

Huffines Sports Medicine Podcast  
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- S0 00:07 Welcome to the Sports Medicine podcast, brought to you by the Sydney and J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply, and bring you the most up-to-date coverage of the wide world that is sports medicine and human performance, all in a language you can understand and share with your friends. Now, here's our host, the director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.
- S1 00:36 Hello, and welcome to the weekly edition of the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance. I'm your host, Tim Lightfoot. We're very excited today about our special guest that we have in collaboration with the Texas A&M Coaching Academy. Today we have Mr. Justin Moore with us, who is the associate athletic director for football at Texas A&M. Welcome to the podcast, Justin.
- S2 00:55 Thank you. Thank you for having me.
- S1 00:56 We're really happy to have you. Let me tell the audience a little bit about you, and then we'll just jump into our conversation. As the Associate Athletic Director for Football at Texas A & M, Justin works alongside Coach Kevin Sumlin here to run the football team. He's been with Coach Sumlin since he was at the University of Houston. He served as the director of football operations there, and then as assistant AD for football. He was a special assistant to the senior associate athletic director here at A&M before that. He has a bachelor's degree in finance and a masters in sports management from Texas A&M. He was the captain of the Aggie baseball team. He was a freshman All-American pitcher, All-Big 12 Team recipient of the university's Pat Olsen Most Valuable Player award, named to the academic All-Big 12 team for four straight years. He has an interesting side and worked as a risk consultant for Deloitte LLP. He's here at A&M. Welcome again to the podcast. We're glad to have you here.
- S2 01:54 Thank you. Thanks for having me.
- S1 01:56 You're welcome. We want to talk to you about what you do as the Associate Athletic Director for Football.
- S2 02:02 That's a great question.
- S1 02:02 There's a lot of background people that work. On TV, we see the coach. We see, of course, the players, and the athletic trainers when they run out to [show?] up somebody. But big time college football is a big operation.
- S2 02:14 Absolutely.
- S1 02:14 It takes a lot of people to make this thing work right.
- S2 02:16 That's right. I oversee all of the day-to-day operations of the football department, which includes the budget, all the purchasing, the scheduling,

facilities, academics, all the things that go into the student athlete's life. Then, I also oversee the administrative side of recruiting, which is what most people want to talk about and think is a cool thing. Probably the easiest way to put it would be, I oversee everything except coaching a position. Anything that's not coaching-related on the field would fall under my role. But like you said, there's a lot of really talented and important people that go into that, and we've got about 15 full-time staff that work just in that area, that don't have anything to do with the actual coaching of the team. It is a big operation, there's a lot of people that do a lot of really good work, and it keeps everybody pretty busy.

S1 03:22 Now you've been involved in this for a while. It's my impression that that side of football, college football in particular, has really grown over the last 10 to 15 years. Is that true, or is that just a misperception of [crosstalk]?

S2 03:33 No, that's absolutely true. Really, it's grown probably the most in the last three to four years. Recently the NCAA has changed some legislation that's allowed you to add some positions that before were prohibited. Even on the field coaches, we've now gone from two graduate assistants to four, which has helped. But non-on-the-field positions has grown tremendously, so much so that we're going through a renovation of the Bright Complex because we don't have near enough office space. Because when the building was built ten years ago, staff sizes were completely different than they are now. We've added some really key staff members, but we've got to find a place to put them.

S1 04:19 [chuckles] Space is always a problem on a university campus, isn't it?

S2 04:21 That's right. Absolutely, yeah. Then we'll get to parking and figure out where they're going to park.

S1 04:26 Park [?]. [chuckles] That's another story. That's another podcast altogether, right? Is this growth in staffing due to increases in compliance rules from NCAA, the complexity of the game, the complexity of the whole process?

S2 04:42 It's not because of compliance rules. It's more about the complexity of the game and just how competitive it is at this level. The margin for error or the thing that separates you from the next team is so small now that people are just looking for the next advantage. You're starting to see big time college program's office structure look almost like an NFL team. We're getting towards that model more so than what most people are used to.

S2 05:21 The biggest difference that I'm not sure will ever change is in professional football, the scouting department and the coaching department are completely separate. The scouts select and pick the players, and the coaches just kind of coach who they get. In college, that's not the case. The coaches make the final decision on the players that they want to recruit and then sign so that they're comfortable with who they're coaching. That's the biggest difference in professional football and in college football. Other than that, the departments are starting to look really similar.

