

9/11 and Athletics at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Abstract

The terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 dramatically transformed the world of aviation, including Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Federal authorities investigated the school for possibly training the terrorists that conducted the attacks, and because of this association, which ultimately turned out to be false, the Athletics Department received a bomb threat in the ICI Center on September 12th, 2001. This poster presentation explores the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and their impact on Athletics at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. The study will include interviews with members of the Athletics staff working at the time of the attacks, as well as with other members of the ERAU community such as former student athletes. The poster presentation also draws upon primary sources in the ERAU Archives, as well as records in the Athletics Department. This presentation interprets changes in the Athletics Department, the university's reputation, and the career aspirations of student athletes in the larger context of a national crisis mentality and the university's response to intense media scrutiny. Just as the nation responded with a renewed sense of unity, so too did the Athletics Department discover that its expertise in team building facilitate its successful responses to the challenges.

Methodology

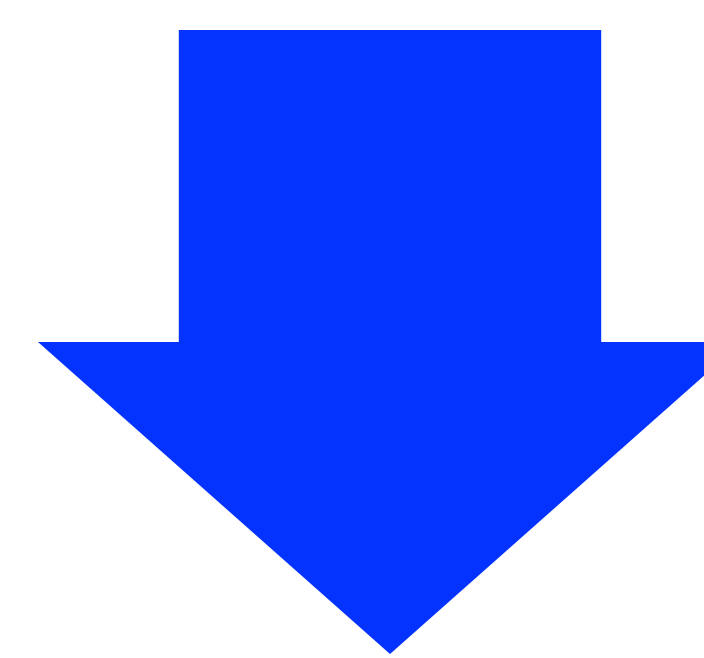
- Interviews with members of the ERAU Athletics Department
- Review of primary sources:
 - ERAU Archives
 - Daytona Beach News Journal

ERAU and Athletics 09/10/2001

- Undergraduate Enrollment: 4,525
- Graduate Enrollment: 278
- 22 Academic programs
 - Only 6 engineering majors
 - No general business major
- 11 athletic teams competing in the NAIA

09/11/2001

- ERAU Women's Soccer driving to away game vs. Warner
- Both soccer fixtures are cancelled; Alison Smalling receives phone call telling WSOC to "turn the vans around"
- Faculty and students gathered together in the lobby of the ICI watching the events unfold



After 9/11

- Classes resumed as usual
- Bomb threat on the ICI
- Heightened awareness. More safety precautions taken when traveling and at games
- The Riddle community began looking out for each other more; there was a sense of "family defending family" in response to the false claims that the hijacker was trained at Riddle
- Comments made about Riddle training terrorists during the NAIA Baseball tournament in Spring 2002 . . . and SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER at ERAU WSOC NCAA tournament in Tennessee, Fall 2019

"Is everything ok?"

"No. You need to pull over."

Coach Steve Ridder to Alison Smalling on 09/11/2001



Conclusions

- Following 9/11, there was a heightened sense of comradery within the ERAU Athletics department, and within the ERAU community in general.
- The words "family" and "team" were used frequently by the interviewees.
- Public accusations about ERAU possibly training the terrorists created a kind of siege mentality.
- Safety needs heightend coaches' protective roles.
- Team responses varied with the composition of team members (US citizens or international students).
- *Unresolved question: Did national views of sports as unifying the country apply to ERAU?*



Next steps

- More research on other events on campus
- More interviews with people on campus
- Interview alumni, particularly from Athletics
- Comparison of 9/11 and COVID-19 crises
- *Note: Due to COVID-19 we were unable to return to the Archives for follow-up research.*



Authors

Victoria Gustafsson, COAS, Senior
Megan Smith, COB, Senior
Women's Soccer

