

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Letter jackets warm hearts

Former Tiger football player Lorenzo Williams, BS '07, remembers the somewhat anticlimactic moment he got his letter jacket at Mizzou. "I just got a little sticky note in my locker that said, 'Go to the equipment room and pick up your jacket.' Turns out it was too small and another one had to be ordered."



Varsity M, the Mizzou Alumni Association's affinity group for athletes who have earned letters,

decided it could and should do better than a sticky note and a hike to the equipment room to mark such a big moment for student-athletes. On March 2, 2011, Williams served as emcee for the third event at which Varsity M presented the jackets to athletes.

The jacket program helps build relationships with letter winners, says Carl Fudge, A&S '83, of Columbia. He is president of Varsity M, which pays for the jackets. "We want to connect with student-athletes, and we hope they come back to reconnect with the university later in their lives. The first object of value they own related to their collegiate athletics experience is usually the letter jacket. It creates a common bond between current student-athletes, former athletes and the university."

Jayson Meyer, director of alumni relations, thinks the event is a meaningful way to honor the moment.

Williams, a businessman in Columbia, agrees. "I still wear the jacket today," he says. "Seems

Molly Kreklow, a sophomore from Delano, Minn., proudly wears the letter jacket she earned from playing volleyball. Photo by Nicholas Benner

like it's always around when I need it." The black jacket with gold M and sleeves catches people's attention. "People look at you a little different when you have that jacket on. And other athletes notice, too, including athletes I had never met. When you're in the program, it's a lot of hard work. Other athletes see the jacket, and they know the struggle. It's a deep connection that you don't have to talk about."




Meyer says Mizzou has roughly 5,000 living alumni who have lettered in athletics. "This is a special group of people who were committed to the university as student-athletes and who remain committed as alumni. They are more likely than alumni in general to be donors and members of the association."

Varsity M's forerunner was the "M" Men's Club, founded in 1911 on the eve of the Missouri-Kansas football game, according to the 1934 *Savitar*. The founders were Chester Brewer, the athletic director who launched Mizzou's first Homecoming the same year, and Henry "Indian" Schulte, who coached football and track. The group maintained a "richly furnished" club room and was active in campus affairs.

Williams has remained connected to MU, not only through Varsity M but also through his Columbia business, [Galactic Fun Zone](#). Located in the former Ice Chalet building, the Zone features games that Mizzou athletics squads have used for team-building activities. "It's great to stay involved," Williams says. "I loved my time at Mizzou."

More on Varsity M: Visit mizzou.com or email Meyer at meyerjay@missouri.edu.

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