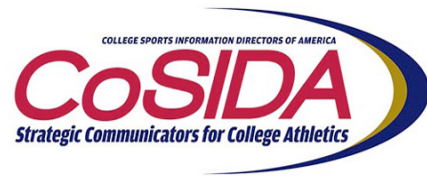


10 February 2012



**CoSIDA Continuing Education Series:
SAAC Leaders The Student-Athlete and
You**

An Interview With:

**CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR. (Western
Carolina football)
DAVID PILLEN (Abilene Christian football)
BRETT HALVAKS (Cal Lutheran t&f/xc)
DALAINE WHITLOCK (Concordia-Tx. soccer)**

**Moderator: Eric McDowell, CoSIDA 3rd VP
(Union College)**

ERIC McDOWELL: We'll first name each of our panelists and have them speak for some introductory comments. Chris Everett, Jr., is a senior football player from Western Carolina University in Division I and he is from Greensboro, North Carolina. Thanks for joining us today.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: Thank you for having me on the call.

ERIC McDOWELL: David Pillen is a junior who plays football at Abilene Christian University, a Division II school, and he is from Richmond.

DAVID PILLEN: Thank you for having me.

ERIC McDOWELL: Brett Halvaks, he competes in cross country and track and field, and he is from a Division III institution, California Lutheran University, and he joins us from Irvine, California. Brett, thank you.

BRETT HALVAKS: Thank you for having me.

ERIC McDOWELL: And Dalaine Whitlock is a junior soccer player at Concordia University in Texas, a Division III University in the NCAA, and she is from Belton, Texas. Thank you.

DALAINE WHITLOCK: Thank you.

ERIC McDOWELL: And you're making history. As we said prior to the call, this is the first-ever CoSIDA panel or webcast conference call with student athletes. In fact, this summer we'll

have three student athletes from the NCAA, one from NAIA, join us for a live in-person panel at our convention in St. Louis.

We want to start things off with each of you talking about your SAAC experience and also the value of a student-athlete, the things that you really like the best. We'll start with Chris.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: The SAAC experience, I would say that the experience I receive through SAAC is tremendous. We get to meet a wide variety of student athletes across the country on national SAAC, and we get to share our ideas and we get to know the common goals we're trying to achieve on each other's campus. Being on campus SAAC is very humbling because you get to see how blessed you are to have the opportunity to spread this for everyone else and try to help your fellow student athletes to get better prepared for life after athletics.

ERIC McDOWELL: What do you enjoy the most about being a student-athlete at Western Carolina?

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: What I enjoy most about being a student athlete at Western Carolina is the opportunity to chase my goal of higher education as well as playing on the field and just being able to meet brand new people every year when we bring in new recruiting classes for all sports. It's truly a growing family here at Western, and I love all these people as if they were my own family.

ERIC McDOWELL: Thank you, Chris, and we appreciate you joining us today. David, let's hear your comments about your experience with the SAAC group and also what you value the most about being a student-athlete at Abilene Christian.

DAVID PILLEN: Yeah, for sure. I think one of the biggest things, just being on SAAC, it's just a huge blessing, huge opportunity, the people you get to meet, and just the interactions you get to have on a day-to-day basis, and when we all get together for our national meetings in Indianapolis, it's like you're a family all over again, so you

wouldn't trade that for anything.

But just being a student-athlete, I think you just learn to value the friendships and relationships that you create, and those are going to last a lifetime. I think you just learn the value of hard work and dedication that it takes to being a student-athlete, and it's unlike anything else you'll probably ever do in your lifetime.

It's just a really -- just a huge blessing that we get to have the chance and the opportunity to be a student-athlete because most people don't really get that chance.

ERIC McDOWELL: Thank you, David. And that brings us to Brett Halvaks. Brett, your thoughts on your SAAC experience and also what you truly enjoy about having the honor of being a student-athlete at California Lutheran.

BRETT HALVAKS: Thank you. I would just first like to say that being on national SAAC has been a wonderful opportunity for me. It's opened up many more doors than I think would have ever been opened if I had not been on it beforehand, and even being a member of Cal Lutheran's SAAC for the last four years has provided me the opportunity to meet many of our student athletes and develop a whole bunch of friendships that I probably wouldn't have made otherwise because I've met athletes from all the other sports and now we all know each other and get to spend time together cheering each other at different sporting events throughout the whole year.

And then the one thing I value most about being a student athlete at California Lutheran University is it provided me the opportunity to continue my athletic career. I probably wasn't going to be able to run at a Division I or Division II level, but going to the Division III level has allowed me to run for four more years and show me what I'm passionate about, and I'm actually pursuing a graduate degree in teaching so I can become a cross country and track and field coach at the high school level.

ERIC McDOWELL: That's great. Good luck with that. And that brings us to Dalaine Whitlock, and your thoughts about your SAAC experience and what you truly enjoy the most, the value of a student-athlete, and that would be at Concordia in Texas.

