



PEAK

PERFORMANCE

TAKES SHAPE

HARRY SHEEHY'S VISION FOR DP2 HAS BECOME A REALITY.



A

ccomplished Williams graduate that he is, Dartmouth Athletic Director Harry Sheehy knows better than to try to reinvent the wheel while he's reinventing the wheel.

Confused yet?

Sheehy will tell you members of his own department certainly were – confused, that is – when he first pitched the concept behind Dartmouth Peak Performance, which is intended, in a way, to reinvent the student-athlete experience.

“The poor senior staff,” Sheehy said with a smile and a shake of his head. “As I would try to explain what DP2 could be, they looked at me like I was from Mars, because I didn’t have a clear picture yet. I knew what I wanted out of it, but I didn’t know what form it would take. I also didn’t know the magnitude it would be able to approach.”

Credit Fritz Corrigan '64, not only for the leadership gift that helped the DP2 wheels get on the ground but for providing the clearest description of where it was intended to go.

And credit Sheehy for being smart enough to not reinvent that wheel.

“Fritz said, ‘I want to give every Dartmouth student-athlete an unfair competitive advantage,’” Sheehy recalled. “I think that’s a great quote. With DP2 we are trying to put our kids six months to a year ahead of the competition.”

The roots of DP2 trace back to Sheehy’s own career as a college basketball standout and his subsequent roles as men’s basketball coach and athletic director at Williams.

“My experience as a student-athlete was overwhelmingly positive, but when I think back college athletics have changed so much,” said Sheehy. “As I’ve watched athletics evolve, as a player, as a coach, and now as an athletic director, it became clear to me – particularly during my time as an AD – that we were underserving our athletes.”

If Sheehy had that feeling at Williams – even with the Ephs’ unprecedented successes at the Division III national level – his awareness of the need to do more for student-athletes became acute when he came to Dartmouth and the Ivy League.

“It bothered me because it takes a lot to play a Division I varsity sport and it takes a lot more at a place that is this rigorous academically,” he said. “These kids are passionate about what they are doing. They want to do it. But we are asking them to do a lot.

“To me, that means my part of the equation is to make sure that the experience is as holistic as possible. That means bringing programming and resources to bear on each and every aspect of their life to positively impact their ability to reach their potential.”

While helping Dartmouth teams win is important, the ultimate goal of DP2, in the vision Sheehy shared with his once-mystified senior staff, is bigger picture.

“Coaches and administrators control the experience to a degree,” he said. “So what are we doing with it? What is our vision for that experience? Is it to play a sport? Or is it to create young men and women who are going to go change this world, which my

generation has already screwed up?”

“Phil Jackson said there’s more to life than basketball, but fortunately there is more to basketball than basketball. Fill in any sport. That’s our responsibility. That’s why I became so passionate about this early on in my time here.”

With that as the vision, Dartmouth has become the laboratory for an experiment Sheehy wasn’t sure his alma mater would ever be.

“We didn’t have the resources at Williams to do this,” he said. “One of the reasons I came to Dartmouth was this kind of program and trying to impact student-athlete lives in a positive manner. At Williams, the hard-sell was going to be, ‘OK, you have won the Directors Cup 10 straight years, why do you need \$500,000 to run this program?’

“That’s the wrong question. Because then what you’re saying is it is actually about the winning. To me, that wasn’t what it was about. If it was, I could have stayed at Williams because we were going to win. We were built to win there.”

The question that fired up Sheehy was, “We have these programs that are educational in nature, but are we reaching the potential we have for them to impact students?”

“We weren’t. Having said that, many, many of the experiences at Williams were great and students will rave about their experience. But to me, we were not fulfilling our responsibility as administrators and coaches, because the school wasn’t going to give us those resources.”

Even before Corrigan boiled the dream of DP2 down to its essential mission, Sheehy found a way to convey the concept when it mattered most.

“I shared this idea with (former President Jim Kim) in a golf cart about 6 in the morning one day, and I give tons of credit to him on this,” Sheehy said. “It never would have happened without his immediate buy-in. He said, ‘Man, oh man, I think we can raise money for that.’ I said, ‘I am pretty sure we can too, Jim.’

“But these places move slowly. The great thing about President Kim, and I am finding about Phil Hanlon too, is they want change. Jim looked at it and went, ‘Oh my gosh, this is a no-brainer.’ He was out selling it before it existed.”

With the green light from Kim, Sheehy went about trying to clarify his evolving vision of DP2 for his staff.

“Those poor guys,” the athletic director said. “They walked out five days in a row thinking, ‘What the heck is he thinking?’

“What changed it was an anonymous gift of \$500,000. Money clarifies. All of a sudden, what was theory about, ‘I think we can do this,’ became, ‘What are we actually going to spend money on?’ That was a gift from a parent of a student. It was an incredible catalyst for us to get off our duffs and to say, ‘OK, let’s go out now and make some mistakes.’ As John Wooden used to say, ‘The team that makes the most mistakes wins.’

“Very early, I had said to Jim Kim, ‘This can’t be a website with some quotes and platitudes. This has to be touchable. We have to be able to feel this and touch this. We have to be able to move the

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pieces around and get the right people on board.’”

Soon, leadership, sports medicine, strength training, psychology, nutrition, yoga, academic support, career connections and more pieces began to come together under the DP2 umbrella.

As a result of all those meetings with Sheehy and Drew Galbraith, who would be tapped to head up Peak Performance, Sheehy’s once-confused senior staff soon came to fully understand and embrace DP2. Others took longer.

“The first couple of years,” Sheehy recalled, “I would get comments like, ‘It’s a PR thing. What is DP2? Is it chocolate milk? I think we are past that kind of skepticism.’”

Three years in, DP2 is still evolving, but Sheehy is confident it has found its stride.

“We knew it was real but we had to get the student-athletes to look and say, ‘This is different. This is not the same way we were acting before.’ I think now we are largely there in terms of buy-in from student-athletes and coaches.

“And frankly, it is silly for a coach not to utilize this stuff, whether you want to use the phrase DP2 or not. To have the resources of DP2 and not use them wouldn’t make sense, and most coaches get that now.” **DP**