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https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/sports/golf/interview-with-new-mens-golf-head-coach-michael-brice/article_3cb5f8bc-729c-11ed-9420-27a75377a7b0.html

Interview with new men's golf head coach Michael Brice

Justin Travis, Sports Editor

Dec 2, 2022



Courtesy of JSU Athletics and JSU Golf

By the Chanticleer

Jacksonville State's men's golf team brings in coach Michael Brice, from Division II Christian Brothers University, to take on the role of full time head coach for the program moving forward.

"It was just one of those things that felt right," Coach Brice said. "It is an amazing opportunity to say the least, so I felt really lucky to take on the job."

Coach Brice served as CBU's head coach for the past six years, and found great success with both the men and women's teams there.

“Leaving there is probably the toughest thing I have ever done,” Coach Brice said. “When I had to tell them, definitely a lot of tears were shed, but I knew I left them in good hands with my assistant. I am still going to be watching those guys because I still care so much about them.”

Coach Brice takes over the head coaching job here at JSU from interim men’s golf head coach, and current women’s golf head coach, Robbie Fields. Coach Fields led the men’s team to a great fall season, and hands the job over to good hands in Coach Brice.

“I am excited to get to Jacksonville and start the Spring season in January with the guys on the team,” Coach Brice said. “I got to go down there and meet them, we all went to dinner, and it was a fun experience. They look like a great group to coach.”

Coach Brice has experienced success at nearly every level of professional and amateur golf. Brice diligently worked his way up the ranks after starting his coaching career in 2003 at the University of North Florida.

“I want to help the players individually and as a team,” Coach Brice said. “I want to help them accomplish some of the big goals I know we will have.”

“JSU’s golf program has had some amazing successes, and to have a program with as much history as they do is important for what we want to build,” Coach Brice said. “Coach Hobbs was a major part of that legacy, so we just want to take the great foundation that was already laid and build on that.”

Coach Brice’s coaching career followed a great playing career where he played at the amateur level at Auburn University before his professional career that saw him garner multiple pro-tournament wins.

“I feel like at this level most of the guys playing want to eventually play professional golf, so I know from my experiences I can help them with that,” Coach Brice said. “It’s all about how hard they work and if they can buy into themselves.”

Justin Travis

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/features/saa-annual-fund-and-university-recreation-set-to-host-jax-jingle-5k/article_8771b878-72d3-11ed-99b0-d78c09909e8d.html

SAA, Annual Fund and University Recreation set to host Jax Jingle 5K

Taylor Smith, Correspondent
Dec 2, 2022



Courtesy of Grace Cockrell/JSU

The JSU Student Alumni Association is hosting the Jax Jingle 5K fun run around campus on Dec. 3 at 8 a.m.

The fun run consists of a timed 5K, an indoor 1-mile fun run, and a virtual 5K. It costs \$30 to participate in the on campus and virtual run. It also costs \$30 to support a student that is running. The 1-mile run is \$10, and all proceeds go to the SAA Scholarship Fund, according to the Give Smart website.

Amy Schavey, assistant director of the Annual Fund Board, said that for the first time the Annual Fund Board is hosting the fun run in person. In 2020 the event was canceled due to Covid-19 and in 2021 it was held online.

“This year's event is a combination of the two, hosted by the Annual Fund, University Recreation, and the SAA,” said Schavey.

Brittany White, assistant director of SAA explained how much the scholarships offer and how it varies based on how much money is raised annually. Other than the 5K, SAA also hosts an annual Shrimp Boil in the spring, and they have had two spirit night fundraisers at Mcdonald's and Struts this year, according to White.

“The Student Alumni Association awards two scholarships annually to SAA members; the SAA Leadership Scholarship of \$1,500 for the Fall and Spring, and the Renfroe Founders Scholarship of \$1,000 for Fall and Spring,” said White.

The Jax Jingle 5K will begin at 8 a.m. and an after-race event will occur from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The award ceremony will be presented in the MAC at the Recreation and Fitness Center. The awards will include overall male and female first, second and third places. There will also be first place male and female in different age categories, according to Give Smart.

Jax Jingle and virtual 5K participants will receive a t-shirt upon registration and extra t-shirts will be available for \$20 to nonparticipants.

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/features/tips-for-finals-success/article_6b6e3b74-74d6-11ed-8de2-9b5d3f724396.html

Tips for finals success

Elaine Acree, Correspondent

Dec 5, 2022



Matt Reynolds/JSU

Finals season is here, which means that stressed and overwhelmed students are prevalent on the JSU campus. Thankfully, JSU has resources like the Student Success Center that can help students push through finals and make it to Christmas break.

Director of the Student Success Center, Debra James, has many helpful tips for students to be successful during their final exams.

