THE COCOA CONNECTION

Dietitian fuels Bobcats with advice on nutrition that includes drinking chocolate milk

BY BRIAN KOONZ
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Dana Angelo White '01 leaned in as though she was trying to soak up strategy in a huddle. A sports dietitian and certified athletic trainer at Quinnipiac, White didn’t want to miss a word, or an opportunity. On this particular day, White was chatting with Taylor Sanna ’20, a midfielder on the women’s lacrosse team, to emphasize the importance—and the advantages—of proper nutrition for college athletes.

“Our weekly meetings consist of discussing ways to make sure I am getting enough nutrients to perform my best and help my healing process after an anterior cruciate ligament recovery,” said Sanna, a biomedical marketing major from Georgia. “I feel that my overall strength and recovery process has increased since meeting with her.”

It’s the perfect routine for White, who holds similar one-on-one sessions and group discussions with athletes in Quinnipiac’s 21 Division I athletic programs. She loves it all—the outreach, the interaction, the difference she makes. White holds a unique place among the 11 schools in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference. Few mid-major athletic programs—especially those that don’t have football—enjoy a full-time staff member with the training, background and expertise White brings to the Bobcats.

“The majority of athletes who come here have never really had any sports nutrition education,” said White, who earned her bachelor’s in sports medicine from Quinnipiac in 2001 and her master’s in nutrition education from Columbia in 2007. “I want to help our athletes gain the tools they need. I tell them, ‘I think it’s important for your sport, but I’m also thinking about your long-term health and your well-being.’”

White’s holistic message of good choices and better results—her curriculum includes a cooking game show and a custom cookbook for student-athletes—gives Quinnipiac another edge on the court, on the field and on the ice.

During one session, she and assistant athletic trainer Becky Mella created a cooking contest for the women’s basketball team based on the Food Network show “Chopped.” Players made their own dishes by integrating surprise ingredients such as eggs, rice and chicken.

“I was terrified. We were the judges. We had to eat this stuff—and the athletes blew us away,” White said. “Everything tasted great. The presentation and the garnishes, they did it all. It worked because you had that competitive mindset of athletes mixed with the educational pieces.”

A few years ago, White partnered with Brijesh Patel, the head strength and conditioning coach, to write “Cooking the Bobcat Way.” The cookbook, given to every freshman athlete, even includes a section on healthy microwave cooking.

White’s menu for success also includes chocolate milk. White said it’s the perfect post-workout drink for Division I athletes who may consume 3000 calories a day during the season. Along with tasting good, chocolate milk provides the ideal blend of carbohydrates and protein to replenish muscles. It’s also easily accessible and has the bone-building nutrients that athletes require, especially female athletes.

“Some kids call me the ‘Chocolate Milk Lady.’ I love when I see our teams carrying cases of chocolate milk to practice or onto the bus,” White said. “It just works. It really does.”

In addition to her work with Quinnipiac’s nearly 500 athletes, White serves as the nutrition expert for FoodNetwork.com and founding contributor for the Food Network’s Healthy Eats blog. As a clinical assistant professor of athletic training and sports medicine, White is on the faculty at the School of Health Sciences and the Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine.

Her peers with the same credentials routinely work in professional sports and the Power Five conferences that play major college football, but White sought a different path. She wanted to move the needle at her alma mater, the university that gave her the chance—and the education—to dream big.