

# For love of the game

For student athletes, heart and hard work bring success on the playing field and in the classroom

Ryan Tryt, bundled inside a heavy black coat and a grey winter hat, was taking short, deliberate steps across the ice-coated pavement toward Clark Gymnasium when he spotted his bleary-eyed visitor approaching.

"Welcome to 6 a.m.," he bellows across the near-vacant parking lot. The sky looks as black as it did when he left campus eight hours ago at the conclusion of his night class.

"I have no distinction of what day it is sometimes," Tryt says. "It feels like it's dark all the time."

Tryt enters the athletics complex and slips into the locker room, emerging a few minutes later wearing a T-shirt and Tiger-orange baseball cap.

It's time for practice.

Baseball in January may seem incongruous to many (6 a.m. January baseball, no less), but off-season workouts – formal or informal – are a regular occurrence.

In fact, to the 575 student-athletes who participate in RIT's 24 varsity sports, the term off-season probably seems much stranger.

It's all a part of the RIT student-athlete experience – an experience, according to Athletic Director Lou Spiotti, that strives to develop the entire person.

"We conduct a competitive intercollegiate athletic program that emphasizes the quality of the athletic experience, along with supporting our student-athletes' academic goals and personal growth," Spiotti says. "We spend a lot of time around the development of our student-athletes and provide them with structure so that they can optimize their time here at RIT."

In turn, the student-athletes spend a lot of their time – in the classroom, in the gym, on the playing field and in the community – working tirelessly to achieve success.

Tryt, a catcher on the baseball team, doesn't believe there is a secret to that success. Actually, he feels it's quite simple.

"It's all about time management," says Tryt, a fourth-year marketing major. "I tell all of the recruits who come in that it's not



Baseball player Ryan Tryt starts most days with a 6 a.m. workout, no matter the season.

difficult. It's about making lists of things that need to be done, prioritizing them, and then crossing them off as you do them."

Tryt should know. He's excelled both in the classroom and on the baseball diamond – boasting a 4.0 grade-point average and a .364 batting average. Those numbers helped lead to his selection as RIT's first representative on the College Sports Information Directors of America/ESPN The Magazine Academic All-American Team.



Lou Spiotti

Spiotti says it takes a special type of individual to participate in sports while navigating RIT's quarter system.

"We have a rigorous portfolio of academic programs at RIT and we also have a very demanding academic calendar," Spiotti says. "Our student-athletes are special in the fact that they are very focused on their academic lives. In many ways, they



Joanna Dobeck spends at least 25 hours a week on the basketball court.



Adrienne Gagnier hits the road.

student-athletes to rise above what everyone else is doing. They live in a competitive environment," Spiotti says. "There is also a safety net in place for each of them. Our student-athletes have coaches and support staff that are really focused on what they're doing academically."

Adrienne Gagnier, a fourth-year illustration major who runs track and cross-country, believes the mentality that makes her a successful athlete helps her academically.

"You always work to do your best in a race and you always work to do your best on a project. I feel those two really coincide," says Gagnier. "I don't ever want to hand in a project that I didn't put a lot of time in on, or that I know isn't good. I hate doing that. I don't want to do that. Just like I hate going into a race knowing that I didn't practice hard that week."

But Dobeck says there is another responsibility that RIT student-athletes take seriously: serving as a role model.

"Once you get immersed in the culture of RIT as an athlete, there's this expectation that you're supposed to set an example for

everyone else," Dobeck says. "I take that to heart – especially when it comes to underclassmen."

Last spring, RIT's Student Athlete Advisory Committee organized a weekend-long community service project entitled "Tigers Give Back." More than 350 student athletes participated in a series of service projects around Greater Rochester.

Tryt, a member of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, says one of the group's goals is to change the stereotypical perception that many still have about "jocks."

"Some people think that athletes don't work hard, that we're lazy, that we're going to miss class and get in trouble. That's just not true," Tryt says in between greeting his teammates as they arrive for practice.

"We understand that we're looking for a culture shift. It's not going to happen overnight. We're going to have to keep working."

