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THE VALUE OF ATHLETICS AT DREXEL UNIVERSITY

I AM A DRAGON

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*Drexel athletics
embraces and
openly celebrates
a performance
culture of doing.*

The Drexel Athletic Department is a vibrant, dynamic organization that touches upon the pulse of our University's *heartbeat*. Our successful Division I athletic program brings together the alumni, the academic community, and at times even a geographic region, providing a spirit, character, and identity that would be difficult to match otherwise. By offering athletic and recreational opportunities for student-athletes, students, faculty and staff, Drexel Athletics embraces and openly celebrates a performance culture of *doing*. This creates a sense of community that has become a nexus of campus life and a stimulating place for students to compete, play, and recreate in. This sense of personal and collective pride has helped cultivate and shape the University's identity – *I am a Dragon*.

Now more than ever athletic departments can be of value to their host educational institutions by serving as models for competition, creativity, a healthy life-style, community building, and integrity. This paper explores, from the athletics departmental perspective, the relevance an athletic department brings to a major comprehensive University such as Drexel. The most recent success of our athletic teams and the popularity of the department's recreation, intramural, and club sports programs are a testament to the development of collegiate athletics at Drexel University as a dynamic, growing area within institutions of higher education.

Drexel has participated in intercollegiate athletics for over 100 years.

Anthony J. Drexel and Physical Education

The history of athletics at Drexel University is rich and intriguing. Alumni are surprised when we inform them that Drexel has participated in intercollegiate athletics for over 100 years. From the very beginning, Anthony Drexel's "Institute" included a curriculum as well as dedicated formal space in which the foremost concern was athletic competition and the educational activity of bodily movements. Drexel's Gymnasium was incorporated within the educational establishment, located on the 4th floor of the Main Building, but which now serves as an architecture studio. Anthony Drexel broke new ground by suggesting that physical education can become an important ingredient for his concept of *Learning by Doing*.



Drexel's Gymnasium in the Main Building, ca. 1895.



Drexel's 1897 Men's Basketball Team.

In ancient Greece, the Athenians were concerned with both physical and mental development and gave sports an important role in education. During the period of the Roman Empire, and later during the Middle Ages, physical education was primarily used as a form of military education. Interest in physical education as a part of a comprehensive education was revived during the Renaissance. It was not until the 19th century, however, that American universities incorporated physical education in their curricula. Thus, it was within that *Zeitgeist* that Anthony Drexel conceived an *Institute* based on comprehensive educational principles – the *practical arts and sciences*. Anthony Drexel established himself as a pioneer in this regard and his commitment to athletics resulted in as early as the 1890s physical education for both men and women, the formation of men's and women's basketball teams, and the embodiment of a competitive athletic spirit and well being associated with physical activity.

Drexel Athletics was ranked No. 1 nationally in gender equity.

Drexel University Athletics Today

From Drexel's vision of *education for all*, a dynamic, competitive, and inclusive athletic department has developed that celebrates athletic and academic excellence as well as athletic participation within the context of higher education. Anthony Drexel's vision to welcome women to participate in education and athletic pursuits laid a foundation for modern Drexel athletics. Today we are proud that Drexel Athletics was ranked No. 1 nationally in gender equity according to the March 2002 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*. And in 2008, the NCAA awarded Drexel Athletics a Top 5 Award for Overall Excellence in Diversity. Equally remarkably, Drexel's basketball teams, which has established themselves as one of our alumni most beloved sports teams, have enjoyed an over 100-year tradition.



Drexel Athletics Hosted the 2008 Olympic Trials in Table Tennis at the DAC.

Drexel athletics... a neighborhood within Drexel.

"Olympic trials were a smash at Drexel" – Philadelphia Inquirer

The growth of athletics at Drexel only rivals that of the University as a whole. Today, over 450 Drexel student-athletes compete in 16 Division I NCAA college sports in the Colonial Athletic Association; 800 students compete intercollegiately in 33 Club Sports; and over half the student body participates in structured intramural competition. Just this year intramural teams passed the century mark with 107 teams competing – *enthusiastically* – for the coveted basketball intramural title, up from 15 teams in 1989. In addition, over 3,000 students use the Daskalakis Athletic Center (the *DAC*) daily for recreational programming, including aerobics classes, cardiovascular fitness, and strength and conditioning workouts.

This unprecedented development that has taken place at Drexel Athletics over the past decade reflects the integral part of a campus life style that is motivated by student's expectations to be part of a community – *a neighborhood within Drexel*. In fact, community building is one of the hallmarks of Drexel's vibrant Athletic Department because it prioritizes essential relationships such as team building and civic engagement, that support the mission to integrate the student into the fabric of the campus environment. In addition, Drexel students have a desire to be part of a healthy life style, to be able to socialize, play and compete, in a safe urban environment, both physically and psychologically.