- Use your notes to create flashcards, outlines, study guides, and to predict exam questions.
- Review your notes, PowerPoints, study guides, etc. each day.

“Give yourself time to retain information,” James said.

- Get a tutor if you need one or utilize Tutor.com.
- Organize your time and take breaks as needed.
- Create a comfortable and distraction-free study environment.
- Know your final exam schedule so that you can study in advance. Know your limits while studying; do not cram for long periods at a time.

“Cramming works for some people if you just want the information to take the test. But if you want to retain the information, you can’t cram,” James said.

- Reach out to your professors if you have questions while studying; they are happy to answer your questions by email or during their office hours.
- Create a study group using the Study Buddies feature in the Navigate student app. It will connect you with other students in your class who are interested in studying.
- Utilize the Student Success Center if you need a place to study.
- Reward yourself for doing a good job or earning the grade you wanted.

Final exams begin on Dec. 7 and will last through Dec. 13. For the specific exam schedule and more information, visit https://www.jsu.edu/registrar/final_exam_schedule.html.

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/opinion/guests/guest-column-is-the-best-yet-to-come-for-the-gamecocks/article_7d6f219c-2e0b-11ed-8add-2f416a95fe23.html

GUEST COLUMN: Is the best yet to come for the Gamecocks?

Jordan Smith, Special to The Chanticleer
Sep 6, 2022



Courtesy of Jacksonville State University

In times like this, I'm reminded that Lou Holtz was right.

The legendary football coach once said, "You're never as good as everyone tells you when you win, and you're never as bad as they say when you lose."

At the risk of upsetting him, I'm ready to make a prediction: Jax State football is a sleeping giant that's only starting to open its eyes.

To be fair, I described the program as a sleeping giant at the end of last year's disappointing 5-6 season, it's first losing record in 18 years. But after just two games, I'm as convinced as ever that this program is ready to return to glory.

I hope I don't sound as ridiculous as Longhorn fans who've been proclaiming "Texas is back" for over a decade. I'm just optimistic, and what I've seen has, so far, passed the eye test. Not only are we 2-0 for the first time since 2013, but we're in the midst of a badly needed culture change that has been every bit as palpable as it has been refreshing.

This year's squad takes the field under a new identity. Phrases like #StayCocky and #FearTheBeak are taking a backseat to what head coach Rich Rodriguez calls "hard edge." And the school appears to be fully embracing "Jax State," plastering it on our new uniforms. When considering how many headlines Deion Snaders is making with the lesser JSU and how the lesser Gamecock in South Carolina is more recognizable than ours, this was a wise move. After all, Jax State is in our fight song.

But it doesn't end at branding. The men are playing harder this fall. Gone are the days of indifference to penalties. We're not trying to land a killshot on an out-of-bounds foe. And our Gamecocks finally seem more interested in celebrating big plays with each other than taunting an opponent.

Our defenders are eager to snatch the ball away from opposing offenses. And our offense is playing like winning by a few points isn't good enough anymore. For the sake of my blood pressure, I pray the days of the "Cardiac Cocks" don't return for a long, long time.

I'll admit, I fell into trap following the Stephen F. Austin game. After seeing our men blowout the No. 10 team in the country 42-17, I looked at the schedule and began counting future wins. I surely resembled fans of that other school in Tuscaloosa. Then the Davidson game came and I, like many others, expected to win by a bigger margin than 35-17. But realistically, Davidson's triple-option, ball-control game plan shortened the game before we could run the score up. And this margin of victory wouldn't feel so deflating if we didn't have a date with Kennesaw State, another triple-option offense.

Even so, my faith in this program is unwavering. An undefeated season is well within our reach. Those pesky Owls from suburban Atlanta are winless on the young season and hardly look untouchable. What a message to send to the ASUN Conference on our way out the door?

And running the table will send a bigger message to Conference USA and the rest of the Group of Five. Should we top Tulsa, it will mean we beat our third straight FBS squad. We may only still be a sleeping giant today, but once our eyes open, CUSA is ours for the taking.

Jordan Smith

Son of Jax State Football (2009-2011)

Chanticleer alum (2011 - 2013)

JSU grad (Spring 2014)

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/features/sga-hosts-jsu-in-lights/article_b07d939e-7752-11ed-829f-836ac4ea9474.html

SGA hosts JSU in Lights

Madeline Ricard, Correspondent

Dec 8, 2022



The SGA officers at JSU in Lights.

Courtesy of JSU Photo Database

Friday, Dec. 2, JSU lit up the campus with lights and Christmas spirit during JSU in Lights at the President's House.

