

We Stand Together: The Purpose of SAS Athletics



Al Wood January 4, 2018

Director of Athletics Al Wood gave the following remarks to the Board of Trustees at their fall 2017 meeting. Wood introduced "We Stand Together," a video and photo project created by the School's student-led Athletics Committee this past spring, in conjunction with the Athletics Department and the Communications Office. You can see some of the We Stand Together photos on these pages, and watch the We Stand Together video at standrews-de.org/we-stand-together.

We Stand Together was born of a desire to reinvigorate our dedication to a culture of engagement. As all of you know, when you are part of the St. Andrew's community, there is no such thing as "sitting on the fence" or "dipping your toe in the water." This process demands full and unreserved commitment for success. The "we" in "We Stand Together" does not just refer to our athletes. "We" encompasses our coaches, our teachers, our advisors, our administration, our parents, our alumni, and it encompasses all of you here in this room today. Your unwavering commitment and support for St. Andrew's athletics allows us all to fulfill our purpose for which I, and the rest of the Athletic Department, are deeply thankful.

So what is the purpose of St. Andrew's athletics? This summer, I found myself trying to find the right set of words to describe the emotions of all of the goals and outcomes we

hope to achieve with our athletes. In all of my research and soul searching, I kept coming back to one simple phrase: "education-based athletics."

On the surface, education-based athletics is a phrase often used to describe interscholastic sports in general, or perhaps even the teacher/coach/advisor model. But at St. Andrew's this phrase means so much more.

I am blessed to have three children who are III Formers here at St. Andrew's, and are all three participating in sports. As much as it pains me to say it, I can only assume that being the child of a father who has dedicated his life to athletics comes with a certain amount of inherent stress and demands. If my children have a competition that I don't get to attend, I still ask the same questions most parents ask after a game: Did you win? How much playing time did you get? How many goals did you score? Did you PR at your meet? Even after 20 years of working in education-based athletics, I still get caught up in the day-to-day successes and struggles of youth sports because winning and losing is an inextricable and positive part of athletics.

But if I take a step back, and instead of viewing my children as the 14-year-olds they are today, look much further into the future and see them as the adults that they will become, with careers, and families, and all of the obstacles and tests life will inevitably place in their paths, our purpose becomes crystal-clear. Athletics has always been about creating "moments." Not just memories, but experiences that are powerful and real, experiences that we call upon long after we step away from the fields, courts, pools, and boats.

I would love if every athlete at St. Andrew's could know what it feels like to be standing on a field under the lights during a state tournament game and to have busloads of their classmates cheer them on while singing "When the Saints Go Marching In" to energize and drive them to victory. I also want every athlete to know the price that must be paid in sweat and tears to earn that moment. But there are other moments beyond these that are far more important. I think of Ben Horgan '19, a Saints boys soccer player who knows exactly what it feels like to have the stands filled with his classmates cheering him on. But when Ben recently lost a childhood friend to a tragic accident, his teammates surrounded, supported, and comforted him. They lifted him up and they helped him be strong. This only happens when a school believes in the power of community. This only happens when a great coach like Matt Carroll demands that his players arrive every day unified, and challenges them to develop a stronger sense of faith and trust in one another on and off the field.

These are not lessons you learn simply by showing up and playing sports. They are not learned in easy wins or blowout losses, but in the messy and dirty spaces in between. Education-based athletics is the testing ground where students practice the skills and develop the resilience to handle life's real and demanding challenges. It takes special,

dedicated, and steadfast coaches who are unwilling to lose focus on the teaching and mentoring of these values. This is St. Andrew's education-based athletics. This is our purpose.