



# Coronavirus Sends Athletes to the Sidelines

BY RYAN FRIEND

**T**he novel coronavirus has left college athletes around the world in an unfortunate and extremely difficult new environment in which they must adapt and succeed. Many athletes thrive in their tight schedule, which allows them to excel in whatever sport they have chosen to pursue. Campuses have provided the resources, equipment, coaching and many other things needed for college athletes to perfect their craft, but as the virus has begun to take athletes away from their normal routines many are beginning to cope in different ways.

Many college athletes were in the heat of training, preparing for the spring season when the coronavirus began to spread at an alarming rate, causing many athletic administrations and the NCAA to restrict college athletes from training in school facilities and eventually canceling the season in its entirety. With one decision, a college athlete's dreams and goals instantly have been put on hold. All the work and preparation that they put in will have to wait another year.

The NCAA is debating whether to give student athletes an extra year of eligibility to make up for their

season's cancellation, but with many on partial scholarships, the extra season may be too costly to continue their collegiate athletic careers. And other college athletes, for example basketball players who were eagerly preparing for their chance to compete in March Madness, that dream has been snatched from them due to the cancellation of the NCAA national championship tournament. This was the last chance for many to compete on a high level as they have no desire to become a pro player or in some cases the last chance players have to impress professional scouts and teams as they try and improve their draft stock. Men's basketball team captain Zac O'Dell, a senior at Swarthmore College, told reporters: "This was it for me — it's all over. I'll be playing in some local men's leagues."

These times are especially hard for college athletes because many of them thrive on daily routines that are most likely impossible to maintain during the pandemic. Those routines consisted of training regimens, dietary plans and building chemistry with their teammates for the season ahead.

Destany Shepard, a dancer at Towson University has tried to make best with what she and her team have available. She has converted her basement into a

small gym and practice area so she can stay in shape during the social distancing quarantine. She and her dancing team VIBE have begun to use online platforms like Zoom to stay connected and continue to build chemistry for their choreography. “Yes, I am disappointed but it’s out of my control and I just will work with what I got,” she said. Even while working out at home she has maintained her goals and has made progress towards her weight loss goal.

**N**ow that all of that their seasons have either been taken away or made more difficult, these athletes may be having feelings of anger, pressure and anxiety. Ayanna Johnson, a transfer student from the North Carolina A&T State University outdoor track team where she struggled physically and mentally, was fully prepared to come into this outdoor season at Bowie State and do what she has loved to do. Since the novel coronavirus caused the season to be canceled, she has repeatedly thought to herself, “Why did this have to happen?”

“All of the blood, sweat and tears we all put in has gone down the drain,” she said. While her morale may have been down following the cancellation, she has been given time to reflect on how the events have transpired. “What is in store for not only me, but my teammates, and everyone else?” She found a renewed sense of optimism that she hopes everyone will see that this may be a setback, but there will be bigger and better things coming for her and her teammates.

**E**ach sport and its athletes will have a unique response to the adversity facing them, some easier than others. For example, athletes that participate in sports such as golf, tennis, volleyball and football are all sports that an athlete would need special equipment and playing fields/arenas to train at their utmost capabilities. Because of the pandemic, these facilities are not readily made available to the athletes who need them in order for them not to diminish their skills.

For example, Mary Marquez, a member of the Notre Dame of Maryland University Gator women’s volleyball team, has just come off a season winning the CSAC championship and was looking forward to preparing with her team for next season. But due to the restrictions, it has only been possible for her to work on her cardio conditioning in isolation.

Spring sports such as basketball, baseball, lacrosse and softball all need other participants to be played at their regulation standards, which aren’t possible with the social distancing order in effect.

What has happened on campuses because of COVID-19 is unprecedented. Many of the athletes seem to be taking this in stride as they deal with the adversity surrounding them and try to stay ready to showcase their talents. For those who won’t get another chance they are thankful for the journey that athletics has given them. The virus may have taken away their games, but the determination and work ethic remain intact.



Photos courtesy Bowie State University