



Global impact

International student-athletes contribute more than wins

In his May 2016 speech at the College of Business commencement ceremony, student speaker Daniel Roppert ('16), a Dukes soccer player from Germany, drove home a message that resonates with JMU students, past and present.

"For each of us, James Madison offered a place to succeed," he said, "a place where we could follow our path and achieve our dream, a place that provided both challenge and opportunity, a place that now feels like home."

Over the years, international student-athletes have contributed significantly to building a culture of diversity, acceptance and experiential learning, not only within JMU Athletics but also across the entire campus.

JMU men's soccer head coach Tom Foley believes it was academics, and specifically the College of Business, that ultimately drew Roppert to Madison, even more than the success of the Dukes soccer program.

"Daniel was a very focused person who maximized every opportunity he had here at JMU," Foley said. "To me, he's the American dream. He had an opportunity to get an education and improve his opportunity to get a job later. He took advantage of what JMU had to offer him, and he's got a job in California already set up."

JMU has approximately 30 international student-athletes among its 18 sports programs for the 2016-17 academic year. Like Roppert, nearly all of them point to the opportunity to compete in NCAA athletics, combined with the value of earning a college degree in the U.S., as their reason for choosing James Madison.

Other factors also come into play. Canadian women's soccer player Sydney Braun-McLeod said, "Coach [Dave] Lombardo's values for the team aligned with what I wanted out of a college program. I wanted to play college soccer in the U.S. for as long as I can remember. In Canada, playing at



Women's soccer player Sydney Braun-McLeod, a Canadian, said the team's values aligned with what she wanted out of a college program.

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DANIEL ROPPERT ('16), *JMU men's soccer player*

the Division I level is the ultimate goal next to playing for the national team."

For sophomore Abby Amos of women's tennis, the unique culture of JMU was appealing. The native of England said, "The JMU community seemed such a friendly one and so did my team and coaches. The university is so welcoming, and as soon as I visited the campus, I fell in love with it."

Many of JMU's sport programs depend on international student-athletes, not only for competitive excellence, but also to fulfill the values important to each program.

"I have seen my U.S. and international student-athletes learn how similar they really are," said men's tennis coach Steve Secord, who counts six foreign-born players on his nine-man roster. "They have

JMU NATION



(Above): Men's tennis coach Steve Secord counts six foreign-born players on his team. (Right): Softball player Tahli Moore, from Australia, has enjoyed sharing the sport she loves with her American teammates. (Far right): Serbian basketball player Dimitrije Cabarkapa says the relationships he has built off the court at JMU will last a lifetime.



very similar athletic, academic and life goals and come together as a group to help one another realize their individual and team aspirations.”

Field hockey coach Christy Morgan added, “We recruit from different countries to enhance our program both on the field and off. With all of our recruits, we look for people with great character and with a passion for life and sport. Internationals come with a variety of experiences and knowledge, which we can all learn from.”

Building relationships between American and international student-athletes contributes greatly to JMU’s vision to provide the model experience for its student-athletes.

Men’s basketball player Dimitrije Cabarkapa, a native of Serbia, has found opportunities on the court thanks to his work ethic, but it’s the relationships formed off the court that will last a lifetime.

“In the last couple of years, I made a lot

‘The global experience is only a positive thing in my mind.’

PAULIUS SATKUS,
Lithuanian men’s basketball player

of friends through basketball,” Cabarkapa said. “My team has been pretty diverse, with many foreign people. I enjoyed spending time with my teammates from America and from overseas. My American teammates have helped me to adapt to the new environment and get used to life in the U.S.”

While Cabarkapa has been surrounded by other international players, senior Tahli Moore has been the lone foreigner on the JMU softball team for her entire Madison career. “It has been interesting to develop relationships and figure out cultural differences,” the Australian said. “Having

good relationships with my teammates is important, as we are able to share and compare how we grew up and how the sport we play varies in different places all across the globe.”

The presence of such students contributes to a culturally diverse campus.

“I think [having international student-athletes] promotes diversity of all kinds,” said men’s basketball player Paulius Satkus of Lithuania. “A lot of people, and especially students, are seeking new ideas or knowledge about different countries. So, being an international student, I feel like it is my duty to represent my country well. The same goes for everybody else. The global experience is only a positive thing in my mind.”

Secord concluded, “I feel fortunate to be a part of a university that embraces inclusion. We are lucky that the ‘JMU Way’ includes diversity and is constantly looking at each individual and including them in our university community so we all develop as a whole.”