THE GAME PLAN 2016-2020

A STRATEGIC VISION FOR KENT STATE ATHLETICS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2015, President Beverly Warren and Director of Athletics Joel Nielsen took the initial steps to create a Strategic Vision for Kent State Athletics. Guided by an Oversight Committee of twenty-one distinguished representatives from the University, the community, alumni, donors, and current and former student-athletes, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics developed a strategic vision for Kent State Athletics - The Game Plan 2016-2020. Developing the Game Plan was a broad-based, community effort with over 300 individuals participating in the process, including an Athletics Program Review which launched the overall effort and was completed prior to the strategic visioning process.

The Game Plan was built upon core values and a commitment to a mission and vision that was carefully aligned with that of the greater University. These core values and new mission and vision statements for athletics were developed by a diverse group of University constituents and adopted as part of the strategic visioning process. Every goal, priority, and strategy included in the Game Plan was created to be consistent with the newly stated values, mission, and vision for Kent State Athletics which are presented below:

CORE VALUES

- **Student-Athlete Well-Being**: We are committed to the health, safety, academic, athletic and personal growth of each student.
- **Integrity**: We do the right thing and hold each other accountable.
- **Respect**: We respect all people, their culture, beliefs, identity and thought.
- **Stewardship**: We are responsible guardians of the University’s resources, relationships and reputation.
- **Family**: We are a collaborative team supporting one another.

MISSION

The mission of Kent State Athletics is to graduate student-athletes and win championships.

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VISION

We are nationally recognized for the exemplary character, achievements and contributions of our student-athletes to better our society.
Working from this foundation, goals and priorities were identified for the Kent State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics for 2016 and beyond:

1. **The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will be aligned with the institutional values, mission, and vision.**
   
   - A defined set of values, a newly created mission statement, and a clearly stated vision for the future will serve as the foundation for decision-making within the Department, especially when establishing priorities and allocating resources.

   With the newly established roadmap for the University, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will be strategically aligned in its decision making with the core values, mission, and vision for Kent State University. The foundation of the Game Plan is rooted in the commitment to the student body and the University as a whole and will not financially jeopardize any University aspirations.

2. **The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will focus upon student-athlete well being, health and safety.**
   
   - Resource allocation will be focused on strategic investments in support facilities and programs that benefit all student-athletes and sports teams.

   This commitment will channel resources in ways that support student-athlete success including: academic services, health and safety, sports medicine, nutrition and dining options, strength and conditioning programs, locker room facilities, and providing a full range of NCAA permitted benefits to all student-athletes.

3. **The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will continue its commitment to a broad-based program of sports sponsorships.**
   
   - The history of providing a broad-based offering of sports will continue with the current offering of sports and will include the future addition of new women’s sports.
   - In the future, increased giving and private support will be necessary to supplement current funding for Olympic sports and investments in revenue generating sports.

   Data gathered in the fall 2014 Athletics Program Review reaffirmed the strong desire and commitment to support competitive success in a wide range of sports. Private funding derived through a united effort of all stakeholders will be required.
4. The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will continue to focus its commitment to equity by providing competitive opportunities for women.

   • The Department will add women's lacrosse as a Division I program with the first competitive season in 2018-2019.

The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will continue its policies of inclusiveness of all individuals and the creation of equitable competitive opportunities for the students of Kent State University.

5. The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will strategically invest in programs and initiatives that grow the resources needed to support the Game Plan for Kent State Athletics.

   • There will be an immediate focus upon men’s basketball as the initial vehicle for increasing revenue generation and national distinctiveness.
   • The enabling factor in achieving the goals in the Game Plan is increased private support. As such, there will be a concerted effort to motivate all constituencies to renew and ultimately increase their philanthropic support of Kent State Athletics.

With an exciting renewed commitment to Athletics success, new sources of revenue will be essential to ensure the success of the Game Plan for Kent State Athletics.

The true value of the Game Plan is not in the documents that have been created but in the planning process that brought people together to review, assess, examine, visualize, explore and to contribute and create. The process used to give life to these tremendously important documents was intentionally inclusive to encourage broad-based participation that will ultimately lead to buy-in and ownership by the University, its many constituents, stakeholders and supporters. The resulting Game Plan is intended to be a series of documents that encourage continuous improvement, not only in the content of the Game Plan, but also in continued collaboration and support for the successful operation of the Department.