DALAINA WHITLOCK: Yes, sir. Thank you for giving us all the opportunity to speak with you all about SAAC and our experience. I would

say that with my involvement with SAAC, I think the most rewarding thing is to be involved with all the people around you that have the common goal to improve the student-athlete experience at the campus level and at the national level, and I think that SAAC is a great platform to make things happen and to bring different issues that student athletes are experiencing to light and just really improve that experience all the way around.

It's been such a rewarding experience to me, especially national SAAC, getting to see just how much goes into making -- we love obviously playing our sport, and how much work goes into it from everyone else to make it the experience that we as student athletes have a good one.

I would say the things for a student-athlete that have meant the most to me is just how rewarding it is to be able to participate in soccer still and just how much it's prepared me for life and the lessons that it's taught me, the lessons that my coaches and fellow teammates have taught me, just playing on the field have taught me. I don't think that I would have ever accomplished the things that I've accomplished outside of sports had it not been for sports. It just has truly been a huge motivator for me. Soccer and my coaches have been something that's pushed me in all the other aspects of my life, in community service and my grades, being on a team and having people support you really does push you to accomplish more in other areas.

ERIC McDOWELL: Thank you. Before we take the questions, personally I want to talk to you folks with the thoughts, we had a wonderful opportunity this year at the NCAA convention to represent CoSIDA and speak to each of the divisional SAAC groups about the relationship that an SID can have with SAAC. SAAC can be very helpful to the SID in informing us about the stories that are behind the scenes, and in addition the SIDs can help members of SAAC and student athletes, as well.

I'd like to open it up to the four of you. I believe all of you were able to attend that or see the presentation, and just talk to us now about your impressions about the sports information profession, maybe the SIDs on your campus and maybe just some of the presentations we made to you to help educate.

DAVID PILLEN: I'll jump in real quick. Just from remembering back to the national



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convention and y'all's presentation, I just really appreciated that you guys -- y'all took the time to give that presentation to us, and just the fact that you guys are putting out an effort to emphasize the relationship between the student-athlete and just SAAC in general and the SIDs, so that was just really encouraging to me to see that you guys are emphasizing that relationship and making people more aware that that needs to be a foundational relationship on every campus within each institution.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: Since you came and gave us the presentation, once we came back to my -- once I came back to my institution, I made it a point for me to go and talk to our SID and get to know him better, and from what he said and what you're telling us, I didn't realize all the effort, the long hours that you guys put in on making these stories and getting these stories out to the media. So it gave me a better appreciation for it.

And I really appreciated y'all talking to us just about how we can get a better relationship with you guys and how we can utilize y'all and how y'all can utilize us.

DALAINE WHITLOCK: I think our SID, we have an awesome SID, and I know that everyone appreciates y'all reaching out to the SAAC and the student athletes because I think for either to be successful I think that the communication between the two just really helps both to be successful.

I know our SID has really helped us to not only broadcast different events that we're having but also to push the issues that -- all the support that we're trying to get from our athletic department, from our volunteers and boosters, our SID has been crucial in doing all of that and just helping us to reach our goals. I know that it's something that I don't think all student athletes everywhere understand exactly how much the SID is working for them and trying to help their experience, and so I think that by establishing that relationship and trying to cultivate it further, I think that it's beneficial to everyone to have that relationship.

I know that we definitely appreciate y'all talking to national SAAC at our meeting and being very open about what y'all do and talking about ways that we can better that relationship.

BRETT HALVAKS: I just wanted to say thank you to Nick for coming to meet with us over at the convention. It was a great opportunity for us to learn more about sports information directors. Ever since I've been back at California Lutheran

University, I've actually reached out to our sports information directors and gotten them to know better, and they were actually nice enough to do a write-up about the convention experience for us, and hopefully we're going to get them to come to some of our SAAC meetings shortly so they can meet the rest of our student-athlete advisory committee because I found out a lot of athletes on our campus don't know who they are and don't know a lot of what they do for us.

ERIC McDOWELL: Well, it was appreciated in that your schedules at the NCAAs are remarkable. To the folks listening, these students go morning, noon and night at NCAA convention with legislation and many other topics, and it is just stunning how busy they are and how much passion they show. The bottom line is we work for you. Well, we report to athletic directors and PR directors, but as the late Myles Brand said, it's all about the student-athlete, and every SID in the country will say that we work for you.

Let's open it up for questions. When you were being recruited and went to a school's website, what piqued your interest? Was it video, social media like a Facebook page, game stories, behind the scene community stories, and what interests you now?

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: When I was getting recruited, to be honest, social media -- this was 2007 when I was getting recruited, and social media wasn't that big to me then, so it really didn't mean too much to me. But the main thing that got me was the multimedia that was on the school's athletic website that will actually show you things instead of having to read because I'm much more of a visual person. So for me to be able to see stories about student athletes doing things in the community and seeing the actual expression of the joy they got from it, that helped me out a lot, along with just the institution showing different stories like that, as well.

