

Student Athletes: Division II Leaders for Community Service

Mercy College's student-athletes are leaders, both on and off the field, and they are committed to using their talents for good. Mercy's 10 men's and women's teams were honored by both the National College Athletics Association (NCAA) and the East Coast Conference (ECC) for their community service efforts.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, Mercy College Athletics ranked second amongst the over 300 NCAA Division II institutions nationwide in total number of community service hours. The department was also awarded the 2021 ECC Community Cup, an award presented to the ECC member that tallies the greatest number of community service and community engagement hours per student-athlete. The Community

Cup comes with a \$500 grant that can be used toward community service efforts during the 2021-2022 academic year.

In total, Mercy's athletic teams completed 772 hours of community service during the 2020-2021 academic year, which works out to nearly 3.5 hours per student-athlete—a particularly impressive feat given that this volunteering all occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We're privileged to be student-athletes and to be students at Mercy," said Veronica Scruggs '22, member of the women's soccer team and president of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)—a student-led organization that has organized many community service initiatives. "If I was in a bad situation, I'd want someone to help me out. It's just putting yourself in other people's shoes."

Mavericks volunteered in all kinds

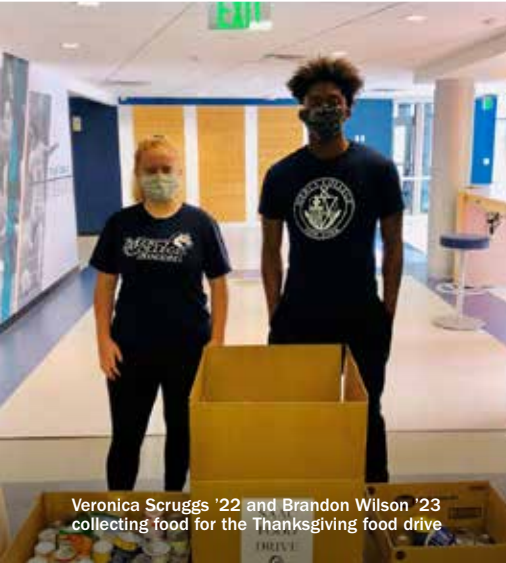
of ways. They helped out at local events such as the Field of Screams and the Holiday Hustle in Dobbs Ferry and participated in a Veterans Day Walk. They gathered donations for a Thanksgiving food drive and a holiday toy drive. They organized a special Halloween celebration for honorary field hockey team member 5-year-old Jelien Ramos who is battling B-cell Leukemia, and they raised money for charities including the American Cancer Society and the HEADstrong Foundation. SAAC and Mavericks Standing Together—another student-led community service organization— even organized a March for Justice, an event that aimed to bring awareness to racial and social injustices.

Though the primary focus of community service is to help others in need, the student-athletes have also noticed an impact on themselves. Brandon Wilson '23, member of the men's basketball team and president





Micayla Brady '22, Kerri Cummings '22, Taylor Bishop '22, and Katie Jelliffe '22 from the Mercy women's lacrosse team volunteering at the Dobbs Ferry Holiday Hustle



Veronica Scruggs '22 and Brandon Wilson '23 collecting food for the Thanksgiving food drive



Sergeant Justin Kamke from the Dobbs Ferry Police Department transporting the donations (with the help of Brandon Wilson '23)



Women's Soccer Head Coach Danny Leon Jr. '14, M.S. '19 Named Coach of the Year

Congratulations to Women's Soccer Head Coach Danny Leon Jr. '14, M.S. '19, who was named Coach of the Year by the East Coast Conference (ECC) for the first time after leading the Mavericks to an 8-1 record in ECC play during the 2021 season. Prior to serving as head coach, Leon Jr. served as an assistant coach for the Mavericks. In his first season as head coach in 2019, Leon Jr. led the Mavericks to a 13-3-4 record and third-straight NCAA Tournament appearance. "It is a real honor to be the Head Coach at the school that I played for and for which I started my collegiate coaching career."

of Mavericks Standing Together, said that he sees more connection and camaraderie between Mercy teams because they have spent so much time volunteering together. When the women's soccer team was playing in the ECC tournament, for example, 50 to 60 student-athletes decided to travel by bus to Molloy College in Rockville Centre to support their peers.

They also learn life lessons, such as how to juggle competing priorities. Scruggs and Wilson both work in addition to being full-time students and student-athletes. "I allocate a little time every day to my work as SAAC President—whether that's planning a new community service event, getting people excited about an upcoming volunteer opportunity or actually volunteering," said Scruggs. "Recently, we were playing in West Virginia for the Sweet 16 [of the NCAA Division II Tournament] in women's soccer, and I had a 10-hour bus ride home. Instead of watching movies, I decided to respond to some emails about upcoming SAAC events because I want to make sure we're ready to help others."

For Matt Kilcullen, Jr., Mercy's Director of Athletics, this type of learning is the biggest benefit of volunteering: "Our job in the Athletic Department is not just about developing a team during practice and during competition. We also need to provide the right academic support for our student-athletes and help them understand that they need to be part of the community. Getting involved with community service is a great way to prepare our student-athletes for the real world."

Both Scruggs and Wilson plan to continue volunteering long after graduating from Mercy. As Scruggs put it, "You can help others while bettering yourself."