

136. Gerald Jordan: Why We're All Here

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 joins us from the Louisiana Tech athletics department. We are welcoming Gerald Jordan to the podcast. He is the deputy AD for competitive excellence over there, which he's going to tell us a little bit a little bit more about what that means. But G, thanks for making time for us in the middle of a busy we're kind of, we're in the first crossover season of the year. Yeah, yeah, we are. Basketball starting up here. Football is in the thick of it. So appreciate you making time for us. Talk to us a little bit about kind of the state of things right now in athletics. You know, I know we're, like I said, in the middle of fall, but with kind of the full rest of the year ahead. What is, what is your job like right now, this time of year,

Gerald Jordan

you know, we've got the projects that we've got going on, or what are the what's occupying most of the time? So the origin bank, Center for student athletes, success is going up, you know, schedule completion of August 2026 so that's exciting. Yeah, that's a big project. I just had a meeting this morning on the Richardson family legacy Plaza, the statues of coach I and coach land bright that are going up southwest corner of the stadium, mainly the entrance to the DAC DAC patio is, yeah, most of us here refer it to refer to that area, and that's super exciting. So those are the two biggest things we're actually getting ready to put a scoreboard. Put a scoreboard up at tennis next week. That's very nice. You know, haven't had that element there for the fans and even the student athletes to keep up, you know, with what's going on the other court. So that's going to be exciting from a visual standpoint, and just, you know, more mass to that facility and an area there. Those are the big three things. I'm sure there's some other things going on that I can't think of. You know, those are the three things from the facility ops standpoint, obviously, football, we're in the back half of the season looking to get get some more wins here. And basketball started. Men's, women's played last night, and then we'll be right into the thick of things for basketball, football slowing down, and basketball ramping up. Bowl season coming, obviously forthcoming, and then, and then basketball be the heart of it. And then we'll, we'll get into the crazy spring crossover. Spring crossover is a different from your time in athletics. That's that, that four to six, maybe even eight week stretch, no days off. It can get a little crazy also. Yeah, we're all in it together. I

Gavin Kelly

think to the, you know, I've had, we've had coaches on and administrators over there from athletics on, Ryan Ivy's been on recently and just talking to people about, you know, kind of the the culture change and the shift over there, and kind of the way things are. And not that the culture's ever been bad, but when you get new leadership in things change, and I think you're an interesting person to talk to about the changes that you've seen in athletics, because you've been here for, what, 11 years. You're 11. Okay, you're 11. So you've seen, you know, multiple ladies, and you've seen leadership. Your role has changed. You know, you're in a leadership role now. So let's build up to that. Let's go back to the

beginning for you talk to us a little bit about where you're from, and early on, kind of how you made decisions that led to, you know, the colleges you attended, what you studied, and kind of what your goals were like. Did you always see yourself in this kind of position, or was that something you kind of figured out along the way? Would

Gerald Jordan

say, I probably figured the the role that I'm in now, figure that out later. So in high school, I knew I wanted, I wanted to be an athletic trainer. Went to East Tennessee State University. I'm originally from Mountain City, Tennessee, little special place for me, small town nestled in northeast Tennessee, the county that mountain city resides in borders, North Carolina, Virginia at the same time. So I grew up about 10 miles from the Virginia State Line and about 15 from North Carolina.

Gavin Kelly

Beautiful area. Yeah, it sounds like it'd be a pretty picturesque

Gerald Jordan

town. Oh, it is. It is. So I lived there all of my life, except for about three years in elementary school. We lived in North Carolina. My dad worked in textiles, factory, clothes, transferred, et cetera. So went to East Tennessee State and became an athletic trainer. My master's degree is from Penn State, so I was in Indian line for a year and worked there. After my time there, went to the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina for a year as an athletic trainer. Was finishing up my master's degree remotely during that time, and that was, I think, oh three. So I finished my master's degree in the summer of oh three, and then went to Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, and I thought I would be there for a couple years, and as an assistant athletic trainer, a few things changed after that. Two turned to six, turned to eight, turned to 10 and turned to 12. You know, and you're there. And, you know, I was at a point in my life, professionally and personally, of like, what am I going to do here? You know, no family there at the time, some, some great extended family that I love dearly and still communicate with today. But, you know, my family was in East Tennessee, and I'd applied for some jobs along the way, and, and was very blessed to, you know, have opportunities to accept them. And I didn't. I just, you know, everything kind of come back, you just get embedded into the community or the school and, and they were good opportunities. But it just just kept getting hard to leave, to say no, but, but I got an opportunity to actually interviewed for the head football athletic trainer position at Tulane. I can't remember the year now, this was when I was at Delta State, the Director of Sports Medicine. There was a colleague. I had known him. We had a mutual connection through the Citadel, and I interviewed, and the process just kind of kept dragging along. And I knew Andy wanted to offer that to me and and hire me, but we were going into Christmas and that year and like, I can't leave, I don't want to leave Cleveland at Christmas, not knowing, right, you know where I'm coming back, and I can't do that to them. So I had pulled my name out of the hat, and I say that and pulling the curtain back as much as I can for the context. Fast forward probably a couple years. You know, always stayed in touch with Andy Massey at Tulane, who would have been my supervisor in that role. And I walked back in from lunch one day in the summer of 15 like I said, we talked frequently. There was a note on my desk this today, and he called and like, that's, you know, time to catch up. And I answered the phone, and it wasn't, hello. How are you doing that? I mean, I remember it like it was yesterday. Today, there's a position open at Louisiana Tech. They're having a hard time filling it. I think you'd be perfect for it. I want to give them your name straight