That also showed me that at Western Carolina being a student-athlete wasn't just competing on the field but it was having an impact on your community, seeing the human interest stories and community service events really helped me to choose Western for my institution.

DAVID PILLEN: In 2009 I transferred to Abilene from the University of Nebraska, and I've had this conversation with our athletic director. But the very first thing that I did when I was looking to



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go to ACU was I just went straight up to YouTube and typed in Abilene Christian football, whatever came up, whatever I could see to pique my interest and find out more about the school. Luckily they had some stuff on there, the very first videos that popped up just talked about the community at ACU and just the stories behind Abilene Christian University football. That was probably one of the very first things that I went to go do when I wanted to find more out about the University, just by going to YouTube and typing in Abilene Christian University football.

Q. Since many athletic communications staff members on campus might not work directly as a SAAC advisor or know a lot about your meetings and discussions, can each of you talk about things that come up in your meetings and discussions? What concerns are at the top of your list as student athletes, and how can an SID or the publicity and promotion folks help you to solve these issues?

DALAINE WHITLOCK: Sure, I would say that we invite our -- we have an issues meeting -- we meet almost every other week, and we invite our athletic representatives, our student government representative, and our SIDs all to the meeting. We start the meeting where we have an issues meeting the first of every month so we can all kind of get on the same page all across the athletic spectrum.

Some of the things that come up in our meetings are the different community service efforts that we have with Special Olympics and canned food drives, planning those and trying to get -- one thing that I know is huge for making it successful is just making the publicity around them. I think that is one thing that our SID helps us out all the time with, just getting all the events that we plan, whether it's a purple-out, trying to get fans to a certain game, or whether it's a community service project that the athletic department or the SAAC is working on. I think that having our SID help us get the word out through -- we have a SAAC web page that our SID runs, so we give him updates after every meeting so he can update the web page, and he also works as a go-between with especially the Special Olympics. Just helping us get the word out has been huge for us. I don't know if everyone else has other things.

BRETT HALVAKS: I would have to say that I agree a lot with what Dalaine just said. Just having the SID help out with promotion for certain

events you're doing, that's one thing. We've gotten better this year as a SAAC, we've tried to keep our SID informed in the loop if we have any upcoming fundraising events, like canned food drives or Special Olympic events, we are pretty good about letting them know and they are real helpful in setting up, putting information up on our sports page for us to promote it to other people outside of the campus, learn more about it, and that's something that's been really helpful for us the last year now.

And one thing we're also working on this year a lot more is this semester our folks have been trying to get our faculty more involved with our athletic events and getting more faculty to attend our games, and that's something that our sports information directors have been helping us out with, planning functions where we can have a whole bunch of faculty come and sit in a certain section during a game to support our athletes.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: Our situation here at Western is a little bit different. I'm on my second term as president here, so my first time as president, I really focused on bringing people into SAAC, and our SID helped us to get the word out about SAAC just to get people interested, and now that we have a strong SAAC here, this year our focus was on service, and the two things we wanted to focus on was service first and outside source, so we did a lot of fundraising for breast cancer awareness.

Our SID has been very, very instrumental in our improvement in that category where last year we only raised around \$1,000, but this year through online advertising and then selling some of our products through online stores and just getting the word out about our breast cancer awareness funds, we were able to get our income up to about \$6,000 thus far, and we're still advertising, we're still doing this through April, so we're still planning on bringing in more money, as well as service to an outside source.

We wanted to do service to our own student athletes, where you always hear on national news about student athletes doing bad things, so we have monthly awards that we give out, and our SID has made it -- has helped to make it important for people to hear about these athletes, so we have our monthly awards where our SID will put up a post on the school's website displaying the student athletes and the good they've done for our school and the community.

ERIC McDOWELL: One thing that's very helpful to the SAAC students is when an SID finds out there is an event coming up, a great thing to do, as we all have digital cameras, is to provide a digital camera to David or Brett or Chris or Dalaine, to have the student take it out to the school or the nursing home or wherever you folks would be to get a nice photo, and then also the SAAC group will provide quotes to the SID of two or three people who attended the event, and a story can easily be placed with that on the website.

And it really works out well, folks, for teams out of season. For example, a spring team, it could be potentially recruits looking in the fall, there are no results or fresh stories on their web page, but a nice Thanksgiving dinner day with your team from the spring could be posted in the fall, for example. So it is a two-way street, and it's very important for the SIDs to assist SAAC in the promotions, and those are some of the ways to do that.

I'm going to get to what I call the challenge section. We need your advice, you folks, and these are questions of things that SIDs face and they know you'll be willing to put it in perspective for us and face these challenges. First one is, this question is we have no control over what the papers print, especially with the hometown news. When the parents complain to us, what are we supposed to say to them when someone else from your high school who perhaps plays at a higher level is written up in the paper and you are not, even though we sent the information to the paper. Anybody want to take that challenge and help the person that asked that question and many of us out there that have that challenge?