S1 05:59 How did you get into this? You were a baseball player, and you kind of-- we think of this as different, the transition into football or whatever. You were certainly not working in the athletic field for a while, so how did you wind up doing this?

S2 06:14 Yeah, I get that question a lot because I have an unusual background for this

position. But now, being in the position, it's actually the perfect background. I didn't know that at the time. It just kind of worked out that way. I was playing baseball here at A&M. Like all college baseball players, thought I was going to play baseball forever, ended up having a shoulder injury, had surgery, and got a job working for Deloitte, which is a Big Four public accounting firm. I realized about two weeks into that that's not what I wanted to do [chuckles], but everybody--

S1 06:46 [chuckles] You missed the smell of grass, right?

S2 06:48 Yeah, I just missed-- my whole life, I was all about sports. I played football, basketball, and baseball all the way through high school and just missed being around sports. That's what I was passionate about.

S2 07:01 I knew I wanted to get back into sports. I just didn't know exactly how or exactly what I wanted to do, but I had everybody telling me if you spend two years at a Big Four accounting firm and you have that on your resume, you can get a job for the rest of your life. I stuck it out for the magical two years, and while I was doing that, I was really just trying to research and figure out what I wanted to do and how best to get back into athletics.

S2 07:26 I decided that the path was I was going to go to graduate school here at A&M, and I was able to get a job working in the athletic department because in this industry, experience is so important - more so than what's on your resume. I was able to get a good job, getting to see a lot of different things in athletics, and did that for about two years as I was going to school.

S2 07:51 Coach Sumlin, at the time, was at Oklahoma, and my wife and his wife were good friends. When he was an assistant coach here - what was that? 12 or 13 years ago now - they had a membership out at Pebble Creek Country Club. My wife actually worked out there, and that's how they first met and became really good friends. We stayed in touch, and I had got a chance to be around him a couple times, so we knew each other a little bit and kind of followed each other's careers. When he got the job at Houston, I had just finished grad school. We ended up going to dinner and spending a lot of time with each other. He said, "You know, I have a position that you would be perfect for." I didn't even know what he was talking about. He said, "Send me your resume and your stuff on Monday." I still didn't know what he was talking about.

S2 08:39 I did some research on it and figured it out, and I said you know what, this would be really, really good. Then I started talking to some people that I trusted and that knew a lot about it, and sent him my stuff, went down to interview with him and the athletic director for a day or so, and got the job.

S2 08:57 I came to find out that he had-- we knew a lot of the same people, and he had done an extensive background check on me. I didn't find that out until later and, fortunately, it checked out. That's how I first got in. I'll give Coach Sumlin credit because the position is not an Xs and Os position. It doesn't require great football expertise, but it's really more of a business position. I had a business background, and that's what he wanted. It really was the perfect fit, and he and I couldn't fit better with each other now. We're best friends, and we spend more time with each other than our wives, unfortunately. [chuckles]

S1 09:36 You talk about the good fit. With your experience, especially with your undergraduate degree, and your years in business, and what you said your job

responsibilities are, it does seem like a great fit.