JSU in Lights is an annual event where the Christmas lights covering the whole campus are turned on simultaneously. In addition, this year there was cookie decorating, Christmas movies, and a beautifully decorated President's House to explore.

According to Dr. Don Killingsworth, JSU's president, JSU in Lights is a way to kickstart a wonderful season and encourage students to study and finish the semester strong.

"[JSU in Lights] gives the campus a warm and glowing feel," Killingsworth said.

Tracy Phillips, a retired JSU employee, said she came back to campus to enjoy this event.

"It's a great thing that brings the campus community together," Phillips said.

In addition to providing a Christmas atmosphere, the SGA accepted donations for Jacksonville Christian Outreach Center (JCOC). Attendees were invited to bring gifts for children in order to make their Christmas better.

SGA President Jewelishia Johnson said the President's office annually partners with JCOC to give kids a better Christmas.

"[SGA officers] gave too... you never know what people are going through," Johnson said.

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/opinion/guests/guest-column-my-hope-for-the-future-jsu-s-graduate-assistantships/article_a3320b8c-7a47-11ed-8b75-6fc8c2db0320.html

FEATURED

GUEST COLUMN: My hope for the future: JSU's graduate assistantships

Seth O'Neal, Special to The Chanticleer
Dec 12, 2022



Photo courtesy of Jacksonville State University

JSU has cut another graduate assistantship, and that is a problem.

Graduate assistantships offer graduate students the opportunity to attend a program at JSU, with scholarship and a stipend, while working for the university.

This decreases workload on professors, provides experience to graduate students, and enables more students to attend graduate programs. I think that Graduate Assistantships are necessary for all universities and for the academic ecosystem.

I was a history major at JSU and a graduate teaching assistant for the chemistry and geosciences department. A little paradoxical, I know, but without the assistantship I would not have had the opportunity to complete my masters at JSU. While not the most appropriate department, many of my peers and colleagues were in similar situations.

Graduate assistantships are not available in every department, and some are highly competitive. The history department at JSU has not had an assistantship for years, and each semester the landscape changes; the chemistry assistantship was cut this semester. This forces graduate students to find other opportunities and pursue positions outside their fields of study.

Assistantships are not just cut, some are added, but I think there is value in analyzing and illuminating the importance of these positions and the negatives of removing them. The chemistry assistantship provided me with the financial opportunity to attend graduate school at JSU.

Graduate assistantships and scholarships are important when considering which schools to apply to, and many students can not financially attend without financial aid. Assistantships also make JSU more competitive and offer opportunities to students that might not have originally applied to graduate programs. One of the deciding factors for me personally, and many of my peers, when choosing a program to attend is the financial cost.

Graduate assistantships are a great incentive to attend a university, and without the assistantship at JSU, I would have chosen a different university. In the aftermath of the Chemistry department's cut, I realized the difficult situation facing many of my colleagues.

I had thankfully graduated, but one of the most important factors for many, the scholarship offered with assistantships, was gone. This is not a new story, assistantships are added and dropped, but it is one that I would like to highlight and examine. JSU offers only 80 assistantships for 1,473 graduate students. I know some graduate students are only virtual but these statistics help show how the removal of one program can have monumental effects. Cuts to assistantships are the first steps towards cuts in graduate programs and an unbalanced academic ecosystem.

Graduate assistantships not only benefit students but also the faculty of the university. These positions allow professors to delegate the instruction of certain classes, like labs or grading, to graduate students. This allows more time for research and instruction in upper-level sections. Upper-level courses allow professors an opportunity to teach in their specific field of study and at a higher level.

Without assistantships to help JSU be competitive for graduate students, there would be fewer students for upper-level courses. Graduate students are also beneficial for assisting research; research assistantships help accelerate the research process by assisting with professors in their field and allow universities to produce more publications.

These programs allow graduate students to gain hands-on experience in the classroom and in their representative field. Graduate students do not make up the majority of the student population, but they do notably contribute to the university.

Academically, for Jacksonville State University, the first thing that comes to mind is not usually graduate studies.

The number of incoming freshmen across the board has continued to increase as JSU has broken enrollment records in consecutive years. According to JSU's own statistics, out of 9,633 freshmen students in 2022, 34% identified as first generation. First generation students are students whose parents did not complete a university degree and they, for good reason, are a focus of the university's administration. In contrast to the increasing number of incoming freshmen, the number of graduate students at JSU is 1,473.

While I do not expect graduate studies to become the primary focus for the university, it still has its place and I hope it does not become overlooked.

I understand that the landscape is constantly changing, and the university is dynamic in its funding, but I hope the value of graduate assistantships are apparent to those that make the decisions. Cuts to assistantships directly affect graduate programs and that, in turn, has influence on the entire university.

