What first drew you to athletics, especially at the college level?
I grew up in a house that was dominated by education and athletics. Many family members were either in education themselves or held on to their own athletic glory days. Conversations around the dining room table frequently had to do with education issues of the time or around the dining room table frequently had to do with education issues of the time or around the dining room table frequently had to do with education issues of the time or around the dining room table frequently had to do with education issues of the time or around the dining room table frequently had to do with education issues of the time or around the dining room table frequently had to do with education issues of the time.

What was your own experience like as a collegiate student-athlete?
I played collegiate soccer at Division III University of California, Santa Cruz. I went from a high school program where I was one of the stronger players to joining a nationally ranked team. I didn’t understand what it took to make that transition. My first couple of seasons with the team were frustrating because I wasn’t one of the stronger players. I rarely saw the field. But as I grew into a young adult and focused on developing my skills, I started to see more playing time and became a significant contributor to the program by the time I graduated. I look back on it and feel very fortunate to have had those experiences because I can relate to the athlete at the end of the bench, but I can also relate to the athlete who has a great deal of on-the-field responsibility.

Why did you want to pursue the job at CUA?
As an athletic director in the mid-Atlantic, I’d seen a number of Catholic University teams win consistently and at national levels. If you are a Division III sports fan like I am, Catholic is a known commodity as a very productive and typically very healthy and conducive to growth and development. I believe that while this line of thinking may not land us every student, it will land us those families who really value those types of experiences and philosophies.

What are your goals for the program?
From a competitive aspect, I would like our athletic department to become one of the top 25 Division III athletic departments in the country. That is typically measured by NCAA Tournament participation and success. You need to get to Sweet 16s, Elite Eights, and Final Fours. I believe Catholic University can extend themselves, really push themselves to put together this engine of activity. That coach said, “I know that when adversity strikes or when I ask someone to do something they might not be interested in doing, ultimately their faith is going to bring them into the team fold. All that mixing and matching personalities together, I don’t have to worry about any of that because I know we’re going to be a cohesive unit.” That is visible on a number of our teams at CUA. We must commit ourselves to one common goal despite individuality and we can all come together as one due to our faith.

What’s your favorite part of your job?
Game day. Watching our student-athletes extend themselves, really push themselves to compete at their highest physical level possible. I love seeing how, when individuals push themselves, that folds into the team dynamic. I appreciate those moments of teamwork being demonstrated right before your eyes.

How does faith play into athletics at CUA?
I’ve thought about this a lot. I spoke with a highly successful Division III coach at another faith-based institution who has won multiple national championships. I asked him, “What is the secret to the success of your program?” He said, “Coaches spend years recruiting certain student-athletes to come onto their team and fill certain roles. When I’m recruiting, I can pick different personalities from across the country and know that their faith will ultimately always bind them.” What he said hit me like a thunderbolt. Coaches spend years recruiting personalities that fit different needs, interests, talents, and qualities. They spend years mixing and matching those parts to put together this engine of activity. That coach said, “I know that when adversity strikes or when I ask someone to do something, they might not be interested in doing, ultimately their faith is going to bring them into the team fold. All that mixing and matching personalities together, I don’t have to worry about any of that because I know we’re going to be a cohesive unit.” That is visible on a number of our teams at CUA. We must commit ourselves to one common goal despite individuality and we can all come together as one due to our faith.

What do you want to see our campus population become?
I like the conversations that I get to have with our student-athletes because they’re such a diverse group of fantastically energetic people. It is great to be able to interact with them and see who they are becoming. I enjoy brainstorming with coaches, helping them work through issues, whatever their team issue might be at that moment, being a sounding board for them, challenging them to look at different sides of an equation.

Meet the Cardinals’ NEW LEADER
Sean M. Sullivan is Catholic University’s new associate vice president and director of athletics. He came to the University in November with more than 20 years of experience in intercollegiate athletics, most recently as director of athletics and recreation for Clark University in Worcester, Mass. This spring, Sullivan sat down with The Catholic University of America Magazine to talk about his own background in sports, his plans for the Cardinals athletic program, and what he loves about the job.

What do you want readers — primarily alumni — to know about the athletic department at CUA?
CUA athletes represent our University in such positive and favorable ways. I would really encourage the community to contribute to that narrative by continuing to support our teams and student-athletes. Your presence and friendship means so much to them. As members of our alumni community, you are welcome and encouraged to be a part of our program. Nostalgia is a very real and powerful phenomenon. I do hope alumni look back very positively on their experiences as athletes here and that they want to contribute as supporters, fans, mentors, and role models.

Mike Allen, a friend, trusted colleague, and confidant. He’s a mentor to me and someone who has leaned on me as well.

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