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Ouachita News Bureau

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NEWS



Photo 1 Photo by Abby Blankenship

For immediate release

Ouachita's KaNeil Purifoy joins panel of speakers during NCAA convention

By Julia Shands

July 8, 2022

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—KaNeil Purifoy, university counselor and resident director at Ouachita Baptist University, was a panelist at the 2022 NCAA Convention in Indianapolis, Ind. in January. Purifoy was one of four speakers during a panel discussion titled, “Coping With Pandemics: The Effects of Racism and COVID-19 on Student-Athlete Mental Health.” The conversation was hosted by Dr. Brian Hainline, the NCAA’s chief medical officer.

Purifoy spoke to the mental wellness needs of student-athletes as a representative of Division II colleges and universities. His fellow panelists were moderator Dr. Stephany Coakley, senior associate athletics director for mental health, wellness and performance at Temple University; Mercy Ogutu, the NCAA Division III National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee representative; and Dr. LaKeitha Poole, director of sport psychology and counseling at Louisiana State University.

“We met a couple of times beforehand to talk about the latest findings from research on those particular topics,” Purifoy said. “I also talked to a lot of our coaches and got some feedback on what they’ve seen and experienced in their own team dynamics and how they’ve been helping student-athletes in those areas in moving forward.”

At the convention, Purifoy spoke on Ouachita’s efforts to support student-athletes’ mental health. Through his experience at the convention, Purifoy recognized that the issues discussed are common on campuses across the nation.

“I do believe that people are seeking out counselors, coaches, athletic directors and trainers to discover what we can do to best support our student-athletes,” he said, “not just their physical needs, but also their mental and emotional well-being.”

He added, “Nobody has all of the answers to every issue that arises, but it takes a collective effort from all parts of the country.”

Purifoy, one of Ouachita’s licensed counselors, earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling from Henderson State University and is working toward becoming a Certified Mental Performance Consultant through the Association of Applied Sports Psychology. He offers counseling services to student-athletes at Ouachita and hopes to expand his impact on campus upon receiving his certification.

“The certification deals with performance issues that athletes may experience,” he explained, “whether that’s focusing while being in the game, having trouble with their confidence or maybe having situations going on in a relationship, back at home or in the classroom that affect their athletic performance.”

Purifoy is partnering with the head coaches of every Ouachita athletic team to make sure student-athletes know about the mental performance services that are available to them through the university’s counseling center.

“There is a sports psychology component and a personal development component” to the program, Purifoy said. “As the word is becoming more known, more athletes are taking advantage of this service.”

“In the athletic realm, you always say that the game is more mental than anything. So I think this is really going to help them sharpen some of those mental skills so they can perform up to their potential,” he added. “I’m humbled to be able to serve our coaches and student-athletes in this capacity.”