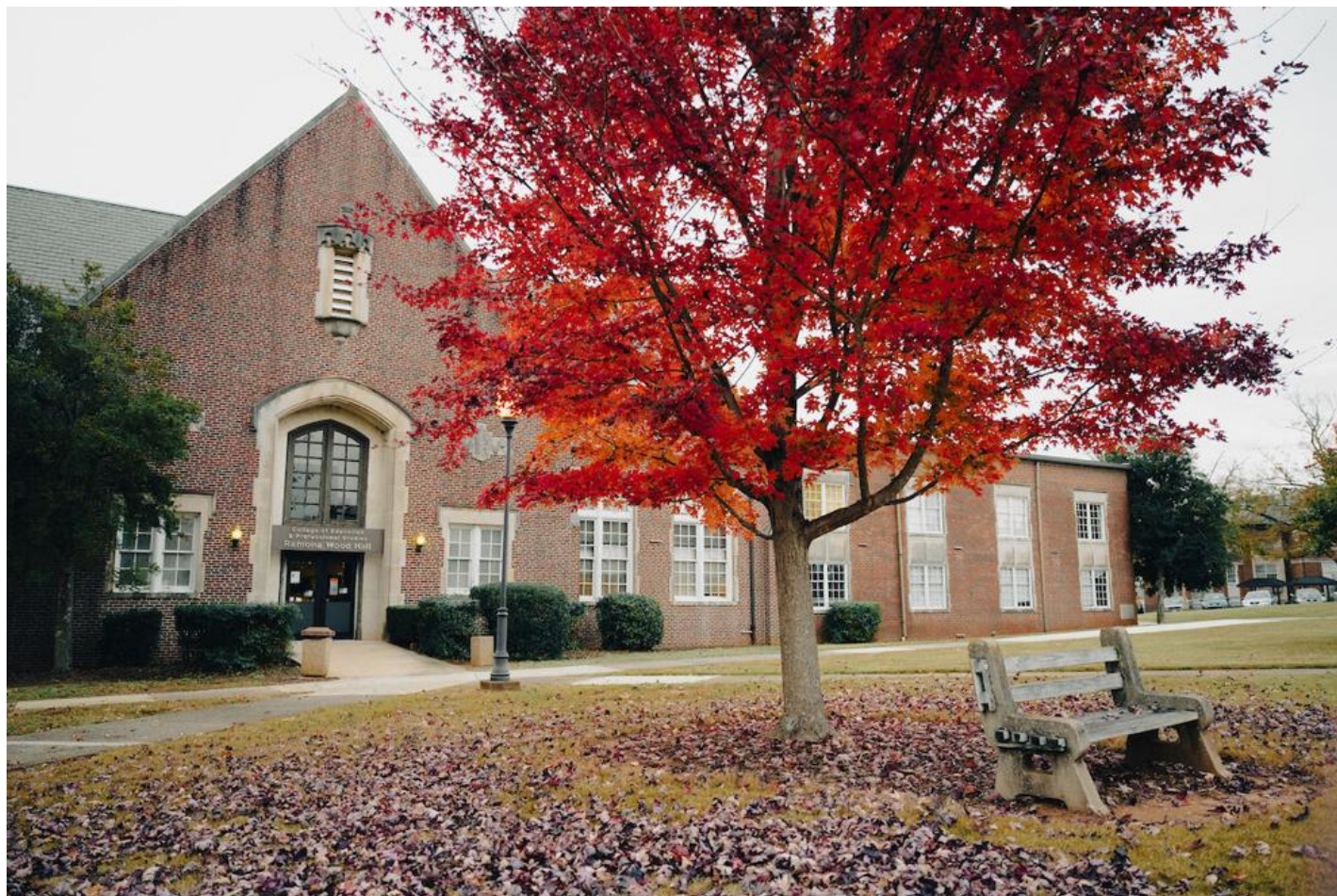
I am thankful for the assistantships at JSU, and my hope is in continued opportunities for future graduate students at Jacksonville State University and the success of its programs.

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/features/sandy-hook-shooting-10-year-anniversary/article_507de07a-7bee-11ed-9039-bbb251a710ee.html

FEATURED

Sandy Hook shooting 10-year anniversary

Anna Gurganus, Features Editor
Dec 14, 2022



Ramona Wood Hall- home to the JSU school of education.
Courtesy of Matt Reynolds/JSU

Dr. Christie Calhoun was spending time with friends, looking at Christmas lights and enjoying the holiday season when she heard the news.

It was Dec. 14, 2012, and a 20-year-old man had entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and shot and killed 26 people. According to the Connecticut State Police After Action Report, 20 of them were children, all in the first grade, and six were adults. The report said that the man then shot and killed himself, and it was determined that he had killed his mother earlier that day.

