

128. Ryan Ivey: Rivalries Renewed

Gavin Kelly

Hey, everybody you're listening to beyond 1894 this is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications, and our guest for this episode is Vice President and Director of Athletics, Ryan, Ivey. Ryan, we appreciate you making time. It's summer, so you know, it's easy to say, you know, it's a downtime, but that's not really true in athletics, is it? I mean, you're

Gavin Kelly

always getting ready for the next year. And also, nothing's really happened recently, right?

Ryan Ivey

Nothing's going on. Absolutely, life is good, and we're not. We're sitting around twiddling our thumbs trying to figure out what to do with our time.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, so everybody's on vacation. Nothing's going on. No, let's, let's talk about this. News is very fresh at the time of recording. Just a couple days ago, there was a press conference about it. The day before that the news broke officially. So, um, Louisiana Tech University has accepted an invitation from the Sun Belt Conference to join the conference. Uh, let's talk about, kind of the thoughts behind why that's a good move, why that's beneficial for Louisiana Tech athletics, and kind of what the process has been like, and some things you look forward to moving forward with that

Ryan Ivey

yeah, it's certainly, it's an exciting time for us, you know, in the in the opportunity to renew rivalries that we've had for, you know, for for many, many years, I think first and foremost is really important for us. And when you look at just the geographic nature and the makeup of the Sun Belt Conference, it certainly makes a lot of sense for us to be a part of it, right? And when we look at the success that the Sun Belt Conference has had over the last, you know, four or five years, I mean, arguably, and from a metric standpoint, they're probably the leading FBS non autonomy conference. And so the opportunity for us to get in that very competitive league, you know, they've had a ton of success from a football bowl standpoint. Obviously, Coastal Carolina this year was in the national championship series. In the college baseball World Series. They've had multiple teams in softball, you know, NCAA Tournament. They've had multiple teams and other tournaments for for other sports as well. And so I think it's a really good fit for who we are as an institution. When you look at the average enrollment size of the Sun Belt institutions, taking out Texas State, and then us coming in, you know the average enrollment 14,000 just a little bit over 14,000 well, that fits who we are, right? When you look at the communities that these institutions are in, they're very similar to Ruston, right? They're smaller college towns that make sense, where the where the community kind of thrives based on the institution as well. So I think those things align with us. And then obviously, you know, we're going to have six within 340, miles of us. And you know, right now, our closest one in Conference USA is five and a half hours, you know, five hours from us and, you know. And so I think, I think all those things factored into and I think when

you put all that from just a data point metric standpoint, I think you think, all right, this, this makes a lot of sense. And then the residual effect and the residual benefits that come from that really stem from we're going to miss we're going to have less miss class time, you know. So from an academic standpoint, our student athletes should be able to be in in class more. We're going to have less travel costs. So from a financial standpoint, we're going to reduce travel costs. At the same time, we're going to, more than likely going to be able to increase revenues just based on the teams that we're going to have coming in from a ticket sales standpoint. So I think our games are going to have more interest to our fans, but we're also going to have more interest in visiting team fans, because they're going to be able to get here and travel more. And when you think about what has made college athletics great over the last you know, twenty thirty, years, it's about the fandom, right? And fans have made college athletics great, and that stem from regional rivalries and things of that nature, and then what I call just good old fashioned hate sometimes, right? As you go through it, and for us to get back to that point, I think, is very, very important for us, and as we look at the landscape of college athletics and how it's changing, especially from a financial standpoint, it's changed drastically over the last two years with the house settlement and so for us to be able to find a way to reduce expenses in one area, maybe be able to reallocate those expenses into other areas to help us manage, you know, our balance Sheet better, I think those things are certainly really important to us, and we're deciding factors as we went through this process.

