

# Mercy Athletes Moving Conversations Forward On Social Justice

As the news of George Floyd's murder exploded across the country, Mercy supported its community in processing the grief and anger generated by his death. In a letter to the Mercy community, President Tim Hall wrote: "So long as racism exists, it stains the promise of equal opportunity under the law... I invite [Mercy's] various members, whether students or staff or faculty, to renew our commitment to justice and equality."

The effect was galvanizing. Some student-athletes found themselves expressing their frustrations regarding systemic racism during their regular Zoom meetings with coaches and mentors. In the safety of those talks, students who'd had little or no exposure to discrimination were able to recognize the need for change. By summer's end, a new student group named Mavericks Standing Together (MST) had formed because of these conversations. Their goal: to join forces with other campus groups and begin the work of combating systemic racism.

The students' eagerness to take action to address the issue of racism came as no surprise to some. Director of Athletics Matt Kilcullen, Jr. said, "There is great power in students leading the way for change, and some of our student-athletes are natural leaders that other students want to rally around."

When the idea of formally organizing a task force arose, sophomore Brandon Wilson '23, a member of the men's basketball team, stepped up. "In the beginning, we talked a lot about each person's experiences of racism. Some people had never seen it firsthand. Some people you



thought wouldn't have experienced racism, did."

The task force brought together student-athletes from different sports in new ways. Women's basketball team member Brianna Santos '22, a junior majoring in veterinary technology, said, "The more we got together for conversation, the more everyone started opening up to each other's differences."

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Before long MST had joined forces with Mercy's chapter of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), a nationwide organization of student-athletes who organize grass-roots efforts in their communities. The Mercy SAAC chapter has long been active on the Dobbs Ferry Campus, organizing community outreach efforts every season, including events for veterans, breast cancer awareness and national Diversity and Inclusion Week. SAAC President

Virginia Scruggs '22, a communication studies major and soccer player now in her junior year, observed that the two groups are cross-pollinating, relying on each other's ideas and energy to give more strength and purpose to their goals. "Attendance at our meetings is better now with Zoom," she said. "Like many students, I have a job in addition to school, so it's a lot easier to just get on your phone instead of meeting in person. It's not ideal, but for now it's our best option."

MST and SAAC are already making a difference and joined forces to collect food for Thanksgiving meals for local families, and plans are underway to host a virtual Black Lives Matter march. The two groups continue to meet over Zoom to prepare for future activities.

For Wilson, the key is reaching out to involve youth from Mercy's three campus communities. "We talked about showing students how different races can work together for the community," he said. "Students are easy to get through to, once they see something that needs changing. We want to reinforce the positive. This is our great vision."