

Huffnes_Sports_Med_Rollins

[Introduction]

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Hello and welcome to the weekly podcast from the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance. I'm your host, Tim Lightfoot, and every week we bring you interesting individuals in the world of sports medicine and human performance. And as we say every week, this week really is no exception because we have a wonderful guest with us. We have Mr. Zerick Rollins with us. Welcome to the podcast, Zerick.

Zerick Rollins. Thank you, Tim. It's really a pleasure to be here. Love the opportunity to be able to share.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. We're really glad to have you and I'm going to tell the audience a little bit about you so they know where you're coming from and then we'll just kick off with the conversation. Zerick came to Texas A&M from Houston. He originally graduated with a degree in economics and has his master's degree in educational administration from here at Texas A&M. Currently, he's a scholastic supervisor for student athletes at Texas A&M and where he helps them build a career and life skills. I don't want to say more importantly, but Zerick is also known as an athlete here as well. He was a defensive end here at Texas A&M in 1997, where he helped lead us to the Big 12 South division title and played in the Cotton Bowl in 1998. He won the academic achievement award as a student athlete, served as a graduate assistant here. He was a graduate assistant under R.C. Slocum who we've had on in the podcast in the past, as listeners know. He worked with the Seattle Seahawks in 2001 as a defensive assistant coach. He moved through the ranks and started coaching linebackers in 2005. Coached them in the Super Bowl, as a matter of fact, against the Pittsburgh Steelers. And so we're so glad to have Zerick here, back here in Aggie land, to share with us. And thank you again for being on the podcast.

Zerick Rollins. It's good to be here, it really is.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Good deal. Let's talk about the Super Bowl.

Zerick Rollins. All right. That's a good one.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Was it fun?

Zerick Rollins. Awesome.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Was it?

Zerick Rollins. Unbelievable experience.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. What's your memory from that?

Zerick Rollins. Just getting there, that's the first memory, but losing the game. You don't get to the Super Bowl to lose.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Right, right.

Zerick Rollins. But just going through the entire experience was awesome, unbelievable.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. You didn't get to go to Disneyland afterwards, did you?

Zerick Rollins. No, I did not.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Sorry, bad joke. We really wanted to talk to you today about your role here as scholastic supervisor. One of the themes that we've built on throughout the couple of years we've been doing this is about the life of a student athlete. So many people think the term "student athlete" really is false, that the kids come here and they're really athletes first and students a distant tenth. That's really not the case, is it?

Zerick Rollins. Not at all. Having been a former student athlete here to me the student definitely comes first. For me and that was emphasized from my family, my parents. You go to college to get a degree. That's most important and athletics is just extra and your chances of making it to a professional level are slim to none. So to me, it's all about academics. That's where it starts and you have the privilege to being able to play athletics.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. How do you help kids to understand that, though? Most of them come here, I was in a conversation last night with a parent who thinks that her child is going to become a professional baseball player. And so they're not worried about future schooling, because he's going to make it in professional baseball.

Zerick Rollins. My biggest thing is, I want to help student athletes see the big picture. That's what I tell them. Don't come in and see life through a straw. There are so many other opportunities here. First off, you're at a great academic institution. You talk about the Aggie network. There's just so many other positives of being at Texas A&M other than playing athletics. So they see the big picture and they put themselves in a situation where they get a degree. They meet people, they network. They're going to put themselves in a win-win situation because if you come here with the aspiration to just play professionally, the odds are against you. When you just talk just about football alone, you have a less than 1% chance of making it. And so why would you come in with that approach? The odds are clearly against you.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So let's make sure the audience understands that. So 99% of the time, you're not going to make it into pro ball.

Zerick Rollins. Exactly.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. That's big odds.

Zerick Rollins. Yeah. And so one of the things that I teach the CHAMPS class, which is for our freshman, sophomore student athletes.

