



Photo by Rob Cornetta

# A Sports for All Approach

Mercy's Club Basketball Team

**T**he benefits of participating in sporting activities in college are plentiful and long lasting. Sports involvement adds richness to students' overall college experiences, offering a way to build friendships, reduce stress, exercise, gain leadership skills, or continue a beloved high school extracurricular.

Even more so, sports program staff provide an additional resource to support students' overall success, and in the case of Mercy College, go above and beyond to provide mentorship, encourage camaraderie and boost confidence.

Fortunately for Mavericks, Mercy understands the need for sports for all skill and interest levels, and provides a plethora of opportunities for students that accommodates varied interests, skill levels and schedules. Other than the varsity sports program, which operates at a required talent and experience level, and involves a significant time commitment, Mercy offers alternate program options for students: intramural sports and club sports.

In an intramural sports league, students play for fun for their college and there is no competition with other institutions. Practice and game schedules are less time consuming than club sports, and in Mercy's case, the sports played each season are based on student interest. Alternatively, club sports provide a middle ground between varsity sports and intramural

sports, offering students the opportunity to engage in structured intercollegiate competition. E-sports, which consists of organized, multiplayer video game competitions, was a recent, exciting addition to Mercy's club sports roster.

In spring 2019, Mercy launched the intramural sports program on the Dobbs Ferry Campus. "It's become a community," said participant Leo Hefferan '20, who played basketball and flag football. "I made a lot of friends and connections that I probably wouldn't have made otherwise."

Daniel Steinberg, Mercy's intramural sports program coordinator and assistant strength and conditioning coach, has seen the program's positive impact. "A man in his 50s joined intramural sports. He was a commuter student who was at college for the second time and wanted something to do outside of class," Steinberg explained.

"The other students loved the fact that he was a part of the league. It was everything that we hoped intramural sports to be — an inclusive forum for people to be physically active, gain self-esteem and have fun with a new group of people."

Robert Cornetta, hired in November 2019 as Mercy's club sport manager, has significantly grown club sports opportunities for students wishing to be part of a team. Besides expanding soccer, basketball and other sports, he has managed the launch of Mercy's new esports program.

The East Coast Conference (ECC), of which Mercy is a member, was the second Division II Conference in the country to sponsor esports programs. “Esports isn’t just students playing video games — it’s an industry projected to be worth about 1.4 billion dollars,” Cornetta explained. “The ECC understands that esports forces students to learn communication, teamwork and strategy. Esports can increase STEM equity in higher education, encouraging participation in an activity involving science, technology, engineering and mathematics.”

Mercy freshman, Brooklyn resident and League of Legends aficionado Patricia Kennedy ’23 not only introduced Cornetta to the popular game but helped him design Mercy’s esports program at the encouragement of Felipe Henao, assistant dean of student affairs. One of two girls on the team, Kennedy is used to people being surprised about her love for gaming. “Not a lot of people expect girls to play a lot of video games,” she said. Kennedy and her teammates compete with esports teams from other colleges in MercyManhattan’s new, state-of-the-art gaming facility, which she commends for its level of equipment and systems.

The extracurricular activity perfectly complements Kennedy’s academic studies as she is majoring in design and animation, which prepares students for careers in animation/gaming and communication design. “It’s cool that Mercy provides the opportunity for me to pursue a career in something I love, that’s also fun,” said Kennedy.

Cornetta is proud that the club sports program accommodates students like Kennedy who commute long distances and have busy schedules. “I strive to create a cohesive programming calendar to make sure that we are meeting the needs of all students,” he said.

“What is great to see is that students who participate are deeply engaged and demonstrate persistence in learning, teamwork and practicing their craft. They are staunchly dedicated to doing something that excites them — a dedication and positivity that transfers into their daily lives.”

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the intramural sports and club sports teams paused in-person practices and games. Nonetheless, staff are providing students, like Kennedy,

the opportunity to participate in remote activities, such as esports tournaments and virtual 5k races. “We have given the students some continuity of programs to make this transition period as normal as possible,” said Cornetta.

“The club sports program is an extension of the institution — it’s our job as staff members to make sure we’re getting the students access to the resources and knowledge they need, at a time when they may benefit from extra support.”



Players on Mercy's Club Soccer Team

Photo by Samuel Baiden



Member of Mercy's Esports Club

Photo by Rob Cornetta



Mercy's Club Soccer Team

Photo by Rob Cornetta



Mercy's Club Running Group

Photo by Rob Cornetta