

THE TRUE MEANING OF *Victory*

Ensuring the right pieces are in place to be competitive across all JMU Division I programs

# A CULTURE OF WINNING

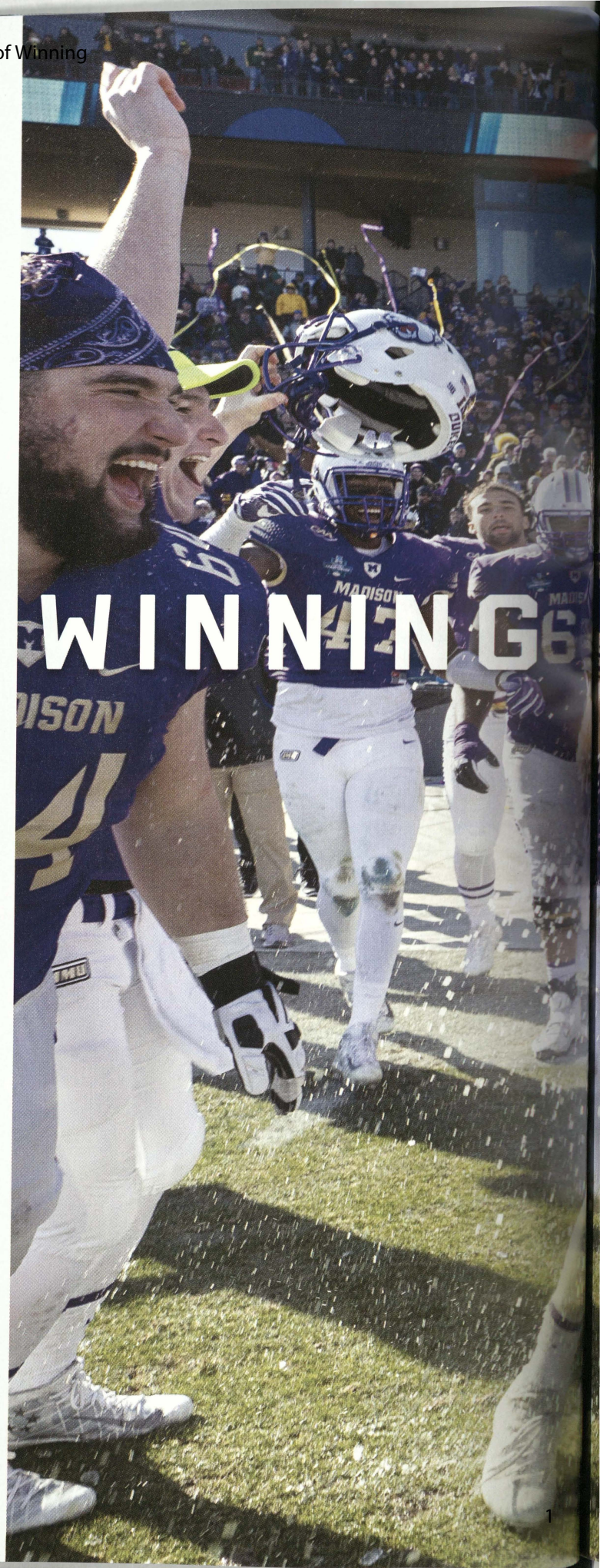
BY KEVIN WARNER ('02)

WHEN MIKE HOUSTON INTERVIEWED TO BECOME THE head football coach at JMU, he had already molded The Citadel, a program previously devoid of success, into a top-10 program in the nation. It was going to take a special environment to pull Houston away to another opportunity.

He found it at James Madison.

"When you look at JMU's commitment to excellence in terms of facilities and a campus that looks the way it does, the expectation is to build a championship program," Houston says. "When evaluating JMU, I first identified the infrastructure in place ... followed by an academic culture that resonates with people. Finally, when you walk across campus, you get a great vibe from the student body. There's never a bad day at JMU. I've never met a JMU alum who didn't have a great experience here. So couple those things with the support of the administration, and I thought from the first day I stepped foot here that we could win a national championship."

The Dukes' 14-1 season that culminated in winning the 2016 NCAA Division I FCS Championship is only one illustration of Madison's winning culture. Strategic investments in facilities, the right coaches and support staff, and an emphasis on the student-athlete have bred competitive success across all 18 of JMU's intercollegiate teams.









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Since the fall of 2015, JMU teams have won 66 percent of their contests. No other Division I institution in Virginia or in the Colonial Athletic Association has experienced success at a higher rate over that span. The Dukes have captured six CAA titles, had eight regular-season top finishes and seven additional runner-up finishes, while sending 10 different programs into NCAA competition. JMU also boasted 20 All-Americans and 11 CAA Players of the Year.

"It's a continuation of our university culture," Director of Athletics Jeff Bourne says. "JMU is the type of school that strives for excellence. Every element of this university achieves at a very high level. Athletics historically has always been competitive and has a rich background of accomplishment. Our goal has been to take that foundation and build on it. The fact that we do that in 18 sports programs, and not just one or two, is a unique quality of this institution."

For Bourne, success in athletics is not happenstance, but rather the byproduct of a strategy centered on the student-athlete and support services. Principles put in place by JMU Athletics pioneers Lee Morrison, Dean Ehlers and President Emeritus Ronald Carrier continue to resonate today.