At that time, Calhoun was teaching sixth grade at Weaver Elementary School, just south of JSU. She was broken-hearted and scared from the news. The tragedy's total of 28 deaths made this the deadliest elementary school shooting in history.

"I remember thinking what a terrible thing it was, but not really grasping how terrible it was," Calhoun said.

Today, 10 years after the Sandy Hook shootings, schools across the country have made new security measures routine, and colleges like JSU that train K-12 teachers try to prepare them for the unthinkable, even as colleges try to avoid becoming the scene of deadly violence themselves.

Calhoun is now the head of JSU's department of curriculum and instruction, which prepares students for jobs in elementary and special education.

"Even now as part of our discussions in department meetings and things, we have these conversations about teaching safety because it's still a very real discussion out there. School violence has not gone away, and situations on college campuses have not gone away, and so my students here and my faculty here have to take precautions," Calhoun said.

It's on me

Kali Payne is a JSU senior majoring in education who plans to begin a job teaching fourth grade after she graduates in December. Payne said that the majority of her knowledge on how to deal with this type of situation came from her real-life experience in her practicum courses.

JSU requires students to get experience working in several different schools while still in college. Payne witnessed a number of drills during her practicums, including active shooter drills. One occurred during her first week of her internship in a first-grade classroom.

"I had all the kids in the corner and shoved in the closet, and I was like, woah, it's on me," Payne said. "It was kind of scary, honestly."

Calhoun remembers contemplating in the days of the Sandy Hook shooting what she would have done if she was in an active shooter situation.

“I think all teachers would have done the same thing. We are charged with protecting our students and I think any teacher would have thrown themselves in front of students to protect them,” Calhoun said. “It’s hard to say what we would do in the heat of the moment, but it’s what I would like to think that I would have done.”

Payne said that she is unsure how prepared she feels to be in that type of situation.

“I feel like I could handle it... but I don’t know really how I would handle that situation until I was in that situation,” Payne said.

Calhoun said the department has looked into curriculums that include safety measures that students will need to know moving forward. One curriculum that Calhoun has seen other schools implement is the CHAMPS program. This program looks at all the security measures, behavior, and safety measures that aren’t always obviously tied to safety and security. It brings to light the less obvious aspects of safety. Calhoun has been looking into bringing this program to JSU.

Michael Barton, the UPD chief of police and director of public safety said that it is also important to take security measures seriously on a college campus. He explained that since universities like JSU have a very open environment, somebody who does not belong is not going to stand out like he would at an elementary school.

“For those of us in law enforcement I think when those things happen it just makes us mad,” Barton said. “Our job is to protect and to serve and we take that very, very seriously.”

UPD Assistant Director of Public Safety and Deputy Chief Brian Mann explained that campus police also have young children to protect in the JSU Child Development Center.

“We not only have college-age students but we have young children too in our Child Development Center. So the university has taken a very strong approach to protecting those children through security measures in place over there,” Mann said.

What would we do?

Calhoun said that after the Sandy Hook shooting she and her students were afraid of this type of thing happening in other places.

“They were old enough to understand and hear the stories, and I remember them coming and asking questions about how something like that could happen, what would we do if something like that happened here?” Calhoun said.

School shootings did indeed increase after the event at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The United States has had 2,032 school shootings since 1970, and 948 of these occurred after Dec. 14, 2012, according to the Sandy Hook Promise website.

Sandy Hook Promise is a nonprofit organization founded by family members of those who were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Their goal is to educate children and adults in order to prevent violence in atmospheres with children.

UPD Sgt. David Becker said that after the Sandy Hook shooting, schools started to focus more on keeping elementary schools safe from similar threats.

“Everyone was focused on high schools and trying to worry about shootings at high schools, but nobody had really worried about elementary schools until that point. A lot more security measures were put into elementary schools than they ever had before,” Becker said.

While Weaver Elementary School already had measures in place for such an event, Calhoun said that after the Sandy Hook shooting they were practiced more often. They had drills, established codes to alert of danger, and the central office and administrative faculty members started paying closer attention, according to Calhoun.

As for Calhoun’s classroom, which was on the ground floor, one thing they had to take into consideration was the windows. They had to keep them clear in case they needed to use them as an escape, but they also had to be prepared to cover them in case they needed to block someone from seeing inside. The rooms also had a small window beside the door, and a student’s mother made decorative curtains for them that were weighted so they could be dropped to cover the window quickly and easily.

“It’s a tough time for a lot of reasons to be a teacher,” Calhoun said. “I think that teachers now, we have a lot of responsibility, not just to make sure that students are learning all the things that we need to learn, but that we are kept safe and secure and feel loved.”

