

# Promoting The Outstanding Student-Athlete

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## Introduction

As an athletic media relations professional, I find that one of the joys in our business is to see our student-athletes succeed, whether that be in the athletic arena, in the classroom, or in the community. I also feel it's incumbent upon us, as media relations professionals, to do all we can to see that these student-athletes are recognized and applauded for their achievements, spotlighting what makes college athletics truly great. Whether you work at a Division I, BCS-level institution, or a one-person shop at a College Division school, the goal is the same — to tell these positive and uplifting stories — and in many ways, the methods we use to reach that goal can be the same. It doesn't require large budgets or flowery presentations, but rather it's about getting down to the basics of our business and applying those techniques in a 21st-century manner.

## Plan Ahead

- ◆ Identify 2-3 student-athletes that you believe are poised to be major contributors for your program during the coming season. Perhaps, it's someone who put up great numbers last year and appears poised to take it to another level this year. Maybe it's someone who burst on to the scene during the last postseason, and achieved a degree of name recognition with the media.
- ◆ Build a separate "promotional" file on each of these student-athletes now. These files should start with an updated media guide bio, including their latest career stats and highlights. Also, select 10-12 clips (feature stories, game recaps, etc.) on each student-athlete that can help paint a picture of that person's achievements to date.
- ◆ Keep a running list of story ideas for these student-athletes. In much the same way that an athletic director often keeps a list of potential coaching candidates in case he has to do a search, you should also have an ongoing list of potential features ready to go at a moment's notice.

## Build Your Network

- ◆ The best way to get the word out on your student-athlete is to start at the local level. If you can sell your stories on a local level, chances are good that those media members on a regional and national level will take notice. The summer is a perfect time to reach out to local media members (both those in your community and those in the hometowns of your student-athletes) and begin to plant that seed for those student-athletes that you hope to promote once the season starts. Meet with your local media in person (yes, step away from the computer and walk away from the office), get to know them as people and engage them outside the normal SID/media avenues (press conferences, interviews, etc.) and you'll build that level of trust and respect that can pay off later on.
- ◆ Look to work with fellow SIDs to achieve a common goal. Many times, you'll have a student-athlete who has a sibling, parent, former high school/AAU teammate who is succeeding at another school, perhaps at another division or in another part of the country. Just this past season, I had a women's basketball player (Natalie Novosel), whose brother Nathan was an All-American at Division III University of Rochester, and I worked with Rochester's SID Dennis O'Donnell, to pitch a story about the successful Novosel siblings that was picked up by ESPN.com and got both players significant exposure on a national level.
- ◆ It never hurts to mix and match your sports, when it comes to promoting high-quality student-athletes. You may have a media member who covers more than one of your assigned sports (for instance, Graham Hays of ESPN.com covers softball, women's soccer and women's basketball, the latter two being my primary sports at Notre Dame), and the relationships you built with a media member in one sport can pay off in visibility and coverage in another sport. In fact, it was the relationship I had developed with Graham that led me to pitch the aforementioned story on the Novosel siblings to him during one of our women's soccer road trips to the East Coast.

## Embrace Technology

- ◆ In today's world, creating postcards, posters and other written promotional material for student-athletes can be costly and often doesn't work. Ask any media member and chances are he/she has received such information in the mail, and the vast majority of them have quickly tossed these items in the trash. Why break your back to design the perfect promotional item when it's just going to end up in the circular file at the end of the day?
- ◆ Social media is an ideal, cost-effective way to promote your student-athletes quickly. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and other outlets offer a means to spread your message your way and can generate the kind of grassroots appeal that leads conventional media members to take notice of your student-athletes and want to tell those stories.
- ◆ Work with your student-athletes to help cross-promote not only their teammates, but student-athletes in other sports, through Twitter, Facebook or other social media. Often times, your student-athletes are friends with one another and will attend each other's event. Try and have a men's basketball player Tweet out his support for a baseball pitcher, or a women's basketball player encourage her Facebook friends to come and join her at a women's soccer match. It not only increase the support for all of your student-athletes at the University, but it also adds to the exposure for your featured student-athletes, highlighting their achievements in front of a different group of fans and/or media members.

## Presented By:

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