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Standing Up To Gender Violence: Soccer Coach Ewan Seabrook offers Skills, from Colby to the NBA

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STANDING UP TO Gender Violence

Soccer coach Ewan Seabrook offers skills, from Colby to the NBA

BY ABUKAR ADAN '17

Colby men's soccer coach Ewan Seabrook knows it's not easy for an athlete to speak up when confronted with abuse happening—and it's even more difficult without the skills necessary to intervene nonviolently.

Seabrook has a national profile for leading gender-violence prevention training for collegiate and professional athletes, from Colby to Major League Baseball and the NBA. And he knows a bystander's actions can be powerful. His goal? To get athletes to see themselves as “bystanders who are invested in their teammates' lives and who ... have a social obligation to help them and intervene,” he said.

Teams across the country are taking a stronger stance on this issue, Seabrook said, and he and others are helping to make gender-based violence prevention a priority, including at the highest levels of professional sports. Their mission is to bring this training to all levels of the organization,” he said of his work with players, coaches, managers, and front-office executives. “This is for everybody.”

As a coach himself for over a decade, Seabrook understands that character development is a key part of his job. This led Seabrook, then coaching at the University of New Hampshire, to participate in Northeastern University's Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program. “Right off the bat we could tell Ewan was passionate about these issues and he was very knowledgeable,” said Jarrod Chin, the program's director of training and curriculum.

After receiving instruction in MVP's bystander approach to gender-based violence in 2013, Seabrook became a consultant through the program. He has since led conversations around the country—with the Oakland Athletics and the Minnesota Timberwolves among others—that are tailored to the needs of each team.

What makes the MVP model effective, Chin said, is that instead of talking to men as potential perpetrators of violence and women as potential victims or survivors, all participants are approached as bystanders who can be empowered to nonviolently intervene and confront abusive behavior.

“Bystanders who are invested in their teammates’ lives ... have a social obligation to help them and intervene.

—Men’s Soccer Coach
Ewan Seabrook

Seabrook’s work complements initiatives that Colby has implemented over the years aimed at confronting and, ideally, eradicating sexual misconduct. In 2014, when Seabrook was named to head of Colby’s men’s soccer program, he was delighted to find student-centered energy behind these initiatives, he said.

In collaboration with Colby faculty and coaches, he rolled out a modified version of the MVP trainings that was to engage all teams this fall. During the 2015 Jan Plan break, approximately 30 student-athletes who are leaders in their teams were trained to lead the conversations. “Instead of watching someone put on a performance or having someone lecture to you, this was more of a self-realization,” said soccer player Fred Randall ’17, one of the athletes at the Jan Plan session.

Randall, with two of his teammates, facilitated conversations throughout the season. In peer-led conversations “people are more open and honest about what happens at Colby,” he said. Even a couple of players who gave their time only grudgingly began referencing the training session afterwards.

“That night or the next day, people would be talking about what we had discussed ... piecing together elements that we had learned,” Randall said. Some of that learning takes place on the soccer pitch as well. If anyone uses sexist language, he said, the coach “is right on them.”