Until changed through a similar collaborative and inclusive process, the Mission, Vision, and Core Values should serve as constant reminders of the significant value of the Athletics program to the distinct culture that characterizes Kent State University. The values should be celebrated widely and serve as a constant reminder of the Kent State’s commitment to the student-athlete and the success of the entire program.

As conditions change, so too may the goals, strategies, and action steps in place to achieve change. Thus, this Game Plan should always be viewed as a dynamic and ever-changing document that will guide the Kent State University Athletics Program into the future.

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Development of the GAME PLAN

At the direction of President Beverly Warren, the Strategic Visioning process began in September of 2015 under the direction of Director of Athletics, Joel Nielsen, and Faculty Athletics Representative, Dr. Kathryn Wilson. Collegiate Sports Associates was selected to assist the department with the process of strategic visioning and planning. The process began by appointing an Oversight Committee (Exhibit A) to represent the University's various constituencies, to oversee the planning process and provide support and guidance for the development of the plan for the future of Kent State Athletics. The Athletics Director presented the charge to the Athletics Department staff on September 2, 2015. On that same date, the Oversight Committee was presented with an overview and a charge to begin their work to oversee the project.

MISSION-VISION- CORE VALUES

A broad based Mission, Vision, and Core Values (M/V/CV) Work Group (Exhibit B) was appointed to review the current Mission, Vision and Core Values statements of the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics and make any revisions that would provide a foundation for the overall visioning process. An important component of the work of this committee was to align athletics’ foundational statements with the University’s concurrent work on the vision for the entire University. That group met for a working retreat on September 3, 2015.

The M/V/CV Work Group thoroughly reviewed the results of the Landscape Analysis, completed as a part of the comprehensive review of Kent State Athletics in July 2015. At the September 3 meeting, Joel Nielsen presented his view on the strengths and challenges facing the Athletics Department (Exhibit C). The Work Group also reviewed the University's new "Vision for the Future" that defined the Vision, Core Values, and Strategic Priorities for the University. The "Vision for the Future" became an important foundational document for the athletics Game Plan. The Work Group also reviewed the current Mission, Vision, and Core Values of the Athletics program and discussed the relevance to the current position of Kent State and the changing landscape in Division I athletics.

After a lengthy review of the Landscape Analysis, the Director of Athletics’ thoughts on the needs of the athletics’ program, and the current vision for the University as a foundation it was decided that, while the currently stated Mission reflected a core commitment, it did not speak to the University's current vision under the leadership of President Warren and the alignment of the Kent State athletics program with that vision. With this as important context, the Work Group developed drafts of new Mission, Vision, and Core Values statements for the Athletics Program. These foundational statements were presented to the Oversight Committee and various constituencies of the University and were approved (Exhibit D).
GOALS, OBJECTIVES, and PRIORITIES

The M/V/CV Work Group also developed initial Goals and Objectives for the athletics program going forward and for purposes of the planning process grouped them into six priority areas of focus. Work Groups were appointed (Exhibit E) to further refine the Goals and Objectives in the six priority areas. Ultimately each of the six Work Groups identified the strategies needed to reach the goals set for their area of concentration as well as the action steps required to implement the strategies, assigned accountability for each action step and time frames for completion, anticipated resource requirements, and identified key metrics for measuring progress.

After the M/C/CV Work Group completed their work, the six Work Groups began meeting to complete a detailed plan to support the priority areas identified by M/V/CV Work Group. The six Work Groups were made up of individuals with a wide range of expertise from the Athletics Department and the University and also included representatives from alumni and donors. The Work Groups met with the staff from Collegiate Sports Associates on October 9, 2015 to begin the work of refining the Goals and identifying critical areas of emphasis associated with each priority.

A broad goal statement was developed for each priority area. These statements, along with areas of emphasis for each priority include:

1. **STUDENT-ATHLETE WELL-BEING** – Kent State Athletics will provide a safe and supportive environment that prepares our student-athletes to achieve their academic, athletic, social, and personal goals.
   - Emphasize and support the holistic student-athlete success (academics, athletics, personal development)
   - Prioritize student-athlete health, safety, and well-being.

