

**Media Relations Handbook
for
The College of New Jersey
Student-Athletes and Coaches**



**Prepared by The College of New Jersey
Sports Information Office
August 2007**



Lion Student-Athlete/Coach Responsibility:

As a student-athlete or coach at The College of New Jersey, you will be exposed to one of the largest media markets in the nation. One of your responsibilities here at TCNJ is to cooperate with the media. The Lion athletic programs benefit from tremendous national and local media exposure. TCNJ has an outstanding reputation of positive media rapport over the years. Therefore, it is important to understand the media, the value of positive media relations and how best to deal with the media. To assist you in your dealings with the media, TCNJ's Sports Information staff has prepared this pamphlet for you. Please spend some time to read through it. And keep it handy throughout the year.

You should view your obligation to cooperate with the media as a chance to promote your team, yourself, your sport and The College of New Jersey. Just as giving 100 percent on the playing field and in the classroom are your responsibilities, cooperating with the media as arranged by the SID office is also a part of the package of being a Lion student-athlete. It is important for you to develop a good working relationship with the media--remember, they not only vote for team rankings, but also for individual awards! It is hoped that through this pamphlet, you will develop a better understanding of the media and the job they are trying to do. The media's role is not to be a cheerleader for you. However, you'll find that the more cooperative you are with the media, the better chance you will have of the media presenting positive stories about you and your teammates.

The Lion Sports Information Director's Office (SID) serves as the link between TCNJ student-athletes, its coaches and administrators and the media and general public. We attempt to provide timely and accurate coverage of Lion athletics by coordinating interviews, servicing the information needs of reporters and compiling and maintaining statistics, photos and historical records. We do not, however, "manage" the news or publicity. We are not part of the media and we do not and cannot write or speak for the media.

Media attention also means your conduct both on and off the field will be under intense scrutiny because of your position as a TCNJ student-athlete or coach. The last thing you want is to receive publicity for an off-the-field incident. You must always remember that your off-the-field actions are viewed by the media as relevant news, while a non-athlete's activities may not be viewed in the same manner. So if you ever find yourself in this position -- tell your coach immediately!

The College of New Jersey Sports Information Office:

Members of The College of New Jersey Sports Information Staff serve a varied role, we work for the coaches, athletes and The College, but we are also here to serve the public, the media and NJAC and other NCAA institutions. It is our goal to help promote the positive and to get the word out about each sport and its individuals.

We are game-day event managers, publicists, writers, designers, artists, traveling secretaries, a liaison to the NJAC and NCAA, and as you can see, a little bit of everything. It is our goal to produce quality media/recruiting guides for each sport. It is our goal to have them printed in a timely and professional manner, while keeping a watchful eye on the budgets.

Our office has a Director, one full-time sports information assistant, and several student assistants. We try to do our best to promote each of the 20 sports equally and to make sure no one gets pushed to the back burner, but we do have to occasionally set priorities.

Sports Information Staff



Ann King



Lyle Fulton



TCNJ Sports Information Office

Names and Numbers

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SID Staff

(Primary Responsibilities) and Home Phone Numbers

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Students: Kelly Halldorson, Allyson Trapp, Kevin Kibala.

TCNJ's Athletic Web Address: TCNJathletics.com

SID Policy for Interviews:

We understand that an athlete's studies, team practices and competition schedule come first. We will do our best to coordinate interviews and other media requests accordingly. If you feel overloaded with too many interviews or want advice on how to handle an interview, do not hesitate to talk to a member of the SID staff. **WE ARE HERE TO HELP.** Please let us know immediately if you feel you are misquoted or if you have had a problem with any member of the working media. Our office staff is at your service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is OK to call us at the office or at home if a media-related question or situation comes up.

* Please, **ONLY** do interviews that have been arranged by a member of the SID staff. This allows us to ensure that requests for your time are legitimate and allows us to remind you of appointments. Also, in the event of a negative occurrence, we can handle requests appropriately and offer advice on how you might deal with certain questions. If you are contacted directly by a reporter, ask that person to arrange the interview through our office.

* Do **NOT** give out your home phone number to a member of the media -- **EVER!** This includes members of your own hometown media. You don't want a late-night phone call from a reporter catching you unprepared during a time of crisis.

* If you have an interview scheduled, show up and be on time. Because of deadlines and your tight schedules, the media relies on you to be on time. Should you have a problem making a pre-scheduled appointment, always call the SID office.