Gavin Kelly

and it's built in, buy in, right? Like knowing that, like you said, the teams that we're going to be playing against, our new our rivalries renewed. I know we use that as a hashtag, but it's true, are within driving distance, correct? By. So the teams, student, athletes, fans, they're already bought into the idea of, like, Yeah, let's go,

Ryan Ivey

yeah. I mean, the response has been fantastic. It really has. And nothing, you know, I think, for years. And when you look at back at all the transition conference transitions that Louisiana Tech has made, there's been purpose behind those, right? I mean, when we left the Sun Belt the Sun Belt the first time, well, the Sun Belt didn't sponsor football, right? We were independent football, and that is a hard thing to do, especially when it comes to scheduling, but also not having the bowl tie ins. And, I mean, you go back to, I think it was 1999 where we were eight and three and beat Alabama on ranked in top 25 and didn't make a ball game. I mean, that's unheard of today, right? And so to be able to have a conference, and so at that point in time, university administration, athletic department leadership, had to make a decision, join the WACC, which, when you look back at the makeup of the WACC, there was a regional component too, because we had rice and Tulsa and SMU, right? So you weren't beyond just on an island by yourself. Then obviously, when the WACC fell apart and the Mountain West started, and then things happen with the AEC in the American Athletic Conference, and all those things that shifted from Conference USA. Then Louisiana Tech came on an island by itself then. And so then you transition in the Conference USA, and you get back to some regional component to it makes a lot of sense where you are. And then obviously the landscape has shifted again in conference realignment. And so this makes the most sense for us where we are right now, and certainly it's going to help us. And I think people are really excited. I mean, generally, at our your tech and your town events. I mean, we've had some conversations this past week, and it's been really good, and everyone is excited about

renewing those rivalries. I mean, I've already seen comments on social and fan bases going back and forth, right? And it's, and that's what it should do, right? It generates interest and exposure to the institution.

Gavin Kelly

I think even when it was sort of rumors swirling around, the trash talk was getting pretty hard and heavy right right away. And, you know, you kind of look at that, and it's, you plenty of people from other schools or whatever, just having strong opinions about why we should or shouldn't be in the Sun Belt, and but you look at that and you're like, This is the reason why we should be in the sun it's like, look at what it's doing. Yeah, yeah. And it's such a crazy time. It's sort of like a everybody's in a bit of a gold rush moment, trying to move around commerces and do what's best for them. I think, you know, with the big shift, even in the power five Commerce has kind of trickled down, and everyone's, you know, kind of looking out for what, what could be the best move. It's changing.

Ryan Ivey

It is That's exactly right. And look, and ultimately, it's in the day we keep score, and we're trying to find competitive advantages for us to be able to help grow the institution, right? And I've used this term, and I'm not the only one in college athletics, but athletics is the front porch of the institution, and our responsibility is try to make sure that we paint the institution in the most positive light possible. And in doing so, we need to be in a league that allows us to do that from an exposure standpoint, but also getting people to campus right and the opportunity now that we have to get more people to campus. And look, this is not a knock on anyone, right? This is not any one person's fault. But, I mean, how many people are going to come from Delaware to Ruston, right? And I'm just being honest, right? And that's where where we are. And you know, how many people are coming from, you know, Springfield, Missouri, to Ruston and when you think about where we are in the makeup of conferences, even Las Cruces, New Mexico, you know, Miami, Florida. I mean, in Lynchburg, Virginia, and everywhere, kind of in between. It's it's challenging, right? And so now we get that opportunity, and it creates an opportunity for us to help, from an economic development standpoint, with our community, because we know we're going to have more visiting fans coming in. We get an opportunity for for to expose our campus to maybe others that are in these areas. And when they step on this campus, they see how gorgeous this is, and see how beautiful it is, and see the people and how welcome and inviting they are. They may think themselves. You know, I really want to think about going to school here, maybe that was something they weren't thinking about before. And so I think it just gives us this opportunity to really paint the institution in, really in the best light possible. And I think that's, that's what's really exciting,

