

MOUNT SPORTS

COVID-19 shuts down Mount Athletics

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MSMU Class of 2020

It's been a hard having it taken away so suddenly without really any warning but it truly does teach you not to take anything for granted," says senior softball player Jordan Weaver after the heartbreaking announcement from Mount Athletics declaring all spring sports cancelled for the rest of the academic year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rocked by the COVID-19 virus, dubbed coronavirus, the entire sports world has come to a halt. The NCAA made national headlines when it decided to cancel all Winter and Spring championships which includes March Madness, a decision that will cost the NCAA over \$817 million in planned television-broadcasting fees for its men's and women's basketball tournaments. The NBA soon followed suit, postponing the remainder of its season after one of its players tested positive for the virus. And like dominoes, everything else fell in unison- the NHL, WNBA, and XFL all postponed season play. MLB postponed spring training and pushed back opening day play two weeks as of the time of writing this article.

For the Mount, the cancellation of the NCAA winter sports championships and the spring sports seasons altogether, affects 13 teams, 353 athletes and 69 senior/graduate student-athletes.

The women's basketball team, poised to play in the semifinal round of the women's NEC basketball tournament versus Fairleigh Dickinson, was alerted of the cancellation of the tournament just seven hours before tip-off.

In an interview with the Frederick News Post, head coach Maria Marchesano told a reporter, "I said we probably played our last game of the year to my husband." She soon got her players together and broke the news, and, "As soon as I started talking, I saw a couple of [the players] tear up." The women's basketball team had their first 20-win season since their 1999-2000 trek to the NCAA tournament, and this year they were just two wins away from appearing in the NCAA tournament.

Graduate guard Kendall Breesee told the FNP, "I just kind of broke down. I was super upset, and I think I was shocked because we were all going about our days getting ready for the game."

Katelyn Kinsella, a senior captain on the women's lacrosse team also felt the shock of suddenly knowing that the lacrosse match against Howard, just 20 hours earlier, would be the last time she would put on her white jersey with number 17 on the back.

"Out onto the field yesterday never did I truly think it would be the last time ever," she said. "Growing up playing sports and being a part of multiple teams, I never thought my career would

end this way." The women had just won their sixth game of the season over Howard by 12 points, to stand at 6-1, and were looking to make their way back to the NEC tournament title match after losing by one-point in last year's championship game against Wagner. Kinsella echoed a sentiment seemingly shared by athletes across the nation: "This is a heartbreaking experience for not only all athletes, but especially senior athletes."

A person who can strongly relate to Kinsella is Aaron Weisel, a senior midfielder on the men's lacrosse team. "[This feeling] sucks. It's been an integral part of my life for 8 years, and I woke up the next day with a slight sense of feeling directionless." He says that he is still training, but not at the same level as if things were normal for him: "I hate being home this early and being separated from my teammates and other friends." Weisel is just one of the 17 seniors/graduate student-athletes on the team, and feels that, "to have it end like this through no fault of my own is infuriating." The men's lacrosse team finished their season at 3-4, and like the women's team were aiming to make it back to the NEC tournament after last season's disappointing overtime loss to Robert Morris in the semifinal round.

Yet, for many of the athletes, hope is not all lost. After an online petition went around the internet calling for the NCAA to give spring athletes a year of eligibility-relief, the NCAA put out a statement on March 13 saying, "Council leadership agreed that eligibility relief is appropriate for all Division I student-athletes who participated in spring sports." This news gives hope for many, but not all including those who had post-undergraduate plans already lined up.

Justin Kimble, a senior sprinter on the outdoor and indoor track & field teams, is just one of many stu-



The fields, the courts and the track are empty as the COVID-19 Pandemic shuts down all athletic activity at the Mount.

dent-athletes at the Mount whose focus is to graduate. "My next steps are likely to just graduate. I'm currently not planning on taking a 5th year," he said. Though hurt, Kimble recognizes that the steps the NCAA took is for his own benefit: "It's devastating that my career ended in a way that was out of my control, but this is a worldwide pandemic and all measures should be taken to slow the spreading and save lives. If I have to sacrifice my last season for the greater good, then that's okay." Unlike the other 11 spring sports at the Mount, the outdoor track & field team had yet to start their season when the news about the cancellations hit.

The Director of Cross Country/Track & Field, Jay Philips, told his athletes to stay positive and learn from this experience. In an email addressed to the team, he reminded everyone that, "You've literally been preparing for things like this, and you've been blessed to able to prepare for them using running, lifting, jumping, and throwing. So, go... go out and find what

mountains the world needs moving and move them. You won't have to look very far...you're walking into a world that's more uncertain than ever before, but you, more than many others and more than you know, are ready to face it."

Though heartbroken, lugubrious, and dismayed, many of the athletes at the Mount are trying to stay optimistic. For Kimble, this experience has made him thankful for the opportunities he had and the future opportunities he will have: "The cancellation has not really affected my mindset much; just made me want to appreciate things more since we don't know when opportunities will be taken

from us." For Kinsella, this ordeal has allowed her to reflect back on her journey: "I am forever grateful for the places I have been, lessons I have learned, and most of all the people that have been brought to me from being an athlete." Weaver receives comfort from the solidarity around the nation, saying, "One thing that really helps me is knowing that it's just not the Mount that's going through it but all senior athletes in the country."

The Mount has transitioned to remote learning for the remainder of the spring semester.

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