DALAINÉ WHITLOCK: That's a tough one. I would say -- well, that's a tough situation. I'm not sure that there is much that you could do honestly. I think that just getting that information out to the newspaper is -- I know our SID does that. Just so the parent is making it clear that you have that information and you are trying. I don't know, that's tough.

DAVID PILLEN: I was just going to say, honestly, like Dalaine just said, I don't think there's much you can do. As long as you're doing everything that you can to get the information out and just doing your job to the best of your ability, there's not much you can do with that. Parents are going to do what they do.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: I would say just to agree with him, as well. You do what you have to do. But the other part of that that

could help out is if the SID has a good relationship with the SAAC or the student athletes at the campus, that would help them out in the sense that other student athletes can help back up the SID and say that this person really does care about us and they try to get the word out, but they can't help what's printed in the paper.

So I guess having a relationship with the student athletes on the campus can help out with their name in that situation. But I think there's nothing else they can do other than submitting the information to the paper.

ERIC McDOWELL: I think what we try to let students and parents and alumni know is we're not the editor of the paper. The biggest challenges everybody faces is in the sport of football where Associated Press is supposed to run from A to Z a score of every game in all divisions each Saturday, and some SIDs who may work at Youngstown or in some cases Union where things could be cut off at the letter T, those scores can be missing. It is good to hear your thoughts on that.

Next one is if I see a mistake in a bio in a media guide or a story on a website, how does one go about getting that corrected. This is a very good question to think about. Can I come directly to you, the student-athlete, or should I go through my coach?

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: I jumped on this one so fast because our SID, he actually has this problem a lot here at Western, and he's very proactive about it. Our SID goes around to every single sport before the start of their season, he usually tries to go to a lot of sports during their preseason, during August, when there are no students here on campus and his job isn't that hard, where he comes up and he tells us if you look at it and see anything wrong, please come up to me in a nice, professional manner, tell me what's wrong, and I'll work at my pace to get it done. And if it's been a good while since you've come up to me, you can come up to me nicely once again, approach me the right way and tell me about it. He just asks our student athletes to approach him with manners and in a polite tone, and he's very, very acceptable to whatever they have to say.

ERIC McDOWELL: The issue, Brett, is there's a loyalty to the coach and they want it right, but they feel better some of them going to the athlete without the coach being offended.

BRETT HALVAKS: I would have to say I would recommend actually going to the student-athlete if at all possible. I mean, most of the SIDs do have all of our contact information, and I feel like maybe, especially at my school, our coaches are just so busy doing all their different activities that it might almost be easier if the sports information director could go directly to the student-athlete and check with him if something might be found wrong. Or if the student-athlete finds something wrong with a story, I'd recommend they go, again, in a nice and polite manner, go directly to the sports information director and ask them to correct it at whatever pace they can, like as fast as they can do it.

DALAINÉ WHITLOCK: I would agree with what Brett said. I think that if you go to the student-athlete and you're getting a more accurate information for bio or anything like that, you're getting a more accurate picture and you're getting exactly what they want put in there rather than what the coach wants or what might be in their interest. I think that it's just more salient to the student-athlete, and like he said, the coaches have so much on their plate, it does matter probably more to the student-athlete how their name is written up or how their name is published.

ERIC McDOWELL: Because in many ways we have had Facebook pages for student athletes before Facebook, right, because if you think about it, for each of you there is a page with your photo and biographical information, and so when websites first came out in the late '90s as teams got expanded and then player bios were put in place, we really did have Facebook before the Facebook that Joe and Joanne Fan know.

That brings us to, I do have a questionnaire question that I'll get to, but I have one more in the challenge category, and this is really directed to the people who have one-person shops as they're called where you're at a school with one SID.

Primary in the one-person shops, the SID goes to whichever event needs his or her time the most. The other sports are not forgotten, they just may not have the SID on the sidelines watching; for example, there may be media demands at one site or there could be a sport that has heavy statistical demands for the SID to attend. How do we show that we truly care about every sport in these cases, because we really do?

DALAINÉ WHITLOCK: I think one thing that our SID has that I don't know how feasible this

is for all our campuses, but we have one SID, but he has, through the work study program, he has probably 15 to 20 student workers that work for the sports information department through our work study, so if he can't be at a certain event, he tries to send a student worker to take pictures, to get all the -- so that they have media there, too, and they're getting their pictures taken.

One thing that our SID is really good about that I think shows a lot, is if he is not at the event, he still has the write-up posted to the website in the same time frame as the other event, so if he's at the baseball game, whenever he posts the baseball story, the basketball game that's going on at the same time, the basketball story is up within the same general time frame so that you can see that, hey, he couldn't be there, but he's still working on our story and he's still -- it's still up there on the priority list.

