. We've sent it out to our whole program that this is what it is. If you don't abide by these guidelines, there will be some sort of suspension or something like that.

We've had pretty good results with it as of this point.

JOE GALBRAITH: That's great.

Greg, is there anything you guys do at Arizona?

GREG BYRNE: We have a presentation at the beginning of the year that a good chunk of my talk with the kids is in the basketball arena. We have all 500 of our student-athletes. I do a PowerPoint. I have pictures from Facebook of Vince Young, different high-profile student-athletes across the country in a variety of sports, both male and female, just showing, Hey, I did a quick Google search, here is who I pulled up.

We talk about cell phones, how they all have cameras now. Basically everybody is a reporter. I actually had our SAC meeting this morning and we talked about that subject. Our coaches talk regularly about it. We don't try to hit it too much where it's in one ear and out the other because they're tired of hearing it. But it is pretty regular communication.

Your compliance office has to be involved in some manner to watch it from a compliance standpoint to make sure there isn't some rules violations that are taking place because of something that is out there in the social media world, either Facebook or Twitter.

That's why they have to report, those who have those accounts, have to notify our compliance office so we can gain access to it.

JOE GALBRAITH: Our next question is: How do you handle tweeting of losses and how many people are tweeting in-game as opposed to just postgame?

As far as the in-game or postgame, from a media relations standpoint, as long as you inform people that's what you're going to be doing, you're not just going to swallow their Twitter feed with pitch-by-pitch or play-by-play activity, let them know that's what's coming, there's no such thing as too much in-game as far as updates go.

Now, in terms of losses, I think that touches on the personal side again. Everybody is going to lose games. I know, Renee, you don't do it very often, but can you talk a little bit about how you handle losses on Twitter.

RENEE JIMENEZ: Yeah, absolutely.

I would say I'm quiet for about the first couple hours while I get over it myself. I know my kids look at it. So more for them than anybody else, I usually put just a quote up, whether it's about the sun coming up the next day, whatever it is, it's more for my players because I know that they peek at it. I know that they're on there when we win. They want to see what I tweet. When we lose, they want to see what I tweet. It's usually a quick quote or, Hey, the other team, they were the better team tonight, we'll be ready to go again tomorrow night. I keep it short and sweet, nothing elaborate. We kind of go from there.

You actually get less people kind of tweeting you after your losses than you do your wins, that's for sure. You find out who your real fans are.

JOE GALBRAITH: Got you.

I think Greg Byrne had to leave us. I want to express our appreciation for him joining us this morning. We have time for a few more questions this morning.

Coach Hudspeth, you have been new to the Twitter world. Do you have any messages from fans that you meet that say they're following you? How has that kind of bolstered your efforts to

want to tweet more? I see over the past few months you've done more and learned more on there.

MARK HUDSPETH: We've got a pretty good following right now. To be honest with you, taking me back a little bit, first time being a Division I head coach, you don't realize until you're out in the public, somebody comes up to you. I mean, I was in a store the other day with my wife looking at furniture. Coach, you don't understand how much I love following you every day on Twitter. That hits home. It's happening a lot more than you probably realize.

So it's been a very positive thing for our program, from not only me putting out things about what I'm doing, what our team is doing, but challenging our fans to buy season tickets, challenging our fans to join an athletic club, challenging our fans to meet me at the basketball team tonight to support the basketball team, softball team, whoever is playing. I use it in a lot of different ways to challenge fans, challenge students to do things, not only just inform them.

JOE GALBRAITH: Can you talk about how Twitter has brought people, such as himself, to your door and led to the publicity of instances such as your parents on an Internet radio show? I think that's probably a question for both coaches.

RENEE JIMENEZ: Yeah, absolutely. I had touched on it a little bit in my opening, but it's really connected me with some great people, like I said, who wouldn't have known me otherwise. I've been able to form some really neat relationships in terms of what he's talking about.

I did an Internet radio show with an East Coast kind of blog, Internet radio. They do everything from (University of Connecticut head coach) Geno Auriemma to Maya Moore. For a Division II school to get on a show like that is absolutely huge in terms of publicity, not necessarily recruiting the East Coast, because we don't go that far, but it's opened up doors and windows for relationships.

I have new relationships now with coaches from all over the country, media people from all over the country. We have I think like, what, 350 followers. I'm working with people now on Twitter that have 4,000 to 7,000 or more followers. We've gotten great attention from people all over the country, new fans who are buying Monterey Bay gear online that live in Texas, the Midwest. It's just been really fun. It's really opened us to a whole other marketing.

When you use stuff like Twitter, it's not about hitting people in your area, your team, your fans, it's essentially getting all over the world, all over the country. It's really blown up for us. We're trying to do more things with it.

It's really been able to get us new fans all over the state. We have people that show up at our games, whether we're in Southern California or Northern California, because of Twitter, what we're putting on it. By the personal touches we're putting on Twitter, people are really feeling like they're kind of vested into our program. We're giving them something fun to follow right now.

JOE GALBRAITH: Thank you, Renee.

Mark, do you want to add anything to that?

MARK HUDSPETH: It's a way that your fans that can't get the local newspaper or the state newspaper, it's a way for them to still follow your program and not have to sit by their computer to do it. So we have a big following in Houston, Texas. We have a big following in the north half of the state, areas where you don't get the papers that cover us.

This allows alumni, fans, parents of players, obviously recruits, to keep up with your program from a distance and still feel connected.

JOE GALBRAITH: Good point.

I want to thank all of you for taking time this morning to join us. I appreciate it. I think it's helpful for everybody that was listening.

MARK HUDSPETH: Thank you. Appreciate you having me on.

RENEE JIMENEZ: Thanks for having me.

JOE GALBRAITH: Appreciate it very much.

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