Mann and Barton both advised that students should watch out for behavior that might indicate danger. Mann said that students should call or email the department or make a report on the Cocky Watch app if they notice anything unusual or suspicious.

“If you see something, say something,” Barton said. “Safety is everybody’s responsibility.”

Anna Gurganus

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/sports/soccer/interview-with-new-soccer-head-coach-sean-fraser/article_037cb58c-7e7b-11ed-8cb2-c38a7991f49b.html

Interview with new soccer head coach Sean Fraser

Justin Travis, Sports Editor

Dec 17, 2022



Courtesy of JSU Athletics and JSU Soccer

By the Chanticleer

After an underwhelming 3-13-2 fall season, the Jacksonville State soccer program recently announced the hiring of new soccer head coach Sean Fraser. Coach Fraser comes to the Gamecocks after serving as soccer head coach for the University of Louisiana-Monroe.

“I don’t want to waste any time,” Coach Fraser said. “When I get to campus I want to have a good picture of what needs to happen for us to succeed. We are trying to get a plan together as quickly as we can, and we are getting there.”

In his final year at ULM Coach Fraser helped lead the Warhawks to a ten win season, the programs first ten win season in 17 seasons. Coach Fraser boasts 120 total career wins in his ten seasons as a collegiate head coach.

“I feel excited about the new opportunity,” Coach Fraser said. “I’ve always kept an eye on the program since Rich Rodriguez and all of his guys went over there, obviously because they came from ULM as well. So, when the position opened up I saw a supportive administration that has a fully-stocked support staff, which to me is the bedrock to success.”

The upcoming 2023 soccer season will be the first season that JSU moves into Division I Conference USA. The move will not only align with the departure from the ASUN conference, but also with Coach Fraser’s first year with the team.

“I know some of the teams in the league already, and I know some of the coaches as well, so I am excited to rekindle some friendships with the coaches in the conference,” Coach Fraser said. “I think it is an opportunity for Jacksonville State to do extremely well from the get go, so a lot of the work we do this Spring will cater toward that.”

“With the returners that we’ve got, as well as the people we want to bring in, I’ve got a chance to work with them for the next four months,” Coach Fraser said. “The next Spring will be huge for us to capitalize on the opportunity.”

Coach Fraser is known for his successful impact both off and on the pitch. At his previous stops the new Gamecocks coach would lend serious focus to his player’s education as well as community outreach.

“I met the players on zoom last week,” Coach Fraser said. “We talked about having a full Spring, where we play some games and build a solid fan base and culture around the team. We want to get our principles and core values established in the team as well. They also mentioned getting in touch with the Jacksonville community, so we will invest ourselves into Jacksonville as much as they invest into us.”

Justin Travis

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/sports/football/jacksonville-state-schedules-coastal-carolina-for-the-2023-and-2024-football-seasons/article_820ce2cc-7fdf-11ed-9504-7bd25bf78551.html

FEATURED

Jacksonville State schedules Coastal Carolina for the 2023 and 2024 football seasons

Justin Travis, Sports Editor

Dec 19, 2022



Courtesy of JSU Athletics and JSU Football

By the Chanticleer

A JSU athletic official has confirmed the reports that the Gamecocks are set to play the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers in both the 2023 and 2024 football seasons.

The confirmation comes after reports from early last week claimed the two schools scheduled a home-and-home series for the next two seasons. The first game will take place on Saturday, September 9th, 2023, as the Gamecocks travel to Coastal Carolina. The second game will see the Chanticleers head down to Jacksonville State on Saturday, August 31st, 2024.

The two schools have faced off only once in program history back on September 17th, 2016. The Gamecocks won that home game at Burgess-Snow Field, 27-26, in just the third game of the season that year.

Coastal Carolina posted a 9-3 football season in 2022, but came up short in the Sun Belt conference championship against the top 25 ranked Troy Trojans. The Chanticleers are set to play in the TicketSmarter Birmingham Bowl on December 27th, against East Carolina. The 2023 football season for Coastal Carolina will also be the first season under newly announced head coach Tim Beck.

The Gamecocks 2022 season saw them bolster a 9-2 record under their first year head coach Rich Rodriguez. The record set the team a top of the ASUN football conference, but due to the team moving up to Division I Conference USA for the 2023 football season, they could not officially be crowned ASUN conference champions and were ineligible for any FCS playoff appearance.

Official times have yet to be announced for both games in the next two years against the two universities.

Justin Travis

https://www.jsuchanticleer.com/features/a-homemade-christmas-this-family-takes-a-unique-approach-to-gift-giving/article_b5469712-809f-11ed-a556-931449bd6f62.html

FEATURED

A homemade Christmas: this family takes a unique approach to gift-giving

Emily Ford, Correspondent
Dec 20, 2022



A homemade doll house and homemade dolls that represent the Presley family.