Gavin Kelly

yeah, yeah, it's definitely, it's going to be exciting time presently, it's a no later than summer 2027 right? So I'm sure there's going to be a lot between now you're working through that process, of course, I'm sure. So stay tuned if you're listening for that. Updates on that. Now, being a part of such a big decision transition, whatever you want to call it, kind of here at the tail end of your first year as AD it kind of makes me wonder about what the first year has been like for you. But I think before we talk about that, we'll go back to the beginning, sure you because I don't know, do you just wake up one day and decide I want to be an AD or start us from the from the get go, and tell us about kind of where you're from, and what those early sort of decisions you made were that kind of guided you to where you are now

Ryan Ivey

Yeah. So I grew up in a small town in West Kentucky called Mayfield, Kentucky, and grew up on Yeah. Just under 50 acres, and, you know, learned the value of hard work just by being on the farm, right? And those type of things and what we did, but fell in love with sports at an early age. I remember, I mean, my earliest memories are playing basketball, right? And state of Kentucky, I jokingly tell people we know two things, and that's bourbon and basketball, and maybe those are in opposite order sometimes, but fell in love with sport, right? And played as many as I could. I played three sports in high school, and was fortunate to be able to walk on the University of Memphis as a football student athlete. There. I use that term loosely, because I was a punter and a holder, and some people don't think that, some people think don't think that football player, but I was able to see that and again. So I was able to utilize intercollegiate athletics as an opportunity to really go to college and later under scholarship while I was there and understood and again, like every 18 year old, when you walk on a campus, they asked me what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, and I had no idea. But when they started talking about, hey, there's sports management, you can major in sport, and it was just what I was passionate about and what I wanted to do. And so got both my undergraduate and graduate degree from the University of Memphis. But I can remember distinctly thinking about I wanted to be a coach, like this is what is something I want to do, wanting to coach. I was passionate about it. And as we as I went through that process, I had a conversation with my head football coach at the time, Tommy West, and I remember talking to him about maybe being a graduate assistant, kind of what that process looks like. And He distinctly told me, he said he called me poison. That was my nickname, because my, because of my, because of my last name. But he said poison. He said there are two types of coaches, those have been fired, and those are going to be fired, he said. And so you need, just need to be prepared for that as you go into and I think that's kind of the running joke in the coaching profession, right, as as you look through there. But it really got me to thinking of, all right, well, what can I do to help that, right? What can I do? And so I really changed my mindset of, how can I get into administration, to think about maybe coaching our coaches and helping them along the way and guiding them and serving them as well so that they can, in turn, serve our student athletes. And I just felt like I would have a bigger impact if I was able to do that, maybe behind the scenes, and maybe people wouldn't know me as well as you're going to know coaches, and that's okay, right? And that's that's not why I got into the business, but the opportunity to be able to make an impact on coaches who then make an impact on our student athletes, I think, was really important to me, and so, so that was kind of the genesis of me getting into athletic administration. And then I started the University of South Dakota marketing promotions coordinator there for about four months. And then Memphis called me, and they had a job opening with the Women's Basketball Program Director of Operations. And so I went and did that for two years, and gained a valuable insight just on the team side, and kind of learned some things there, but again, always knew I wanted to get into administration. And then from Memphis, I went to McNeese State for five and a half years, was assistant associate ad down there. And then I was able to go to Texas A and M commerce, which is now East Texas A and M was That was my first ad job. I was got that job when I was 31 didn't have a clue what I was doing, but figured it out as we went. Was there for almost three years. Went to Austin, Peay for three years, and Stephen F Austin for six years before I came here, and so the path and the journey has been interesting along the way. In every place that I've been, we've tried to really focus in on making it better and growing and creating opportunities for our coaches and our student athletes

Gavin Kelly

Talk about that first move to AD, because I think no matter the institution, I think anybody jumping from any role to AD, it's got to be a bit of a scary one, right?

