

IT'S A GREAT DAY TO BE A
Judson Eagle

Rick Williams '02 of Schaumburg, Illinois, is grateful for the ways his Judson education has impacted his life. As he reflects on his Judson experience and the opportunity he has today serving as Judson's Athletic Director, he sees God's hand in each piece of his story and feels everything has come full circle.

Living on his own as a high school senior in Orlando, FL, Rick came to Judson through a conversation with his Assistant Basketball coach, who just happened to be from Elgin, IL. Rick was a remarkable athlete with the aspirations of continuing his education by playing basketball in college. After receiving scholarship offers to attend larger institutions, Rick knew that even with those funds he would not be able to afford his education. However, that changed when he spoke to the basketball coach at Judson.

"At the time, scholarship funding was everything. I knew I was on my own and although the other schools were offering partial funding, without any family support, I knew I was going to need more funding. After coming to campus to visit Judson, I remember accepting their offer to play for Judson later that day."

However, the next couple of months would be a time of uncertainty for Rick as the Judson coach who made him the original offer took another job, and Rick was told that the offer he received might not be available.

"When you are 18 and you are from the neighborhoods I am from, that was like saying you had made it, and then that you hadn't made it. It was devastating... but then about a month after that, I received one of the best calls of my entire life from Elliot Anderson telling me that the offer would still stand... To be honest it was the scholarship dollar that brought me to Judson and the opportunity to play basketball. I had not processed it was a Christian university yet."

Rick's first semester at Judson was difficult. He was homesick. Elgin was very different from Orlando. From a basketball standpoint he also had to adjust from being the 18-year-old high school senior who was one of the best on the court, to being the college freshman who did not play as much.

"Judson's faculty and staff, some of which are still teaching here today, really put their arms around me, saw I was struggling, and loved on me in a way that made my experience bigger than basketball. I had grown up in the church, but at Judson I was able to embrace my faith. Judson really started to feel like home, like family, and I eventually found the place where playing time became secondary. I didn't get much playing time that first year, but I fell in love with Judson my freshman year."

From sophomore year on, Rick got the chance to play the sport he loved, became a starter on the team, and even developed the nickname "Showtime" for his skills on the court. But most importantly, Rick reflects on the community he got to experience, the opportunity to connect with others that were different than him, and the transformation that took place in himself those four years.

"I came to Judson as one person and left completely changed. At Judson I grew in my faith and was surrounded by Christ-centered values and the Judson community. After graduation, what was really cool was bringing those values back with me to the spaces I grew up- Baltimore and Orlando- where I stood out among my peers. God told me at that time that he wanted me to use my experience to help young people who were struggling as I had."

After graduation, Rick excelled in corporate America and made it to management, but he still felt like something was missing. In 2009, he went back to school to earn his Master's in Child Psychology and around that same time he began coaching basketball. From that moment on, he knew what he was meant to do. He founded *Always Get Better (AGB)*, a basketball program for youth with a unique emphasis on many of the values he learned at Judson. Around the same time Judson inducted Rick into their Athletic Hall of Fame, which only helped Rick better establish himself and his program as a coach. By the fourth year, AGB became one of the most respected programs in the state of IL.

Rick continued to coach and through his connections to Judson he wound up being offered the position of Athletic Director at Elgin Academy, a private school in Elgin, IL. Overnight he went from being a JV basketball coach to a high school athletic director, and he credits that to his time at Judson and the values that were instilled in him. He served at Elgin Academy for six years, until the Athletic Director position opened at Judson.

"It's gratifying to think that I made a decision 24 years ago [to come to Judson], and that decision has continued to give back to me. To work and serve at Judson today is incredible! Ultimately, I am here to do for others what Judson has done for me and that is what motivates me every day. I know Judson took me off a certain path and put me on a path of success and I couldn't be more grateful."