Courtesy of Emily Ford

On Christmas morning, 9-year-old Suzie Presley could hardly contain her excitement. As she stumbled down the stairs to see what was waiting for her, she wasn't looking for any gift in particular. While all of Suzie's friends had written a long wish list full of toys, Suzie had no idea what to expect for Christmas, but that didn't make her any less enthusiastic about opening her gift than her peers.

One by one, her parents and sisters opened their gifts until it was finally her turn. When she looked inside, she was thrilled. It was a wooden dollhouse and 8 very familiar looking dolls. Suzie's 14-year-old sister, Sarah had made the gift special for her.

She took to Hobby Lobby to gather the materials, a blank wooden doll house, small wooden pegs, paint, fabric, and glue. She hand-painted the peg dolls to represent members of her family, and she invited a family friend to help her paint extra dolls. She and her friend spent about four hours painting the dolls and the house to go along with it. She then took

the time to painstakingly cut out the fabric and construct it into tiny curtains for the windows. The best part is that the total cost of the gift only came out to about \$30.

The Presleys are happier than ever to hold their tradition as Christmas spending isn't the only thing that is driving expenses all over the nation.

According to an annual report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics measuring consumer spending for all of 2021, entertainment expenditures rose by 22.7%, personal care products and services rose by 19.3%, and miscellaneous expenses rose by 8.7%. Even the U.S. Christmas Price Index, an annual tradition which shows the current cost for one set of each of the gifts given in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," rose 5.7% to over \$41,000 last year.

In times like these, the Presleys want to inspire others to try their family tradition as they feel it can help families who are struggling financially. This has become something that the girls look forward to with great anticipation each year, and the entire family participates. They draw names from a hat as early as October 1 every year to find out who they will be making a gift for.

Mike and Chrystal Presley have four daughters between the ages of nine and sixteen, and their home-made gift tradition started in 2016 when their youngest daughter was one year old. The two oldest daughters made gifts for each other. Sarah made a heart-shaped necklace with a picture of the two of them in the center and Sophie painted a doll to look like Sarah. The tradition is now in its eighth year, and the family says they will never go back.

According to Mike, the tradition was born out of a desire to cut down on holiday spending while also allowing each child to take part in the gift-giving. Although Mike Presley doesn't remember the exact amount that is spent each year, he estimates that the family spends about half of the money they would spend each Christmas without the tradition in place.

"There are six of us in a household and if we're having to buy each person a gift, it gets expensive and it's a lot to have to look for," he said. "We did the homemade gifts to help bring more focus in preparing the gifts for one person instead of five."

"When we started, the process was hard because I had two little ones, so I made the gifts for my youngest two daughters for a long time because they were too young to do it," Chrystal said.

According to Chrystal, her oldest daughters were showing an interest in buying gifts for the family, and this seemed like a fun and inexpensive way to include them. Now the younger girls are able to fully participate in the action too.

"We did it to save money because Sarah and Sophie were old enough to want to get everyone a gift, and we wanted the girls to be able to buy for each other without having to buy for everyone," she said.

Sarah, the Presleys' oldest daughter, even takes it a step further, making gift planning a year-long pursuit.

"I keep a note in my phone of all the ideas I have for each person," she said. "Any time they mention something that interests them, I write it down so I can remember what they want if they get picked."

Even though the original purpose of the tradition was to save money on Christmas presents, it has had many more benefits that the Presleys never anticipated. The process of planning and hand-crafting each gift has been a great way for each family member to exercise creativity and create lasting memories to cherish for years to come.

“The girls get pretty creative with what they come up with and I think that’s also a good thing,” Mike said.

The Presleys say they enjoy the process of choosing and making the gifts just as much as receiving them on Christmas morning, and it has proven to be a bonding experience for everyone involved.

After drawing names each October, the family divides into separate teams of three to keep the gifts a secret from the recipients and take a shopping trip to buy craft supplies together, and some of the most memorable gifts for them tend to be the ones with family bonding experiences tied to them. The gifts are extra special to them because each one has a story.

For example, the Presleys’ second-oldest daughter Sophie says her favorite gift she has made over the years is a doll bed that she made for Sadie, her youngest sister in 2020. It was made from wood for the frame and fabric scraps from Hobby Lobby. She used more fabric scraps and cotton filling to construct a pillow. The total cost of the project came to about \$30 and she spent roughly six hours completing it. However, what makes the gift so special isn’t the money that went into it, but the memories she made while making it.

