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A First for the Bengals: Female Season-Long Athletic Training Intern

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Kelsey Howell, a Cedarville University senior athletic training major from Allen Park, Michigan, is the first season-long female athletic training intern in the history of the Cincinnati Bengals. She is serving during the 2019-20 season.

"Females working in athletic training is nothing new," said Paul Sparling, longtime head athletic trainer and the director of sports medicine administration for the Bengals. "Women now represent the majority of entry-level athletic training students. They have earned the right to take advantage of every opportunity that men have had over the years. Ultimately, it comes down to if they have the personal skills and physical endurance to do the job in a setting that is virtually 100% male."

"Without question, Kelsey has proven that she has all the tools and skills necessary to be successful in this setting. The right candidate is the right candidate, regardless of their gender."

Sparling noted that the Bengals had not hired a female intern before this season because their facilities were never designed for coed athletic trainers.

"It had nothing to do with a sense that females can't handle it," said Sparling. "The question was if we had the ability to utilize their skills and give them the opportunity to truly be an integral part of the medical team, considering the physical layout we have in our facilities. I felt we owed to whomever we considered to be sure that we could make whatever accommodations we determined to be necessary, to be sure it would be a positive experience for all. Kelsey has reaffirmed that we made the right decision and even made me ask myself why we waited for so long to hire a female intern."

Interning for an NFL Team like the Bengals is a coveted position. Sparling receives 250-300 applications each year for internship positions. The team brings on a total of four season-long athletic training student interns every season.

Sparling intentionally limits candidates to be considered from a select group of local colleges and universities, which allows the interns to work with the team from April through the end of the season, instead of only for training camp. The interns are also students who are personally approved and recommended for consideration from the head of their school's athletic training program. The schools can also use the opportunity as a selling point for the schools in recruiting prospective athletic training students.

This year, three female athletic training students were in the mix for consideration. Sparling, however, noted Howell's background as a missionary kid who lived in Tanzania, East Africa and China as a factor that distinguished her from other candidates.

On the job, Howell enjoys seeing all aspects of athletic training, including creating rehab plans and treatments, taping before games and practices and taking inventory and ordering supplies. But one of her favorite experiences is working with injured players during practices and receiving guidance from the Bengals' staff.

"The Bengals' staff allowed me to develop circuit training for injured players to do during practices," said Howell. "I was able to help run the training to make sure that the players were doing the exercises correctly."

"I have been so thankful to work with the staff here," she continued. "They don't just make me do work; they take the time to teach me. And when I do mess up, they help me learn what I did wrong and what I can do better next time."

Cedarville athletic training students have interned with the Bengals six straight years. Mike Weller, Cedarville's associate professor of athletic training, connected with the Bengals when he taught at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio, and continued that connection when he joined Cedarville's faculty.

"Cedarville students are definitely prepared for what they were going to do here," commented Sparling. "Mike knows what we need here, and understands the demands of the position, and clearly has confidence in the competency of his students he recommends. It is very clear that Cedarville has a great athletic training program."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,380 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.