

2009 ECAC-SIDA WORKSHOP “HANDLING THE MEDIA CRUSH”

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In my first year at Saint Joseph's, I was fortunate to work with the men's basketball team that put together a perfect regular season, achieved the nation's number-one ranking, reached the NCAA Elite Eight and had the consensus National Coach and Player of the Year. The attention we received from the local and national media was unprecedented for Saint Joseph's and at times, was overwhelming. But it was manageable – and helped greatly by an extremely accommodating and media-friendly head coach. And although it was a once in a lifetime experience, the following points will help you deal with a “crush”, no matter the level or intensity.

1. Be organized – This was a key, as I had to keep track of many requests for phone interviews for both print outlets and radio stations. I answer my own phone and that in itself has its pros and cons - but at least I was the only one talking to the media and didn't have to rely on someone else taking messages. I created a spreadsheet that I would update daily and give to my coach, and he in turn, would just go down the list and make the calls. When planning, I did keep my coach's schedule in mind and attempted to group interviews in ‘blocks’ during the day so as to get the most efficient use of his time.

2. Be proactive - I sent out (and still do) a weekly email to the media (tv, radio and print) detailing the practice schedule for the week and listing the media availability. If there was a last-minute change, I made sure I communicated it as soon as possible. The media were appreciative to receive this in advance so they could plan their schedules.

3. Be accessible – As you know, in this business, you are always “on duty”, regardless of whether or not you want to be. But this is extremely important when experiencing the “media crush”. Make sure all of the key media members have your cell number and get used to answering it at odd times (within reason). Keep up with the emails, and respond, even if it's just to confirm that you received their request and are working on it.

4. Be accommodating and flexible – Obviously there were times when our schedule didn't fit perfectly with the schedule of every single media member. Try your best to accommodate those “stragglers”. This flexibility will be greatly appreciated by the media.

5. “Don't let them see you sweat”- No matter how crazy it gets, try to stay pleasant and maintain an even keel with the media, even the really demanding ones. That goes a long way and can help you down the road – especially when your team isn't the main story. Try to enjoy it – you don't know when it's going to happen again (believe me, I know!).

6. Make sure your coach does his/her part – This is one thing I absolutely did not have to worry about, but there are coaches who put dealing with the media very low on their list of priorities (I've dealt with those kind too). Keep after your coach to make the calls and be on time for the scheduled interviews. Communicate with your coach a few times a day about the schedule (see spreadsheet in #1). Probably the most important thing you can do to keep your coach on board is by showing him/her that you're coordinating everything to make the most efficient use of his/her time.