John Follaco

To find out more about RIT's athletics program, including game schedules and team rosters, visit [www.rit.edu/athletics](http://www.rit.edu/athletics).

are pretty business-like in how they handle their lives. I think they know that, in order to succeed, they have to be business-like."

There is a lot to do, and little time to do it in.

"I spend, at the very minimum, 25 hours a week playing basketball," says Joanna Dobeck, a fourth-year electrical engineering major who plays forward on the women's basketball team. "I spend at least four hours a day practicing, watching film, working out and playing. I try to take one day off a week – usually Sundays."

Dobeck works just as hard on her studies as she does on her jump shot. And she expected nothing less when she made her college selection.

"I wanted to be challenged academically, that's why I came to RIT," she says. "All of the athletes that are recruited pretty much have that mentality as well. We know that we're going to do well in school as well as on the court."

And they do.

RIT student athletes consistently outperform the RIT student body at-large in terms of grade-point averages. In the 2006-2007 academic year, RIT student athletes averaged 3.19 grade-point averages. RIT's overall grade-point average was 3.05.

Spiotti attributes that success to a number of factors. Effective time management skills and academic eligibility requirements are two of them. Others aren't quite as obvious.

"There is a natural competition among

## From RIT to Super Bowl history

More than 70 former members of the RIT football program gathered at the Radisson adjacent to the RIT campus on Super Bowl Sunday this year.

They included players and assistant coaches, athletic trainers and cheerleaders. They came from Texas, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Ohio and all over New York to watch their former coach, Tom Coughlin, reach the pinnacle of the football world.

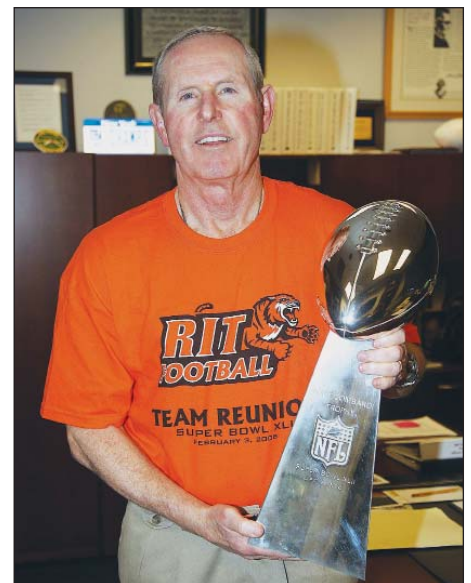
Coughlin, coach of the New York Giants, led his team to a 17-14 victory over New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLII.

"We all went crazy. There wasn't a dry eye in the place," says Mark McCabe '75 (criminal justice), who played linebacker and defensive end for Coughlin from 1972-1973. "We all looked at each other and said, 'From RIT to the Super Bowl! We were the team that he started with and we were there to celebrate it together.'"

Coughlin's RIT connection made national news in the week leading up to the Super Bowl. It was featured in newspapers such as The New York Times, Newsday and Chicago Tribune.

The day before the game, word of the RIT reunion reached Coughlin in Arizona. He took the time to answer a question about the reunion that was posed to him through a team spokesman.

Coughlin was "really touched by this,"



Coach Tom Coughlin with two prizes: RIT reunion T-shirt and Super Bowl trophy. (Photo courtesy N.Y. Giants)

the spokesman told the Middletown, N.Y., Times Herald-Record. "Those guys played the game in its purest form," Coughlin told him. "It was club ball going to varsity. To think that they learned some life lessons that they still practice and are passing along to the children means a lot to me. That was a special group of young men who loved the game for the game."

# Sports experience brings life-long benefits

Former student athletes say athletics shaped their lives – sometimes in surprising ways

## All about teamwork

Suzanne Traynor Pail '98 (mechanical engineering) played soccer, softball, hockey



Sue Pail '98

and tennis at RIT, maintained a 3.56 grade point average and graduated with B.S. and M.S. degrees. She went to work for IBM as an engineer and took a leave of absence last year to manage Closet Factory, a business she and her husband,

Michael Pail '98 (electrical engineering) launched in Raleigh, N.C.

