

From the AD: Introducing the Cougar Core

by Joe Pott

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EDWARDSVILLE - On Monday evening, near the end of the official first day of class for SIUE, our student-athletes converged on First Community Arena for our SIUE Athletics Student-Athlete Welcome Back and inaugural Cougar Games.

For SIUE Athletics, it was the first time since pre-COVID that our student-athletes have had the opportunity to officially start a year together. For me, it was the chance to officially commence my first year as the Director of Athletics.

Our night included introductions to our coaches and staff, our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee President Alexis Hutchins and the SAAC's Executive Board, Dr. Venessa Brown and Ashley Beaton Simpson introducing our leadership development programming, and the Cougar Games. The Cougar Games mixed our student-athletes into different teams to get to know each other better and compete in a variety of "In It To Win It" games.

Finally, our night together provided an opportunity for me to share the new core values of SIUE Athletics – Cougar Core.

When I arrived at SIUE, I arrived with the priority of guiding our collective mindset and culture collectively to achieve success. Success in and out of competition. Success as both individuals and teams, and as coaches and staff. Success as an athletics department, as a campus, and broadly as a community of fans, alumni, and supporters.

Below are my remarks to our student-athletes on Monday, introducing our Cougar Core values.

As fans and supporters, I would ask you to join SIUE Athletics and allow these new values to serve as a guide for our expectations, our philosophies, and our actions.

Commitment – Be Committed to your preparation. Be committed to yourself and being the best version of yourself. Be committed to a mirror-first approach, meaning holding yourself accountable. Be committed to your academics. Be committed to our community. Be committed to competing with the passion and energy it takes to win. Be committed to each other.

Optimism – I believe that positive things happen through optimism and belief. Be optimistic about SIUE Athletics. Bring positive energy. Believe in yourself and others. Be solution-oriented.

Unity – All of our teams will be more successful when they are united. I ask you to have that approach not only within your specific team but with all of our teams. We have a rule on our staff that I refer to as "No US vs. US." We can't maximize our results and success with internal conflict. Work together. Collaborate. Embrace our diversity. Ensure we have a culture where everyone feels included and has a sense of belonging. Unity does not mean we will not have conflict, but, when you do have conflict with a teammate, a peer or coach, do not allow that conflict to linger and be disruptive to our success.

Growth – I think there is an argument to be made that there is more growth experienced on a college campus than anywhere else. My college President John Roush had a commitment that college was a place to become a better version of yourself. That is our commitment as an athletics department. To relentlessly pursue progress in ways that allow us to become better versions of ourselves. I charge you to do the same this year. Make progress. Grow and develop in and out of your sport. Set and achieve ambitious goals. Self-reflect and take care of yourself to foster that growth.

Appreciation – Let's be an athletics department that has a culture of appreciation. Appreciation of the opportunity to be here representing SIUE Athletics. Appreciation of those that helped us to this moment. Appreciation of the opportunity to compete. Speak with pride about being a Cougar. I also ask you to have an appreciation of differences. Dr. Brown and I were talking this morning about the natural diversity that exists in college athletics. Embrace and appreciate the opportunity to interact with people with different backgrounds, experiences, personalities and world views. Appreciate the differences in coaching styles, in the roles you might play for your teams. Finally, let's be an athletics department that appreciates others. Congratulate each other, show gratitude, say thank you.

Resilience – One of the reasons so much growth happens on a college campus is because of adversity. Growth happens through adversity. Just like there is natural diversity in college athletics, there is also natural adversity. Some that is in our control and some not. Wins and losses. Missed shots, missed putts, errors. Injuries. Referees and umpires. Just yesterday, Coach Burton said after our women's soccer game – "Sometimes losses give you more to think about or to learn from." Let's be resilient this year and embrace that adversity. Grow through our mistakes and losses. Outwork our opponents.

Commitment, Optimism, Unity, Growth, Appreciation, and Resilience. That is our Cougar Core. I hope you'll join me in embracing these values and allowing them to guide our success this year.