BRETT HALVAKS: I would say one thing that our SID has done a great job of doing, luckily we have two at California Lutheran University, but one thing that they've done, especially for cross country, because we don't have any home meets during our season and our closest meet is about an hour away, so a lot of times on a Saturday morning it's hard to drive an hour away to watch our meet and then be back for all the other sporting events we have on Saturday in the fall.

So one of the things he's actually done is he'll either contact SIDs from other schools to find out if they're going to be there and get the information to them, or he'll actually ask us if any of us, our parents or any of us athletes get photos, he'll ask us for the photos and use those photos and any quotes that we can come up with and use them in his write-ups for cross country, and I feel that's real helpful for him because it takes the burden off driving an hour to watch a race and then trying to get back for all the other events that are actually on campus during the day, and it actually shows that he cares about us because he's still getting our story up in a timely manner.

ERIC McDOWELL: I think the biggest challenge is when there's an away event and a person has got the home event covered and gets the story right up and then the story on the away event may come later, and that's where we rely on our colleagues to get that information to us.

This next one, we did touch on a bit, but it just came in, and it is how do you handle social media with the SAAC, and I want to tie in another



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question with that, and it's -- we can talk about the social media and we've touched on it, but I'd like to tie in with this one about control. This question is what should I do when I find people are bad-mouthing either the SID, the department, the school or students, teammates on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Each of you on this one, first talk about what SAAC does with social media and then also the challenges that are faced by the SID when they see social media get out of hand. This isn't just a large Division I question. It happens at all levels. Let's start with Chris on this one.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: Here at Western Carolina, we use social media to get the word out about SAAC meetings, games that are coming up, events that are going on on campus. We use it to broadcast what we have going on. But when it comes to people bad-mouthing the athletic department, usually we take a stance where we just don't say anything because the way that we look at it is we are a family, and no one really knows what goes on behind the doors or the decisions that the coaches have to make when it comes to playing somebody or a last-second decision they must make while they're in a game, and no one knows logistics of a situation where there's a situation with a student that did something that was legally wrong, and people could be bad mouthing the coaches for it, for the decisions that they made, but as long as we take the proper steps within the athletic department to handle these situations, we feel that we can't control what the other people say in the social media or in media in general. All we can control is what goes on here.

So we just try to make sure that we do what we can as a family to protect each other, and from there what they say is just what they say is their opinion because everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Does that help out? Did I answer that correctly?

ERIC McDOWELL: Yes, that's good. David, your thoughts?

DAVID PILLEN: Yeah, so I just commented on here, for our SAAC, our social media, as the president I actually handle all the posting that goes on online and whatnot. I would just agree with Chris. You can't really control the outside of what other people who aren't within your athletic department, what they're posting in social media about, your athletic department or a team where a certain individual -- but if it is somebody within the institution, within that athletic

department, maybe a person that is on the team, then you can definitely handle that in house and talk to them one-on-one and see where they're going with that and see if you can change things, just protect everybody within the department.

BRETT HALVAKS: Yeah, I would have to say at California Lutheran University we have a CLU SAAC Facebook page, and what me and the vice president always do is we'll go on there from time to time to promote -- whenever there's a sporting event we put it up there and promote it, and whenever we're putting on a certain event, we'll make a Facebook event to promote it that way, and all our student athletes are Facebook friends with that page, so it's just a way to promote -- promoting the upcoming sporting events and trying to get other athletes from other sports to attend each other's events.

And then for talking down social media sites, fortunately I've never had it occur at CLU before, but I would just have to agree with what Chris and David said. If it were to occur it's something you would have to handle in house and try to deal with. You can't control those that are outside of the athletic department doing it.

DALAINE WHITLOCK: We have a social media committee on our campus SAAC, so we have a social media chair who is one of the administrators for our Facebook and Twitter pages, and IM, as well, so we have a Facebook group that's for our SAAC that we can post about meetings, talk about that kind of stuff, and then we have a Facebook page that people can like, we can ask questions of our student athletes, do polls, stuff like that. And then we have a Twitter page that we are still trying to get in the works.

And I think that if you can get in touch with your SAAC, and having those links on -- we have a SAAC web page, as well, that our SID controls, but getting those links onto the -- if it's possible to get those links on your SAAC web page, I think that that would be helpful to, first of all, keep the sports information director informed but also help SAAC whenever there's things that may not go up on the web page so people can still have access to that.

And as far as bad mouthing, I think that if you were having really serious problems, I think that you could ask SAAC to maybe sit in on a meeting, and if every team is represented in that SAAC meeting, you could maybe talk to them about any concerns you have and hopefully that way they can take that to their team and it can go

down the chain until hopefully it reaches everyone and you can hopefully get to the root of the problem that way and see some results.