Media Policies and Procedures

- * All Interviews must be arranged through the SID office
- * All Interviews must be requested one day in advance (except for postgame interviews)
- * Site restrictions ... Media is off-limits to:
 - Locker Rooms; Weight Room; Training Room
- * SID will be present during interviews if requested by athlete
- * No home phone numbers given out...if you get calls at home, refer person back to SID

Tell SID Immediately...

- * If you are misquoted
- * If you feel you have been a target of "bad" journalism
- * If you are bothered at home by media calls

How to Handle Tough Questions

- * Don't say "No-comment", instead...
 - "I'd rather not talk about that"
 - "I'm not qualified to discuss that"
 - "You would need to speak to the coaches about that"

Think before you speak and consider these points...

- * What point do **You** want to get across
- * Who is the audience (not the person asking questions)
- * How can you turn a negative subject/question into a positive answer
- * You can't control the questions, but you can control the answers
- * Anticipate the tough questions before you sit down with reporter
- * Practice the answers to tough questions before you begin interview

Top 10 Hints for a Good Interview

Do...

- * Keep Head up and Smile
- * Look at the person interviewing you
- * Be courteous (it's their job)
- * Be on time (the longer they have to wait, the less time they have to write a good, accurate story)
- * Be presentable (representing The College), wear practice gear, or nice clothing, remove gum
- * Repeat question in answer
- * Avoid "ums, you knows, etc."
- * Pause and think before answering questions, pauses never show up on paper, or on radio/TV
- * Find out the name and news source of the person who is interviewing you, before you do the interview
- * Contact your sports information director if you feel you have been misquoted, called at home, or hounded by the news media in any way

Don't...

- * Criticize teammates, coaches or officials
- * Joke or use sarcasm, you cannot control the tone in which it is written, or the context in which it will be aired
- * Say anything "off the record," or "just between you and me"
- * Say "No comment," instead say, "I'm not at liberty/qualified/ advised/able to discuss that issue"
- * Say anything that you wouldn't write down, add your signature and feel comfortable showing your coach or your mom
- * Provide locker room material
- * Pretend you are a coach, let the coaches answer questions regarding who will start, game plans and strategies
- * Miss class or practice for any interview
- * Take calls at home, make sure the interview is pre-arranged by the Sports Information Office, and that someone from the SID office has informed you the reason/angle for the story
- * Wear black and white clothing or stripes, another school's attire, or clothing with holes for photo shoots

Meet the Media...

Know Who You Are Talking To

Beat Writers...These newspaper writers cover TCNJ, sometimes on a daily basis. Get used to these faces because they are here all season. During the week, they often write player feature stories which may require more in-depth interviews. Feel free to elaborate with local beat writers when answering their questions, but make sure you remain positive. Humorous anecdotes you have to share will greatly assist their stories. While beat writers may become the most familiar members of the media to you because of the amount of time they spend with us, they still must remain independent and impartial. Game stories are a little different, because they are usually on a strict deadline and only need a few quick quotes to help complete their stories. The three daily papers that cover TCNJ on daily basis are the Trenton Times, the Trentonian and the Star ledger.

Columnists...Columnists cover all stories and are not assigned a specific sport. Therefore, you will not see them as frequently as beat writers. Unlike beat writers, columnists are assigned articles and allowed and encouraged to express their opinions. It is a creative form of sports writing. These opinions are often reflective of the team's performance on the field. If you do well, they are positive. If you play poorly, they tend to be more critical. You might not always agree with what a columnist writes. Don't take their criticism personally. They are just trying to do their jobs. As with beat writers, take your time and think answers through. Pauses--while you are thinking--will NOT show up in print.

Wire Service Reporters...The AP and UPI wire services are continuous digests of breaking news. Their writers send out short, capsule stories nationwide as soon as an event is over. Many of the nation's smaller media outlets rely on the wires for most of their sports news.

Television News Crews...Although you likely won't see camera crews from the local television stations as often as beat writers, don't overlook their impact. More people get their news from television than newspapers. Speak clearly, answer honestly and don't forget to smile. You'll be amazed at how far those three things will carry you. Remember, they are most likely to only use 30 seconds of sound bites.

Television Game Broadcasters...If a game will be televised either live or tape delayed, during the week count on seeing the announcers--a play-by-play announcer and analyst. They will come out to view some of your practices and along with the TV producer and director, may want to speak to you informally before the game. Obviously, you should not discuss game strategy in detail, or share confidential team information. But if you make a good impression and share some useful information, they'll likely talk positively about you and your team. Often, immediately following the game on the field/court, TV may do a live interview with either players or coaches.

