



**Feb. 19, 2014**

**CoSIDA Membership Call: You, Your Boss, Your School: Keeping Priorities in Line**

**Presenters**

- **Jeff Blair**, Director of Athletics, Ohio Dominican University
- **Mark Fleming**, Sports Information Director, Moravian College
- **Lenny Reich**, Assistant to the Athletics Director/Sports Information Director, University of Mount Union

**Moderator**

- **Blake Timm**, Sports Information Director (Pacific, Ore.) and Chair of CoSIDA's College Division Management Advisory Committee

**BLAKE TIMM:** Hello everyone. Thanks for joining us for today's CoSIDA continuing education session in our year-long series. Today's presentation is "You, Your Boss, Your School: Keeping Priorities in Line." I am Blake Timm, Sports Information Director (Pacific, Ore.) and Chair of CoSIDA's College Division Management Advisory Committee, and I will serve as the moderator today.

Let me introduce our presenters: Jeff Blair, Director of Athletics at Ohio Dominican University, Lenny Reich, the Assistant to the Athletics Director and Sports Information Director

at the University of Mount Union, and Mark Fleming, Sports Information Director at Moravian College who has coordinated this continuing ed session.

Thank you, Mark.

Our session today will also have a full transcript available following the call courtesy of ASAP Sports, CoSIDA's corporate partner and our official instant transcript provider. You'll be able to access both the transcript and an archived audio of this call on CoSIDA.com later this afternoon.

This is the first of three CoSIDA continuing education sessions this month. Tomorrow at 3 p.m. Eastern, noon Pacific, the NAIA SIDA holds its monthly membership call, the topic this month will be Teamwork: Integrated Sports Information and Sports Marketing. Will be led by John Phillips the Director of Athletics at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Next Thursday, February 26, we'll hold a call, Keeping Up With the Joneses, led by Mark Adkins of Manchester College, that call begins at 11 a.m. Eastern, and 8 o'clock for those of us on the west coast.

The February continuing education calls are the latest in CoSIDA's year-round continuing education program, which considers recommendations from the 2013 Cryder Rinebold report. This being the third and final year of my term, we've picked out ideas from that report, and one of the ones that jumped out was how to keep priorities in line between you, your boss, and what the school is actually looking to do throughout in marketing and other things.

We have a unique perspective here. Jeff will start us off in a moment. He's a former SID and now athletic director. Lenny is Assistant Athletic Director and SID, and works in the athletic department, and then I will finish it off with a unique perspective to many people as I've been a member of the public relations staff at Moravian for 17 years, and I've never worked, technically, in our athletic department, though my job is 98% with athletics.

So first we'll start with Jeff introducing himself and talking a little bit about how his move up the ranks has shown him how to keep the priorities in line, so the SID and AD and school are all working together.

**JEFF BLAIR:** Good morning to you on the west coast. Good afternoon to everybody on the east coast I started off as a Graduate Assistant at University of Findlay where I also did my undergraduate and got into grad school as a GA in sports information, and that's where I began my career in sports information. At that time I really wasn't sure what the sports information profession really consisted of and as I got into it I really enjoyed my experience at that time. I then moved on to Ohio Dominican as the Sports Information Director and spent the first part of my career as the sports information director, and being at a small NAIA institution at the time, wore a lot of hats. And I think a lot of us do in this profession in sports information.

One of those hats that I wore were game operations and operations of tournaments and things of that nature and I think it really got me involved in the administrative side. As my career developed, we had a change, and I was promoted to Assistant Athletic Director in charge of operation and facilities management, and then it in turn continued up the ranks as becoming athletic director in the last three years.

That's kind of my track into this role. I think that talking about what our education session is today and you, your boss, your school keeping priorities in line, it has been a unique experience for me knowing that communication is the key role of the sports information department, but that communication is very important here to us at Ohio Dominican. Understanding what our priorities are and giving the student-athlete the experience they deserve when they come to our institution it is our highest priority.

So, I think that that's what we've really tried to do over the years, and that's what I've really focused on over the years, and something I continue to do today, trying to give them the best experience possible.