ERIC McDOWELL: I'm going to go back to the question about questionnaires. Many sports information directors have now online questionnaires so you don't have to sit at the preseason meeting and fill out two pages. Most people can do it online and it can be emailed directly to the SID. Two questions: First one is how do we get the athletes to get those filled out? For example, one person that sent this question said only 35 percent of the students filled out the questionnaire, and then there were many player bios that were blank because they did not have info and people had bios that were not accurate or not complete. And what do you recommend would be a good thing to add to a questionnaire besides the basics, the height and things like that.

DAVID PILLEN: So you said these questionnaires are just like your height, weight and that type of deal?

ERIC McDOWELL: Yeah, the sports info questionnaire that provides the SID with info prior to the season.

DAVID PILLEN: And now they're all online?

ERIC McDOWELL: Yeah.

DAVID PILLEN: I would say to get everybody to fill them out, I would meet with each team, each athletic team on your campus possibly individually, maybe just bring them all into the computer lab on campus and have them all fill it out right then and there if it's online so that you get everybody's information, you sit everybody down right there and have them fill it out.

As far as interesting facts or interesting questions, you could just have on there what's your favorite music or what do you like to do on the weekends or what's your career goals, anything like that I think would be good.

DALAINA WHITLOCK: I think that one thing that I know our SIDs go to the coaches because I think sometimes they can make things happen, provide incentive or punishment that might encourage responses. I know our coach just handed them out and told us we had until Monday to turn them in, and giving it to the coach I think does help give some authority to the -- handle it out and filling it out. I don't know, that seems to kind of work for us.

BRETT HALVAKS: I would have to say one thing that you could look into doing is maybe

finding a way to get it to the student athletes through social media. I know all too often athletes will get emails sent to them and just won't check their email for the longest time, so that's maybe one reason why they're not filling out these forms, because they don't see it in their email or don't check their email at all. So it might be hard, but if there's a certain way you could get it to athletes through social media, that is one way that I can get more SAAC members to even attend our SAAC meetings is if I text them the information about the meeting or send them a Facebook message about it, they're more likely to show up than if I send them an email about our meeting just because some student athletes don't check their email regularly.

And some questions that would be interesting, we just this year actually added to ours stuff like favorite team, favorite sport to play outside of the one that you play, like favorite athlete or athletes that inspires you, and I felt like that was stuff a lot of student athletes liked to answer, and looking through our bios, there were some interesting answers that I saw.

ERIC McDOWELL: I think one of the most interesting was I had a football player pick his favorite athlete was Mia Hamm. I thought that was impressive. He didn't put Peyton Manning or Tom Brady, but he put Mia Hamm, and we got a great story about it. He had once met her, and that's how we found out about a story that way.

This one comes from a conference office. In our conference's strategic plan, one of the items is to discuss and create ways to enhance the conference championship experience for student athletes. I was looking at input, specifically from DIII, maybe II in this one, athletes that are on the panel, as to what their conferences do to make playing for a conference championship a memorable and enjoyable experience, and if you'd have suggestions as to what we could implement.

DALAINA WHITLOCK: I think that from a student-athlete perspective, I think that especially at a Division II and Division III school when you aren't going to have the same crowds and the same number of fans, one thing an SID can do to help promote it is kind of just try to make it as big of a deal as you can through the outlets that you do have. I think that having live webcasting, maybe getting interviews with players that you -- pregame interviews, postgame interviews that you

post to that. I think signage is one thing that just esthetically makes it seem like a bigger deal. I don't know, I think just trying to blast it through all the outlets that you have available to you, that you have as a team going to a conference championship and competing in that and maybe just trying to get the word out.

BRETT HALVAKS: The one thing I would say, I would agree with Dalaine, just promoting it as much as possible. This past fall we actually had the opportunity to host the SCIAC women's volleyball and women's soccer conference championships here, and our institution did a really good job of just promoting it. There were signs all over campus, they had multiple articles on the website giving like team bios on all the teams that were coming so you could see who our school was going to be playing against and what their record was and who their key players were, and also they had both of them being -- at least women's volleyball was live streamed on the web, and that was just one way to enhance the experience. If you couldn't make it out to the game, you could still watch it and see what was going on, and I thought all the athletes I've talked to that participated in both those events said they had a wonderful time, and there were tee shirts they could purchase, as well, that commemorated them being part of the conference championship.

DALAINE WHITLOCK: I was just going to say what Brett said. I think it's a good idea if you have your -- in the American Southwest Conference, the conference Concordia is in, to make things available that are from the conference available to your institutions to put up or to give out, make available for purchase, I think that that kind of -- if they're from the conference, that that might help to get the word out and make it seem like a bigger deal.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: I know you really wanted the DII and DIII perspective, but I know one thing our institution does for women's basketball, because it's hard for us to get a good crowd to women's baseball, is when they have certain games, they'll have it open where -- they'll go to a school and advertise it very heavily, at like an elementary school or middle school, and they'll make it so -- they'll get buses to come to the school and bring those young students so that there can be a lot of people in the stands, and to be honest, the games that we have children there from schools, they have the most life to them, because to a seven-year old child, seeing a 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 year old playing soccer, football,

basketball, that's just as good as seeing a professional do it, and they're so amazed by seeing these people out there competing. Then afterwards you have them running up to the players, asking for their autographs and everything.