"Sports gets you involved with people outside your major, and when you get out in the business world, you have to work and network with all kinds of people. In sports, everyone has to pull their weight, and that's true in the real world. You can't accomplish your goals unless everyone performs."

## Moments to remember

Ritchie Herbert '85 (photography) says playing hockey at RIT shaped his life.



Ritchie Herbert '85

He'll never forget the 1985 national championship. When the team returned from Schenectady after defeating Union 3-2 in the semifinal and Bemidji State (Minnesota) 5-1 in the final, the bus was greeted by a huge crowd. Herbert was

later interviewed by Bryant Gumbel on NBC's Today show.

"Coach (Bruce) Delventhal said 'This is an experience you will remember all your life,'" says Herbert, who went on to play professional hockey in Europe until 1998, and now lives in Ingolstadt, Germany, where he works as a free-lance photographer. The memories of the championship remain vivid. "It's almost like yesterday."

## Great role models

When David Egan '62 (business administration) was wrestling at RIT, opponents included Cornell, Syracuse University, Pittsburgh, Bucknell and Lycoming. The

RIT team and Egan did well, "because we had an outstanding coach, Earl Fuller."

Egan also credits his coach at Spencerport (N.Y.) High, Leo Bernabi, with teaching life lessons as well as athletics skills.



David Egan '62

"My dad died when I was 8," says Egan, "so that made a difference."

Egan went on to serve as an assistant coach to the RIT wrestlers – and a career in law. He has been a New York State Supreme Court Justice since 2000. Egan says the most important lesson those mentors taught was "to build a house brick by brick, point by point, to start from the basics and build slowly. There's no overnight success."

## Reduces stress, increases success

Karen Provinski Conlan '96 (mathematics) excelled in academics and on the basketball court. Named Senior Athlete of the Year in 1996, she was an Academic All-American and won an Ellingson Award for academic excellence by a student-athlete. At graduation, she was chosen to represent the senior class and spoke at convocation and commencement.



Karen Conlan '98

"I feel that athletics almost enhances your coursework," says Conlan. "It is another outlet for stress, another way to make friends, another way to have success while in school. Another way to be recognized."

In her career as an IT professional for Dupont, she's discovered another advantage. "When co-workers hear I played basketball in college, they look at me with another level of respect," Conlan says. "It is something to talk about in job interviews."

## Competitive edge

"Having sports as a vocation and avocation has really worked out for me," says Sean Bratches '84 (business administration), executive vice president of sales and mar-

keting for ESPN. "I've had a front row ticket not only of ESPN but the world of sports," says Bratches, who joined the cable sports network in 1988.



Sean Bratches '84

Bratches, who played lacrosse at RIT, mentions time management, teamwork and leadership skills among the important lessons learned on the playing field. Honing a competitive spirit is another.

"When you get down to brass tacks, everything is measured in the world," he says. "On the field, there is a winner and a loser. I hate to lose, on the field or in business."

"Coach Bill Tierney said one thing that I use every day in business: 'One bad pass breeds another.' It means you have a game plan and you execute it flawlessly. If you have one bad pass, you have to recover your rhythm, you lose your momentum, your competitor gains an advantage. That can be critical."

## Winners never quit

Kristine Pierce Brassie '99 (hospitality and service management) scored her biggest win off the sports field. Diagnosed with Hodgkins disease in 1997, she underwent six months of treatment and returned to RIT and hockey and immersed herself with helping others. In 1999, she became the first woman and the first person in



Kristine Brassie '99

Division III to win the national Humanitarian Award.

"I played to be part of something," says Brassie. "Am I competitive? Absolutely," she says. "I don't know if you're born with it, but as a female on a boys' team, or a female in a boys' sport, you're always striving. I don't think that's always a good thing, but I think you accomplish a lot more."

Brassie, who coached women's hockey at Mercyhurst College for several years, is busy building a new team. She and her husband have four children, ages 4, 3, 2 and 1.