

PHILANTHROPY



The Battle plan

Family's gift will fund professional opportunities for student-athletes beyond the playing field

BY KEVIN WARNER ('02)

When Mike Battle ('81, '83M) was a student-athlete at JMU, he understood the symbiotic relationship between competition on the field and in the classroom. Now the former Dukes linebacker and tight end has turned that understanding into a \$600,000 gift to the university—a gift he and his wife Cecelia hope will inspire others.

The Battle family's gift consists of a \$500,000 commitment to support the construction of a new JMU Convocation Center and an additional \$100,000 to create an endowment for experiential learning opportunities for student-athletes through an emerging leadership program.

Their gift recognizes the importance of balancing athletics with scholarship. "It's not a zero-sum game," he says.

"What Cecelia and I did with this gift was to structure it to benefit the student-athletes' progression to their professional career, to benefit the university's efforts to achieve its highest level of visibility through its athletics program and to show it is important

to bring academics and athletics together—as opposed to choosing one versus the other."

Battle, who currently serves on the Board of Visitors, is founder and CEO of Battle Resource Management Inc., a professional services consulting firm that provides business and technology strategy and planning support for government and commercial clients. He serves on the Duke Club Advisory Board and is a former member of the College of Business Executive Advisory Council.

The gift is the largest by a former student-athlete in JMU's history.

A SHOVEL IN THE GROUND

The Battle gift accelerates the private giving campaign for the Convo well past its halfway point. With an overall price tag of \$88 million, the Convo must reach \$12 million in private support before moving into the architectural and construction phases.

A gift from the Battle family – Mike ('81, '83M); JMU senior Michaela; Steven; and Cecelia – establishes an endowment to create experiential learning opportunities for student-athletes through an emerging leadership program.

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“My objective was to get some momentum to get to \$12 million because we need to get a shovel in the ground,” Battle explained. “I think it’s important that this happens now—and I want to be a part of it. I did not want to wait until I’m retired or I’m out of the business that I’m in.”

While JMU Athletics and the basketball programs will be tenants of the facility, it serves a greater purpose for the university and the local community. Battle believes it will also be a key contributor to branding the university on a national level.

“To me, the highest priority is providing a facility that is at the level of institutions we compete against,” Battle said. “That doesn’t mean just in our conference, it means in establishing the brand of JMU nationally. For us to perform and compete, we need to recruit talent. And talent is attracted to an infrastructure that is big-time. We’re not just recruiting against the traditional CAA schools for talent. We’re recruiting against Virginia and Virginia Tech. The football stadium has brought us superior athletes. We’ve got to recognize that formula also pertains to basketball.”

THE BATTLE PLAN

As a former student-athlete, Battle recognizes the inherent benefits of sports participation. He also recognizes the tremendous load placed upon today’s student-athletes as competitors and ambassadors for the univer-

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— MIKE BATTLE (’81, ’83M)

sity—a load that sometimes prevents them from taking advantage of opportunities to invest in their future outside of athletics. That’s where the Battles’ gift and the emerging leadership program come into play.

“The objective is to give student-athletes opportunities to intern, to get real-world experiences with organizations aligned with their field of study,” Battle explained. “Most of these kids are not going to be playing professionally, but they *are* going to be professionals in something other than their sport. So when they go out to compete in the marketplace, they will be able to point to real-world experiences they’ve gotten through these internships and other experiential learning opportunities because of this leadership program. It

will allow them to compete in the job market, and we owe them that because of their level of commitment. They’ve impacted the university’s brand through their excellence and the visibility on the field.”

Participation in athletics is widely considered to enhance skills such as collaboration, communication, teamwork, goal setting, responding to failure, following direction, time management and more. The Battles’ gift aims to bridge the gap of applying those skills to practical settings that provide professional opportunities in the business world.

A FRONT PORCH OF EXCELLENCE

Battle subscribes to the philosophy that athletics provides an important role in drawing attention to the university and attracting students from all walks of life to JMU. Ultimately, such prominence helps all academic programs and student activities to recruit the best students. That’s why he continues to dedicate his time and skills to the university and why he felt compelled to help cultivate growth at JMU.

“I’d love to see us competing in the highest level possible, so that the brand of the institution of JMU is getting national visibility on a constant basis,” Battle said. “Then when you walk around San Francisco, or Los Angeles or Chicago with the JMU swag on, people know what that means. And that’s because of the impact of excellence of athletics as the front porch of the university.”

Convocation Center momentum



At press time, the gift by Mike (’81, ’83M) and Cecelia Battle had pushed private giving to the JMU Convocation Center well past the halfway mark of the \$12 million goal. “I think it’s important that this happens now – and I want to be a part of it,” said Mike, a former student-athlete and current Board of Visitors member. “I’m hoping that alums who have the passion and interest in seeing the university succeed at the highest level will see this as a way that they can contribute to needs both on the academics and athletics sides. It will make a difference.” To see where the Convo project stands today and to make your contribution, go to jmuconvo.com.