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And towards the end, I have this one class where I say, "Okay. You guys play the lottery." And they look at me and say, "No, what are you talking about? Nobody wins the lottery. We don't play the lottery." I say, "Well, guess what. You're playing the lottery if you come here with the anticipation of just going pro and that's all you're thinking. And what I'm saying is the odds are clearly stacked against you." So my message to you is, put yourself in a win-win situation. Get you a good degree, get out, network and now the odds are in your favor.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Nationwide, there's such an emphasis now on, especially freshman come back for their sophomore year, this whole retention thing. Being a freshman athlete, it must really must be pressure packed for these kids. What the biggest problem they have when they come on campus?

Zerick Rollins. I think the biggest thing is just the time management. Because you have so many things that you're trying to get accustomed to. And then on top of that, everything has increased in terms of difficulty. You play at a higher level, competition-wise, school's going to be harder. Just being able to manage and balance all those things. That's normally the biggest adjustment for all of them.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. On top of that, do they have issues with – all of a sudden now they have more independence than they've had and that becomes part of their time management issue?

Zerick Rollins. And I tell them distractions. Because now you got the independence, and more times as not as a student athlete, most of your time is structured. Your day is gone, but you do have some free time and what you do with that can have a huge bearing on your success level.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. I can remember going to college and my big deal was I could eat any time I wanted to. Sounds silly now, but that was the sign of independence for me. It was I didn't have to eat at three specific times of the day. Cool. So you've done a little bit of it all in your career at this point and you're a relatively young man, still. So as you think back, you were a coach at a very high level. What made you decide to get out of that coaching track and come back and work with students in their scholastic achievement?

Zerick Rollins. I don't know if I necessarily got out of it. Going into the coaching, you know it's a volatile business. I knew that, know the odds and how things work. You see coaches who are moving there year to year. And so going into it, I've always said, "What's your contingency plan? If for some reason you can't find a job, what else would you want to do outside of coaching?" And so at 22 years old, that's what I was thinking and got my masters in education administration, so I always had the plan to have an opportunity to be an athletic director. And so

for me, when I couldn't find a coaching job, I spent seven months working with Northwestern Mutual, which was a great opportunity for me. But when I saw this opportunity, it was the opportunity to get my foot back in the door and do something that I was passionate about, which was helping develop young student athletes.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. People see athletic departments and they really see the coaches as kind of the – the head coaches they see as a representative of the athletic department. But there's a whole side of athletics that almost a very stable side, especially in the student success rate side of things. So you're saying you went back into that almost for stability to do some other kind of impact things.

Zerick Rollins. First off, it was a passion of mine. Because when I first got into coaching, my thing was, I wanted to have an impact and so my coaches were very impactful to me. R.C. Slocum, Bill Johnson who's the D-Line coach for New Orleans Saints, but I just wanted to have an impact. At first, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I did an internship with Dr. Thornton. I did that for six months and wasn't sure if I wanted to go into athletic administration or coaching. So it was kind of a toss-up. I said, "I'm going to give coaching a try because I think I can have more of an impact." But coming back here doing this, this is still part of my passion. I wanted to be able to impact, help develop and in the position I'm in now, I may not just be working with football players, I'm working with all sports. Which makes it neat, but at the end of the day, I'm still helping impact, helping them see the big picture, helping prepare them for life after.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. What's the difference across the sports? We have, for the folks that are listening that aren't familiar with A&M, we've got a wide variety of sports teams here, men's and women's, ranging from football to equestrian. What's the difference in working with those? What's the similarities and what's the difference in working with all those athletes?

Zerick Rollins. Similarity first. All of them are very competitive. They take pride in what they do. You notice that right off the bat. I think we have a lot of good coaches. I enjoy really talking to all the coaches. But every team has their own little culture and they have their own little personality, which is neat. So I'd say that's the difference. Just every team just does things a little bit different because of their culture and just the different personalities.

[10:02]

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. That team dynamic changes, too, doesn't it?

Zerick Rollins. Oh, yeah

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. I mean, one of the things as an instructor I've noticed, I can teach the same section of a course in the same semester and the two classes will have completely different personalities. That's the same way with these teams. They change on a yearly basis.

Zerick Rollins. No question, no question. And that's what I love most about working with the student athletes. Working with all of them, not just football, is that there's never a dull moment because there's so many different personalities. You're talking about over 650 student athletes.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Wow.