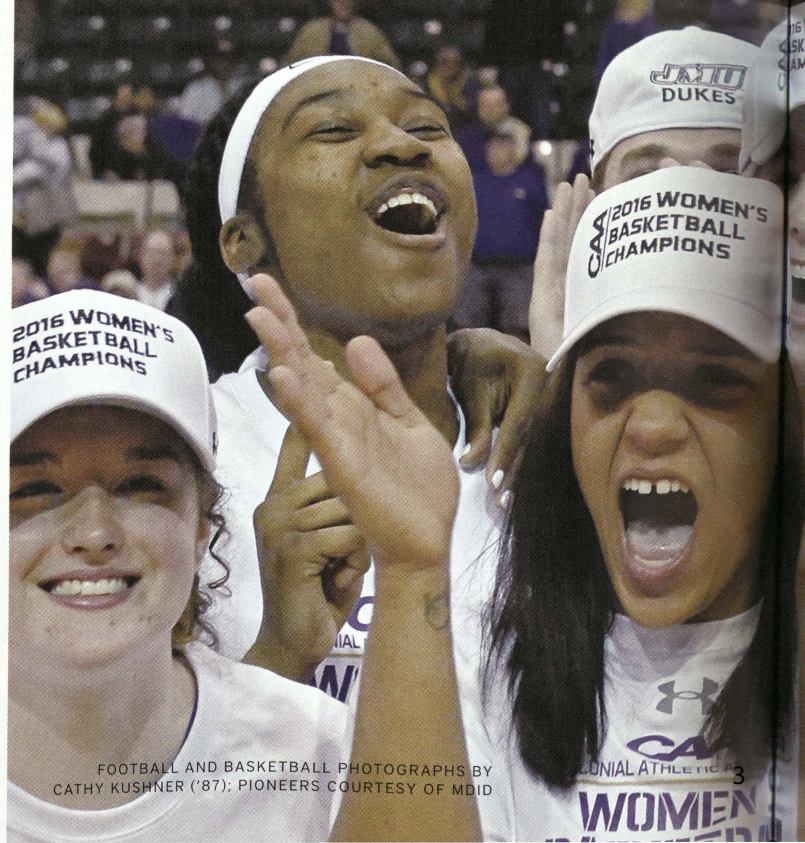
"Our recent experience has been the culmination of a lot of preparation, hiring the right type of individuals for the right jobs," Bourne says. "It includes affording opportunities to our staff to be able to do things at a high level. Success is never compartmentalized. It's never the result of one person, but rather it's a collective effort. This is a program that we've been building over the years. We have the right people in the right seats across our athletics department who are doing an excellent job at their profession. That's helping all of us to achieve excellence."



(From left): President Ronald Carrier and Athletics Directors Lee Morrison and Dean Ehlers were pioneers in establishing a successful intercollegiate athletics program at Madison.

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FOOTBALL AND BASKETBALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
CATHY KUSHNER ('87); PIONEERS COURTESY OF MDID





Jazmon Gwathmey ('15) hoists the trophy after the JMU women's basketball team won the CAA crown in 2016.



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**- MICKEY DEAN,**  
SOFTBALL HEAD COACH

For Deputy Athletics Director Geoff Polglase, JMU Athletics' new strategic vision, launched in March 2015, merely formalized a growing sentiment. "We've been living our culture a long time by investing in support services, our integrated sports performance model and ensuring that our student-athletes can compete at the highest level," Polglase says. "It's a testament to Jeff Bourne's leadership and long-term vision that our programs are what they are."

Perhaps no coach at JMU has been more successful at embracing the mission and vision and tailoring it to his sport than softball head coach Mickey Dean. "You need to establish core principles," Dean says. "When somebody walks through the door, there already needs to be a culture of what the program is about. There's no guessing, so you know coming in whether you fit into that environment. Some of those principles are team first, trust and loving each other."

That approach has led JMU softball to a 185-48 record in Dean's first four seasons. A winning tradition has been built through a focus on personal development. "We never make it about winning and losing," he says. "You're going to win and you're going to lose in sports. Greatness is about how you really affect other people; can you take other people and help them become the best people that they want to be."

JMU Athletics is building momentum across the



Under head coach Mickey Dean, JMU softball has tallied a 185-48 record over four seasons.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHY KUSHNER ('87)







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department. "We tell our kids, if you want to be a successful person, then you need to surround yourself with successful people," Dean says. "What happens in an athletics program is when one or two programs are winning and they start hanging around other athletes, they start to carry themselves differently."

A culture of winning contributes to a vibrant, successful athletics program and a positive image for the university as a whole. Athletics provides the avenue for a diverse range of individuals to engage with the university, whether it's for ESPN's College GameDay, an FCS national championship game, a home game in Bridgeforth Stadium or an NCAA Softball Super Regional at Veterans Memorial Park. Those opportunities engage students and alumni and attract prospective students and donors.

"I think the public perception of success helps all elements of the university in terms of positive recognition and achieving at the highest level," Bourne says. "It reinforces all the other areas where we are achieving excellence, whether it's the arts, academics or other programs. I think there's tremendous value brought to the institution at many different levels when athletics programs represent you well and they fit within the university's mission and guiding policies." <sup>M</sup>



ESPN GameDay personality Lee Corso (center) shows his support for JMU during Homecoming 2015 as fellow cast member Kirk Herbstreit looks on.