to business, straight to business. And there was a little pause, and I'm like, okay, yes, you know, and Andy hung up. There wasn't any any follow up after that. Tommy McClellan called me two hours after that, and we talked for quite a while. I interviewed. This was on a Friday. I didn't remember that. I interviewed the following Friday and accepted the job the day after that. So it was a little bit of a whirlwind for about eight, nine days of hey, all of a sudden, you're going to move to rust in Louisiana. And, you know, came here in 15 wasn't actually the plan was not to be the the head football athletic trainer. We were trying to look at a model to where you're just being the administrator over that unit. Yeah, you had a large staff, you know, and you want you, you don't want to necessarily get bogged down into to working with a team. But the young lady that was a football athletic trainer serving in that role, she took another position after my second week here, I did it for 11 out of the past 12 years. What's a few more gonna hurt? So, you know, did that for four years, and after my first couple years, Tommy elevated me to the executive staff level and knew that really my passion I was at a point in time, and I still do miss the student athletes and just that camaraderie and athletic training room and practices and games, and you just, you missed that, because that's what we're here for. You know, that's, that's why we all have jobs. But the tornado happened in April of 19 and you know, the rest they say is history. You know, Adam, my predecessor, moved up into the role that he's in. And Tommy said you got 24 hours to make your mind up if you want this or not. So that was another quick, quick transition

Gavin Kelly

the nature of that administrative role and being over internal operations and that sort of thing. That's a big shift from a career that up to that point was pretty much completely focused on sports medicine and athletic training. So what instilled the confidence in you to be like, Yeah, this is a, this is, I mean, obviously Tommy wouldn't have offered you that job if he wasn't sure you could have done it right. But what did you to yourself think and do to be like, yeah, that's, I've learned enough to be able to do this job and do it well,

Gerald Jordan

I think there was a lot of transferable skills like it. You know, it may not seem like that on on paper. You know, at face value, you're dealing with a medical component with your student athletes, but you're solving a lot of problems and and some of them are very serious problems, you know, and you've got little time to make a reaction, to make a decision on what you're going to do. You're dealing with staff and staff problems. You have 10 people under, you know, they're coming and going, you're hiring, rehiring, training, developing, you're going through that whole process. You know, we tried to structure our athletic training department just like a little mini athletic department, somebody that was over the insurance, over ordering, over our apparel, etc. And obviously, you know, the. Being on the executive staff for two years prior to that transition help, because I had a seat at the table, and I could opine on some things. And my opinion was, was asked of some things that may not even have anything to do with the medical component, but, you know, and I think a lot of it, you know, I don't know how Tommy would answer it if he was sitting here, but I do think that he saw, you know, the care and compassion that I had for the student athletes, and knowing that, you know, we were an integral part of the department, but that's what we were also was a part of the department, you know, the year which the department's a part of the university, yeah, and we all have to work in harmony to move this needle. That is Louisiana Tech, you know, further down the road. So, you know, I think that was probably some,