So I think that's a little bit of where we are coming from as an athletic department, as a sports information department here at Ohio Dominican. I've had the opportunity to hire one of Lenny's former assistants who has done a tremendous job here at Ohio Dominican. And I've found in my time at sports information trying to wear all of those hats, I wasn't always able to give a hundred percent focus to one area, and really had to time manage quite a bit in terms of trying to complete tasks and to give that experience that we talk about. When our sports information director, Scott Miles, came in, one thing and one area of focus for me was to give him the opportunity to be able to tell our story and do the sports information side of marketing our student-athletes, our athletic department, and our university to his full potential, and like I said, he's done a tremendous job with that.

We have slowly started to prioritize and change not our focus, but slowly started to give Scott a lot more responsibilities within the athletic department, which I think is very important for us to achieve success in a lot of different areas.

As the trend starts to change and our field with technology, the influx in technology, the websites, the social media, I think it's been very important and he's done a tremendous job with that. That's where I'll turn it back over.

**BLAKE TIMM:** All right. Lenny, let's hear a little bit about what your feelings are in keeping your priorities in line with your boss and your school?

**LENNY REICH:** Yeah, thanks, Mark, thanks, everyone, for having me on the call. Yeah, I mean, I think I come at things from probably a unique perspective as well. I've been an SID

since 1997 at a couple different schools, and six years ago I came to Mount Union as their SID, where I worked in the PR office like Mark does. And after I was here a couple years we saw a need or opportunity to integrate the SID position into athletics. Thought it would better serve our institution to do that, and then we moved over to athletics. And then a couple years ago, I was promoted to Assistant to the Athletic Director to aid Larry Kehres, at the time who was our head football coach and athletic director in the operations of our athletic department. We now have a 23-team athletic department in Division III, and when I moved over to athletics, I was the only full-time administrator in the department that wasn't a coach.

So we've had a lot of people that worked well together that pinch hit and did a lot of different things along with their coaching assignments, and had a tremendous amount of success. But we thought obviously with some of the things that Jeff talked about with technology and some of those things changing, that we'd be better served having the sports information director over there and assisting with things in the athletic department.

Since then, my athletic director is now a full-time AD. He retired after serving 27 years as our head football coach, as most people know he had a lot of success in his football coaching life and we're confident he's had at least that much success in his athletic director role in hiring the department and building the facilities and things that we have.

I think what's aided me to kind of move up the ranks, I guess, at Mount Union, or have the successes that we've been able to have relative to sports information has been trust and confidence. Like I say in the notes that are available, I think you as an SID have to trust yourself. And I think work as hard as you can at your job and I believe that over time good things will happen to you or things positive will happen for you and your office.

I never went to Mount Union with the idea that I was going to work in athletics. I never went there with the idea that I was going to be an assistant to the AD. I went there with the idea I was going to try to be the best sports information director that I could be and over time

the school recognized that and has such has adjusted my role accordingly. I think what that's done is also built up trust with our athletic director and with our administration in what we can do.

So I think the SID needs to trust that the athletic director or if you don't work in athletics, trust that whoever your superior is or the people that chose you to do that job, you have to have trust that they're working on your behalf, and that they respect what you're doing and they'll be an advocate for you, whether sometimes being in your department if you need help with head coaches that you're dealing with, if you need those head coaches to understand that you've got a lot of things on your plate, and sometimes the athletic director or your PR boss or whatever needs to step in and help educate those people on that. And conversely, being an advocate outside the department.

Since I've been at Mount Union, we've added two SID intern positions, and those positions we wouldn't have those two positions unless the athletic director was on board and willing to reorganize some things that they had going on in athletics to make it available to have those sports information assistants, because he felt that we needed those to do the job the best way we could.

So I think it's that trust both ways. I think the SID sometimes, the AD has to trust the SID that that SID is going to carry forward what the AD is trying to do, how the AD is trying to manage the department. Sometimes that means when a coach comes in our office and wants to get on their soap box or wants to rant about something departmentally, sometimes the SID has to be the buffer or be the person that says well, this is kind of the big picture. This is what's going on here. I think the AD sometimes needs somebody in that role that can be kind of the middle person or the buffer between them and the coaching staff sometimes, or them and other parts of the campus, whether it's dealing with development people or marketing people or booster club, those kind of things.

I think the SID can serve a great role in not just helping promote the student-athletes and the team, but also help echoing the mission statement of the athletic department, and echoing the strategic plan that the athletic department might have going forward that the AD can't always communicate that with everybody at the same time, so the SID can help that.

