

Tritons Are Division 1 Now!

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SPEAKERS

Bobbi Aguirre, John Earhart, Jeff Tourial, Greg Thayne

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Jeff Tourial 00:11

Happy New Year, and welcome to another episode of Triton Tools and Tidbits. My name is Jeff Tourial. I'm an Associate Athletic Director here at UC San Diego and I also co-host the weekly UCSD athletics podcast, Tritoncast. We've got an exciting show in store for you today as we discuss UC San Diego athletics' transition to NCAA Division One. We'll talk about how we got here, where we're going, and of course, how you can get involved. On today's show, I'll be joined by Triton baseball alum John Earhart. The 2017 grad played baseball here and was a former Triton Athletes Council President. He tells us all about how the Division One move was approved during his time as a student, and the proud-papa feeling he's got now that the time has come for the program to move to Division One. We'll also chat with current softball player Bobbi Aguirre. The fourth-year Revelle student, team captain, and starting catcher chats about Triton pride, student support in the stands, and what it means to have her team's home games broadcast on ESPN3 starting this season. Rounding out our panel today is Greg Thayne. Greg is the Co-President of Triton Tide, the official student section and engagement group of UC San Diego. He tells us how you can get involved - and pro tip, if you're too excited to wait until the end of our conversation, feel free to multitask. For more on Triton Tide, or to activate your free membership, visit UCSDtritons.com/tritontide Now, it's on to this week's roundtable discussion. Go Tritons. Greg, I'll start with you. In terms of student spirit on campus, what does this transition to Division One mean in terms of excitement?

Greg Thayne 02:13

I think, personally, I see just a lot more people having a lot more school pride - representing UCSD and representing our name even more. Being in the Big West Conference, I think, is super exciting. And I see that - I know we just started to be in D-1, and we are obviously in a global pandemic, so we haven't really seen a lot of things. But I think from the back end, and also just seeing it as the year kind of grew up into it - I see a lot of people just being excited. And I'm really excited personally just to see a lot more games with big-name schools, but also just having more unity within our campus. So, I think having this college rivalry is awesome, but then also always, at the end of the day, being a Triton and being able to have Triton pride everywhere we go.

Jeff Tourial 03:06

Bobbi, what about for you as a scholar athlete, when it's safe to be playing games again? What's kind of, the exciting part for you going out against Division One competition?

Bobbi Aguirre 03:16

Yeah, I know all of my teammates are super excited. We were coming from a great conference, though the CCA conference was super challenging. We had great competition, but Division One is supposed to be the best of the best. So, we're all excited to compete at a really high level. And I'm personally excited to play against a lot of friends I grew up playing with. So, we're hoping for the best and we can't wait to get out there soon.

Jeff Tourial 03:44

John, you were on campus when the vote took place - or votes, it was more than one vote - took place to move the athletics program to Division One. What do you remember about that process? And as an alumnus, what's your take on laying the groundwork to help us get to where we are now?

John Earhart 04:02

Yeah, it's incredible just to see it finally come to fruition. Like you mentioned, this is many, many years in the making. And even before my time, there's been people working on referendums and stuff to make this finally happen. So, yeah, as I look back, I think some of it ties into what Greg was saying. At that time of the referendum, we saw a lot of excitement and unity around this common vision and goal, and to see that finally come to fruition and teams to start playing in the Big West is just awesome to see. And I think the alumni body who was maybe a part of the referendum, or just supportive of it - it's really cool to just be a part of it, and kind of see it, and lay that foundation for the future Triton generations to experience it and be a part of it.

Jeff Tourial 04:50

And John is the lone representative on this discussion who's in the real world now. Is that something that, again - when it's safe to be in office settings and so on - that you can discuss? And to give your coworkers a hard time around the water cooler, because now they may be butting rivals and they didn't used to be.

John Earhart 05:07

Yeah, I think it'd be fun. Especially - I live in the Orange County area. So, there's a lot of schools in the area. So, I think there'll be fun with some local rivalries, having some coworkers that went to, maybe some other Big West schools. Yeah, it'd be a great conversation topic and just a great way to stay connected to university.

Jeff Tourial 05:27

Greg, what about from your end? Looking at it from a Triton-type perspective, the fact that UC San Diego is now a member of the Big West - it really does go beyond playing other UC schools. It's playing other like-minded academic institutions at the highest level. That's something that really can build spirit on campus, right?

