

## Jackson Among 51 Athletes Graduating This Weekend

Written by James Ashley  
Saturday, 10 May 2014 13:04

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We've all seen the Sports Illustrated cover of him running past a Michigan defender in one of college football's greatest upsets. We watched him time and time again as he hauled in touchdown catches during Appalachian State's string of three-straight NCAA Division I FCS National Championships

We watched as he ran the fastest 40-yard dash time (4.27) of any wide receiver at the 2008 National Football League Combine. Students sat side-by-side in Legends and threw watching parties in the dorms to watch his name get called in the second round (58th overall) of the 2008 NFL Draft by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Now, we can celebrate yet another milestone in the life of a Mountaineer legend.

Former Appalachian State wide receiver Dexter Jackson will have his name called once more on Sunday as he walks across the stage at the Holmes Center to receive his bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a concentration in political science. He is one of 51 current or former Appalachian student-athletes that will graduate from the University this weekend.

Jackson left to pursue his NFL dream a mere 15 credits shy of completing his degree requirements. Graduation was put on hold as he pursued and achieved his dream of playing

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professional football, which he has done for the last six years. However, his playing career suffered a major setback when he tore an anterior cruciate ligament last September while playing for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats of the Canadian Football League.

Despite the devastating injury, Jackson bounced back in a big way and used the time off to finish his degree requirements.

“I used the injury as a positive,” Jackson said. “I knew that I had to do rehab so I figured that I can get my degree at the same time. It was just a bonus.”

Jackson finished his career ranked among Appalachian's all-time leaders in receptions (110), receiving yards (1,846), receiving touchdowns (17), punt returns (93), punt-return yards (837) and punt-return touchdowns (two). As a senior, the Dunwoody, Ga. native caught 30 passes for 688 yards (22.9 avg.) and a team-high eight touchdowns, including two in the Mountaineers' famed 34-32 win over Michigan in the 2007 season opener.

Despite the on-field success, Jackson says that having his diploma will rank at the top of the list of accolades he has earned.

To complete his degree requirements, he completed a semester-long internship with the DeKalb

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County District Attorney's office and three online classes. With the support of Kim Sherrill, associate director of Appalachian State's Learning Assistance Program, Jackson applied for and received an NCAA Degree Completion Award to finish school.

The NCAA established the Degree Completion Award program in 1989 to assist student-athletes who have exhausted their eligibility for institutional financial aid. Applicants must have completed eligibility for athletics-related aid at a Division I member institution before applying and must be within 30 semester hours of their degree requirements. Student-athletes receiving the award receive an amount equivalent to tuition and fees, as well as a book allowance based on the number of hours in which they are enrolled.

"In the last 10 years, (Appalachian State's) Academic Services for Athletes staff has assisted approximately 12 former student-athletes to apply for and receive this award," Sherrill said. "One hundred percent of those students have graduated. Most of these students, like Dexter, understood how essential a degree is to their success. It is one of the most gratifying aspects of our work to see them finish."

Jackson is one of two former Mountaineer student-athletes that is graduating from Appalachian State this weekend after receiving an NCAA Degree Completion Award. Former men's basketball player Marcus Wright is the other.

At 27, Jackson said that graduating gives his mother and himself a confirmation of

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accomplishment. He also wants it to be a lesson for other student-athletes that no matter how old they are or what circumstances may come up, they can still finish school.

“I’m an example,” Jackson said. “It’s taking me 9-10 months to rehabilitate my ACL and not being able to be playing pro ball, I had to become a regular person who works 9-to-5. The athleticism will only carry you so far but education allows you to build relationships with people in different facets of the world and in business.”

Jackson remembers sitting in Owens Fieldhouse as a freshman in 2004, seated adjacent to former Appalachian State wide receiver coach Jason Nichols and never forgot the words that came out of his mouth. Nichols told Jackson that if a school is going to give scholarships to athletes to improve their sports, why not take advantage of the scholarship to get an education.

“I actually heard it from a friend of mine,” Nichols, now the wide receivers coach at Louisiana-Monroe said. “I’m glad that it resonated in Dexter’s mind and I’m proud that he came back to get his degree. I recruited Dexter out of high school and saw something special in him. We took a chance on Dexter and it worked out and him getting his degree is all we could ask for.”

Those words from Nichols stuck in Jackson’s mind and Jackson hopes his accomplishment sticks in all student-athletes’ minds for the rest of their lives.

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“Education is not inherited,” Jackson said. “It is obtained through everyday life, day-to-day. If you’re not learning something everyday, then you’re not listening.”

In addition to adding another great accomplishment to his life, graduation will also become one of Jackson’s fondest memories.

“With it being on Sunday and on Mother’s Day, it heightens the moment,” he said. “It feels like a game day and I get to give my mom an accomplishment that will stick with me until I die. No one can take away the national championships and no one can take away my degree.”

Jackson walks across the stage on Sunday as part of the College of Arts and Sciences commencement ceremony at 9 a.m.

### Baseball

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Chad Farmer (finance and banking)

William Head (double major: management, marketing)

Zach Joyce (communication studies; general business minor)

Josh Zumbrook (double major: appropriate technology, construction management)

Tyler Zupcic (journalism; leadership studies minor)

### **Men's Basketball**

Tevin Baskin (communication studies; sociology minor)

Tommy Spagnolo (recreation management; psychology minor)

Marcus Wright (communication studies)

### **Women's Basketball**

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Jessica Barios-Hernandez (physics; mathematics minor)

Michelle Taylor (apparel design and merchandising; marketing minor)

### **Field Hockey**

Emily Knapp (technical photography; communication minor)

### **Football**

Ian Barnard (general management)

Drew Bailey (marketing)

Patrick Blalock (marketing)

Brandon Grier (communication studies)

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Dexter Jackson (criminal justice)

Tucker Lee (criminal justice)

Storm Moore (management)

Mark Powell (exercise science)

### **Men's Golf**

Jay Brown (criminal justice; psychology minor)

John Cole (recreation management; communication minor)

Casey Komline (recreation management; communication minor)

### **Men's Soccer**

Harrison Delbridge (advertising)

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Danny Free (journalism)

Ryan Lavigne (political science - pre-law)

### **Women's Soccer**

Jordan Hatton (electronic media/broadcasting)

Demetra Kleitches (health care management)

Jamie Lockie (electronic media/broadcasting)

Samantha Neill (double major: community and regional planning, geographic information systems)

Jordan Vezina (communication sciences and disorders)

Amy Werdine (public relations)

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### **Softball**

Whitney Johnson (communication disorders)

Lindsay Loudermilk (double major: psychology, health studies)

### **Women's Tennis**

Jessica Thaggard (biology; geography minor)

### **Men's Track and Field/Cross Country**

Adedeji Adeneye (advertising; health promotion minor)

Jamal Tiller (accounting)

### **Women's Track and Field/Cross Country**

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Katie Cagle (double major: geography, community and regional planning)

Cassie Crawford (nursing)

Meaghan McCauley (exercise science)

Jocelyn Parnell (psychology)

Shelby Williams (exercise science; psychology and health promotion minors)

### **Volleyball**

Lauren Brown (electronic media/broadcasting)

Jess Eley (public relations)

Lindsey Sauls (special education)

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### **Wrestling**

Kaleb Forrest (criminal justice)

Chris Johnson (actuarial science)

Dominic Parisi (recreation management; technical photography minor)

Acton Pifer (chemistry; Spanish minor)

Aaron Scott (criminal justice)

Nick Vetell (health promotion; exercise science minor)

Paul Weiss (health promotion; general business minor)

**Photo Courtesy: Dexter Jackson, App State Athletics**