As far as confidence goes, I think, like I said, the SID has to be confident in their abilities ask and they have to be willing to discuss and work with the AD on those things and know that not all the time it's going to be a great conversation. There are going to be times when the athletic director has an idea of something that they'd like to do that might not be something the SID is totally comfortable with, but that's what the athletic director wants, so the SID needs to figure out a way to get that done or figure out a way to work together on that and conversely, like I said, there has to be the AD having confidence in that person to do that.

I know there are times when I've reminded young SIDs that might get down or get frustrated about something is that realize that there is somebody that selected you to do that job because they thought you had the ability to do that job. They wouldn't have hired you in the first place if they didn't think you could do that. So there is nothing wrong with asking for help. There is nothing wrong with asking to get something done or try and come to some kind of middle ground on things.

Sometimes SIDs are inherent problem solvers and they want to solve problems by themselves. They sometimes almost feel vulnerable or something if they have to go and ask for some kind of assistance. I think sometimes that's when you can be the most successful is when you have to open something up a little bit like, hey, I need your help with this or we need to work together to get this done. I'm fortunate that our athletic department, whether it's our head coaches or our athletic director, we've been able to work on those things, and I think we've been able to accomplish a great deal when both the athletic director and the SID are on the same page.

I've told people before, our athletic director, like I said, has kind of a larger-than-life persona in a lot of circles, especially in Division III athletics. When I was first presented the opportunity at Mount Union, if I was presented the opportunity originally with the idea that I'd be working for him directly and working with athletics, there might have been part of me that's had some trepidation or maybe not sure of it, and it probably would have been the biggest mistake that I would have made professionally about not joining up with him in that way. And I've been fortunate that since I've been there I've been able to work for him and work with him on a variety of things and thrilled that I have his confidence and trust in most things that we do and try to do.

So I guess it's a good object lesson for sports information directors about not necessarily judging a book by its cover, or not having a preconceived notion when you go into a job or an assignment and just try to work as hard as you can and get those things done.

Like I said, we've been fortunate to do those things, and I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to do a lot of really great things because I've had trust and confidence in the director of athletics that I've worked for not at just Mount Union but the other schools that I've worked at.

**BLAKE TIMM:** Before we hand it over to Mark, just a reminder to people on the call that we do encourage your questions. We'll have time for questions and answers after Mark speaks. Again, you can submit those questions on the CoverItLive blog at CoSIDA.com. Or email Barb Kowal, our Director of External Affairs at BarbKowal@CoSIDA.com.

Now, Mark Fleming.

**MARK FLEMING:** Thanks, Blake. I'm in my 17th year here at Moravian, and the entire time I've been here I've been part of the public relations staff. Before I began the position here,

when the position was formed for Moravian, they felt that outside of statistics at the game, the majority of the job was public relations, so they added the position over here and it's been a good situation for me.

Biggest drawback I have is I have to walk one block west to get to our gymnasium, our soccer field, and our field hockey field. I have to walk one block to the east to get to the football stadium, track, baseball, softball, tennis. So I'm centrally located, but it kind of keeps away from those times when coaches just want to come in and see you and do things. So one of the biggest things I say is to keep your priorities in line is you need to have all sorts of communication.

I attend our monthly athletic department staff meetings. Our athletic director and I sit down at least once a month, if not more, and have an hour-long meeting. What's going on. What do we need to do? And being on the other side of public relations, I'm part of the decisions when we do new marketing campaigns. How the college wants to promote to our prospective students, so I can take that information, and when we go to do stuff with athletics, I can say this will fit into what the school wants to do and fit into the strategic plan. Or I can kind of make a buffer and say this truly isn't what we're looking to do. It's different from what the school wants. Then when we do have those meetings with public relations and marketing, which we have weekly, I can give that athletics perspective saying I think athletics would say this or want to do that overall.

Lenny touched on in addition to public relations, our area here at Moravian includes the alumni office and development office, so I work with all of those people. I can give them information to go out. A large number of our alums are student-athletes or former student-athletes. So they're always asking for information on how teams are doing and what former graduates are asking about.