Zerick Rollins. So actually enjoy that.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. You're the perfect man to deal with this next issue which is just take head on this myth of the dumb jock. As a group, and we're talking about a group here, how do student athletes compare to the normal student population, as far as academics? How they do?

Zerick Rollins. I don't know how they necessarily compare, but I will say this. That if you're a student athlete here at Texas A&M and you're competing at a high level, athletically and you're going to class and you're getting a degree, I think you got to have to have a certain skill set to be able to do that. That's not easy. And I can take you back. I read an article last March in the *Wall Street Journal*. And it was talking about how all these people were so successful in life. They were CEOs, lawyers and doctors. The one common thread with all of them, they were all former student athletes. And they said, "Why are you so successful?" They said, "Because of the things that I've learned from being a student athlete." They are transferrable skills. So I would say that if you're a student athlete and you're graduating, that you're going to have certain things that you can take out into the real world and be successful. And so I just think those are things that you, that unless you're in the military, I don't know where else you would learn some of the things you learn from being a student athlete.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. I can't speak for the history of some sports, but nowadays, the complexity of play is such in so many of these sports that if a kid is not bright, they're not ever going to get on the field. I think about football playbooks and I also want to talk to you about that. Football playbooks are incredibly complex things that they have to digest, learn. I think about wide receiver coming to the line, how many different reads. Let's talk about defensive end. How many reads have you got to make before the ball is ever snapped?

Zerick Rollins. Yeah, I'll tell you. It's a very fast game so you have to be able to make decisions, make plays on the run. But yeah, just to concur with what you said, Bill Belichick, that's one of his biggest things. When you look at his teams, most of his guys have graduated because that's something he looks at and they're just smart players. And you look at the success that he's had, but there's something that goes into the picking of his players. He wants smart guys.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. What was the difference between coaching at the college level and the pro level? In both the systems and in the players themselves.

Zerick Rollins. First off, college, you're not going to be as complicated, just because you don't have the time. You have your 20 hour rule.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Just tell the audience what the 20 hour rule.

Zerick Rollins. Basically, the 20 hour rule is basically saying that you are only able to practice, watch film, do anything that deals with a sport for 20 hours. So anything outside of that would be a violation, a NCAA violation.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Is that really enforced?

Zerick Rollins. Yes, very much so.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. I have to ask because the audience is sitting there going, "Yeah, right."

Zerick Rollins. Now obviously, if you want to be the best at what you do, you can come in as a player and get more time in, which most players will do that. If you want to be average, you're doing 20 hours. If you want to be the best, you're putting in extra time, but it has to be on your own.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. We want the audience to think also, we talk about a full time job being 40 hours a week. If they're limited to 20 hours and the better players do more than that, we're looking at minimal, a half-time job, if not more to be an athlete.

Zerick Rollins. I would say, really, you're putting in another 10 to 15 hours, on top of the 20 hours, by yourself as player, if you're trying to be good.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. So we got the 20 hour rule out of the way.

Zerick Rollins. Obviously, you can't be as complicated. And then at the NFL level, everything gets faster. Everything gets much faster in terms of the players are bigger, they're faster, everything just happens at a rapid rate. So those are probably two of the biggest differences between college and NFL.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Is that one of the measures of success, for those players? The ones that can adapt to that changing speed.

Zerick Rollins. Oh, yeah. Because either you adapt or you're going to get weeded out. That's just the nature of it, especially at that level, because now you're getting paid. And so it's a business. And that's probably another difference. Whereas in college, there's a little more emphasis on the development of the students, because they are student athletes, whereas at the NFL, it's more of a job and you're getting paid a lot of money to do a job and so it's more of a business.

[15:05]

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. With all the fluidity of that kind of business, you don't play well, you're gone.

Zerick Rollins. Oh, yeah.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Especially if you're a kicker.

Zerick Rollins. No question.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. And we won't get into kickers. So let's I guess talk about your life as a student and what you've translated now for the current students that you have. What were some of your methods for excelling in school that led you to the achievement award that you won and your success that you've had since you left?