Ryan Ivey

It is no question. And I think probably, you know again, what scared me the most, and this is probably a little bit being naive as you walk into a position like that, is that everything that you've done up until that point before you sit in that chair, chair has been theory based, right? This is what I would do if I was the ad, right, in the conversations and thoughts in my mind, well, when you sit in the chair and now the decision rests with you like that's a different weight, right? And that's a different responsibility, what we have. And so I think that first year for me was learning to really be comfortable with who I was as a decision maker, and having a specific decision making process that I could be consistent with moving forward. And so again, you learned a lot. You learned a lot about yourself, and I learned a lot about myself and who I was in that first year, and trying to figure out what works and what doesn't work. And I was very thankful to have a have a president and the late Dr Dan Jones, who really invested in me and helped me along the way and and did some really, really cool things to help me grow as a leader. And I think I still remember those things today, and certainly utilize those as I move forward.

Gavin Kelly

Let's talk about the jump to Louisiana Tech then, was that something that, you know, you kind of just saw an opportunity and thought and weighed the pros and cons, and thought maybe so, or was it kind of, you were looking for a move or a change, or how that had that come about, and what was that decision like?

Ryan Ivey

Yeah, Gavin, it's a great question. I mean, you know, I was at Steven F Austin, we were happy with where we were, you know, we had some challenges there at SFA, and part of it, quite honestly. I mean, I'd been there six years and gone. Had five presidents and just a lot of transition, a lot of turnover. And so we were going through a new presidential transition at the time, and I just felt like the timing was right. And I say this for a couple of reasons. One, Dr Henderson was new. He was hiring an ad to be able to come in early on a President's tenure, from an athletics perspective, is really important, especially from an ad's perspective, because you become that partner with them. Yeah, and I think it helps to align vision and values and what you're trying to do, so you can really help to move things forward. And I felt the same way about SFA. I felt like, look, at the end of the day, there's a new president coming in. Athletics is going to be important over there, not that we couldn't have had a good relationship or anything, but I felt it was important for him at the time, to be able to hire his person, right, and be able to create an opportunity to help that place grow. And so I think as we, as we move forward, as we got to that point, and this job came open, obviously had some connections with people that have been here previously. Knew all about Louisiana Tech and the history of it, and how great of a place that it really is, and the opportunity, and then when I got a chance to visit with Dr Henderson and the committee like, it just kind of solidified the fact, hey, this is the right moment in the right time. And I think in college athletics, it's all about timing. You know, when you look at the opportunities and things I've always said, and Kelly and my wife and I have always had this conversation when we've taken new

jobs is we need to be okay with being there for the rest of our career, because you never know if an opportunity comes along. And so you just need to be ready to be there and really be where your feet are. And I think if you do a really good job with where you are, then people notice and opportunities really come about. And I think that's what happened with this one for me

Gavin Kelly

Ruston and Louisiana Tech are easy to fall in love with.

Ryan Ivey

Absolutely. It's awesome. It really is, I mean, and not and again, I'd been here before, but, you know, didn't really understand the deep connection that this community has with the university and, I mean, and from an athletics perspective, that's that's so critically important.

Gavin Kelly

So you get here to Louisiana Tech as with any new Athletics Director, you kind of have to set some standards right early on about, you know, competing and culture. And, you know, standards academically, what was it like in the first few months for you? And what type of culture Did you credit try to create early on here Louisiana Tech?

Ryan Ivey

yeah, I think for me coming in and, you know, into February, 1 of March, like it was an opportunity for me to really just sit back and listen. And I spent the first, you know, three or four months, and really, kind of into the summer as well, just having one on one, what I called my five and five meetings with everyone in the department, or asked them to bring five positive, five negatives. I compiled all that information, was able to aggregate that qualitative data and look at it from a standpoint of, hey, what are we doing well, what are we not doing well? You're obviously going to have some outliers for everyone, and they're going to have one or two things that are going to be really important to them, but you can kind of start to see a theme throughout. So it was able to really aggregate that data, see that theme through our tech talks, you know, it was able to engage the fan base, understand what was really important to them, and listen to that and try to try to act on some of those things as well. But I think what I wanted to the message I wanted to have to our department and our fans and our student athletes, is, look, we're going to get back to some grassroots type relationships, and it's really important. Again, I go back to the fandom piece that has made athletics successful over the years is we've got to be connected to our fans. And that was the idea of the barclauder campaign. You know, the mission of that is to be able to engage, enhance and advance the brand of Louisiana, tech athletics, and we do that by being accessible, right, and having conversations and being transparent and being, you know, being open and talking to people and explaining context and why decisions are made, right, and then all those things. And so I think that was really important to me, is be able to set that standard of engagement, and what we're going to do again, we're not always going to get it right. We're going to mess up. You know, we're people and we're imperfect and but I think as we've gone throughout this last year or so, I think we gained a lot of equity with really with the fan base, and knowing that, hey, if you have an issue, if you have a problem, you can sit over in a corner and you can complain about it to someone else, or you can just reach out to us and say, Hey, this is what's going on. All right. Well, let's have a conversation and see what we can do to maybe try to fix that. And if we can't address it right