Besides this growth in recreational athletic participation and under President Constantine Papadakis' innovative leadership, there have been unprecedented infrastructure improvements that will continue to change the landscape of Drexel's campus and Athletic Department. The new **Recreation Center** is expected to open in fall of 2009 and will quickly become the most



Rendering of the new Recreation Center at the DAC.

important social and recreational destination on Drexel's campus. It will be a hub of campus life, serving as the primary nexus of recreational activities for all Drexel students. The **Vidas Athletic Complex** has undergone major renovations including a new Astro-Turf field (Buckley Field), new Sprint-Turf field (Vidas Field), game lights, a new sports medicine facility, scoreboards and bleachers, among many other improvements, that have prepared the 18-acre facility located at 43rd Street and Powelton Avenue as one of the best outdoor collegiate athletic facilities in Philadelphia. A new 50-year lease, with two 20-year renewable options, was signed in summer 2008 with the historic **Bachelors Barge Club** located on the Schuylkill River Boathouse Row. Starting in 2009, the Drexel crew program will be rowing out of the oldest rowing club in the United States. This positions Drexel's emerging crew teams as one of the favorites for the annual Dad Vail Regatta, as well as national and international competition. Finally, the next marquee address in Philadelphia will be the **Basketball Arena and Convocation Center at the Armory**. In April 2008, an initial 50-year lease agreement, with two 20-year renewal options, was finalized between Drexel University and the Pennsylvania National Guard. This agreement paves the way for one of Drexel's most ambitious projects. To convert this classic building located in the heart of Drexel's campus into a state-of-the-art athletic and events center that preserves the traditions of a national historic landmark. The Arena will serve as a venue for scores of entertainment, sporting, and cultural events, and as the new home of the Drexel University men's and women's NCAA Division I basketball teams, the *Drexel Dragons*.

Drexel University Division I Athletics

Over the last decades there has been an increase in the participation in intercollegiate sports with over 60,000 student-athletes participating nationally in over 90 athletic conferences at over 1,000 NCAA membership schools. The NCAA differentiates between three different tiers of intercollegiate athletics programs, that is, Division I, II, and III. All of Drexel's 16 varsity teams participate in the most competitive and visible Division I. Division I schools typically adopt a professional business model for their operations and make available athletic scholarships according to NCAA guidelines. Thus, Division I athletic departments are organized into different areas of functioning, including business operations, academic support, fundraising, external relations, sports information, recreation, strength and conditioning, sports medicine, compliance, facilities, and sports administration. Because of the investment in intercollegiate athletics and its competitive context, most student-athletes in Division I programs are recruited out of high school and some are recruited internationally.

Among Division I schools it is useful to further divide the approximately 340 schools and over 30 athletic conferences into Division I A, mid-major programs, and the smaller Division I programs in terms of scope and size. Division I A schools are athletic departments with large football programs that sponsor over 100 participants and over 10 coaches. Mid-major Division I programs, such as Drexel's, are those that are not affiliated with a football Bowl Championship Series (BCS) conference. Although the NCAA recognizes no distinction between so-called "major" and "mid-major" conferences in either basketball or football, and there is no true definition of the term "mid-major" as it relates to college basketball, these programs are smaller in terms of their size and often have a specific strategic focus on selective athletic excellence.

The main mission of our 16 Division I teams is to generate Drexel *Pride* through athletic excellence. By building an *esprit de corps* within our University community, Drexel Athletics celebrates academic and athletic excellence thereby bringing value and a heightened exposure to Drexel University. For example, in 2007/08 Drexel Athletics had a record 23 televised athletic exposures that reached a potential quarter billion households. The royalties of the Drexel logos, which is directly related to the sales of the Drexel Dragon mark, has increased by 150% over the last 10 years. The regional media, even the national media such as *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *USA Today*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* among others, frequently cover Drexel Athletics.



Drexel Men's Basketball at Madison Square Garden against Duke.

The main mission of our 16 Division I teams is to generate Drexel Pride through athletic excellence.

"Rowing improved my fitness level, self-esteem and time management skills, which helped me become a professional." - Sarah Grogan, Student-Athlete, Dad Vail Regatta Medalist

In addition to generating positive exposure, one of the main missions of Drexel's Athletic Department is to foster competitive excellence within an academic context. This is singularly unique to higher education in the U.S. and a staple of the American system of higher education. Collegiate athletics done properly, coupled with expectation of high-level athletic and academic achievement by student-athletes, can serve as an instrument to celebrate *openly* the competitive spirit of an academic community. As a result, the athletic performance of teams in many universities has become a valued but complicated business and plays a major role in the shaping of an institution's identity and pride. Thus, the modern athletic department, such as Drexel's, has become a specialized division within a university with a deliberate focus on competitive intercollegiate athletics.



In 2007 the Women's Basketball Team Won the Nations Longest Collegiate Basketball Game Ever on Record when they beat Northeastern at the DAC in five over-times!

The focus on both athletic and academic excellence within our competitive Division I programs are an essential ingredient of our performance culture. As a result, our retention figures are the highest in the University with over 90% of student-athletes graduating that fulfill their athletic eligibility. Over the last academic year our 450 student-athletes earned an impressive 3.15 grade point cumulative average. Drexel Athletics also received impressive scores on the Academic Progress Rate (APR) and was honored by the NCAA for scoring academically in the top 10% for men's basketball for the second year in a row. Our teams have been nationally ranked athletically (e.g., men's lacrosse in the top 10 last year) and competed in venues ranging from Madison Square Garden to the Thames River in Henley, England. Our student-athletes have participated in national championships and have been bestowed the prestigious title of All-American and Academic All-American.

