



Washington State University

Native Youth Sports Summit

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Native Students Learn from Collegiate Athletes

by Faith Price



(l-r) Panelists Sam Mendez, Ashlee Bonahoom, and Derek Johnson speak to a packed house at the Native American Youth Sports Summit November 10 at WSU.

If you want to be a college athlete, it's going to take a lot of discipline and hard work, and you should start developing those qualities now. That was the resounding message students attending the Native American Youth Sports Summit received.

One hundred middle school and high school students from around the northwest were on hand Sunday, November 10 to listen to three Native athletes speak about the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of participating in college athletics.

Ashlee Bonahoom (*Iroquois/Cherokee*), Sam Mendez (*Klamath/Wyandot*), and Derek Johnson (*Saginaw Chippewa*), were on hand to share their experiences as college athletes. Bonahoom is a senior on WSU's women's rowing team. Mendez, also a senior, is a former member of the WSU golf team. Johnson played football for the University of Hawaii and now works for WSU Athletics, and is the only Native American Academic Coordinator in all of Division I.

Bonahoom was a multi-sport athlete in high school. She competed in gymnastics, track, water polo, swimming and diving. She hadn't heard of rowing until her senior year. A connection through a coach brought her from her home in Kelso, Washington to WSU where she made the rowing team. Unfortunately, her first year here, she couldn't compete because she hadn't taken enough math in high school.

Johnson stressed to the Summit participants the importance of their high school academics.

"If you want to be a student athlete, the first thing I want you to do is go back and talk to your high school counselor," Johnson told the audience.

Student athletes must have at least a 2.3 GPA to play in Division I, said Johnson, and must have completed all coursework for high school graduation and NCAA eligibility requirements. This includes having taken four years of English and three years of math higher than algebra I, among other coursework.

In addition to staying up on your academics, all three panelists emphasized the importance of discipline and time management to be successful as a college athlete.



Sports Summit Participants from Port Gamble S'Klallam pose with Butch.

Johnson shared the tight schedule of his football students. Their day starts at 6 am when they hit the gym for weight training, then classes from 8 am to 1 pm, followed by practice from 1 – 5:30 pm, a short dinner break, then from 7–9:30 pm mandatory homework/tutoring time. Mendez and Bonahoom echoed his words.

Golfers are also in the gym by 6 am, said Mendez, and with strict punishments, they don't dare be late.

"Your sports schedule is set for you (in college)," said Mendez. "There's no, 'I don't want to do it today.' That's tough. So school is what you can control."

Mendez grew up in Portland, Oregon and played basketball and baseball in high school. His dad however, thought his son was best at golf, and encouraged him to concentrate on that sport. Mendez listened, and it paid off with a position on the WSU golf team.

Having a busy sports schedule in college has been a positive for Mendez, as it keeps him on task. He recommended students use a planner to help them keep on top of homework, exams, and scheduled practices and

sports events.

Rowers practice six days a week, said Bonahoom. Their one day off is Sunday, but it's far from a lazy day.

"We call it Sunday Run-day," she said. "We'll all go for a 3–4 mile run together, just to get an extra workout in, because there's always someone working harder than you."

Following the panel, participants headed to Beasley Coliseum to cheer on the WSU women's basketball team in their 3rd Annual Native American Appreciation day game vs. Syracuse. The team sported turquoise Nike N7 T-shirts specially designed for WSU, and the first 200 fans received one as well. The game started off with a flag song, and halftime entertainment included a rounddance song by Lightning Creek singers of Lapwai, Idaho.



While the ladies couldn't quite pull off the win in the hotly-contested game, the team stuck around to sign autographs, including Native

Sports Summit Participants from Suquamish cheer on the lady Cougs!

Hawaiian players Lia Galdeira and Dawnyelle Awa. Overall, the knowledge gained, and experiences had, made the day a big win for the Native American Youth Sports Summit participants.

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