now, here's why we can't address it. And at the end of the day, I think that's all anyone can really ask. And so that was really important to me in that first year. Was being able to be accessible, to have that conversation, to try to rally, rally the troops, so to speak, and show some progress, and get people involved in a way that maybe they haven't been before.

Gavin Kelly

I think it's a good problem to have, in a way where, you know, you're at a institution that has kind of rich traditions and, you know, championship history and a fan base that you know, feels very strongly, absolutely, it's a good thing. But it also means that they, you know, can often have strong opinions and feel strongly when things go a certain way. So being, I think, visible and accessible does a lot to kind of calm some of that.

Ryan Ivey

Yeah, well, I mean, look, I say this sincerely. I mean, I'd rather someone love me or hate me, right? Because at least I know where they stand. Yeah, it's the silent ones in the middle that scare me, right? Because you never know which way they're going to be. But our people are passionate, right? And you heard Keith talk about it, and then transition to Sunbelt, that was one of the metrics for them, right? Passionate fan bases, and that's what they have throughout the Sun Belt. And our fan base is very passionate about about tech athletics, and when you look at the deep history that we have, there is a sense of pride, and they want to protect that right, and they want to make sure that we're able to grow and enhance that deep tradition that we have. And that's our responsibility, and they should hold us accountable for that. And I expect them to do that, and because I'm going to, in turn hold them accountable to help us grow the department right. And what we're doing, whether it's from a revenue standpoint or just showing up and supporting our student athletes, really, whenever they can. So I think it's a very it is a two way street, and we need to make sure that we're having those conversations.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, fan engagement, fan attendance. It's kind of taken hits everywhere. It's not just a problem, you know, here in this region and this whatever. But I think fans, putting them in a position where they feel like they have a voice

Ryan Ivey

Correct

Gavin Kelly

Kind of gets them to want to be engaged more.

Ryan Ivey

It's the ownership, right? You fit. You feel like someone's listening. You see some things that are happening and maybe some ideas that have been shared as a group, and you take some ownership of that. And, you know, hey, what? They are listening, right? They are paying attention. And, you know, we did some things with tailgating last year that I think helped to eliminate some of the barriers. And that's, that's what we talked about a lot is we can't make it difficult to be a fan of tech athletics, right? And so how do we eliminate those barriers to entry, and not physical barriers, but the things that make

it difficult to be a fan, right? That we're, you know, we're not, we're not clear in messaging, right? We got things that are that are that are cumbersome to get through, right? How do we streamline our forward facing platforms or ticketing system, right? All those things that we've talked about over the last year, and I think we've been able to do that in a way that I think has helped to engage and energize our fan base a little bit.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, let's get into that some more. I keep saying, you know, you're at the end of year one, but you're wanting some change, right? Because you got here in the middle of a season, but your first full year, and having these sort of goals and missions and ideas about, you know, culture and engagement as you went through it, talk to me about kind of what you've seen come out of that, some positivity, and then also kind of mention, maybe some highlights, some big wins that you've, you know, been happy to be a part of over the last year, in terms of our student athletes, our coaches, our teams, our university, whatever, kind of just put your first full year into into perspective for us

