



# Building a Dream Team at USF

**“It’s harder to get into the sports and entertainment field than it was to get into the White House,” says Greg Williams.**

He should know. A former college baseball player who served as assistant to the press secretary in the George W. Bush administration, Williams set his sights set on a career as “a decision-maker at a professional sports team.” He networked in the industry and did due diligence on a number of sports business graduate programs before getting a valuable piece of advice from former Denver Broncos General Manager Ted Sundquist. “Unless it comes with an MBA,” he told Williams, “it’s a waste of your time.” Starting this August, Williams, 29, will join the inaugural cohort of two dozen students in the newly launched MBA in Sport and Entertainment Management at the University of South Florida.

The idea for the two-year program arose from a conversation between USF President Judy Genshaft and Tampa Bay Lightning owner Jeff Vinik last year. “I had a great meeting in which we were just getting to know one another, she was welcoming me to the Tampa Bay area,” recalls Vinik. “We found some synergies, one thing led to another and here we are.” The promise of four years of funding from the NHL team’s Lightning Foundation clinched the concept.

Genshaft grasped at once the program’s potential to serve both USF students and the needs of the region. “Our metropolitan location is home to a myriad of professional sports and family entertainment organizations,



**Bill Sutton, hired to lead the new MBA program, was presented a Lightning jersey at the news conference announcing the partnership.**



**Located in Tampa, the University of South Florida recently announced that it will offer an MBA in Sport and Entertainment Management.**

everything from professional sports to family entertainment parks such as Busch Gardens, Adventure Island, and the Florida Aquarium,” she points out.

The program gained instant visibility and prestige by luring Bill Sutton to serve as its founding director. A veteran of the Sport Business Management Graduate Program at the University of Central Florida, Sutton brings a distinguished record to USF, both as an academic and a practitioner. The principal and founder of Bill Sutton & Associates, a consulting firm specializing in strategic marketing and revenue enhancement, Sutton’s clients include the NBA, WNBA, NHL, and MSG Sports. He has also authored more than 200 articles and has made more than 250 national and international presentations. He is a past president of North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) is a founding member and past president of the Sport Marketing Association (SMA) and the Sport Marketing Quarterly — a publication where he served as the co-editor.

Ideal candidates for the program should have a passion for the business and industry, not just a love of sports, say school officials.



**Portions of the students’ educational experience will be small, cohort-only classes focused on the sports industry.**

Housed within USF’s College of Business, MBA candidates will complete coursework in management, finance, marketing, information systems, and accounting, as well as industry-specific electives in negotiating and conflict resolution, the economics of sports, communications and strategic marketing. But it’s a unique residency program that differentiates USF from other programs. In their second year, students will attend classes two days a week, with the rest of their time devoted to a job with a pro team or sports business.

**“It will fund the students’ education in the second year. They can work, get their tuition paid for, receive a stipend, get experience and then go out in the job market. It’s a perfect situation,” says Sutton.**

“They’re going to be able to fill senior roles here and really make a difference in our organization,” adds Vinik. “Every student that’s admitted to the program is going to have an internship, either with the Lightning or another team in town.”

In fact, very few universities can claim the sheer number of pro teams, venues and sports businesses at arm’s length as USF. In addition to the Lightning, the Tampa area hosts major league baseball’s Rays, the NFL’s Buccaneers, professional golf and tennis, IMG

sports academies, spring training facilities and more. “Our region has been the host to the Super Bowl, the Stanley Cup, the World Series, and NCAA tournaments and championships,” notes Genshaft. “Our partnerships will help prepare students for careers in sport and entertainment management all over the world.”

“What drew me to USF was Dr. Sutton and the MBA program. I’ve done the research on him and he’s the real deal,” says Williams.

Also among the first cohort of students arriving on campus this summer will be Jamie Grant, senior community development coordinator for the Atlanta Hawks and Philips Arena, who met Sutton as



**Jamie Grant**

a Central Florida undergrad and kept in touch over the years. When she heard Sutton was going to start a new program at USF, Grant says, “I was very intrigued and wanted to explore what the program had to offer.”

Williams made a hard-nosed decision before joining the USF program. “If I’m going to spend \$30,000 on an MBA, I need to get a job out of it. I can do the work. I’m very employable. But it’s about getting that interview and getting that push forward.” Ultimately it was “Dr. Sutton’s connections, his track record, and that it comes with an MBA,” that prompted Williams to sign on to USF’s program.

It seems like a smart bet. “Our students will get a great in-class experience, through business education in the classroom but they’ll also have real world experience with the incredible tutelage of people like (Lightning CEO) Tod Leiweke, Jeff Vinik, and their staff,” says Genshaft. “I’ve done this for 25-plus years. I’ve got a strong network of students that I’ve had all over the country,” says Sutton, who expects that network to help graduates like Williams and Grant make their way to the upper echelons of the business.

Indeed, the program already has the feel of a well-established sports MBA program from Day One. Sutton has been hearing from USF alumni who work in the industry who are excited that their alma mater’s new program, and eager to help provide expertise, internships, and opportunities for the program’s eventual graduates.

“This is a true partnership,” concludes Genshaft. “It’s very exciting and a game-changer.”



**The University of South Florida’s Marshall Student Center.**



**Students in the Sport and Entertainment Management MBA will join their peers from USF’s traditional MBA program for foundational business courses in areas such as accounting and management.**



The **USF College of Business** and  
the **Tampa Bay Lightning** are  
partnering to offer the new **MBA in  
Sport and Entertainment Management.**

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