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Career-ending injuries led Georgia Southern graduate to find his passion in exercise science

January 6, 2020



EJ Mitchem

After several concussions forced EJ Mitchem to walk away from the game he loved, Georgia Southern helped him to rediscover sports in a new way.

Mitchem was born the youngest of four boys in Augusta, Georgia. Growing up he watched his older brothers play sports, so naturally, it became something he wanted to try as well. He began playing football and basketball in high school until things took an unexpected turn.

“In high school, I had seven concussions from football,” said Mitchem. “My sports medicine doctor said to me that if I got to number eight I wouldn’t ever be able to play again.”

Having to experience what Mitchem thought would be career-ending injuries, he began researching sports medicine, which ultimately led him down the path to choose exercise science as his major at Georgia Southern.

“I got into the sports mindset and decided I wouldn’t play tackle football because I understood the injuries,” he said. “I wanted to be in the sports field but I didn’t want to have memory loss when I got older, so I started researching about football, concussions, and injuries, and I just fell in love with it.”

Mitchem didn't let his injuries stop him from playing sports altogether. Once at Georgia Southern he got involved at the Grube Recreation Activity Center (RAC) where his love for the game led him to become an intramural athlete, including flag football.

"I play almost every intramural sport," said Mitchem. "That's how I made most of my friends on teams that I'm usually the captain of. I go out and find people to ask them if they are good at a sport because I don't like to lose."

Since being involved at the RAC, he has worked as an intramural official which he says has allowed him to step outside of his comfort zone in such a family-oriented environment.

"Getting out of my comfort zone led me to help others get out of theirs as well," he said. "Just talking to people and meeting them at the RAC is something I'll always remember."

Outside of being an exercise science major and playing intramural sports, in Mitchem's spare-time he is the owner of Negasi Clothing, a T-shirt line that he hopes to brand as a part of his sports legacy.

"Right now it's a part-time hustle, but in the years to come I would like to share my clothes with professional athletes," he says.

In January, Mitchem will begin graduate school at the University of Kentucky where he will enter into the sport leadership specialization graduate program with long-term goals of being a general manager of a professional football or basketball team.

Leaving the RAC and intramural sports at Georgia Southern is hard for Mitchem, but one thing will always remain the same.

"I'm glad I was an Eagle."

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers 141 degree programs serving more than 26,000 students through nine colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities. Visit [GeorgiaSouthern.edu](https://www.GeorgiaSouthern.edu).

Georgia Southern graduate finds purpose within campus recreation and intramurals

January 6, 2020



Joiya Reid photographed by Houston McClurkan

The moment journalism and spanish double major Joiya Reid stepped foot on Georgia Southern University's Statesboro Campus she instantly connected with her family's alma mater, and would soon discover a calling to help others through recreation sports.

"Georgia Southern was the only university that I toured when I was in high school," said Reid. "My stepdad is an alumnus who only had good things to say about the university. And when I toured, I fell in love with how small the community was and how everything was so easy to access."

During her freshman year, she explored Campus Recreation and Intramurals (CRI) Southern Adventures Challenge Course program, designed to allow on and off-campus organizations the opportunity to develop functional skills that aid in their leadership development through adventure programming.

"I fell in love with it," she said. "I remember looking at the person doing the challenge course and thinking I wanted to be one of those people."

Reid eventually joined the CRI Challenge Course staff and thrived assisting individuals and groups meet their personal growth through challenge courses.

"In my time working with CRI and Southern Adventures I developed a passion for being able to help people and work with different groups while helping others realize their goals," Reid said.

Leaving the family environment of the Grube Recreation Activity Center (RAC) was bittersweet for Reid.

“From the moment I stepped on campus, the RAC is the one place that felt like home,” said Reid. “It’s a part of my entire college experience because of the people I met here. It’ll always have a lasting impression on me because it helped me to grow as a person.”

In the future, Reid wants to do more with recreation. She hopes to work with camps and businesses who want to do retreats as a means to team building.

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