Ryan Ivey

Yeah, I mean, it's certainly been a lot of fun, and we've, I think it's certainly been a lot of work, and they would just look from a competitive landscape, right? You go back the opportunity for us, we finished in the top, top 200 in the Lower Field Cup this year, which is really important that measures national postseason success that we've had. Think about the lady texters, who made the w the lead a W and it run this year as well. Obviously, baseball, winning the conference championship last year. You know, football, going to the bowl game. You know, basketball, seeing our student athletes doing what they've done from a men's, women's basketball perspective, softball, you know, beating two power four teams you know this this past season as well. Tennis, growing and what Coach Sargent has done, getting to the Conference USA championship match for this year, for the first time of program history. You know, we've just had some ton of individual opportunities. I mean, Oscar, from a men's track standpoint, finished as a second second team all American to nta track championship. So competitively, we've been able to do some really good things. And so it's been fun to watch our student athletes compete as well off the off the field, off the competition service, if you will. I think we've really focused again, on trying to create engagement and trying to create connection with our fans and our students as well. And one of the things that I'm really excited about that we're launching, that we just launched a little bit ago, was our blue bullets program with our with our students, and that student organization, an official organization, student organization for for Louisiana Tech University, and our students can be a part of that, right? They're going to earn points by coming to games. They're going to be able to redeem those points for swag or experience opportunities that we're going to have, maybe even traveling with a team, if they want to, you know, so I think those are things, again, when we get back to that fandom piece, just creating that engagement level with our students and in all like the energy at our events starts with our students. I mean, when our students are engaged and then they're fired up and they're getting after the other team, and the trash talking is going, I mean, that's, that's what makes people feed off that energy, right? So we need to continue to grow the relationship that we have for the student body. And then, from a fan perspective, again, we launched, we launched our Paki Owen system. We streamlined our ticketing and donor transactions aspect of it. Through Paki Olin, we've launched our priority points program for our fans as well, where they can earn points for every dollar that they spend with us. They're going to be able to redeem those points as well and do some things. And so I think again, just

creating that, that again, reducing those barriers to entry, if you will, streamlining what it is to be a fan, I think, has been really important for us. And then just internally, from a departmental standpoint, one of the things that we just launched, as well as our vision of values, right? Our vision in creating that clear kind of North Star for where we are, our champ values are going to be really important for us. And so people are going to start to see that from a visual standpoint, over the next year, and really what that looks like.

Gavin Kelly

Let's talk a little bit about kind of athletics as a like staff as a department. It's a tricky industry. I mean, I've been in it. I Sure i couldn't cut it, you know, so sure, or at least I chose not to.

Ryan Ivey

you're probably smart

Gavin Kelly

in a sort of, you know, overworked, underpaid time, and that's, again, that's everywhere. Sure, that is not just places with budgets, problems, you know, it's everywhere. How do you kind of get your staff from come from an ad position, because you know you're they, everyone's going to look up to you. How do you kind of get your staff in a spot where, you know, they're comfortable going into a year knowing it's gonna be a lot of nights and weekends, but this is what I want to do, and it's where I want to be. How do you kind of get that buy in?

Ryan Ivey

Yeah, I think one, it's just, it's being open and honest and being genuine with them. It's being there beside them as well, like I've always prided myself on. I'm not going to ask my staff to do something I'm not willing to do and or haven't already done myself, right? And so I'm right there with them. I mean, I'm serving them along the way, and I think for them to see kind of this servant leadership approach that I have in creating an opportunity for them to grow and develop, right? I'm big on leadership development. I think it's really important. I think, I think a leader's responsibility. I mean, ultimately, every day, I have to divest control of the department to everyone that's in it, but yet I have to maintain responsibility of it right. And as a human being, sometimes that's hard, because if you're going to be held responsible for something, you want to be able to control the actions, but to be able to set that overall vision, the values, that decision making process of what it is that who we're going to be as a department, and then allowing our staff to go out and execute in work within that framework, I think, is really important. Yeah. I mean, trust is, is really there, and trust takes time, right? And you got to be in the trenches with them, and you got to have experiences with them. And so I think we've been able to do that over this last year. And I think our morale is really good. From a departmental standpoint. We like each other, like we hang out with each other after after hours, even, right, really, to as much as we can. And so I think all that creates that culture, right? And it just every day is something that we've got to continue to work with. And I use the some people may be familiar with, habitudes. It's a habit and attitude combined. But we use the habitude of pocket change quite a bit. And ultimately, every day, we're either debiting or crediting pocket change, right? And with every action that we have, and as you go through your time as a leader, you've got to make sure you've got enough pocket change built up to where, when you have to, you know, pay that out in some form or fashion based on decision making or whatever, that you've