That year, Sophie went with Sarah and her dad to Eric Ford’s house to make gifts and hide them until Christmas. Eric was a close friend and Sunday school teacher from the Presleys’ church. Sadly, Eric passed away from Covid the next year, but the memories that she had with him live on in her heart, and she will forever cherish them.

“I was grateful for the time we spent together that year and the years before,” Sophie said.

“One of my favorites is the handprints that Sarah made just because I feel like that captured a moment in time,” Chrystal said. “Sarah took some nails and did string art, so she got the kids handprints and drew them and placed nails where their handprints are.”

For this craft, Sarah tied different lengths of string to nails pounded into the wood, painted with handprints, stretching the string from nail to nail, creating a neat display.

The family’s love for making memories together during the holidays rather than spending hundreds of dollars on gifts is furthered emphasized by the fact that some of their favorite gifts are the ones that turned out to be fails.

For example, one of Sadie’s favorite gifts she has received was a cork board that her mom made her to hang her artwork in her bedroom. After buying the board, her mom personalized it for her by adding letters to the top of the board, spelling out “Sadie’s Artwork,” but the letters didn’t stick properly and have since fallen off. It makes no difference to Sadie, though. She cherishes the gift from her mom and uses it often to hang drawings, paintings, and schoolwork.

One tip that Chrystal recommends when considering what sort of gift to give is to try not to think about what you would like to receive, but to put yourself in the shoes of the other person. Think about their interests and what they would love most. This is the same advice that she gives to her girls.

“Try to make it meaningful,” she said. “This is not about getting something that we want. It’s more about thinking about the other person and doing something that they would enjoy.”

An example she gave of this concept was a scrunchie holder that she made for Sophie last year. It had a flat wooden base with five pegs protruding from the base to hold the scrunchies. According to Chrystal, Sophie wanted something northern-lights-themed in her bedroom, so she painted the northern lights on the holder and sewed all of the scrunchies for her. Sophie now uses it all the time.

When it comes to planning the gifts and drawing inspiration, the Presleys spend a lot of time scouring the internet using websites such as Google, Amazon, and Pinterest. They also get ideas from friends and just from knowing each other well.

They also find inspiration from each other and share ideas with one another. The idea for one of Sophie’s favorite gifts from Sadie came from their mom who suggested that she use a large letter “S” made of wood with the rest of the letters in Sophie’s name hot glued to it to make personalized decor to hang on her wall.

The research is the most time-consuming part of the process for the family, which is part of the reason why they draw names as early as October.

Mike said he searches for inspiration by searching terms such as “homemade gift for (fill in the age) girl” and trying to get ideas through the search results, but he sometimes just goes with his gut and what he thinks the person he is gifting will love.

“If I decide I want to make a necklace for Chrystal, I may look at different types of necklaces on Amazon just to get an idea of something to make, so I’d say research is the most critical part of it and it involves more planning than doing,” Mike said.

According to the Presleys their favorite place to shop for supplies is Hobby Lobby, where they go in teams each year.

“Hobby Lobby is kind of our anchor point when we’re looking for ideas or supplies,” Mike said. “They seem to always have most of the things we need.”

The Presleys are grateful for the lasting memories that this family tradition has brought them on top of all of the money they have saved because of it. They hope to encourage others to try out the tradition in their own family, even if it is in addition to regular gift buying, because it has brought them closer together and they believe it will do the same for others this holiday season and many more to come.

Mike said he didn’t know of any other families that made gifts for each other for Christmas, but he would recommend it to anyone as a way to bring the family together.

“One thing I will say about the homemade gifts which is true every year is that you really don’t have a clue what you’re about to open,” he said. “It’s something that you always have to give a lot of thought to making, so the surprise part of it is really good.”

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FEATURED

Siran Neal named alternate for 2023 Pro Bowl Games

By Thomas Ashworth, Editor in Chief
Dec 21, 2022



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Former Jacksonville State defensive back Siran Neal was named an alternate for the 2023 Pro Bowl Games at the special teams position, the Buffalo Bills announced in a release.

Neal finished 10th in fan voting at the special teams position, with Justin Hardee of the New York Jets named the AFC starter at the position.

Sixteen players from the Bills were named a Pro Bowl Games starter or alternate, with Neal being named a fifth alternate.

Neal has appeared in all 14 of the Bills' games this season playing a large role on special teams. He has logged 14 total tackles (nine solo) and a career-high four pass deflections this season.

This offseason, Neal inked a three-year, \$10.9 contract extension to make him the NFL's highest-paid special teamer according to a report from Syracuse.com.

Neal was selected by the Bills in the fifth round of the 2018 NFL Draft after being named to the All-OVC and Football Coaches Association's NCAA FCS All-American teams his senior year with the Gamecocks.

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