

A student-run social media team may be affecting Ithaca College's recruiting

By: Cam Manna

ITHACA N.Y., Dec. 7 -- One of the toughest decisions a student-athlete will make in their senior year of high school is deciding where to continue their athletic and academic careers. Jake Yarish, a senior at Staples High in Westport Connecticut, is going from playing his final football season in the town he grew up in, to having envelopes of offers stacked on his desk. Twenty-plus schools at the Division III level have an interest in Jake, who earned All-County Second Team Honors this past fall, and now he has to decide which one is best for him. Every school has a football team and a business school for Jake to attend, but only one institution has a unique factor that is appealing to him.

Many athletes like Jake are going through the same process when looking at Division III schools and these students are all looking for something outside of the sports team that is appealing to them. At the Division I level the biggest pull for athletes is the media attention they receive from the major networks, because many athletes work to be recognized on such a large stage, but outside of the Division I level the media attention is lacking. However, one small school in Central New York is not like other low-tier NCAA sports schools when it comes to sports social media content. Ithaca College, just two miles from Cornell University, does not have ESPN at their games nor do they have a conference network like the SEC conference which includes teams like Alabama and Georgia, but what Ithaca does have, is a student-run creative media team.

Yarish has followed the Ithaca Football Instagram and Twitter accounts that are run by the Creative Media Team for the last year and has been amazed by the daily posts that consist of team hype videos, highlights from the games, and creative photos of the team. This one element of Ithaca College Athletics has contributed a lot to Jake wanting to call the South Hill home next fall.



Photo from Ithaca Bomber Football

“A lot of the other schools I am looking at aren’t very active on social media and post nothing even close to the quality that Ithaca does,” said Yarish. “I think it helps recruits get to see what it’s like to be on the team whether at practice or on game day and it makes me want to play for Ithaca even more.”

The Creative Media Team was founded by junior, Peter Raider, in February 2020 to bring more attraction to Ithaca College athletics through social media. The Creative Media Team is the only source of game day hype videos and highlights for Bombers parents, students, alumni, and recruits.

“During my freshman year I saw that Ithaca needed a bit more attention to social media and content so I started a small Creative Media Team in February of 2020,” Raider said. “In the spring of 2021, it took off to say the least.”

The Ithaca Football Instagram account has over 3,000 followers and has racked up thousands of views per video while all other Bomber sports have their accounts with at least 1,000 followers. The Creative Media team has been the number one source for Ithaca Athletics sports content and so much has gone into its success.

Raider has had internship experience working for the Baltimore Orioles in 2020 where he put out content for the team’s TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter accounts, as well as interning with Boston College’s football media team. The Ithaca junior has talent, but more than anything, he has the dedication to the students, alumni, and fans.

“I show up two hours before the game with my team to get warmup videos, hype speeches, and excitement from the sideline,” Raider said. “After the game is over, I get the videos out as soon as possible even if I have to edit in a Chick-fil-A.”



Photo from Peter Raider Media

Raider's hard work is noticed by the team, especially from starting quarterback AJ Wingfield who believes the Creative Media Team's work will have a clear impact on recruiting in the future.

"Not many D1 schools are doing what Ithaca is doing from a visual media perspective," Wingfield said. "I think it will have an impact on recruiting in the years to come."

Division III athletes usually get attracted to a school because of academics, a specific major and the size of the school, on top of the sport they want to play. Ithaca College is known nationally for its communications, music, and PT programs which are major attractions for students; however, the Creative Media Team is also becoming yet another pull for the institution that is not advertised enough.

On the Ithaca College website, there are links to different academic programs, athletics, events, and important news, but there are no direct links to what the college students are producing on social media. On the home page, the banner reads "Discover Life At IC" and the school is doing its applicants a disservice as well as media makers by not advertising an aspect of the school that is so popular right now.

Head Football Coach Dan Swanstrom sees the Creative Media Team as a helpful tool to the football program's recruiting because of how it displays the team.

"The Creative Media Team presents the program in a way second to none," said Swanstrom. "We can compete with any school in the country with our product because I don't think what Georgia or Alabama is putting out is better than what we're producing."

For context, both Georgia and Alabama are the top four teams in the country right now for Division I football and they hire college media graduates to produce social media content, a far cry from IC's dependence on students for the same task.

Swanstrom also sees the social media work Peter Raider's team has done as a recruiting tool for the acclimated Roy H. Park School of Communications.

“The Creative Media Team can truly help recruiting for the Park School,” said Swanstrom. “It can help these students build a portfolio.”

The Roy H. Park School of Communications has yet to add the Creative Media team to its list of clubs or make it a class but Raider is working on a solution to make the group more recognized on campus.

“I think that we’re in the process right now of the school helping us out more as we’re starting to collaborate with the Park School with the hope of making things official in Spring 2022,” said Raider. “We’ll be able to advertise through recruitment nights and be able to build our team even further.”

Peter is not just thinking in the short term, he is also looking down the road as he wants the Creative Media Team to last even after he graduates. His hope is not just for the recruitment of athletes, but also media making students.

“A long-term goal would be to have creative media be a big recruiting point for getting talented HS students to come to Ithaca, major in sports media, and work for creative media.”

Ithaca College has a gem inside of it that is growing every sports season and recruits like Yarish can see it grow because of the power of social media and coach Swanstrom loves that.

“Peter's good style and focus on social media makes it easier to get it out to recruits,” said Swanstrom.

Swanstrom's goal as a coach is to bring in good players, help them grow as people, and win games, and Raider helps out with this goal because another one of his main objectives for the Creative Media Team is tailored to the players.

“The content is for the athletes first and to fire up the team, ” said Raider.” “We want to show the recruits what Ithaca sports are all about and we want to make sure that they know that they will fit in.”



Photo from Peter Raider Media

An in-person study showed that out of 12 freshman athletes asked if the Creative Media Team played a part in them coming to Ithaca, all 12 agreed that “It was a big pull.”

The Creative Media Team is for the students, by the students, and it is something that attracts student athletes to Ithaca College. This student-run team can also attract media makers if the Park School of Communications makes it a club or even a major. The opportunities are endless, but what we know now is that this institution has a popular attraction that it can exploit because of how much attention it is already getting.

Yarish is a kid from a small suburban town in Connecticut and is looking to find a home to play football for the next four years. Yarish did not find the Creative Media Team through Ithaca’s website, on a tour, or through the common app, he found it on social media. Ithaca has a group of students who are talented enough to open the eyes of recruits because these students can see on their devices that there is only one Division III school that produces exciting social media content.

Many other athletes at Ithaca have similar stories to Yarish and even though the sample size is small now, there is reason to believe that the Creative Media Team will become a known pull for IC applicants.

Ithaca football has won the National Championships, holds a strong fan base, and has good facilities, but for Yarish, his reason to apply to Ithaca is because of the media attraction to players that he otherwise would not have as a D3 athlete.

“The creative media team is the biggest reason I have been so interested in Ithaca football,” said Yarish.

“I want to be a Bomber because of it.”



Photo from Ithaca Football Instagram

