

A Man with a Plan

Tim Perneti, Rutgers' new athletic director, intends to use technology to disseminate sports among the university's far-flung fan base while coupling scholarship with athletic excellence.

I began on Twitter [twitter.com/RUathletics] shortly after starting in April," says Tim Perneti RC'93, SCILS'95, Rutgers' new director of intercollegiate athletics in New Brunswick and, at age 38, the youngest athletic director in the Big East Conference. "It's great for connecting with fans and congratulating student-athletes for their accomplishments." Perneti, formerly a radio analyst for the Scarlet Knights football team, for which he played as tight end from 1989 to 1993, became vice president of programming for College Sports Television (CSTV) in 2003 and later rose to executive vice president in 2006. He played football as well at Ramapo High School under Rutgers football coach Greg Schiano. Perneti oversees 24 men's and women's intercollegiate teams.

Rutgers Magazine: You were the executive vice president of the CBS College Sports Network [formerly CSTV]. Why Rutgers now?

Tim Perneti: You chase your passion, not the job. The relationships that I developed while a student-athlete changed my life. I got a great education, started on the path to an advanced degree, and met my wife here. I'm in a position to create an even better environment for student-athletes.

RM: What was your perception of Rutgers while at CBS and as a radio analyst for Rutgers football?

TP: Rutgers was a complicated place in a complicated state, but has great potential and has only scratched the surface.

RM: What lessons from building a college sports network apply to being the athletic director?

TP: You form a vision, articulate that vision, and don't shy away from making tough decisions.

RM: What are your priorities?

TP: Improving the supportive environment for the student-athlete, athletically and academically, and, of course, winning conference and national championships.

RM: What about the consumer: the fan?

TP: Not every Rutgers fan is within 30 miles. We have to develop new ways to connect with our fans and alumni, such as "streaming" sporting events via the internet.

RM: How has Rutgers football changed since your days on the gridiron?

TP: From the day Greg Schiano came here, there was always a plan, and we haven't deviated from it. There were a few big games when I played in 1992, but nothing came close to the media attention surrounding our 2006 season, culminating with the Louisville game and our first bowl victory.

RM: Men's basketball hasn't made the NCAA tournament since 1991. What needs to be done?

TP: Coach Fred Hill has done a good job of attracting some top-flight talent, which now has to be developed. The RAC needs an upgrade, and that's being addressed, including a plan for a new practice facility. We need to have the necessary tools for men's and women's basketball in order to compete in our league.

RM: Are there other recruiting challenges?

TP: In many of our sports, Rutgers is not at the full NCAA equivalency of permissible scholarships. We have to do better to compete with the schools we are up against.

RM: The NCAA singled out football, women's tennis, and men's cross country for top academic performance. What's the challenge to recruiting blue-chip athletes who can also stand out scholastically?

TP: Recruiting is about relationships. I tell parents that Rutgers is the best environment for their kids to grow academically and athletically. We have the right coaches and a great system of academic support. The Academic Progress Rate success speaks for itself and is a feather in our cap.

RM: What is the biggest issue for student-athletes?

TP: What they'll be doing after they leave Rutgers. To that end, we plan to help them be ready for success with our LifeSkills Program, which puts people in place to support student-athletes from day one. We have



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successfully endowed the program, which is unique to Rutgers.

RM: What other changes can we expect to see?

TP: We want donors to feel closer to the athletics program. There are many successful entrepreneurs and businesspeople who are as passionate about Rutgers as I am and have an interest in our success. They help us get where we are going, and we want these people surrounding our program in every way.

RM: How will the cuts to the university's state appropriations affect athletics?

TP: We will run different areas more efficiently. We are also uniquely positioned, better than most, to raise revenue through fundraising and other activities. Our staff in athletic development, under Jason Kroll, has had a great year.

RM: How does your long relationship with Coach Schiano have a bearing on your new job?

TP: I have known Greg since we were kids. I played for him in high school and as a freshman here, and I stayed in touch with him when he coached at other places. We know each other, respect each other, and trust each other. It will make all the conversations—good, bad, and indifferent—productive.