



Making the Brown Bears Stronger

By Debra Bradley Ruder '80

Athletics and Recreation is being transformed to drive competitive success, promote campus wellness and build community spirit and pride.

Keely McDonald '00 has loved coaching women's lacrosse at her alma mater for nearly 20 years. But things feel different now — and she's delighted. Brown's Division of Athletics and Recreation is investing in its people, programs and facilities in new ways to boost the quality of sports teams and fitness experiences for the Brown community and to spur wins. This is happening under the leadership of M. Grace Calhoun '92, the Chancellor Samuel M. Mencoff '78 Vice President for Athletics and Recreation.

"The additional resources for our students are fantastic, and they come with expectations for us to achieve more on the field, court, wherever," McDonald says. "The coaches are excited. It feels like a whole new athletics department."

Since starting at Brown in April 2021, Calhoun has focused on elevating Brown's competitive

success in varsity and club sports, promoting student-athletes' well-being, expanding recreational opportunities on campus and cultivating a stronger sense of community through sports events. The division's new strategic plan, crafted with broad stakeholder input, describes its priorities for this transformation and reflects Calhoun's holistic approach to physical activity as essential for overall health.

"I've been working with President [Christina] Paxson, University leadership and the Brown Corporation on a shared commitment to fund and staff the division more comparably to peers," says Calhoun, who previously headed athletics and recreation at the University of Pennsylvania and ran track and field at Brown. "We have aggressively recruited top talent to build on existing strengths, ensuring we have a strong foundation for sustained success."

Championship Culture

Brown's 34 varsity and 37 club sports teams have notched notable victories in recent years, such as in varsity women's soccer (2019, 2021 and 2022 Ivy League champions) and club men's rugby (2021 national champions). In addition, Brown baseball made national headlines in spring 2023 when first-year student Olivia Pichardo became the first female to play NCAA Division I varsity baseball.

To continue driving success, the division has set the ambitious goal of regularly finishing in the Ivy League's top half for varsity team conference championships won and competing for national championships in all top-level club sports.

As part of this effort, staff are reshaping recruiting practices to attract and retain more championship-caliber student-athletes, and the division recently deepened its coaching roster with such impressive additions as All-American wrestler Jordan Leen as the Marvin Wilenzik '56 Head Coaching Chair for Brown Wrestling, and two Olympians in track and field: long jump champion Damar Forbes as the Anne Rothenberg Assistant Coaching Chair and Aries Merritt, a world-record setter in 110-meter hurdles, as sprints and hurdles coach.

Helping Student-Athletes Succeed

To foster student-athletes' wellness and performance, the division has added support services such as in-house professionals in sports nutrition, sports medicine and psychology, as well as innovations to its strength and conditioning program. The division is also providing science-based workshops on sleep, exercise recovery,

mindfulness and other practices, notes Senior Associate Director of Athletics Joe Walsmith '94, who leads this effort.

"We are focused on whole-person well-being — mental, physical, spiritual, emotional — to help our students flourish as engaged learners and athletes," says Walsmith, a varsity soccer alumnus with training in physiology, mindfulness and other fields. "We want to empower them with life skills they can use well beyond their years at Brown."

McDonald, a former Brown lacrosse standout, says: "Our dual goal is to win and to develop student-athletes. If we're doing the *how* right, they're going to work together beautifully."

Brown Bears Pride

Beyond investing in varsity and club sports, the division is working to broaden campus-wide participation in fitness classes and other recreational activities at the Erickson Athletic Complex. It is also energizing Brown sporting events through new traditions like the Student Hype Squad and Bruno's Cub Club for children.

"We want to be an integral division of the University where everyone feels like they belong," says Calhoun. She hopes competitive successes will multiply as Athletics and Recreation continues to fortify, aligned with Brown's distinctive educational approach. "Past experience has taught me you have to play to your strengths. We're winning recruits over peers and getting students involved in record numbers because of our unique value proposition. I'm confident our future will be bright."

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