

Athletes staying in class for Masters in coaching

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For most CIS athletes, contribution to their team ends when their eligibility does. But, with the U of A's Masters of Coaching program, some former Bears and Pandas are finding a way back to their former teams by holding clipboards on the sidelines.

Of the four students currently enrolled in the program, three are former Golden Bear or Panda athletes—despite it being available to anyone who has an undergraduate degree and a level-three coaching certification through the national coaching body. Current Golden Bears football running backs coach Jason Lafferty and current Bears volleyball assistant coach Aaron Schulha are both helping with their former teams, while former Pandas volleyball player Jennifer Telfer is also taking her graduate degree.

"[The Masters in Coaching program] is a big reason why I came back from playing volleyball overseas

last year," said Schulha, who spent the past year competing in Europe. "You get a different view from some of the other people who have coached in the past. As well, there are people from all different sports, so the thinking is a little bit different in that it kind of broadens your view on a few things—things you wouldn't think about in your own sport. It's nice to have those different views to help you think outside the box a little bit and apply that to your own sport."

The degree is offered at only a handful of universities across the country, and provides students with not only a Masters, but also a corresponding level of coaching, according to Mike Mahon, Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation.

"When our coaches graduate, they graduate with certification from the National Coaching Certification program, as well as with a Masters degree because of our relationship and understanding signed with the Coaching Association of Canada,"

Mahon said. "Ours is the first program to be able to accomplish that in the country, so it's a real attraction for students because, in the end, it means that they come out with a couple of pretty significant accomplishments."

One distinguishing factor of the Alberta program is that the coaches that guide their teams from the bench at a Bears or Pandas game also advise students of this program inside the classroom.

"Other universities don't have their coaches as part of their academic program; they have them as, basically, fundraisers, coaches [and] recruiters," explained Ian Reade, the coaching concentration coordinator with the Faculty of Physical Education. "Our coaches teach, and it makes a huge difference even in terms of the respect that they have for the student-side of the athlete. They're not teaching their athletes, they're teaching general, run-of-the-mill people in the student body, so they get a sense of what the pressures are on a student. It's a very important piece of

why this all works—if the coaches weren't academic staff, this program wouldn't exist. It's as simple as that."

However, the program—now in its fourth year of existence—has encountered some bumps along the way. One concern faced by its directors is the number of students enrolling each year; on average, only four students enroll for their Masters in coaching annually, with coaching seminars being offered every two years, bringing the student total to eight. Because of the demand for high-level coaches in Canada, Reade—one of the people spearheading the degree—said that he would, ideally, like to see coaching seminars being offered every year, and to more students.

"We're struggling to try and figure out what the real number should be—if you get too big, the quality of the experience for the students in the seminars just isn't there," Reade explained. "I don't think you can have a good seminar beyond eight or ten students, so it's hard to say where it's going to go."

THE PROGRAM

- It was started four years ago by a group within the Faculty of Phys Ed and Rec, headed up by Dr. Dr. Marshall.
- It takes two years to complete.
- Students take four mandatory courses that are coaching-specific (physiology and psychology courses, as they relate to sport sciences), and four courses that are optional, but should be related to something involving sports (ie sports ethics, sports organization, etc)
- Graduation from this program is the equivalent of a level-four or -five certification from the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP)
- It's a non-thesis program. Instead they do a capping project that focuses on some aspect of coaching, as well as a six-credit practicum working directly with a national team head coach, or the equivalent of.



Roy Halladay is an imposing figure.

He stands 6'6" on a raised mound and fires balls at people at almost 100 miles-per-hour. Luckily, despite our sports editor's love of the game, the *Gateway* doesn't spend a lot of time covering Major League Baseball. Instead, we try to focus on the Bears and Pandas, covering the games that happen on campus. If this sounds like fun to you, fire off an e-mail to sports@gateway.ualberta.ca

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