some things that you know, were seen, and things that I felt like, you know, were transferable, but still like, you know, I tell people I worked in the athletic department for four years, so before I moved into the role that I'm in now. So you would like to think you have a little bit of a pulse on things, but then you're sitting hit a different seat at the table. You're like, whoa, you know this, this is, you know, there's some things that may be a little bit different than you know. You just don't know until you're sitting in the role. Even from sports medicine. I had done this and worked football for a long period of time before I moved to Louisiana Tech, and they're still, you're in a new desk, yeah, new role and and one of my mentors, and I've shared this with a lot of people, the guy that I worked for at the Citadel, Andy Claussen. I mean, he's a legend in the sports medicine area and field, and one of the things that he always said was, your first year is going to seem like five. These were packaged two different statements, but they were always together, your first year is going to seem like five, and it's going to take you five years to get something how you want it. And that is so true, like, I mean, and you know, because you're coming into a new place, I went from being the old kid in school, you know, being at Delta State for 12 years, to being the new kid in school, even though I came in with experience and right? And this, that and the other. I don't even know what key opens, what door, right? I can't remember your name or her name, or, yeah, you know their name, or, you know, where do I go for lunch? This, that and the other. So, you know that first year, it does. I mean, even my first year in the role that I'm at now. You're so much is coming at you. It just seems like five and, you know, I think both of those things are important because, you know, we do want change and development and improvement, and you want to put your your thumb on things, but it is a process too, and it can all happen at one time. And you know, sometimes I think we have to remember, it's the slow game, you know, for things to develop, and you got to build trust, and the more change happens at the Speed of Trust. And you need that to be able to do some of the things that you want to do. You can't change everything, you know, in year one, and we're still on that journey. You know, doesn't mean you get the year five and everything hits the brakes. And, of course, perfect and, and, you know, you go to the house at five o'clock, but you know you're still looking for ways to improve.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah. And you know, for you, after that jump in 2019, your first year might have felt like 10, because we were talking before the podcast about everything that happened right after,

Gerald Jordan

yeah, it was, it was a little bit of whirlwind, yeah, tornado,

Gavin Kelly

winter storm. Covid. Wasn't, you know, walk us through what that was like. Because, I mean, when you're trying to learn how to settle into a new role, and then these challenges keep getting piling up, piling up, you know, you're having to already adapt to one thing and then adapt to multiple other things. I mean, obviously it was something that you were able to pull through. But talk about kind of how you stayed the course over that, that first time, that first period, and you're in that job where things were kind of coming at you, yeah. I

Gerald Jordan

mean, you just have to be patient. There's some things you can't control. You control what you can control, you know, you lift, you know, all of it up in prayer of, I need some help with this. And, you know, and everybody just jumped in, you know, to to help. You know, 19 the tornado happened. Adam transitioned into his role, and we did that immediately, too. Yes, it was needed. Like there was a big, I mean, Adam had a monumental lift and on his plate, all of a sudden, you know, he woke up one day and, boom, you know, here's, here's three facilities and campus issues, and this that and the other that have to be, you know, rebuilt. So we, you know, obviously, kind of overlapped each other, if he was helping me, and I'm trying to keep an eye on sports medicine and transition in. But you know that that morning, it was, you know, it's that's been discussed a lot about everything that happened in your, you know, your baseball teams out of town, you're getting trees off your softball equipment shed so they can go practice. And, you know, your your community and town and universities, everybody's doing stuff. You know, we had, we lost two citizens of Ruston, you know. It's never, you know, can never be forgotten. We actually ended up, the crew that I was working on ended up working on their house to help get some trees off of that. But, you know, we're handing out water, Gatorade, cutting trees and moving trash and limbs. And it was everybody. Yeah, it was everybody. It was a whole, the whole town. But anyhow, so, you know, tornado happens, and then that next week we got to play Western Kentucky, if we got to have a place to play, yeah, we were, we were trying to play at Ulm. Got a lot of rain. That was not an option. We transitioned to the sports complex at Ruston high school field. And you know, some things that you know, you just have to figure out. We had to figure out where to broadcast radio. Not we had was air marks, Pepsi taco trailer. We took that out there, you know, and the lightning hit the scoreboard one night. You know that that went out. And you know you're just again. You just have to figure make it work. You make it work. And then, you know, you, you, you plug along there in the fall of 19, and you're in a new role football stadium or football operations, and you're rolling into basketball. And here comes the spring of 2020, and right, you know, basketball's at the conference tournament, and somehow I ended up being the Designated Survivor, if you will. And everybody was still in Frisco, and Tommy called today. You got to go to, you got to go to the 16th floor for us and meet with Dr GEIS and other people from from campus leadership on what we're doing here, you know, and obviously that everybody knows what happened with covid. Shut that down. And you know, you're rolling into the summer, and the week before the season hurricane Laura, you know, we're four hours, five hours from the coast, and it's still a category one hurricane when it gets to, gets to North Louisiana. So that knocked the power out for three days, and that was a whole issue, even just getting to being able to get to work, and cutting your way out of where we live to get there. So you kind of get that put to bed, and you're going through covid and all those challenges that everybody went through. And then here comes ad transition, yep. And then here comes a winter storm that iced everything in for for for a week. And then, I mean, it was a little bit of a blur for about 12 months, what is going on. And at the same time, you're designing and constructing a baseball, softball and soccer stadium, and trying to get you know back to to normal with that, and getting and get into the the 2021, season, and get everybody you know back into their their home. So it, it was wild there for a period of time. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly

