



Building Alumni Community through Athletics

Traditional sport rivalries between universities can re-engage all alumni on an annual basis. *However, among those alumni who were student athletes, a tighter knit alumni community can be developed.*

Student athletes are fiercely passionate about their sport. They expend intense amounts of time and energy with team members and coaches. They work tirelessly and fearlessly to excel in competition. Spending so much time together in pursuit of common goals builds strong friendships with teammates -- and a student's identity with a particular sport runs deep. When the team is part of the university, a student's loyalty to the team can translate into loyalty to the university. This loyalty to team, teammates and sponsoring university can continue as students become alumni and can continue for a lifetime.

Alumni athletic associations can nurture loyalty to fellow team members and the university. For example, at Yale, self-organized alumni athletic associations were the first shared interest groups (SIGs). Alumni used them to provide monetary support for equipment and coaches to current student teams as well as networking and career support for alumni who had been team members. This sense of ongoing family may translate into more general support for the University. See Athletics Overview.

Friendly competition among athletic team alumni can strengthen friendships and develop new ones. It can continue to build on the emotional bonds that developed among teammates who competed together. It can help develop new bonds among athletes of different generations. Possibilities among non-contact sports are myriad. They can build sustainable traditions that support team and university. For example,

- Yale's swimming and diving teams have a Blue Legends Alumni Swim during their annual winter alumni weekend.
- The Yale golf team annually has an alumni golf outing in the fall.
- Yale's men's and women's crew (rowing) teams regularly host alumni rows during reunions, large events, or just because a few former teammates called their head coach to request it. In conjunction with endowing their head coach position, the women's team recently celebrated their 40th anniversary with six teams of alumni "eights" racing!

Such competition is facilitated in many sports through recognized systems of age handicapping. Others have traditions (often called "pro-am" for professional-amateur) of pairing more robust or skilled players with less skilled ones. Still others, such as basketball, reduce contact aspects of the sport for older athletes.

Athletes like to engage through sport – even new sports. Golf is a favorite and can be the basis of friendly but competitive outings among former teammates. For example, Yale's golf course hosts an annual alumni event for the volleyball, soccer, hockey, football, basketball and lacrosse alumni associations.

Friendly competition between alumni and students can build important networks. The potential advantage of such competitions is that it creates friendships and networks that bridge generations, and can result in connections that help students get jobs when they graduate. Former athletes understand the teamwork and focus that young athletes can bring to any job. These intergenerational networks strengthen the sense of family among team alumni – and a sense that the university is part of that family. In some sports athletes remain competitive for many years and can compete directly with younger ones, especially when honed skill, hand-eye coordination, or the elements of teamwork are more central than raw force or speed. Consider fencing, archery, or sailing. For example:

- The Yale Association holds the Dernelle Every Tournament as an annual event when alumni can fence against current student fencers, followed by a banquet.
- The Yale Sailing Team has an annual spring alumni regatta which current students often join.