Greg Thayne 05:49

Oh, absolutely. I think looking from before, we've had a huge attendance numbers whenever we've [played] a big name. The biggest one, I think, was men's volleyball, because they played in Division One last year. So, we had games, like UCLA - I don't know about USC - but just these really large names, and we had everyone coming to RIMAC, packing it, and being able to see that. So, I think having that kind of big-name reputation will be really exciting for us just to be able to bring that out to the community. But also, for us to then like see bigger schools, other than just UC'S, like the Ivy's. I'm thinking of SEC school, possibly, or just bigger conferences. It was really exciting. So, I also think about stuff like - I believe regionals in 2023 or 2024, something like that. And for water polo be held here or anything, it will be so cool to see like that. And also [to see] other big, developed Division One schools come to us for sporting events too.

Jeff Tourial 06:48

Greg, you bring up that regional component, which is a good point. John, I'll come back to you here. You know, now that UC San Diego is a Division One institution. The fact that the Tritons can be playing USD and San Diego State - there's not a formal city championship, but now the Tritons are a part of that. That's pretty cool.

John Earhart 07:08

Yeah, I think that's really exciting. It's a great opportunity for the city of San Diego to kind of have some of that rivalry between those the top three schools. It's gonna be a lot of fun to see them play and compete together at such a local level for the city.

Jeff Tourial 07:25

Bobbi, is that something as a team that you've spent any time talking about or maybe your coaches have chatted with you guys about as you prepare for what will be your inaugural D-one season?

Bobbi Aguirre 07:36

Yeah, definitely. We've talked about playing the other San Diego schools we used to play - or we usually scrimmage against San Diego State in the fall. I know we're scheduled to have to be in that San Diego tournament this coming-up year - I'm not sure how that looks now. But you know, again, it's just going to be exciting. And playing at the local level, and having our families and friends come out to see these games are definitely something we talked about and we get excited for sure.

Jeff Tourial 08:07

Greg, I want to ask you about Triton tide, which is the student spirit group, how can students on campus who may not be active in Triton tide? How can they get involved?

Greg Thayne 08:18

Yeah, so, students - Triton Tide is our official students' section here at UCSD and it's a free thing. All you need to do is activate your membership - you can go online I think it's like [UCSDtritons.com/tritontide](https://ucsdtritons.com/tritontide) and you can just activate your membership there. It's absolutely free, I highly recommend doing that. And then with that you get a lot of different benefits, like first-access to games, and just access to a lot of different stuff that we have. I didn't know when this is coming out, but I know if it's around early January, we should be having some spirit packs for some of our students

here that will have a lot of like different merchandise items - and then also things like, if you attend games you can possibly win a pizza party. So, I know my supervisor has been super ecstatic about trying to throw a pizza party in a global pandemic. Just little things like that. We want to build up school spirit not just at games but also around campus as well.

Jeff Tourial 09:20

Bobbi what has school spirit been like in your first years at UC San Diego in terms of teams supporting one another?

Bobbi Aguirre 09:29

Yeah, that's actually something we focus a lot on TAC, and you know, we make it a point to really show up for our other scholar athletes. My past years here we've done a great job of that. We have TAC challenges and the more people we get there just - it makes every game more fun and more exciting. So, I'm really looking forward to that in Division One. I'm hoping we get bigger crowds and a bigger turnout just to bring up the energy and make the games even more exciting.

Jeff Tourial 10:02

John, when you were here, you were heavily involved in Triton Athletes Council or TAC as well. How did that shape your perception and really cement your fandom, I suppose, of UC San Diego athletics?

John Earhart 10:18

Yeah, I think it's really critical. I think TAC plays a vital role in the unifying aspect across all the collegiate sports. UCSD having so many, and such a big presence - it can be hard to maybe connect with other teams. So, having those TAC challenges of attending different events or different competitions, I think, was really just a fun way to interact with other athletes, and just a great way to build community within the athletic department.

Jeff Tourial 10:54

And, John, when you played baseball here - UC San Diego has had a strong program for many, many years. But now, moving up to the Big West conference, which is one of the top conferences out of all of collegiate baseball - it's a pretty tall order. How do you think the program will stack up over time?