but I mean, like, part of a job like that too. Like you don't last long in athletics if it's not something you want to kind of eat, sleep and breathe, if you don't welcome the challenge, if you don't welcome the teamwork, you know, I've, like I said, I've had, we've had several people from athletics on this podcast. I think back to Kyle Cavanaugh, you know, he gets fired up talking about the way that people work

together over there. And you got to because when, when the hiccups get thrown your way. You know, how do you adapt as a team? Because people who aren't behind the scenes don't normally think about what goes on behind the scenes. But, I mean, you know from an internal ops standpoint that, like, game day doesn't happen without dozens and dozens of people. So you've been here for, like, you said you're going on year 11. I'm curious to know what's kept you here. Like, obviously, like, the job has been something that you've been comfortable with. But what about Russ and in Louisiana, tech not only was appealing to you in the first place, because you had to make a choice to, I understand it was an appealing job offer, but like, you had to decide that that was something that fit for you. So you've been here a while now, and why is that?

Gerald Jordan

You know, I had some opportunities, even in sports medicine. I just, I like to see something grow, you know, like you, you want to. The only way you're going to get the year four or five, or, see year four or five growth or five years, to get it right is to get the two, three and four. Yeah, good point. You can't move, you know, 1218, months later. So, you know, I worked prior institution for 12 years. Some of that's a little bit of an anomaly in college athletics, but I just love the community here, you know, in the institution. And I remember, you know, when I interviewed here, stayed in the Fairfield inn, in room 101, and I the piece that I felt that I was supposed to move to Rustin and I was gonna get it offered, was I slept like a rock the night before my interview. You know, it was just surreal. And, you know, the the in the midst of all of that change too, and 19, I met my wife now, you know, and in the summer we had known each other, not getting all the way off into that that history. But, you know, we were engaged in January of 2020, and married in May of 2020, so in the midst of covid, that's always a story, too. You know, we're supposed to get married at First Baptist Rustin and, you know, families of. Sat and come down with covid. Stops that like, Hey, we're just gonna pivot. So we got married our family at the times, land and buy a pond, and we got married on Facebook Live. I don't know how many people do that, but we had to figure it out. Family, you know, how might we run Ivy says that a lot, and we have to figure that out. But, you know, obviously that changed where I was at from a personal standpoint, my family's here deeper roots. Yeah, much deeper root. My wife is four floors above us, yeah, literally, actually, this is about her on the 12th floor on 16 Samantha Jordan, Bailey. Jordan works, you know, in the Provost Office, and she's got two degrees from Louisiana Tech and and her family. I mean, Papa Bill Bailey played basketball here from 51 to 55 her aunt Cathy Bailey played on the first three lady textures teams from 74 to 77 and several aunts and uncles, you know, her cousin Colin works here, you know. So there's the family ties there. And you know, we have a soon to be one year old daughter at home, Grace. And you know, my family's 12 hours away, you know, and I miss them a ton, and can't wait for the opportunities that we have to go back and see them. But you know, just the family, the the area, the ties, and, you know, had some opportunities, but, man, there's just a lot of value. And, you know, personally and professionally at Louisiana Tech and Rustin, and just the from the professional standpoint, the growth that we've had over 11 years. And knowing that, you know, there's still more growth to happen, you still want to see something else. There's still all these little other things that are in the back your mind of, hey, this we could get here, here at Louisiana Tech. We could do this, you know, and just the area, again, to Samantha's family, my mother and father in law are 25 minutes down the road in Athens and and, you know, there's just a lot of value there. Yeah, you're not going to have somewhere else?

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, that's your, I mean, Samantha's your better half, right? And she's got all that those tech ties, so that's half of you now, yes, but also, like I said, deeper roots, yeah, we're talking about growth. We're talking about, you know, being here for a long time, I mentioned earlier culture, and you've worked here, just here under three ads now, right? So you've seen sort of culture changes. And you know, everybody brings every new leadership brings their own ideas about how things function around here, you also, in a leadership role, are responsible for part of the culture. So last question before we let you go talk to me a little bit about how as your leadership responsibilities have increased over the last 11 years, as you've moved up in terms of being in an administrative positions. How have you influenced the culture? However, you hope that you've influenced the culture here at Louisiana Tech.