It really adds to the experience of our women's basketball players. And I feel like if possibly they could do that at DII and DIII levels as well as with Division I, it can help the student-athlete experience be that much greater because there's nothing like that feeling you get when there's a younger person who looks up to you.

ERIC McDOWELL: That's a good point is that at every level when a student-athlete has a uniform, you see the faces of the little kids after that team has visited an elementary school and then the kids come out and root for them, and I can't wait to get my currently eight-month-old daughter out to a country women's lacrosse game this spring and see her face when she sees them for the first time. It's going to be very exciting.

This one I think is one of the best questions we have, and this doesn't involve social media. This you could consider an old-time question. This is something that we could have asked student athletes 50 years ago, and 50 years from now hopefully somebody will be doing the same thing on a call. Tough teams: Let's say you have 30 teams on your campus. You may have a couple that are national championship contenders, you may have a few that are conference contenders, you may have some that have individual national champions like a weight throw or in the 400 meters, for example, or a three-meter dive. But then you have a tough team, and when you say tough, the results are not there, I mean they may not be winning or having success, but they are obviously just as important to the SID as every other team. What suggestions would you have to the SID to work with SAAC or to try to find a way to get some nice positive stories and tell the story of the great students that are on that team that maybe are just having a down season?

BRETT HALVAKS: One thing I would recommend to do is if you have a tough team is just to -- the SID could either get in contact with the coach or get in contact with the student athletes themselves and just find out more in depth about the student athletes on their team. Like you said

earlier, talking about the football player whose favorite athlete who inspired him was Mia Hamm, maybe there's some interesting stories on the team, maybe there's some interesting backgrounds about how some of those student athletes got to this program and where they were beforehand. That's always a great thing is to see just inspirational pieces on maybe one or two athletes from a team on how they maybe got to the team, and that shows that maybe they've struggled through something before and that's why they're persevering through this tough season but are hoping to bring the sport back to prominence in years to come.

DAVID PILLEN: I would totally agree with Brett on that. If you've got a tough team, I would just look for other stories that -- something that an individual on that team might have been doing in the community. I mean, shoot, maybe they're just a 4.0 student athlete, do a day in the life of a student athlete story of a 4.0 student from that team, just things like that, just other interesting stories that you might be able to positively reflect that tough team.

DALAINE WHITLOCK: I would just agree with them. I think just turning over stones to find the stories that might be something that's off-the-field stories. If the stats aren't giving you good stories, just turn over stones until you find something that might be unique to that team.

Also, one thing, I know Concordia has an athletic who in the past has not been very competitive in our conference and who is really kind of just up and coming, and whenever we would have teams that weren't doing so well in the conference, I think one thing that sometimes you can look at that is just a point to find is that if you're not having a good -- where are they coming from? If it's not considered a good performance, is it an improvement? And that's one thing that we have really highlighted is, well, they may have only had four wins, but hey, that's a record, four wins in a season. And trying to spin it in a positive way.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: Well, my football team, as you know, I'm a part of the football here at Western, and we're one of those teams. And along with our team, we have some others, as well, but what our SID does is he comes to the SAAC directly because our SAAC, we have at least two members from each team on our committee, and there's at least one person at every single meeting unless they have a game on that day because usually we have our meetings on days there are no games. So our SID will come to

SAAC in particular and ask what can we talk about from this sport that can get people excited about it. I agree with everything everybody else said, but just go towards the SAAC and ask them for what do they hear that they could publish.

ERIC McDOWELL: We've all faced challenges like that. I once had a men's basketball team that was -- and a women's basketball team. Both were making a transition to Division I. So the first year there were a lot of what they called guarantee games to bring money into the program and it was extremely difficult, but we had some wonderful stories about the people in the uniform facing adversity and the excitement of the places that they went to, as well.

Very good question, and you all had tremendous answers to help us. I'm going to get one more question in and then we're going to close off with each of you with some final thoughts. This question is does a SAAC member at your school attend regular staff meetings, meaning either administrative staff or full staff including all coaches?

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: Yes, we do it here. When it comes to staff meetings, we are required to have one person at every single athletic department meeting, and now that we have a new AD, we are now encouraged to come to other meetings, as well. And we have our university athletic committee meeting, where there's one person from each department on campus there, as well as an AD representing athletics, and then we also have a student athlete, which is usually the president or vice president, that has to go to this meeting. So it's usually a requirement for a student athlete to be at one of these meetings for us.