Radio...Much like TV interviews, radio interviews require good sound bites. Remember to take your time and speak clearly. It is the way you pronounce your words, not your expression, that is most important on radio. Some of TCNJ's sporting events are carried by radio stations or networks. You might be asked to do a taped pre-game or live post-game interview with one of the announcers.

Photographers...Photographers for newspapers and magazines and TV camera operators tell their stories visually. They will circle the playing field during practice and at games. So while you must be careful in your comments to the media, remember that your actions can be captured on video or film too.



A word about DEADLINES...Just as your sport might have a clock that winds down, many members of the sports media have to keep an eye on the time. Most newspapers require their writers to submit their stories by a daily 10:30 p.m. deadline. Wire services and radio news have almost instantaneous deadlines, while TV news crews must put their segments together for the early evening and then the late evening news. So time--and accuracy--is of the essence for journalists. Keep deadlines in mind. When the media is seeking access to you after a practice or game, visit with them as soon as possible.

A word about HEADLINES...The sportswriter who interviewed you didn't write the headline for his story or the caption under the picture. An editor wrote them, after reading the story. So don't blame the writer for a less-than-complimentary headline the next time you see him or her.

What Others Say About Interviews...

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Hall of Fame Basketball Player...“Dr. J never refused an interview. Anytime, anyplace, ever. I could never do that. But he probably had the best relations with the press--and public--of anyone in professional basketball. And it's helped his career and his outside interests enormously. He's an example of how to cope with maybe the toughest problem in the NBA: dealing with the media. If Dr. J is the best example, I'll give you the worst--me. At least near the beginning of my career, before I learned some important lessons. In high school and college, my coaches hid me from the media. I think maybe they should have done with me what they were doing at other schools. They made players available in a controlled situation.”

Brooks Robinson, Hall of Fame Baseball Player...“Don't fight the media. That's a mistake. The media doesn't close doors. It keeps doors open.”

Norm Charlton, Major League Baseball Pitcher...“If there weren't writers, cameras and microphones in the clubhouse, then we wouldn't be getting paid what we're getting paid. The media is part of the goose that laid the golden egg.”

Magic Johnson, NBA Superstar...“The way you're perceived, that's everything. Athletes take it too lightly, but your image is very important. Especially if you want to get into something after your career is over.”

Ronnie Lott, NFL Great...“Part of our job is giving interviews. It's not something you want to do at certain times, but it's part of the job. It comes down to being professional.”

Marv Levy, Former NFL Head Coach...“I don't think players realize a comment they make is interpreted in greater depth than the depth of thought they gave before making the comment.”

Paul Tagliabue, NFL Commissioner...“If you understand the media's role and prepare yourself properly, your relationship with the media can pay big dividends. Learning how to deal skillfully in this area results in tremendous benefits during your playing career and long after it has ended.”

Gene Upshaw, NFL Players Association Executive Director...“It's more important than ever that the players cooperate with the media.”

Tom Friend, Basketball Times Magazine Writer...“The bottom line is those of us in the media tend to treat athletes exactly the way they treat us. And the reason the media rubbed Magic Johnson's back (when he went through his personal problems) is because he treated us like Fresh Princes.”

Lora Banks, Pro Athlete Magazine Writer...“The power of the press can make or break an athlete's career. For a pro athlete, a good public image translates into higher off-the-field income. You can, to a degree, control how you are perceived by the press and the public, which is the key to building a positive public image. Fans will be more tolerant and the media gentler when an athlete who is seen as likeable is dealing with a slump or controversy.”

Steve Woodward, Author and Broadcaster...“Conventional media training is when athletes are told to survive the interview experience and to view the media as a negative. Proper media training is when an athlete is taught that the whole media experience can be a positive process that an athlete can control and enjoy.”

Buck Rodgers, ex-California Angels Manager...“Deal with the press by keeping a very simple strategy in mind. When the writers come to me, I always remember they have a job to do, so I try to give them a pearl. Somebody told me that the one thing you don't want is to let a sportswriter write his own story.”

NFL Media Relations Handbook...“Fans judge you as a player according to how you perform on the playing field. They judge you as a person according to how you perform with the media. If the fans develop a good impression of you through the media, especially when things are not going well on the field, the benefits to you can be significant.”