

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department of Education and Department of Sports, Park, and Recreation introduces the Student Athletic Combine in a Bubble program

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A special collaboration between the VI Department of Education and the Department of Sports, Park, and Recreation, in conjunction with the VI Department of Health, to offer deserving student-athletes an opportunity to be considered for athletic scholarships started on Wednesday.

According to Commissioner of VIDOE, Raquel Berry-Benjamin, the Student Athletic Combine in a Bubble program, was developed in an effort for DSPR to fulfill its mandate in providing the community with recreational and athletic activities and for VIDOE to fulfill

their decree of providing a well-rounded quality education for students. "The purpose of the bubble is to create a safe and secure environment for top student-athletes in the Virgin Islands to demonstrate their skill and competence in one or more sports," said Ms. Berry-Benjamin.

The exhibition sessions will be videotaped and will feature students engaged in drills, training, and scrimmage games. The videotapes will then be shared with colleges, athletic recruiters, and scouts with the intent of securing athletic scholarships for participating students. Student-athletes that were invited to participate in the program are Juniors and Seniors from V.I public, private, and parochial schools, as well as students who are being homeschooled. Ms. Berry-Benjamin emphasized that participation in the program will come at no cost to neither students and parents.

Ms. Berry-Benjamin said that while students partake in the Combine, they will still be required to log in and participate in their virtual classes. She added that students will be required to wear their uniform shirts and will join classes from their electronic devices from 8 a.m to 3 p.m.

Ms. Berry-Benjamin also expounded on how students' schedules will look like while they are in the program. She stated that during the week, students would engage in classes from 8 a.m to 3 p.m., homework from 3 p.m to 4 p.m, training from 4:30 p.m; to 7:30 p.m, dinner from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m, and recreation workshops from 8:30 p.m to 9:30 p.m. However, on the weekends, students will participate in training from 8:30 a.m to 11:30 a.m, lunch from 11:30 a.m to 12:30 p.m, recreation from 1 p.m to 4 p.m, training from 4:30 p.m to 7:30 p.m, dinner from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m and recreation workshops from 8:30 p.m to 10:30 p.m.

Throughout the Combine, there will be several topics presented to students such as the clearinghouse process for the NCAA and NAIA compliance presented by Greg Tyler, the expectation of student-athletes presented by UVI Athletic Director, Dr. Jerel Drew, careers in sports presented by VIDOE Director Kirby Calender, and the process and information on financial aid and FASFA will be presented by career counselor Mia Felix. Ms. Berry-Benjamin said that parent meetings are being held via zoom for each student group to inform them of the program's requirements and answer any questions the parents may have.

Expanding on what Ms. Berry-Benjamin said in her report, Calvert White, Commissioner of DSPR, told the community that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the NCAA has suspended all in-person recruiting for Division I sports through January 1st, 2021, and has encouraged all colleges to stop all official and unofficial visits.

This means that coaches aren't allowed to meet with recruit's face-to-face off-campus or do any in-person scouting. Mr. White stated that while recruiting is restricted right now; it will not stop completely; coaches and recruits will communicate via email, phone, text, and social media. "Now more than ever before, it is important for Virgin Island student-athletes to maximize their digital presence and be proactive in starting recruiting conversations with coaches," said Mr. White.

Mr. White explained that the selection process to identify students who were eligible for the program was based on several factors; their academic status, behavior record, and

how close the student is to graduation, which are all critical factors to contend in the race to obtain scholarships. Mr. White added that organizations like IAA and other respected federations played a role in the eligibility requirements and selection process.

Currently, 82 student-athletes have been selected to participate in the Combine in a Bubble program. While partaking in the program, all athletes will reside on campuses of the University of the Virgin Islands in both districts for one full week, Wednesday to Wednesday starting November 4th, with the last group ending November 5th. Mr. White stated that indoor sports would occur at the UVI Sport and Fitness Center on St. Thomas, while outdoor sports will occur at the D.C Canegata Ballpark on St. Croix. Mr. White explained that not all sports would be offered in each district; therefore, athletes will be required to travel to participate in the sports not offered in their district. Mr. White added that VIDOE School Food Authority would provide breakfast and lunch for athletes while DSPR will provide lunch.

The first group of athletes to take part in the program are girls' softball on St. Croix and boys basketball on St. Thomas from November 4th to November 11th. Week two will consist of boys baseball on St. Croix and girls basketball on St. Thomas from November 11th to November 18th. Lastly, week three will be volleyball on St. Thomas from November 18th to November 25th. The total number of students per sports are Boys Basketball 15, Girls Basketball 11, Girls Softball 14, Boys Baseball 20, and Volleyball 22 with 13 girls and nine boys.

Moreover, Dr. Donna Christensen, the Public Health Advisor for the Department of Health, shared with the public the health measures the DOH has put in place to ensure the students' safety and well-being while they are in the program.

Ms. Christensen stated that testing is free for students and chaperones. Each week, students will be tested for Covid-19 on Mondays before they travel on Wednesdays. Individuals will be tested for a second time if anyone in the initial testing tested positive for the virus, "anyone testing positive will not be allowed to participate," said Ms. Christensen.

Ms. Christensen explained that in order to ensure the integrity of the bubble, outsiders such as parents, family members, friends, or any other member of the public would not be allowed to come on campus or be around the activities that are taking place. Furthermore, no one in the Combine will be allowed to leave the bubble; however, if they have to due to an emergency, they will be required to go through testing and screening before reentering.

"I believe this is a spectacular project on giving our students an opportunity to number one to get out and actually participate in sports but most importantly get that exposure they need to get that university education," said Governor Bryan.