The other thing that the focus has been on here with our administration, and this goes down to how we cover some of our athletic things is what's big at your school? Until this point and in the last few months, doing video streaming has not been a big push here at Moravian. Now we're going to be an all Mac Book and iPad campus, we'll have the infrastructure to do it. So in the future marketing and video streaming and things like that will come more on to our plate.

But one of the big things schools push for is service. So we do a lot of stories on when our athletes and teams go out to do community service work. That's important. That's what they want out. Our teams have been very active in Coaches Versus Cancer, Play For K, Be the Match with the bone marrow donation that the football teams do.

So getting that type of priorities where you know what the school wants, what athletics wants, and keep those all in line is very key, I think.

**BLAKE TIMM:** First question that comes up is what are some tips you have, and maybe, Jeff, you're a good one to start with this since you're in the athletic director chair now. What tips do you have on either creating better lines of communication between the sports information office and the athletic director or tips on keeping those lines honest and open throughout someone's career at an institution?

**JEFF BLAIR:** Sure, we talked a lot about this, I think all three of us have talked about communication and how important it is and things that we've tried to do and we've all kind of touched on it a little bit is having regular meetings. I have a standing meeting with not only my entire staff but our support staff as well on a biweekly status right now. So I meet with each coach and each staff member every two weeks.

We also have a staff meeting every month where we touch on a lot of things. What I have created in those staff meetings is updates from all our different departments within the athletic department.

One area that we talked about already is the communications across campus. Really with our sports information office, we -- our SID currently communicates with a lot of different departments across campus in terms of development, marketing and promotions. We are in the process right now of a new branding campaign, and he is directly involved with a lot of that.

So communicating to the coaches what we're trying to do as a university and communicating that through the sports information office is very important to us. So keeping those open lines of communication is very important. I have an open door policy, which I'm sure many of you do, and then your athletics, hopefully your athletic directors do as well.

Scott and I probably, our SID, talk multiple times throughout the day and he probably gets sick of seeing me popping into his office or requesting to come to my office, but it's very important to us to be able to have those open lines of communication in order to achieve the goals and things that we're trying to do here at Ohio Dominican.

**BLAKE TIMM:** Question: My office has never been in athletics. Please provide the negative and positives for having your office in athletics. Mark, maybe you can provide after that the positive and negatives of being a sports information director housed within the PR office.

**MARK FLEMING:** Lenny, I think this one is for you.

**LENNY REICH:** Yeah, well, being in athletics, I think it helps in the idea that your coaches don't necessarily view you as a suit from the other side of campus. You were kind of in the trenches. I think they might have a greater appreciation for some of the things you do because

they'll see you in there early in the morning or late at night. They feel you're in the foxhole with them I guess or part of the team a little more than if you're necessarily coming over from across campus.

I try to encourage SIDs that I talk to that do work across campus is try to go over to the gym when you don't need something. Even just popping your head in and talking on occasion or seeing those people so they don't get the idea that the only time they see you is, oh, here comes this person again, what are they going to need from me or what do I have to provide for them or anything like that.

From the standpoint of covering events, in my case my office is in our athletic center that houses our Natatorium, our field house, our arena, our stadium is right across the street. So I'm right by where those venues are, so getting set up for a game or moving around or those kinds of things, it's convenient in that aspect. I think also, like I said, being able to see people and be accessible where they feel like they can get to you at times or whatever else.

When I worked in PR, I would spend a couple afternoons a week working out of the athletic department. I'd bring over a laptop and set it up, sit at a desk or an open area where then coaches could come and get me if they needed something or I could get some stuff from them and try to do those kind of different things to make it accessible.

I think I definitely don't know if one area is better than another area. I think if you've got people behind you that are working that whoever your direct report is, that direct report believes in you and is on your side and helping you out, whether that's the AD or PR person, I think you can make the job work or make it a great situation.

So in my case, my AD and I obviously spent a lot of time together when he was the head football coach, and even now he and I will have lunch together almost every day and talk about a variety of things. We both kind of keep the same hours. We're both in pretty early in the

morning, so there are times where he and I will be maybe two of the only people in the building and we'll talk about some things and try to hash some things out that way.

Then we have one other assistant AD that is our baseball coach and our women's basketball coach, our senior women's administrator, and we have a guy that's our tennis coach, assistant football coach and compliance director, and he never sleeps. But all five of us, obviously, work together on most of the, I guess would be "the senior staff" that would work together on a lot of projects and things. We're all housed relatively close to each other so we can access those things.

