

Transcript of Interview with CJ Richardson by Blake Hatt

Interviewee: CJ Richardson

Interviewer: Blake Hatt

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Location (Interviewee): Saint Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas

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Abstract: An oral history interview with CJ Richardson the Head Sports Performance Coach at StMU discussing COVID-19 protocols and life during the pandemic.

Blake Hatt 0:09

All right. So my name is Blake Hatt. I'm here with CJ Richardson the head, sports performance coach here at St Mary's University. CJ just want to tell us about yourself, where you're from, how long you've been here, stuff like that.

CJ Richardson 0:29

Sure. I've been here for, I guess, almost three years now. I've been living from different places - in Texas. I lived in Colorado, and I grew up in Chicago.

Blake Hatt 0:45

Awesome. And before COVID-19 happened, what would be like a standard day in the life for you as a- as a coach?

CJ Richardson 0:55

Uh, get in around five or so in the morning. Prepare for the day have several teams come through, you know, we'd have anywhere from, you know, sometimes you have smaller groups of, you know, whatever 10 people or so in the weight room, but sometimes as many as 50, 60, 70 kids in here sometimes when bigger teams are involved and the student population as well. So, and then yeah, just do that for a few hours in the morning, and then work, you know, in the office for, you know, most of the kids are in class, and then afternoon usually have another, you know, handful of groups come through. Days done late afternoon.

Blake Hatt 1:48

And so, When the shutdown happened did things kind of stop all of a sudden and kind of flipped upside down or did you kind of sense that like, there was going to be movement happening with

COVID-19 and that, things started to dwindle down or was it like a just stop right in the middle?

CJ Richardson 2:08

As I remember it, there was a little bit of growing concern, but no one was really expecting it to affect us. And then we went on spring break. And while we were on spring break, I remember it was a Utah Jazz- it was a Utah Jazz game. It was Rudy- Rudy Gobert got the virus, because I remember up to that point they were talking about, you know, possibly doing events with no fans and stuff like that. And then when an actual player got it, seemed like everything just went crazy at that point. And everyone started canceling their seasons- or not necessarily canceling but at least postponing, and then eventually some had canceled. But- and then it kind of became a thing where we were like, "Oh man, it's gonna happen us too." And then our school extends from break initially by a week- might have been two weeks; I can't remember. But they initially just extended spring break to give professors a chance to basically catch up and get ready for online school. And then once that happened, you know, I mean, nobody came back. I mean some kids came back, the likes especially some of the international students. So they were around, but everything was closed, and yeah. So it was pretty sudden but I guess might have been less sudden if we hadn't done Spring Break it might have been more gradual but because we're on spring break. Once, you know, once- once everything happened it was just done. So things never really got back to any sense of normal until the fall.

Blake Hatt 4:00

The spring break felt like that lasted for like six months.

CJ Richardson 4:00

Exactly.

Blake Hatt 4:00

And how specifically did your life change, you know from your busy days from where you started the morning go to like the late afternoon to, you know, it's complete shutdown. How did you kind of deal with that and what were some changes that you had to make in your life?

CJ Richardson 4:21

You mean like, during...

Blake Hatt 4:23

Yeah, like during the shutdown.

CJ Richardson 4:24

Um, yeah, so I guess it changed- so we started, uh, you know, we know- we know anything's gonna last. So initially it was like, "Alright let's put together some- some workouts that we can do virtually with the athletes. You know, it won't be as good as, obviously, you know, our normal training but it'd be something to kind of fill in the gap for a couple weeks until we can go back to." You know it's kind of what everyone's thinking was, um, you know? And obviously that didn't happen but so I guess, initially, it was more of a thought of, like, "Okay, just let's just kind of stay in shape." And so I would do these virtual workouts every morning with- I think it's 7:30 or 7:15 in the morning, which was much later for me, actually, than the normal, but we would do the workouts then. It'd be 30 to 40 minutes and kids would get a chance to get ready if they had to log on to a class at like- I think it was 7:15 and some kids had classes that they had to log on to at eight or something like that but anyway. So we do that, and then I would basically, I mean, I work on stuff that I could that I knew we were going to be doing. But a lot of it was still up in the air so I didn't really want for too much work into something that might never happen. I did a lot of professional development, personally, a lot of research, just studying different topics and things just to try to expand my own knowledge base and just keep trying to improve even while I wasn't able to actually work with kids, try to reach out to as many kids as I could, you know, electronically, email, text, whatever on social media, just try to stay connected with them. But yeah, I have a lot- a lot more time on my hands for sure. So, yeah, spend a lot more time with my family, obviously, you know, I was- I wasn't able to really work out like I like I used to, but I ran a lot, and stuff like that, so it was a weird time for sure. Like, I get the feeling of being kind of bored at times and things got very repetitive after a while. But, yeah, everything that I said that- the number one thing is just that nobody knew what was happening and how long it was going to last. So like the confusion of that I think was kind of the main thing I remember, through those, especially those first that first month, first six weeks, first eight weeks kind of thing. It was just kind of like everyone just thought out some- like, one day it'll just be okay, everything's normal, but obviously that didn't happen so...

Blake Hatt 7:22

Yeah. Okay. Um, yeah it's interesting. I remember the beginning too, I found like, "Okay this is my last few weeks. Get back to it." You know, and we were wrong. So now that students are back and you're training athletes again, what are some of the major changes you notice from before the lockdown to now, and how does that kind of affected your life, and just how you do your day to day job?

CJ Richardson 7:54

In terms of like the restrictions that we have?

Blake Hatt 7:55

Yeah restrictions and, you know, maybe some differences you noticed even with the athletes and how, you know, they bring a different attitude maybe or if you sense like concern amongst some,

things along those lines.

CJ Richardson 8:12

Sure. Okay. Um, so when it comes to, obviously our restrictions, much smaller groups training at once. We're only allowed to 20 in the weight room at a time, and it wasn't even that in the beginning, it was 10, 15 at a time in the beginning. So, smaller groups means usually a little less energy. You know, we've tried to limit movement where players that are coming into contact with each other, you know, sharing the same physical space. You know, and by doing that, you kind of- the distancing takes away some of the intensity of the training, and so... I do feel like they are a little more subdued than I've seen in the past, not that they don't work hard, but it's just a little less energy. The mood is a little more, I don't know, less excited or something maybe. We do have some athletes that you can tell are more nervous than others. I shouldn't- you have that- so there are some athletes that are that are like genuinely nervous about getting sick. That's a pretty small number, but there's- there's some. Then there's a lot who are like very intent on taking all the protocols seriously as far as the wearing masks and the distancing, and you can tell they're very vigilant on about like using the hand sanitizer and stuff like that. And then you got some who are kind of, they're trying to do it, but they're not maybe like super strict about it. And then you've got the ones who are like, I don't want to wear a mask, like you don't really like that stuff unless you tell him. I've never seen them wash their hands like you know you got ones that are just like, kind of, essentially, ignoring everything, so it really does run the- run the gamut through a wider range of reactions that we've seen. But I would say- I would say the ones on the ends obviously are the minorities and most fall into the middle section of, even if they don't necessarily agree with all the protocols, they're still gonna get on board, because they understand the way we keep doing what we're doing so...

Blake Hatt 10:32

Good. All right. Awesome, thank you that's all I have for you.

CJ Richardson 10:37

Cool.

Blake Hatt 10:43

Yeah. It's only supposed to be like 10 minutes so, 10 minutes and thirty seconds maybe.