Gerald Jordan

Yeah, I hope just the way I go about my day, and, oh, and like you had alluded to of, you know, everybody has to jump in. There's not an opportunity that you can say, hey, this is not my job. You know, we just not, yeah, there's not enough people to go around. And even if there were, you know, okay, hey, if there were more people, what could you do with everybody, you know, jumping in there and and doing more so, you know, I hope, and I know there's people that I've practiced on from a leadership standpoint that still, you know, drives me crazy at times, if you'd like to go back and have this back or have that back, and our opportunity or lead in a little different way. But, you know, I hope that the willingness to say yes, you know, to jump in to do something, the care that we have for your neighbor. Yeah, you know of your neighbor in your office, or your neighbor down the street and and just how much Louisiana Tech means, you know, to you. And I don't have a degree from Louisiana Tech, you know, I didn't walk the sidewalks here, you know, as a student, but I've been here for 11 years now. And, I mean, it doesn't matter if you're here 11 or one, it needs to mean something to you know, they offered you a job, you know, like you were not taken up off the street and brought to Louisiana Tech. You know, you're not kidnapped, yeah, even going back into sports medicine, of just wanting our GA's and our staff to see how much we need to care about our student athletes and and and not care for them and taking care of their knee right or their shoulder, but care for them, as you know, Jenny or Joe, you know, and care for our coaches and you know, same thing from the facility ops and the support staff side of things. You know, our job is to support and take away roadblocks and mitigate things. They happen. Sometimes you can't take a take them away and and sometimes you can, but you know, just know when you know, like, like, today we're in a meeting in Brook store. Ask about Eva grace, yeah, yeah, that's a very recent example of. And that's value, you know. You know past Dr Henderson and Miss Tony in the parking lot, and they roll the window down and how Eva grace is doing and and you know, those things just mean so much, you know. And that doesn't you know, they don't have to, but they they know your child. They know your child's name. And you know, that's what I want, our, our the people that are under, you know, in my columns of sphere of influence, and to know that, you know, there's a deeper purpose here and a bigger role, and how we care for the 18 to 22 year olds that 24 now portal Extended Eligibility at times. But how we care for them, how we support our coaches, and how we care for our institution, you know, and the reasons we're here and to develop the brand and Rustin. And if it's good for Rustin, it's good for the university, if it's good for the university, it's good for Rustin. And we're we're part of both. The University resides in Rustin and the departments reside within athletics, that resides within the university, but just to know that, you know, we care about them and we want to develop them, you know, and seeing the growth, and that's what you know, is one of the things

that's rewarding to me is, is seeing someone grow and develop from year two to Year Three to year four and and they take what they've learned here and move somewhere else and do that. And you know, you get those phone calls, and they don't happen every time, but they sure are special. And what I'm referring to is, you know, when you get that phone call from the former employee to say, I just want to thank you for what you did for us, you know. And you know, I didn't realize what we had at Louisiana Tech or what we're trying to do, because there are a lot of places that, you know, you go into some of these meetings with some of your peer institutions, and I'm just saying that, you know, from a generality standpoint, and you're listening to some of the problems that they have. Hey, I'll take ours anyway. We got a lot of problems with that. I anyway. You can't fix that. Yeah, you know that that that you cannot fix, it's going to be very hard to fix. And that's usually cultural related, you know, like, whatever they're talking about. The root cause of it is usually probably culture or, you know, how they're developing or leading their staff and wanting to the best forum, because that's, you know, that's why we're that's why we're all here.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, beautifully said, I appreciate that. And look like I said up top, I appreciate you making time for us in Fall crossover season, like you said, football on the road, if you're listening right now, we're in the middle of the back half of football season. Basketball season just started, but it never ends. Even in the, you know, people like think of summer is the downtime, but it's not. There's work to be

Gerald Jordan

there's there's a lot, there's a few weekends that pop up, but, you know, they're still, you know, you get that question of, What do y'all do during the summer? We're not on vacation Exactly. We do go at a period of time, but it's not, you know, we're not nine month 10 month employees. There's a lot of planning and a lot of stuff that goes on during the summer.

Gavin Kelly

Always work to be done, so keep doing good work over there. G and again, thanks for making time for us. And Go Dogs. Go Lady Techsters.

Gerald Jordan

Absolutely. Thanks, Gavin.

Gavin Kelly

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