- S2 09:48 That's right. Yeah, it is. Especially at a place like Texas A&M-- football, you're dealing with a large budget. Fortunately, I have a finance background. I did some auditing work, and so I've seen a lot of budgets. A lot of my job is almost HR-related, personnel, and hiring, and that type of stuff. Like I said, I didn't map it out that way on purpose, but like a lot of things, it works out how it's supposed to. I look back and think it was great experience the way I got here.
- S1 10:21 We have a lot of listeners that are doing their undergraduate, so they're students. That's one of the reasons we ask these questions, is because they want to know how do they become the next Justin Moore? One of the things that our podcast guests continue to say when we ask the question is 'Meet as many people as you can. Know everyone you can. Build that network.' That certainly sounds like the case that helped.
- S2 10:44 You know what, it takes a little bit of luck to get sometimes in front of somebody, but obviously your reputation and the work you've done to that point is going to come into play at some point. I'd say a couple of things. One is, whatever you do, do absolutely your best job at it, no matter what it is. I had someone tell me some great advice one time. They said, "If someone tells you go outside and pick up rocks, you be the best rock-picker-upper they've ever seen." [chuckles]
- S2 11:12 It's funny, but in this industry, it's so true because there are so many people that want to get into sports, and they're willing to do a lot to get in. Most of the time it's for free at the beginning, or the pay is really low. To be able to separate yourself, you can't-- there cannot be a question of your work ethic or, 'I'm above that.' That can't even come into question. You have to be willing to do whatever it is and to do it better than they've ever seen it done before. That will just will even get you in a position to maybe get a full-time job or a paying job.
- S2 11:46 And then, you're right. This industry is so much more about who you know and the relationships that you build with people. Most people are not going to hire somebody either they don't know, or that they don't know someone really well that knows them because it's such a trust industry. Especially in coaching, where there's a lot of turnover, guys are hired and fired based on results, and so they're going to look at it and say, 'Okay, I've got this job as the head coach at XYZ. This is my only shot. If I'm going to win or lose, I'm going to at least do it my way with my people.' They've got to trust you. To do that, they either have to know you or know someone really, really well that trusts you and knows you.
- S1 12:32 There is a lot riding on these positions.
- S2 12:34 Absolutely, absolutely.
- S1 12:35 People from the outside look at it and go it's just a game. It's just wins and losses, but these are people's lives, because universities more and more are willing to ditch everybody and start all over again.
- S2 12:45 That's right. It's good and bad. The more money that is involved now, the higher the risk. But you know what? We know that when we sign up for it, and that's part of the job. But you're right, that's a great point. I think a lot of the time, fans or just people watching think, well, it's just a game. They can't imagine why certain decisions are made or why they would do this or that. This is people's

livelihoods, and there's a lot that goes into these decisions, and usually a lot of things that people don't see, but it's a great industry, it's a fun industry, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

- S1 13:24 It's like being with the circus though around here most of the time, nowadays.
- S2 13:26 Yeah. I'll tell you what, it's changed so much, even from when I was in school as a player, and baseball is obviously not near as visible as football. But even knowing the football guys, you didn't have Twitter, you didn't have Instagram, you didn't have social media, you didn't have camera phones. It's just changed now that the media attention and how everything is just instantaneous. It's really changed the sport, and obviously, society, but it's putting a lot on these young kids. It really is.
- S1 14:02 Yeah. We've said this before in podcasts, is people forget how young these players are. Whether it's male or female athletes, they are 18 to 22 years old, and sometimes we expect them to act like they're 30 already.
- S2 14:16 That's right. For us, I would bet you 80% of our guys are from non-traditional homes, from different backgrounds where a lot of times, it's our job to teach them, mold them, and educate them on what is right and wrong. They truly don't know until they get here. They've never been told how to act or what's okay and what's not. That's a huge part of our job. To be honest with you, coaching - the Xs and Os part that coaches will tell you - that's the easy part, and they don't spend near enough time on that. It's all the other stuff that takes up most of your time. [chuckles]
- S1 14:53 Yeah. Speaking of change, you've been here a couple years now when Coach Sumlin came in. We've seen just a huge change in the football culture here for a variety of reasons. What has been the biggest challenge for you over those two years? Because two years ago, I can remember going into the stadium for the first game saying, "Okay, new conference, new coach, new freshman quarterback. We have no clue what's going to happen." Here we are two years later with huge expectations.
- S2 15:20 That was the biggest thing - without question - was changing people's attitude. We kind of joke, the Aggies look at it as it's always going to go bad.
- S1 15:34 [chuckles] Real fatalistic.
- S2 15:36 You know, we're up two touchdowns in the third quarter, but somehow we're going to screw this deal up. I knew it, because I lived it. I had come to a lot of A&M football games growing up as a kid, and then I was obviously a student athlete here and experienced it. That was the biggest thing, was just to change people's mindset that it's not always going to go bad. Don't look for reasons why it won't work, or don't say, well, we've always done it this way. That's the biggest thing was, hey, you've always done it that way, but honestly for the last 30 years, you've been 500. If you look at the whole thing, so if you don't want to be 500, we're going to have to do something a little bit different.
- S2 16:19 I think Coach did a great job of going about that the right way and not being just kind of over the top and saying we're doing it this way because I said so. He has a great savvy about him, about kind of changing things, but also doing it in a way where you don't offend a lot of people. But that was the biggest challenge, without question, was making changes in things that had been going on for a

long time, and then changing just the attitude of not just the athletic department and the players, but the fan base, too. Hey, it's going to be okay. How about if we're down in the third quarter and we think, 'hey, we're going to come back and win the game'? That's what we've got to get to.

