

*“In 2012, the men’s lacrosse team won the NCAA National Championship and then in 2016 made an appearance in the Final Four.”*



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## Home is Where the Turf Is By Alice Regan

The cheering of the crowd and the passion of the players. The screaming coaches and the deafening yells from announcers. All of these contribute to the fervor throughout Ridley Athletic Complex. Located on W. Cold Spring Lane only a few miles from campus, Ridley is the home of many Loyola sports teams and the site of enthusiastic fans cheering on their peers (“Loyola”). Completed in 2010, Ridley is where athletes put in endless effort to proudly show off the “National Champions” banner hanging from the railings while firelessly fighting for more banners to come.

Every aspect of this outstanding athletic complex contributes to the one-of-a-kind feeling that encapsulates Ridley. Some of the most unique parts of Ridley include the different rooms where everyone spends hours preparing for games and practices. The building itself consists of laundry rooms, coaches’ offices, film rooms, weight rooms, VIP suites, training rooms, walls of trophy cases, and locker rooms for each team. After having spent time in all the nooks and crannies of Ridley, let me tell you something: the locker room is a place like no other.

Not only does it constantly smell like sweat, dirty clothes, and cleats, but you can feel the determination and hard work of every player in that room. Each

player has their own locker with a name tag, hooks for clothes, and a small cubby that can be decorated to personalize their space. Some teams blast music, dance, and sing to create uplifting vibes for everyone. Others have serious and intense talks, all listening to their game day music through headphones. The locker room is a place for the players to decompress, gather themselves, and prepare both mentally and physically for whatever may lie ahead of them.

Walking into the locker room on game day creates a feeling of pure pride and excitement—pride to wear the name on the front of your jersey and excitement to prove your skills and hard work in a fierce competition. Music blasting and teammates singing brings the whole team together, creating an energy level to set the tone for the rest of the day. Everyone has different ways of preparing for games, but no matter what your pump up strategy is, the locker room is the place to express it and the place to encourage others to find the spark to light their fire.

Game day preparation starts in the trainer’s office. From heating pads to foam rollers every player takes the responsibility of providing aid to their physical needs. Professional trainers pay close attention to any and all injuries, tend to bumps and bruises, and wrap body parts from an-

gles to shoulders. Pregame snacks are stocked in the training room—enough energy bars to feed an army—making sure the talent of each player is not hidden by a lack of strength and stamina. Once taped, rolled, and heated, it’s time for the next step of the process—meeting with the coaches.

Morale is high walking out of the locker room, and all of the sudden it’s time to get down to business. Pregame meetings include starting lineups, strategies for games, and important last minute details the coaches deliver for the best possible outcome. Game day jitters create a buzz around the room, but once the coaches come in, everyone’s focus is all in and attention to detail is vital. These specifics are essential to a team’s success, essential for a win.

The thing about college sports is that every team you play puts in just as much effort as you do—it’s the little things, the details, that eventually separate the champions. The extra time spent at Ridley for pregame talks and game plans adds to the sense of home Ridley gives off—this time leads to more familiarity and the strong bond players have with this complex.

There is no better feeling than walking through the glorious tunnel that leads from the locker rooms to the turf. Walking through the tunnel you can hear the stomping of the crowd's feet and the liveliness of the fans along with loud music blaring from the speakers. There is a certain spirit in the air that only one community can create—the Loyola University Maryland fan section. Referred to as "The Dog Pound," students from all years cheer and celebrate the hard work they witness on the field. Their energy and excitement is contagious; the players feed off of their emotions. With a maximum capacity of 6,000 people, soccer and lacrosse games are lucky to be accompanied by such an enthusiastic group of fans. Cheers such as "we believe that we will win" and "you can't do that" push the players to new levels, to exert energy they didn't know they had. It's the fans, the cheers, and the excitement that bring the entire complex together and create a sense of home and togetherness for those experiencing it.

Whether you are an athlete or a spectator, game days give everyone an opportunity to be part of a community designed to support those around them. On the side lines, cheering and reassurance from players on the bench is necessary to give those playing the extra push, the extra sprint, to win games. And in the stands, the fans' support changes

the entire atmosphere of the stadium. It roars with rowdy students and encouraging parents. The community of Loyola is carried down the street to Ridley, creating a venue perfect for any student to venture to. Game day shuttles run multiple times per hour, making it easy to cheer on your fellow hounds right down the road. There is no reason not to participate in game day festivities all throughout the year, no reason not to join a group of people coming together to support each other in events overflowing with pride.

Just like any other place you might call home, Ridley has its ups and downs. Athletes on every team work tirelessly day after day on the field and in the weight room. Being a student-athlete sounds a whole lot better than the actual grind that goes on behind the scenes. Going from an early morning practice, then to class, then to study hall, all while trying to balance meetings, hanging out with friends, eating and trying to be a normal person isn't the easiest lifestyle for a college student to live. Ask any player—from swimming to soccer to basketball—life as an athlete is challenging. Luckily, game days provide an escape from this stress. The players can put aside all the school work, studying, and everyday troubles that encapsulate the lives of all students and just play their game. Sports provide a way to escape from reali-

ty and the stress that everyone feels as college students. Ridley is the place to let these feelings go, to work hard and get away from anything negative that embodies you—fan or athlete.

Although there are many difficulties that come along with being a student athlete, no one I know would trade this for the world. College sports bring you friends of a lifetime; you spend every waking moment with your teammates all while struggling on and off the field together. The ups and downs wouldn't be worth it without the amazing bonds teammates create. Struggles are inevitable—life wouldn't be the same without them—but the people we surround ourselves with are how we get through these struggles. Every day I feel blessed to be surrounded by hardworking athletes who understand that success will only come to those who work for it. Ridley is home for many student-athletes, including myself, and the place where friendships have been formed and continue to grow.

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#### Works Cited

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