

# Disciples in the dugout: Team chaplain, BSU reach athletes throughout the week

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How can ministry effectively breach the eventful schedule of a college athlete without forcibly dragging him from the practice field to the pew? Will an ultimatum of “Sunday morning church or else” really win the heart of a non-believing teammate for Christ?

The Baptist Student Union (BSU) at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) recognized that the Gospel, godly fellowship, and discipleship could meet students where they are, even in a dugout.

Twenty-five years ago, the USM BSU started a weekly Monday luncheon that allowed players during the baseball season to share a meal together and hear a devotion from various speakers, including many Mississippi Baptist pastors and leaders.

The team chaplain, Lloyd Lunceford, who has served in his position before the luncheon’s inception, ministers to the young men throughout the week and organizes the weekly lunch.



USM baseball chaplain Lloyd Lunceford (Photo credit: Tanner Cade)

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Adams, a believer, appreciates what the gathering could mean to his teammates who may not yet know Christ.

“I think it’s a good steppingstone,” said Adams. “I know it can be intimidating for people who are not believers to step into a church for the first time. This is a good way to segue them into that, kind of get their feet wet, if you will. We

have this lunch in season, and we also do a Bible study with our team in the fall. We do a good job of planting as many seeds in different ways as possible. Coach Oz is a believer in words, that eventually something spoken is going to mean something to somebody.”

Head coach, Christian Ostrander, known by his players as “Coach Oz”, encourages his team to make time for this ministry.

“Getting this entire team together is what makes this lunch special,” said Ostrander. “Obviously it’s a great meal, but the fellowship, along with hearing a great message, just really keeps them centered. Regardless of their religious affiliation, I think it’s so important for these guys to hear a message from the good Word. We’re very fortunate that this is a part of the culture of our program.”

“Personally, this luncheon gets my week going,” said Carson Paetow, outfielder. “There’s good people here, good fellowship, good food, and after a tiring although fun weekend, it’s nice we get to have a good hot meal ready for us on Monday. We have some good spiritual leaders in here, like Mr. Lloyd and Kris Walters (USM BSU director).”

“Lloyd has been our team chaplain for many years,” said Ostrander. “He stays in our dugout with us. He travels with us on Sundays. When we have our devotion, he brings a message to us before we leave for the park that day. We try to be well-rounded, and faith is an important part of that. We can’t force it on everybody, but you want to provide it. So Lloyd has been a blessing. What him and Kris and Josh Richards (USM BSU leader) and this whole group does for our team is pretty impressive.”

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MBCB executive director-treasurer Shawn Parker speaks to baseball players during a weekly luncheon at the USM BSU. (Photo credit: Tanner Cade)



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“It is especially exciting to be a part of an athletic event

like this," Parker remarked. "I'm so impressed with the USM baseball program, from Coach Oz all the way down to the players. These guys seem like they are really focused on being the best people they can be, and I think a lot of them understand that the only way they can be the best person is to know God and to follow Christ and to obey His Word. That's a tremendous encouragement to me.

"Kris, Josh, and Lloyd do a great job of ministering to the baseball program here, and that's really what we're all about with BSU. It's reaching the campus, and a big part of any campus like Southern Miss is the athletic program. So for us to have inroads into the baseball program is just wonderful."

At one time, the luncheon was considered an added blessing, but not a need. Over 25 years, however, team chaplain, Lunceford, and other leaders, developed the ministry to impact players for Christ on a weekly basis.

"We moved from doing something *for* them, to this being an integral part of their program," Lunceford affirmed. From every coach that has retired since, Lunceford has continued to be told, "not to go anywhere." Unmistakably, Lunceford understands the practice field is also a mission field.

"Do you remember what Colin Powell said when they asked him if he were going to be Secretary of State in the second Bush administration? He said, 'I serve at the pleasure of the President.' I serve at the pleasure of the head coach," Lunceford stated. "I drive them nuts because they will say, 'Do you want to do this and this at such and such time?' I respond, 'Why do you ask me what I want to do? You tell me what you want; I'm going to do it.'

"I'm here to serve these young men, and it's given me a chance to speak Jesus into their lives by walking with them. Jesus had the best model, and that was to walk with people where they were. I do not enjoy talking to the team on Sunday

morning; that is not my strength. My strength is standing next to that kid in the dugout and answering his questions. I've had that happen so many times."

For more information on the BSU at USM, visit <https://www.southernmissbsu.org/>.