2. **COMPETITIVENESS** – Kent State Athletics will position our programs to regularly win MAC Championships and/or compete in post-season play with opportunities for individuals and teams to compete at the national level.
   - Prioritize improvements to support facilities and programs that impact all student-athletes (e.g. academic support, health and safety initiatives, sports medicine, locker rooms, strength and conditioning, nutrition, full cost of attendance, etc).
   - Create a Departmental and University culture that emphasizes the importance of student-athlete recruitment.

3. **RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT** - Kent State Athletics will provide student-athletes, coaches, and staff the resources necessary to achieve academic success and attain competitive goals.
   - Make initial investments in Men’s Basketball as a first step in building identity and generating resources for the overall athletics program.
• Develop a fundraising structure that enables growth of the donor base, increased annual giving, and increased major gifts.
• Enhance revenue streams from all areas: ticket sales, gifts, multi-media rights, corporate sponsorships, licensing, concessions, game guarantees, etc.
• Increase attendance at athletics events.
• Create a dynamic, exciting collegiate environment at home games.
• Prioritize facility improvements that support overall student-athlete well-being, with an initial focus on enhancements to the Memorial Athletic and Convocation Center (MACC).

4. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS – Kent State Athletics will provide facilities, services, and effective use of resources to give our student-athletes the opportunity to achieve their academic, athletic, social, and personal goals.
   • Properly maintain and enhance competitive areas, placing priority on facilities that impact the most student-athletes, consistent with the department’s gender equity plan, and addresses student-athlete well-being; Including an initial focus on the MAC Center.
   • Implement a transparent budgeting process.
   • Provide an efficient and effective organizational structure for the Department.
   • Support professional development opportunities for the athletics staff.

5. EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION - Kent State Athletics will cultivate an environment where all facets of the athletics department are characterized by fundamental fairness, gender equity, respect for diversity, and inclusion.
   • Meet or exceed the requirements of Federal Title IX including the addition of women’s lacrosse with the first competitive season in 2018-2019.
   • Fully integrate all student-athletes within their teams, the Athletics Department, and the University community.

6. identity and engagement - Kent State Athletics will leverage it's athletic and academic success for national recognition with a consistent identity that generates positive emotions and engagement with our constituencies.
   • Enhance PR tactics in alignment with University initiatives to proliferate support, communication and the image of Kent State Athletics.
   • Coordinate marketing and branding efforts with other areas of campus (Admissions, Advancement, Alumni affairs, etc.) and in alignment with the University's Strategic Plan.

WORK GROUP STRATEGIES and ACTION PLANS (Exhibits F-K).

The six Work Groups each developed strategies to be implemented in order to achieve the identified Goals and Objectives. Additionally, they developed action steps that would be needed to fully activate strategies to achieve the goals of the Game Plan. In addition to identifying strategies and action steps, the Work Groups developed a tracking matrix that
assigned accountability, estimated resource requirements, identified key measurements, and set time frames for the completion of each action step and strategic initiative. Each matrix was designed to serve as a management tool for use in tracking progress on the Game Plan. Finally, all of the strategic initiatives included in each matrix were put together in a detailed master time-line for tracking progress on the implementation of the Game Plan (Exhibit L). In all, there are six (6) priority areas, eighteen (18) goals and objectives, forty-four (44) strategies and ninety-nine (99) action steps.

THE FINAL REPORT

The six Work Groups met regularly in November and December 2015 with oversight from Co-Chairpersons, Joel Nielsen and Dr. Kathryn Wilson. The six Work Group Chairpersons met regularly throughout the process with Joel and Kathy and provided final drafts of each Work Group’s plan in mid-December. The Chairpersons also met to compare and contrast their group work to insure consistency and accuracy. In February 2, 2016, a meeting was held to share the draft with the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics staff and the Game Plan Oversight Committee for their endorsement and ultimate adoption. The resulting Game Plan, which serves as a management tool for the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics and as a guide for the University, was accepted by the President and assigned to the Director of Athletics for immediate implementation.