

## Acadia Athletics; something in the water

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The old saying, “there must be something in the water” is meant to explain extraordinary things that we don’t quite understand. But in the case of Acadia University’s varsity sports program, the achievements of its teams and individual student-athletes are the result of deliberate and calculated strategies rather than some hidden influence due to Acadia’s proximity to the world’s highest tides in the neighbouring Bay of Fundy.

“We have a remarkable group of student-athletes,” says Kevin Dickie, Acadia’s director of Athletics. “The performance of our teams within our conference and in national rankings is one thing. The performance of individuals in their sport is another. And the academic achievement of our student-athletes across the board is a third thing. But when we combine every aspect and add it to the role these young men and women play in the community as role models and mentors, the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Dickie is speaking about the way Acadia and its student-athletes achieve outcomes that are out of proportion with Acadia’s size. With a student body of approximately 3,500, Acadia is one of Canada’s smallest universities. But early in the 2015 school year, Acadia is already achieving success. Five of Acadia’s teams are ranked in the CIS Top 10 and three student-athletes have been named CIS Athletes of the Week. With 108 CIS Academic All-Canadians, Acadia is ranked sixth overall in Canada and with approximately 40 per cent of student athletes carrying an academic average above 80 per cent, Acadia’s proportion leads all Canadian universities. In addition, this year’s AUS female Academic All-Canadian Top 8 recipient is Acadia dual-sport student-athlete Katie Ross, the third Acadia player in a row to make the trip to Rideau Hall to be congratulated by Canada’s Governor General. In fact, since the Governor General’s Award was introduced by the CIS three years ago, Acadia and McGill are the only universities to send a student-athlete to Ottawa three consecutive years.

“We ask a great deal from every member of our program,” says Dickie. “But we find that it’s these high expectations that both attract and motivate our students. Our overall academic average is just above 75 per cent and our student-athletes contribute hundreds of hours of volunteer time every week. Many of our student-athletes are at Acadia today because of an interaction they had with our program when they were younger.”

Dickie describes a commitment to academics that includes study sessions, a network of faculty advisors, and coaches who put academics before athletics. Acadia’s Academic All-Canadian results speak to that. He also explains that building the connection between campus and community is deliberate. Whether through youth sports camps, presenting to students in the network of Annapolis Valley Regional School Board schools, working as a S.M.I.L.E. volunteer, or fundraising for one of many causes, Axemen and Axewomen are visible in the community. This, he says, ensures student-athletes remember that whether they are competing or socializing, they wear an invisible jersey and are, therefore, highly visible representatives of Acadia.

Having a long and proud history of athletic achievement in every sport helps foster a sense of Acadia pride. In the past five years alone, Acadia has claimed conference championships six times in four sports; football, hockey, men's and women's basketball, and, just this fall, women's rugby. These recent titles build on previous teams that have won regional and national championships and produced student-athletes who have enjoyed successful careers that have ranged across the full spectrum including professional sports. This success has built a deep and loyal base of support for the varsity sports program, student-athletes, and the University.

“Our alumni are unbelievable,” says Dickie. “We are the big game in town. Our alumni are in the stands at games, they are members of our coaching staff and they lend financial and fundraising support for our facilities and scholarships. It's unlike anything I've experienced at any other university. Our student-athletes and coaches respond to this in a very positive way and I know student recruits notice it when they visit. This is a very special community and to see this link between the past and present makes everyone behind the scenes feel very proud to be part of this program.”

Visit Acadia's [Varsity Athletics website](#).

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