Zerick Rollins. For me, a lot of things generated for me just from playing athletics most of my life. Growing up playing little league, playing in middle school, playing in high school. And in order to be good at anything athletically, you had to put in time. And so I knew that and I watched myself grow as an athlete. But the same thing applies for a student. For me, when I went into a classroom, I was competing.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Competing with everybody else in the class.

Zerick Rollins. Because life is about competition and so when I step into the classroom, I may not have had the highest SAT score out of high school, whatever the case. But I was in the classroom with these same students and my thing was that I was going to compete against them.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. How do you get students to take that attitude? Because there's so much nowadays we hear about students not caring about whether or not they do well in class, that there's a social stigma about being smart.

Zerick Rollins. To me, what I try to relate to the student athletes is the same approach you take being successful athletically, you take that same approach into the classroom.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Just another competition.

Zerick Rollins. It's just another form of competition. And if you take that approach, more times than not, you're going to be successful. And then it's the same approach you're going to take out into the real world. When you're done playing athletics, when you go out and you have to go work for whomever, it's that same approach. All the things that you learned from being an athlete, the hard work, setting goals, reaching goals, having to deal with adversity. All those lessons, take it with you.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Seems like today's social media world has really amped up the external pressures that kids get, especially if they gain somewhat notoriety on the field or whatever. Then they're really watched very closely. How do you help students deal with that because we've had

a recent case where the course choices of one of our players was roundly criticized in the national press but in hindsight was probably the best thing for him to do.

Zerick Rollins. I think the biggest difference, it's distractions. Anytime you have more time to access to more things, they can lead to distractions. And so I'll always tell them be careful what you're doing. Don't spend too much of your time with the social media. And I know this is the social media age. But also understand that what you're saying, it doesn't go away. And then when you're getting ready to find a job and companies are doing background checks on you, a lot of that stuff comes back up. So just be smart and I would say limit it. Don't overdo it. I think that everything in moderation.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. That's something that you and I didn't have to deal with.

Zerick Rollins. I know.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Which is fortunate, actually. I'm glad that there's some things that I've said that have gone away. Well, we've enjoyed having you here today. Thank you so much for being here. As our audience knows, we always end with some specific kind of things. Tell us what your most prized memory as an athlete is.

Zerick Rollins. I would go back to the Cotton Bowl, my last game as an Aggie, playing the UCLA Bruins and I sacked Cade McNown for safety. So that was a thrill.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. That's not a team we get to play often, the Aggies, for whatever reason, we don't play UCLA all that often.

Zerick Rollins. Cade McNown was a first round draft pick.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. That made it even better. There's a lot of hype around that. As people listen today, what's the take home message you want them to take away from this today?

Zerick Rollins. I think the big thing when you think of student athletes, to me they have a skill set and they have opportunities and learning experience that a lot of people don't get. And that can prepare them for life after. And to me, it's about development and if we can help develop out student athletes, especially here at Texas A&M, because you think about the academic institution we have here, that we're basically developing future leaders. They have some innate ability that they can go out and they can make an impact in their sphere of influence.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Excellent. Excellent take home message. Again, thank you for being with us today.

Zerick Rollins. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. And I'd like to thank all of you that are listening for taking the time to download us and listen today. And as always, we have our question of the week.

[20:02]

And here with the question of the week is Kelly.

Kelly. According to the NCAA rules, how many hours a week can a student athlete engage in sport specific supervised activities?

Dr. Tim Lightfoot. Be the first one to email us at huffinespodcast@hlkn.tmu with the correct answer to that. Zerick's sitting here, dying to answer that question, but we're not letting him answer the question. Be the first one to give us the correct answer to that and you'll win one of those nifty podcast t-shirts. And as I keep saying over the last several weeks, better hurry up and answer it because we're running out of those t-shirts and you want to make sure you have a full collection of them. We've enjoyed having Zerick with us, again thank you for being with us and we've enjoyed having all you with us as well. We hope that you take the time next week to download us and listen to us as we bring you another interesting individual from the world of sports medicine and human performance to your earphones and until then we hope you have an active and healthy week.

[Conclusion]

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