

Q&A Interview: Jake Ryan

By Erica Hayden

After a week of planning and coordinating, Jake Ryan, 19, and I agreed on a time to meet. Despite Ryan's busy schedule, being a psychology major, a defensive end for the Roosevelt University Lakers, and a Residential Advisor for ResLife; a simple knock on his door and I was immediately met with a meek boyish grin and tired blue eyes behind his thin black bifocals. Before I uttered a 'hello' he beat me to the punch by profusely apologizing for the late hour that was scheduled for our interview. Ryan softly spoke ten words a second, explaining that football practice had run late. He also wanted to shower and fit in physical therapy for his knee. I chuckled at Ryan's consideration and his beachy, dirty blonde hair that was still wet.

Ryan exclaimed his excitement for the interview but was still unaware of its importance. I stated my goal was to optimize Roosevelt University's football team as a brand, specifically targeting freshmen with a sense of school spirit. I assume they would want to create a sense of familiarity from their previous schools' spirit in an attempt to (re)create a close-knit community. That way, we boost home game attendance, give freshmen a chance to explore Illinois/make friends, market our D2 team, and hopefully spur ideas for events at the games. The marketing for our team needs some work, especially on our Instagram page. We need our students to intentionally search for the teams' page, whether that be to catch highlights, get to know the players, find out the final scores, events (tailgates?), etc. This can be done by ensuring the content being put out is of high quality, hence, where I come in to improve the team's brand.

Did anything in particular interest you in coming to Roosevelt? If so, what?

I was definitely recruited here to play football. I really like- kind of just being in the city and being close to home. I live a 40-minute train ride from home, so that's Jefferson Park, Blue

Line. I wasn't heavily recruited for football in high school, so the fact, like, this was probably the best option that I had, and it was close to home and that they were going Division II, I really liked that, so that's pretty much the main reason. Roosevelt was my best option. -I've been playing football since eighth grade, so, uh, this is my sixth year, right? Six, seven years.

Do you wish to pursue football after college? If yes, do you want to remain in the same position, and what team would you play for?

It was definitely a dream of mine, but it's really not, like, attainable at the level I'm at right now. So, I - it would be fun too, but realistically, I'd probably stick to my major path - I either want to go into psychiatry or, - I believe it's psychopharmacology. That's what I'm more focused on. This is just helping me pay for school. If I had my way- Defensive end, first-round pick to the Bears. Of course. That's everyone's dream.

Roosevelt University was recently accepted into the NCAA on July 13th, 2023, as a Division II team. How has this impacted the team?

It's really just, I would say, like, just the intensity. We're more focused now that we realize that there's bigger competition. I mean, this weekend we're playing a Division I team. So, really, we're just more focused. The intensity of this practice has risen, and everyone's just a lot more excited. I feel like just, just being a division better- that comes with the hype around it, and, it's really exciting.

Do you believe the teams in the GLIAC will be more challenging opponents? Why or why not?

I definitely think so. There are two or three teams that are, or have been, ranked opponents before in Division II. Especially Grand Valley State, I think. It's either Grand Valley State or Ferris State that won last year, like the championship. And so definitely there's a lot

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Commented [a2]: Follow-up question: What is your major and what led you to choose it? What about it makes you think you will stick to it as a career?

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more money that goes into those programs, so they get a lot better players. So, it's definitely going to be a harder competition than it was last year.

Are there any improvements you hope to see in yourself or the team with now being a Division II team? If so, what?

I really just hope we have a winning record. Because we're brand new, we're not allowed to go to the playoffs. That's just the way it works. Like the first two years, you can't make the playoffs, but we can still win the conference. So, I'm hoping to have a winning record, or at least I think we will. There are a few teams we could definitely beat, but there are going to be a lot harder teams that we'll have to lock in for. Grand Valley State, which is our last game, and Ferris State [which] we play in two weeks. Those are pretty much the big dogs of the conference, I would say.

What happened to your knee?

Okay. Week five, I believe, last year, we were going up against St. Ambrose and I had worked my way up the depth chart. So, that basically means that... I would have secured play. I would have secured a lot of playing time for that. It would be my first game where I would really have gotten a lot of playing time. The practice before was not... We had no shoulder pads on. It was just helmets and these little lacrosse pads that we wear. - And I was doing a drill. I went to dip under alignment and that's where my knee ...I stepped the wrong way, and I tore my ACL. So, I rehabbed. I had surgery, and then I did physical therapy for the next 10 months. Which I didn't mind. It was definitely a first, I felt I could be doing a lot more.

How has your experience been with the team? Any fond memories or vivid tales that have stuck with you?

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I've made so many connections, like, personal connections. It's hard to know 140 guys, but I know at least a little bit about everybody. So, I definitely have really close friends on the team that I see myself being friends with for the rest of my life. But yeah, they really do a good job of having everybody know each other. We all have name tags on our helmets with our names on them. Because they [the coaches] get pissed off when ... If I looked at it [jersey number], I was like, number two, - they were like 'no, say their name on their helmet' and stuff.

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After some extensive research, it seems that other universities are known to attract an immersive fanbase when it comes to their home football games. Do you believe there is more to be done to attract fans and residents to attend the games? If so, what?

100%. The fan buses are really good, but I think ... I heard there was nobody there on the fan buses. Transportation may factor into the game-day attendance. They put up flyers- I think they put up... We put up the flyers a day... Was it two days before? So- nobody really had a chance to coordinate. It's definitely different because at the Goodmen Center, you could go to a basketball game. It's right across the street, so it's really easy to just be like, 'Hey, do you want to go to a basketball game with your friends?' But you really have to coordinate like, 'Hey, do you want to get on this bus for... I don't know, an hour to go see a football game at a pretty small stadium.

How is it like balancing your schedule because you're an RA, you're a psych major, and you're a football player?

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I- yeah, everything worked out perfectly, I have pretty much zero free time, my only free days are Sundays, and that's when I have to pick up RA shifts because- I guess I could, I do them, I could do them on Monday and Tuesday too because we end at five so I could just- pick up the phone at five. But really, Sunday is the only day I have like zero things going on, if I don't

have an RA shift. But yeah, I'm super glad it just worked out like that. I can do all three of those things, like with my schedule. It's pretty busy, I won't lie.

Is there anything you want the students to know, specifically about you? Being an RA and then being a football player- you kind of have this stigma of the RAs are perceived as the 'bad guys' and then the football players are 'jocks'.

I get that, and like, I'm definitely trying to move away from that stigma because we really do have a great group of guys- both on the RA team and like the football team, so I don't know. I'm just trying to show people that, you know, I'm a nice guy, you can talk to me, it's cool- we definitely, we know that there's a stigma around just like the football team being jocks and like, assholes, not us specifically, but just like in general. Our big saying is "Don't embarrass the unit." The way I take it is also, like- if there's a mess in the cafe like, we clean it up, we clean up after ourselves, and the coaches really kind of hone in on it, like, you know. They make us, not make us, but they tell us, you know, you have to sit in the first two rows of class, you have to be on time, and they really do a good job, it's not just football, like, they make us do a good job.

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Commented [a9]: Nice ending, Good sense of form throughout.