The short answer is accessibility, I guess, would be one of the conveniences of being in athletics.

**JEFF BLAIR:** I would chime in on this too. I would agree with what Lenny is saying, and I put this in my notes. I really feel that my time as a sports information director here at Ohio Dominican, and then seeing the role of our sports information director currently really has the pulse of the department. I really rely on that a lot because the SID really works with all of our student-athletes, knows the majority of them by name, works with all of the coaches. At the same time I try to do my best to do the same things, but when I'm pulled away for meetings and I've found in my role of moving up into the athletic director's role, I know faces a lot more than I know names. I don't have those personal relationships that the SID is able to create through their office, through their work, through writing stories on certain student-athletes or researching them, writing bios on them. I don't get that personal contact with them as much as I'd like to, but our SID does.

So I can really rely on that position to be able to give me information when I need or to remind me this student-athlete has done this or has come from here, and it really helps me along the way. I think that it's very important to be able to have those conversations where I

think it's very important that our athletic department have the sports information office housed in the athletic department.

I've never worked at a university that has it as a PR. I can see positives and negatives on both sides, but I would say that would be the most positive for me in terms of why I like having our set-up the way that it is.

**MARK FLEMING:** Then on my end, one of the biggest pros of being in public relations is the fact that I'm in our administration building. I know all the vice presidents very well as well as our presidents that we've had, and they have helped get some things where if I was in athletics, I wasn't sure if those things would come about in terms of informations or funding things. But because I've been in public relations, we've been able to get those things funded.

Drawbacks, opposite of what Lenny said as positives, I now have to make sure that I do go down to the gym at least once a day, and a lot of times I'll go down not needing anything. I just go stop in and get some coaches. One of the things I see on the flip side as a positive is we have some coaches that like to talk, and if you don't have a lot of time, they can get you caught up by talking about things that might not be important at the time. Being on the other side of campus, they can't just pop into your office at times and take away from the things that need to get done. So I think we have another question there, Blake.

**BLAKE TIMM:** We have two questions. I'm going to combine them into one because they're both very related to each other, almost asking the same thing. What are tips that you have on communicating SID duties to others? What would you tell peer ADs who have not advanced up the ladder on being SID to better understand the demands of the SID today?

**LENNY REICH:** I think one of the things we've done in Mount Union and on our conference level is we've become very pro-active as a group of having an SID presence at our athletic director and conference meetings, so that people can put faces with names and hear from SIDs and hear some of the things that they have going on. I think the publication that was produced by Blake's group at CV MAC and the NCAA, and the group at CoSIDA that produced the Strategic Communication Guide for Division III athletics has helped as well, as far as getting the word out to people and letting people know what is going on.

I think SIDs can't be afraid to tell their supervisor and tell them they need an advocate or discuss openly what the challenges are. What maybe some of the opportunities are in the business right now and knowing those things going on. And working together amongst ourselves. Most of us in our conference had been trying to get more staff, and so we've been sharing memos, proposals and those kind of things with each other that we've been presenting on our campuses and try to advocate those things. Or even talking to coaches from other teams when they come to your gym or whatever. Telling them or getting them on board with those kind of things.

I think sometimes SIDs as a group of communicators, the worst things they communicate is about themselves or their jobs. I think we can't be afraid as a group to promote ourselves, to put ourselves in positions where people know who we are, try to serve on leadership roles whether serving on NCAA committees, CoSIDA committees, those kind of things. Getting involved to get people know on your campus in your conference around your region what you do and how you do it, and how it should benefit on their campuses.

**JEFF BLAIR:** I would agree with what Lenny is saying. I think it's very important, not so much to promote yourself, but to be able to stand behind your work and have that confidence that Lenny talked about before. I think that really with the way things have evolved and the

trends that I've seen in sports information over the years, it's not behind the scenes like it used to be back a couple years, ten years ago or so. It's more in the forefront and getting exposure out there for your university through social media, through your web presence. Those are all things that I think the SID departments that I have worked in, and I'm working with are doing a really good job on, especially here at Ohio Dominican.