S2 17:02 I think, like you said, it's pretty amazing in two years now-- it's funny. We went from 'you guys are going to get killed in the SCC, you have no chance', to now, the expectation's that you should win every game - which is great. You'd rather have it that way.

S1 17:16 You talk about change though, and people who aren't from A&M or haven't been to A&M that are listening to this podcast, they may not understand, but tradition is a huge thing here. If something happens three years in a row, it's tradition around here, and people go, 'No, no, no. You can't change that tradition.' To come in and change some of these things, that's a big deal.

S2 17:34 Yeah, I think you're right. That's a great point. A lot of people have that same problem going into different organizations, but A&M is an extremely unique organization. You're right, everything's about tradition. Our point was, we don't want to change what makes A&M great. We're not trying to change traditions, but there are certain little things that aren't going to take away from A&M's tradition. If we wear a different uniform now and then, A&M's still going to be A&M. It's still going to be a great place, but to the kids and to the demographic we're trying to attract, that stuff's important.

S2 18:10 You have to understand that. If you want to be successful and you want to play at an elite level, there are certain things you're going to have to do to compete to get elite players. We have to figure out how do we do that while still maintaining A&M's great tradition and their culture. I think we've done a good job of that, and we'll continue to try to do that going forward.

S1 18:31 You mentioned uniforms. The other thing that came to mind was, you just changed where the players came in for the game. Instead of coming in at the south end zone, they come in from the northwest side of the stadium. Now it's natural.

S2 18:42 You know, people think that's a little thing, but-- and that was Coach Sumlin's baby. It just bugged him that the team entrance, originally, was just not a grand entrance. You could see the guys immediately when they came out of that door, and there just wasn't a lot of show to it. That's important to the players, just right before the game as they're about to play, kind of getting that feeling of the crowd and the excitement. We talked about it for a long time of, how can we change our entrance based on the setup of our stadium? We worked with 12th Man Productions and said here's kind of what we want to do, and we came up with a plan. They said, well, it's about an eight-minute process. People that don't know coaches well, as you get close to game time, those minutes are really important when you're in a locker room. Coach said, "That's okay." He said, "I think it's going to be good." We practiced it a week or so before the first game with nobody in the stands. All they had was the music and the video board playing so we could get the timing down. It's the middle of the day and we're walking with the kids in street clothes, and the kids were fired up. They were like, 'Coach, this is awesome.'

S1 19:53 [chuckles] Ready to go right now.

S2 19:53 And we knew it. We said, 'All right. We got it.' They were ready to go. That was neat.

S1 19:58 Let's go.

S2 19:58 Yeah.

S1 19:59 So, what jumps out at you right now? You talked about the kids there. I call my students the kids, and yes, these are grown adults. Yes, we understand that. No one write in, we know that. But what differentiates the student athletes of your day when you were playing ball, against the student athletes of today?

S2 20:17 Wow. I'd say first thing that comes to mind is just the microscope that these kids now are under. That is a huge difference. I don't think people understand that. I mean, they almost have zero room for error, and a lot of times, it's not fair. Sometimes they make bad decisions, absolutely. There are consequences for those, but I don't think people understand what their day-to-day life is like with not being able to do anything that's not on camera or not seen or put on social media. That's probably the biggest difference from when I was in school to now.

S2 20:55 You always hear of kids are different now. They're just more entitled, or they're this or that, but I don't think kids are different. I think the way that kids are raised are a little bit different. You can still coach kids hard and require them to do a lot of things if they know that they can trust you. That was a big thing that I think Coach did a great job of early, and he and the coaching staff is getting to know the kids personally and building a good relationship with them before we even started practice, so that the kids could trust them, and they believed them. If they trust you, then you can coach them hard, and you can get what you need out of them just like you could 15-20 years ago. But they're just brought up a little bit different than they were. It doesn't seem like that long ago.

S1 21:46 [laughter] No. We've had guests on, and I know from my observations being in the classroom for the last 25 years or so, it seems like the coping capabilities that so many of our students now have are diminished. They haven't faced maybe as much adversity many times. Parents are very protective of them.

S2 22:03 That's right.

S1 22:04 It's like something happens and it's the end of their world. Or they have the video game mentality - 'Okay, I'll just restart and go over again.'