John Earhart 11:12

Yeah, the Big West is, you know, some of the best baseball in the nation. There's a lot of depth, and quality teams in that conference who are always competing for spots to go to Omaha every year. So, I know Coach Newman and his team - I'm sure they're very excited to compete and carry this success they've been building over the last many years to take that into stride. I'm sure they're up for the competition. And I'm excited to hear them and see them go to Omaha here in the coming years.

Jeff Tourial 11:44

Greg, now that the program is part of Division One, UC San Diego has a seat at the table - if you will - that it may not have had, athletically, in the past. And so now bands, and students, and alumni can go to national chain stores here throughout San Diego County and Southern California and buy Tritons gear - that may not have been an option in the past. How cool is that?

Greg Thayne 12:09

I'm so excited about that. I remember my first year going to Target - we've a lot of targets around San Diego. And to only see San Diego State and USD stuff - and I did not realize what was going on. I was like, "Why the heck - why isn't there anything from UCSD?" so it's so exciting to see that, and now having our own Target on campus - I'm so excited just to see fans, and just our community, being able to rep UCSD gear everywhere we go.

Jeff Tourial 12:45

And right now, of course - during the pandemic - bands and students unfortunately aren't allowed to attend games due to county state and local health orders. But Bobbi, your program games will air on ESPN3 this season. In the past, they had been streamed on the on the athletics website, but now they'll be available nationally on ESPN3. What does that mean, as far as promoting the program?

Bobbi Aguirre 13:12

I think that's huge for our program. You know, we were so used to watching the big SEC schools on TV in the Pac-12, and in schools like that. So, to be one of those schools now is huge for us, and so exciting. It makes it easier for people to see UCSD, and see what athletics is all about. We're definitely all really excited. A little nervous, obviously, because it's live television. But we're definitely more excited than anything.

Jeff Tourial 13:42

John, I gotta think that for an alum, who, again, has obligations now outside of going to class, and earning a degree, and playing a sport - now you're in the real world. But being able to follow the baseball program, which is, of course, another that will have its games available on ESPN3 - that's got to be a pretty amazing feeling. Right?

John Earhart 14:01

Yeah, the availability to that content - to just be able to turn on the TV and watch UCSD play against great competition - I think it's gonna be an awesome experience. I think there's going to be a lot of great advantages of bigger audiences, greater engagement, and just greater camaraderie along alumni through social media or whatever that may be. Just having that platform, I think, is going to be really big for the university.

Jeff Tourial 14:28

Greg, how can students - whether they're on campus right now, or whether they're still learning remotely for the time being - how can they become more engaged?

Greg Thayne 14:40

Of course, I think joining Triton Tide is a great way to do that. Our biggest platforms are Instagram - at UCSDTritonTide. But also going to games, especially the basketball scene - its season is coming up soon. All of the games will be on ESPN3. So, if you're on campus, you automatically get access to that, and then if you're using a UCSD VPN you can also access that. And then also just wrapping your school spirit all around. So, we have blue-and-gold Fridays, or different events that happen. Just making sure you attend all those events, I think, really helps boost our training spirit.

Jeff Tourial 15:17

Bobbi, is that something - as a scholar athlete, specifically blue and gold Friday - if it were not a game day for your team, is that something that you all participate in anyway?

Bobbi Aguirre 15:26

Oh, absolutely. I think it just helps build the community on campus. And it's something kind of simple to do, you know. Our whole closets are filled with blue and gold. So, it would definitely be something fun to participate in.

Jeff Tourial 15:42

Greg, John, Bobbi, thank you so much for joining us.

Bobbi Aguirre 15:46

Thank you.

Jeff Tourial 15:48

What a fun conversation. Our thanks to Greg, Bobbi and John for their time. If you have questions, or want to learn more about activating your complimentary Triton Tide membership, visit UCSDtritons.com/tritontide. To learn more information on how to watch your Tritons in action on ESPN3, visit UCSDtritons.com/live. Thanks so much for joining us on this edition of Triton Tools and Tidbits. For all of us at UC San Diego athletics, I'm Jeff Tourial. For more information on Triton athletics, check us out on the web at UCSDtritons.com or on social media at UCSDTritons. We hope to see you at an athletics event on campus again soon. In the meantime, please wear your mask and stay safe. Go Tritons!