got enough in there to be able to do it. And so it's really important for us to be able to have those conversations, to get buy in to, you know, to make sure that we're being very inclusive in our in our in our decision making processes.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, and it's tough. It's here at Louisiana Tech, you hear a lot of people toss around the phrase, like, doing more with less sure, but that's, that's a that's kind of a damaging mentality if you approach it, because that can get into someone's head if they're in a spot where they're correct, kind of questioning their career moves and their opportunities. And if you're in a place where people are always like, well, it's just how it is around here, it's easy to kind of look for other spots

Ryan Ivey

well. And Gavin, I've been at smaller resource departments my whole career, right? I haven't been at the highest level. I haven't had the opportunity of seeing what it's like to have \$200 million in departmental budget, right? And so I don't and so all I know is how to be creative and try to work through problems with people. And that's kind of the approach that I take every day. I mean, look at the end of the day. While we have tons of issues and tons of problems in college athletics, we get to work in college athletics every day. We get to Go to games, to watch our student athletes compete, to do things that they love to do, to engage a fan base, to create opportunities for experiences that these people, especially young kids and young fans and people are going to remember for the rest of their lives, like that. That is fun, right? It's it's meant to be fun. And yes, I'm not saying it's not hard. It's challenging along the way, but it's meant to be fun. And what I tell our staff is, look, it's not a prison sentence to work here. If you get to the point to where this is not fun and I don't like it, then, hey, let's, let's help you find something else. Like, that's okay, right? I mean, I always, always laugh when people say in we hear it a lot in college athletics, well, I'm gonna go work there for two to four years, or three to five years, like, when did it? When did you get sentenced to be here, right? Like, it's not a prison sentence, and what we're doing, so understand that just while you're here. And I think understanding that this place was here before us, and it will be here after us, and our job is to try to make it better while we're here. And if we take that approach in that perspective, I think we we have more fun with what we do.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, that's a like, you said, it's, it's kind of like, it's a revolving door. A lot of times people get, especially, you know, the kind of entry level positions and those younger assistant positions. And, you know, some people stick around for a year less, sometimes in a year or two. And sometimes they do go into it thinking that that's a stepping stone. This place is a stepping stone. But if you can get them to want to, want to be here and be a part of what, yeah, and it's, it's pretty it's not only impressive because it's difficult to do, but it helps the benefit

Ryan Ivey

I always ask. I mean, I always ask our staff, and what is it that they want to do? Like, where do you want to be? What can I and how can I help you get there? And I think that's important, right? And that's part of my responsibility as a leader, is if I've got staff members that want to be an ad, well, I got to help them. I've got to develop them and help them to get to that point, right? And then I've got to create

opportunities for them to gain experiences, but at the same time, I've got to be able to leverage my network to help them in different places. And so that's why I tell them, like, I want to know what it is that you you want to do and if you want to be here for 20 years, great, yeah, let's figure out how for you to grow while you're here for 20 years as well. Because if you're in the same spot in 20 years as yours a day, then we've messed up somewhere along the way, right? And so how do we help invest in people and grow people.

Gavin Kelly

It's good to hear you talk about that in the sense of, like, you've been here for a year and some change, and you've already kind of got these, like, deep rooted ideas about what you want the department to be and how you operate it. So it's good to kind of hear that firsthand. I'm sure it was day one when you referring to Louisiana Tech is we and us? Because, you know, you're part of the team,

Ryan Ivey

absolutely.