DALAINE WHITLOCK: No, we do not. We have different student athletes that sit in on our individual team like booster meetings. I think that -- and we have a banquet committee for end-of-the-year banquet committee. Typically we don't sit in on staff meetings, and that's one thing that we as a SAAC are looking into, and if there are meetings that SAAC members don't sit in on with the administrators, I think inviting administrators and the SID to SAAC meetings is a way to bridge that gap if they aren't at the actual staff meeting.

DAVID PILLEN: We do not have anybody, no SAAC members, that sit in on any of the staff

meetings.

ERIC McDOWELL: Do you think that's something that's advantageous, that could be discussed?

DAVID PILLEN: I would agree. I think that there -- that every SAAC at every institution within the NCAA, you should probably have a member or even two members from your SAAC attending meetings. It just helps the flow of information, and to know what's all going on within the athletic department within every aspect.

BRETT HALVAKS: We try our best to usually have one student athlete attend most of those meetings. We'll usually get invited from the different groups that are meeting to let us know. It's usually a direct invite to me, and I'll -- if I can't attend, I'll try to get one of our other student athlete members from our SAAC to attend the meeting, and if neither of that works out, then we do our best to be able to get the minutes from that meeting so we can go over them at our next SAAC meeting so we can as a SAAC understand what's going on on our campus.

ERIC McDOWELL: Before we get some closing comments, one of the things I wanted our members to hear is that you can see how the SAAC students can very much help us. They're the leaders, one or two from each team on every campus. It's imperative that the SID gets that relationship, meets with SAAC. It's nice to get out and see the student athletes away from the website. There is a life behind that head shot, folks, and you need to find out who they are.

An example last week here is we went out to a flood-stricken area with three members of our crew teams that did flood relief, and it was wonderful to see the work that they've done, and it's because of the SAAC group that we found that story.

One thing, also, that SIDs can do to help the student athletes, as well, is résumé building, and that's something we touched on at the NCAA is student athletes, when they go to the coach it's usually about how they're playing or how things are academically, but SIDs can be very helpful in providing résumé assistance and also letters of reference. I want each of you to just touch on that, or one of you actually, if one of you could touch on that, what we just mentioned, about how an SID could help you with a letter of reference or résumé. Do you think that would be helpful?

DAVID PILLEN: I think that would be key, just to be able to have -- to say, hey, I'm available as a resource for you here as the SID if you ever need a letter of reference or help to further on in your career after your sport, after you're done here. We still want you to come back and be able to -- you value your student athlete experience here at ACU or whatever school you're at, so being able to have them as a reference would be huge.

ERIC McDOWELL: What I'm going to do is we're going to have each of the four folks on here answer this question, a very simple one, and that is what is the message you have to the SID? There are hundreds of sports information professionals listening to the call. This is the first time as we said that they've been able to have a call to hear from the student athletes. So we'd love to hear whatever message you would like to send to us with this opportunity. We'll start with Dalaine.

DALAINA WHITLOCK: I would say just I think that all SAAC members, we really appreciate the desire to be involved with SAAC. I think that that's something that can be really, really beneficial to both sides. I would just say get in touch with your SAAC president and really try to cultivate that relationship and just be as involved. I think communication is key in all things, and just having frequent communication with your SAAC leaders will help you not only find those stories but will help you to promote SAAC events and just bring the most that you can to the athletic department and the student athlete experience.

I think that that relationship is extremely important, and if it's there, then you should continue to cultivate it, and if it's not there, then you should definitely -- we should definitely try to work on establishing that.

BRETT HALVAKS: I would have to agree with Dalaine. I would just say -- what I would recommend to sports information directors out there is just reach out. Don't be afraid to try to get to know your student athletes better. I know on our SAACs and even our national SAAC, we want to know who the person is behind the computer. That's what it turns out being a lot of times, it's some person that we might not know very well that writes all these amazing stories on all our sports teams, and we'd really like to get to know you all better and find any ways we could make your job easier and help make it so we can promote our campus and our sports teams even more because as student athletes that's what we love to do; we

love to get the word out about all our different sports, and anything that the SAAC could do, I know all of our SAACs would love to help out with that, so I would just encourage you to reach out to your SAAC president and try to find a way to strengthen that relationship you have with them to try to make it easier on both of you.

DAVID PILLEN: Totally agree with everything that everybody has already said. Just make sure that relationship is there, and if it's not, just work to create that relationship. Just get to know who your student athletes are outside of the sport and what they do and who they are as people and just what they value. There's probably a lot there that you can find out.

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT, JR.: What I would say to the SIDs is that just like everyone else has said, just really work to get that relationship with the SAAC at your campus, especially the SAAC president, so that they can relay the word to everyone else, because they're key to the SID finding out these human interest stories that people love to see, and just what I would say to the SIDs, as well, is help us get the word out about the student athlete, the student part of it, because we aren't just athletes, we aren't just the statistics that you see day in and day out. We do things outside of our playing courts. So just help us to get the story out about us as people.

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