S2 22:12 The thing that we're getting to now, when you recruit elite level players is, their whole life, they've always been the best of the best. Nobody's ever told them anything negative. The first time that happens, they almost look surprised, like they don't believe you. Like, hey, you have really bad body language right now, or whatever, and they're like, 'What?'

S1 22:33 Who are you talking to? [chuckles]

S2 22:34 It's not that they want to be offended, but they're just surprised. Just changing, sometimes, the mentality of these kids is a little bit challenging.

S1 22:48 Yeah, and when you hear people talk about that, that's a big differentiator. They've been all five star, four star, or whatever. They get to a university where they're playing with all five stars and four stars. It's the ones that can actually

step up and continue to improve their game at that point.

- S2 23:04 That's exactly right. That's exactly right. For a lot of these kids - probably most of them - this is the first time they've ever been surrounded with players of equal or close to equal ability. Some of them can't handle that competition. They've never had to, and when it hits them in the face, they just don't know how to react. That coping mechanism, like you talked about, and so they just either shut it down or go the wrong way, but the really good ones, they thrive on that. Yeah, but that's a big deal and something that you don't really know in the recruiting process until you get them here. That's one of the challenges. That's why it's an inexact science. You just can't duplicate that until you put them in it.
- S1 23:49 Right. To maybe throw you a little bit of a curveball here, but this would be something that you've observed I think. We talk a lot about the sports medicine aspect, and we've talked a lot about concussions and yadda yadda, all that other stuff. Player safety is a huge deal now, and how the sports medicine side of the team is integrated into the coaching decisions. I have been impressed with how that's done here at A&M. Is that similar to what you think goes on around the rest of the country?
- S2 24:18 I would hope so. You know, you're right. That is such a touchy subject. You're usually talking about issues that coaches don't know anything about, and the sports medicine people are the experts. The coaches, obviously, they want their best players to play, and that's really their main concern. I think it's important that the sports medicine doctors, they have the final say. They do here at A&M, so if the head trainer or the head team doctor says he can't play, he doesn't play.
- S2 24:51 I hope that's the way it is everywhere. I think it is in most places, but you'll always have places where the head coach is the most powerful guy in the room usually, so they have a lot of influence. But we're fortunate. We've got a great sports medicine staff, and we have a great relationship. Our head athletic trainer, David Weir, he's in our staff meeting every day. That's usually the first thing we go over is the medical report. What he says, goes. We have great communication. I think that's obviously key, but we kind of put that in their hands.
- S1 25:28 Yeah. It's been great having you here, Justin, today.
- S2 25:31 Sure.
- S1 25:32 We thank you so much for your time today.
- S2 25:33 Absolutely.
- S1 25:34 We're running short on time, and as we give all of our guests though, we're going to give you an opportunity to give a take-home message. If there's anything that you want people to remember from this conversation, what would that be?
- S2 25:44 I would just say that in a football program like Texas A&M, there are a lot of people that go into putting the product on the field that you don't see or you don't know about that work a ton of hours, that work extremely hard, and do a great job. The product on the field would not be possible without their work. I just want people to think about that when they go to the game, and you look down on the sideline, and there's a lot of guys wearing khakis and polos.



[chuckles] Those guys do a lot of really good work to make what goes on the field possible. They don't get as much credit as they deserve, so that's what I'd leave you with.

S1 26:23 So it's a justified benefit to have a sideline view of the game, right?

S2 26:26 That's right.

S1 26:26 Absolutely, after all those hours. Absolutely.

S2 26:26 Yeah. That's right.

S1 26:29 Again, thank you for being with us today. And I want to thank all of you for taking the time to download and listen to us today. Regular listeners of our podcast will know that this is the time where we have our podcast question of the week. With our podcast question of the week is our producer, Kelli.

S3 26:45 What is the biggest difference within the departments of professional football and college football that will probably never change?

S1 26:52 All right. Great podcast question of the week. Be the first one to email us the response to that, and you'll win one of those nifty podcast t-shirts. That email address is [HuffinesPodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu](mailto:HuffinesPodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu). Again, thank you all for taking the time to download and listen. Please join us next week when we have another interesting person from the world of sports medicine human performance, and until then we hope you have an active and healthy week.

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S0 27:58 If you have questions or comments, please send them to [HuffinesPodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu](mailto:HuffinesPodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu). From all of us at the Huffines Institute, we hope you have an active and healthy week.

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