

TRAINING FROM THE TOP

Monmouth University students benefit from school's association with ESPN

BY ANDREW SHELDON

When it comes to sports broadcasting experience, **Bob Davies** has been ahead of the curve since his time at Jackson Liberty High School.

"They have a great program down there called JTV, and that was the program I got involved with initially and carried that to Monmouth," he said. "The things they do are college-level, in terms of broadcasting."

Now, having just finished his sophomore year at Monmouth University, Davies has acquired the experience of broadcasting the school's sports teams on **ESPN3**. It's the result of a new relationship between the school and the sports media giant that has just wrapped its first year and 50 broadcasts.

Eddy Occhipinti, the school's assistant athletics director for marketing, said the relationship can be traced to when the college joined the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference, which has a close relationship with **Disney**. As a result, Monmouth University and Disney subsidiary ESPN were able to come to an agreement to broadcast the school's home games on the channel's Web-exclusive ESPN3.

Occhipinti said the timing was fortuitous.

"We joined this league two years ago and, through the league, we got more exposure, more opportunity to push our brand (while) ESPN had a big push for their digital side," he said.

While the new partnership is a boon for athletics at the West Long Branch-based school, it's also creating more visibility for the institution as a whole.

"It's equal in pushing Monmouth University. We run their undergraduate and graduate commercials as part of our inventory," he said. "We've allowed school personnel to be part of our halftimes and interviews (and) we try to publicize different departments, like the music industry department."

That increased visibility helps in the recruitment of both prospective students and their parents, who might live too far to travel and watch their kids play, Occhipinti said.

"Athletically, it gets our student-athletes on a much bigger scale because, now, we're national," he said. "If you're a parent in Virginia, it makes a big difference, because now they know they can not only watch the game for free, live on ESPN3 — it's archived; it's an on-demand function."

"That's going to matter in recruiting, it's going to matter in admissions and it's going to matter in everything we do."

But it's not just athletes getting a bump



Above, the Monmouth Digital Network trailer. At right, Eddy Occhipinti, right, assistant athletics director for marketing, and Greg Viscomi, associate athletic director for new media and communications.

-AARON HOUSTON

from this partnership; the students enrolled in Monmouth's communications program also are getting invaluable experience.

"A huge component of it is an undergraduate student crew that helps us do it," he said. "We're not able to do it without our communication department and our sports communication minor."

Chad Dell, chair of the communication department at Monmouth, said the experience provides some clear benefits, just through name recognition alone, as students leave the program and look for employment.

And that doesn't just have a positive effect on the students looking to leave the university after graduation, but on those looking at entering it as new students, as well.

"I think this has been a terrific opportunity for communication students to work on a live sports broadcast, get that experience and add ESPN to their resume," Dell said. "It has certainly generated a lot of interest among students and among prospective students, and I suspect this will help us grow our sports communication minor."

Dell, who previously taught communications at the University of Wisconsin and helped broadcast Badger sports events, said the offerings resulting from this partnership have been impressive despite the difference in size between the two institutions.

"It's hard to compare a school of our size to University of Wisconsin with 45,000



students," he said. "That said, I'm really impressed with the program **Greg (Viscomi**, associate athletics director for new media and communications) and Eddy (Occhipinti) have put together, and I think we're well on our way to matching that quality. We'll get there in a couple of years."

Many benefits can be seen today.

"It's every aspect of a broadcast, from camera to directing, audio, graphic packages," he said. "It's academic, it's brand building, but it's also showing people what the students at Monmouth can do."

The program was not ready for launch in time for the 2014 football season but, from the winter months through the end of the 2015 spring semester, the department executed 50 broadcasts of home games for the Hawks' baseball and basketball teams.

Now with the academic year behind

them, Occhipinti and his team are assessing results of the program and looking toward the fall, when they will be ready for football.

"We're in the process now of debriefing the whole year from every point of view," he said. "Did it increase our (social media) followers and our likes? Did it increase the amount of people registering for things on our website?"

As for Davies, the opportunity to gain real-life experience under the ESPN brand, occasionally with actual representatives from the network, is a good opportunity.

"I think it adds immense value: ESPN is a pinnacle of what we're trying to do," he said. "To already have experience with them, doing the things they do and seeing how they want it done is invaluable."

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