Gavin Kelly

And again, grew up in a in the South, in a small town, worked at small school like, you know what it's like you you come here maybe as a quote, unquote outsider, but you know what it's like,

Ryan Ivey

correct

Gavin Kelly

So it's easy for you to kind of fall into it before we let you go. Let's talk about the future. Let's talk about the next year. So kind of some things that have you fired up, and whether that's, you know, projects, construction projects, things like that, or things that are going on with our student athletes, our coaches, what's going into this this fall, even the late summer, I know we got soccer starting early, yeah. So talk about kind of the things you're looking forward to here in your second full year?

Ryan Ivey

Yeah I mean, obviously I'm excited to watch our student athletes compete. I think we've got an opportunity, I think, to have a really good year. I think when you've got just look at our fall sports. I mean, football's got 70% of their returners, you know, players back coming off, coming off, a year in which there's probably four plays that we could have gone our way, and we could have been nine and three, right, and we weren't, and that's part of it, but I think we were right there when you saw the growth from a football perspective. I'm looking forward to see them being able to compete, and I think you will see a good year out of football as well. Volleyball, we got a brand new volleyball coach, and Scott Montero, who's just become come in and done a phenomenal job as a teaching, as a teacher, has done a great job of growing our volleyball programs. I'm looking forward to seeing that program as well. Soccer starts. It's our first sport that starts right, and be able to grow that we got cross country in it, and just, you know, I could go on and for each each sport here, but you know, we got lady texters and bringing back those core four freshmen, and what that looks like, and adding to it like just tauvin really revamped our Bulldog basket, our dunking dogs and Bulldog men's basketball program. You know,

lanes going to continue to grow baseball. Josh is going to continue to grow softball. You know, Brian's done a good job from a track and field standpoint. And then bowlings are, you know, national champion, yeah, National Championship contending sport. You know, Matt Terry's done a great job on a golf course as well. And we just Amy gross tennis, right? I mean, we just got a really, I think, unique opportunity for this year from a competitive standpoint. So I'm really looking forward to watching our student athletes compete. But from, like, from a construction standpoint, we got the North End Zone project going on, the origin bank center for academic student athlete success. That's going to be a phenomenal facility for us. It's going to help us to grow our already strong academic endeavors that we have from from an athletics perspective, this past year, our department had its highest, highest ever annual departmental, GPA, almost to three, three, just over three, two. And so it's fun to be able to see us be able to invest in that as well. We've got a new football field going down right now as well. So we've got some really, really unique aspects coming from a construction standpoint as well. And then I'm really excited too internally, and this is not going to be out there where anyone's going to be able to see but the process that we've taken as a staff to attack the house settlement and be able to have the structure in place, to be able to capitalize, to create marginal opportunities for growth for us in that in that way, so that we can compete in recruiting and retaining, you know, quality student athletes. And so I think we've put some really good plans in place. I'm excited about our ability to be able to attack that through some through some unique opportunities, through the Louisiana Tech sport Performance Institute, and so I think those things are going to help us create marginal advances for us, which, over time, is going to grow and grow grow for us as well.

Gavin Kelly

Also you talk about staff, it's just a good feeling to go into the second year. It is with like because it's new when it's new to everyone, kind of when the team, when the framework of the team is new, and you're kind of learning stuff together that first full year, but then you done it, you done it once, and so the confidence is up, the trust is up, correct? The team chemistry is up. So just it's it's just the second go round, and then from then on out, it just gets a little bit tighter and a little bit nicer every year.

Ryan Ivey

No question. That's exactly right,

Gavin Kelly

yeah. So looking forward to seeing what you guys can accomplish. I appreciate you making time for us this week, and if you're listening, we've bounced this interview around a little bit, but it's not Ryan's fault that this the Sun Belt stuff has been quite a big deal. So yeah, appreciate that, and just just good luck moving forward. We are happy to have you here.

Ryan Ivey

We're excited to be here. Appreciate everything you do for us.

Gavin Kelly

Thank you, Ryan. Go Dogs.

Ryan Ivey

Go Dogs.

Gavin Kelly

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