Drexel Athletics can assist in the University's national rankings, such as those compiled by *U.S. News & World Report* (USNWR), in which weighted key indicators play an important role. For example, variables such as *Peer Assessment* (i.e., the perception of the University; weight 25%), *Retention* (i.e., the proportion of freshman who return to campus the following year and eventually graduate; weight 20%), and even *Alumni Giving* (i.e., the average percentage of alumni who gave to their school, weight 5%) are all used in USNWR rankings. These key indicators of perceived student satisfaction can lead to improved rankings among national college and universities and the impression of Drexel as a modern, *rising* University. This in turn leads to alumni interest in Drexel University and Drexel Athletics. For example, our Drexel Athletic Club has now nearly 700 members and Drexel Athletics raised over 1.5 million dollars per year for each of the last three years.

The mission of Drexel recreation is to introduce sports and exercise into the fabric of the collegiate experience.

“I realized my limits. I learned how far I can push myself athletically, scholastically, and personally. I became a stronger person who is more optimistic and self-confident.”
Amanda Hastings,
student-athlete

Recreational Athletics at Drexel University

Recreational athletics provides our campus with opportunities that enhances the Drexel experience for all through sports. The Recreational Sports program at Drexel organizes and implements diverse sports activities on campus to promote fun, fitness, development and social interaction for students, faculty and staff. These activities consist of intramural and extramural sports, club sports, group exercise, instructional programs, outdoor trips, and informal recreation through usage of the DAC and outdoor athletic facilities (Buckley Recreational Field, Buckley Green, 34th Street Tennis Courts). The program also facilitates special athletic events at the requests of student organizations, fraternities and sororities, residence halls, and student life offices, such as dodge-ball tournaments, 3-on-3 basketball, and sports events for social and philanthropic purposes.

In total, Drexel Athletics provides club sports, intramural, and recreational opportunities and infrastructure support to over 20,000 Drexel students. The mission of Drexel Recreational Sports program is to introduce sports and exercise into the fabric of the collegiate experience. The Recreational Sports program strives to provide opportunities, in the form of programs, services and facilities, which meet the needs and desires of the Drexel University campus. The program aims to provide activities for fun and fitness that promote competitive and cooperative play, to provide student development and leadership opportunities, and to promote sportsmanship and participation. The Recreational Sports program strives to create an environment that promotes socialization and friendships in a safe, fun, urban collegiate setting. The program’s mission to ensure that participation in recreational sports is a positive aspect of the Drexel University experience.



The Drexel University women's championship Ice Hockey Club

For every varsity student-athlete competing there are at least ten students that participate in intramurals or club sports, and an additional one-hundred Drexel students that engage in recreational programming or workouts. In recreational programming over 30 group exercise classes were held each week last year including diverse offerings such as mind/body, cardio, strength and flexibility, among others. Nearly 900 students, faculty and staff registered for these classes, which are free. Intramural competition allows students to participate in structured athletic contests, including *co-rec* leagues. Intramural sports participation has exploded over the last year with 31 leagues and tournaments to choose from and an additional 37 special events. Many Drexel intramural champions participate in extramural championships such as the City Six championships or even national championships. For example, the 2007/08 male, female and coed teams represented Drexel at the NIRSA (National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association) Regional Flag Football Championships at the University of Maryland. Drexel students can also compete on Club sports and compete against other colleges and universities. Drexel currently sponsors 33 club teams, up from 15 in 1998. Highlights of the 2007/08 season included women’s Ice Hockey who won the Delaware Valley Collegiate regular season championship, Sailing who won their third straight America’s Cup Qualifier, men’s Cycling who finished 35th in nationals, and men’s Squash, which finished its season ranked 35th nationally.

“Sports magically provides us with a manageable and accessible slice of life.” – Eric Zillmer, Psy. D.,
Director,
Drexel Athletics



At Drexel Athletics, Student Peers Referee all Intramural Athletic Contests – Learning by Doing!

Athletics, students play an important part in the infrastructure of the department, by performing as Intramural Officials and Game Staff, Facility Monitors and Attendants, Lifeguards, Exercise Instructors, Recreational Sports Supervisors, and assisting in Athletic Game Operations. As a result Drexel students participate in all facets of the Athletics program, recreationally and operationally.

Conclusion

Sports are symbolical of a personal quest for excellence. Organized athletics can be a reaffirmation of America’s founders’ principle of the *pursuit of happiness* and the country’s democratic values supporting a *level playing field*. As such, sports have become part of the American culture, including Drexel’s educational culture. Sports play an important role in higher education since athletics at all levels requires self-discipline, leadership, managing risks, teamwork and experiencing what is possible. Having the opportunity for a Drexel student to take that shot with the game on the line, whether it is intramurals, club or varsity competition, is the quintessential *American Dream* for both young women and men. For those Drexel students, only that moment matters, though some of those moments may last a lifetime.