Being able to utilize that technology and utilize those tools to promote your institution, promote your student-athletes and coaches, I think that here at Ohio Dominican the coaches have seen a very big, positive movement towards that from our SIDs office, and it's getting us more media exposure here in Columbus, Ohio, which is one area that we challenged or we were challenged with with having a university, a large Division I university here on campus with the Ohio State University. It was very tough to get media exposure. Being able to use those resources to promote our student-athletes has really gotten the word out and gotten our name out.

It helped with the transition from NAIA to Division II, but I really feel the web presence that we have through our office of sports information and social media aspect of what our sports information director and our assistant sports information director are able to do, and educate our coaches on how to use social media in the right way as well, has been tremendous for us.

**MARK FLEMING:** From my standpoint, one of the things that I mentioned before we haven't done a lot with video streaming, but that is something that is going to be coming to the forefront. And I've tried to express to the administration, the athletics administration and people above me, that I think it's great. We need to do it. But you need to understand if I'm running live stats for a basketball game and something happens with the live stream, I can't go

away from one computer to go fix something on another computer. So we need to make sure we staff them.

I also make sure our coaches and administrators are aware of deadlines. A perfect example is we have two newspapers here in Lehigh Valley. We're about two hours from New York City. One of the two newspapers about six months ago stopped printing here in town. It now gets printed out on Long Island and shipped back here every night. So their deadline for us to have anything in the print addition is 8:45 in the evening.

So we were very upfront with the administration, with the coaches saying if you're playing at night, you're not going to see it in the print paper the next day. Don't come to us and complain that they're not covering you. It's just because of their actual deadlines that they can't get anything in. They'll run it online, they'll stick a score in the following day, but I think that's one of the biggest keys is just being out there and talking with people and saying these are what our deadlines are for the conference, for the NCAA, we still have to do this stuff.

We're doing all the bells and whistles which are great and everyone wants to do, but they're parts of our jobs that still need to be done for the sports information aspect.

**BLAKE TIMM:** What a great point there. Thank you for bringing that up, Mark. We've got one more question. Actually, we don't have one more question. We are at the end of our time. So we want to thank our presenters for today's call. Jeff Blair, Lenny Reich and Mark Fleming. And before we conclude the call, I'd like to ask each one of you to make one final point of emphasis for helping keep priorities in line. We'll start with Jeff.

**JEFF BLAIR:** One point of emphasis for me is understanding the priorities of the university and trying to match those to the mission and the vision of the university through your athletic department and your sports information department and communicating those, telling your story. Telling your story to prospective student-athletes, your current

student-athletes, to parents, all the constituencies, your fan base that you're really trying to reach out to is something that I think is very important, and it will help drive the success of not only your sports information office but your student-athletes in the recognition they get.

**BLAKE TIMM:** Division III football, Lenny Reich?

**LENNY REICH:** Not me. You have to call somewhere else for that right now. But, no, I would say to work hard and good things will happen. Have that trust and confidence, confidence in yourself, trust in yourself and trust in your athletic director or your direct report, whoever that may be. Have those real conversations with people and let people know where you want to go, what you want to do, and get forward in that direction.

Like Jeff said, do what you can for your student-athletes, your programs, your coaches, and over time good things will happen to you. If they don't, then it will be somewhere else that you can be an SID and do those things.

But just echoing what I said in the notes and stuff, just trust and confidence in yourself and the people you work with.

**BLAKE TIMM:** And Mark Fleming?

**MARK FLEMING:** Biggest thing is just have open lines of communication all over campus. Whether you're like myself in the administration or whether you're in athletics, be communicating with the athletic leadership, the head coaches as much as possible, and also get across campus and meet those administrators and those vice presidents that are public relations, marketing, whatever it be on your campus, and find out what their marketing strategy is.

If you're not in public relations, it's actually good to know what the admissions office wants to put out there for prospective students. What message are they trying to push? That

way you can use that same thing in all the athletic publications and stories you're focusing on your website or maybe the way you're tweet things out and doing stuff on Instagram and other social media. But you need to have that communication so you know what the administration in addition to the athletics leadership wants you to be focusing on in your position.

**BLAKE TIMM:** Once again, thanks to all of our presenters and our member participants today, and to CoSIDA for supporting the continuing education program. We'll have the audio and a full transcript courtesy of ASAP Sports will be available later today on CoSIDA.com.

**FastScripts by ASAP Sports**