

May 05. 2006 6:01AM

Former Gator gives chance to student-athletes after college

His basketball career was winding down when he came up with the idea. A torn Achilles pushed it into overdrive.

Today, Dan Cross is trying to help a group of people who many assume need no help - former athletes struggling to find a way to assimilate in society.

"It's not some experiment," Cross said. "It's life. I'm just trying to help a lot of people."

Cross is in the middle of his own experience of dealing with a new world. After starring at Florida and leading the 1994 Gator team to the [Final Four](#), he has played some professional basketball, most recently in Israel where he suffered the injury.

While rehabbing, he has accelerated his plan to form a company that will help former student-athletes. The Web site - [AthleteConnections.com](#) - is up and running. Former college athletes can log on and answer a few questions to get the ball rolling.

The schools around America and the [NCAA](#) preach that they care about student-athletes, but how many are forgotten as soon as their eligibility has run out? There are plenty of success stories, but there are also the former players working as janitors because they have no guidance or connections.

"I know how hard the transition can be," Cross said. "There are so many people who have come through a school like Florida and have had success in business. Why not connect them with the athletes who played at their schools?"

"The same support they showed them when they were playing, they can show them now. I'm just trying to put people together. I'm going to work with athletes who played professional sports, but this is really for the 98 percent who did not."

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Cross is starting with Florida athletes and Florida alumni, but plans to expand the idea and his non-profit organization throughout the country.

Connecting people with a common fight song can be as simple as making one phone call or bumping into the right guy at a golf course. Part of Cross' plan is to get around and do plenty of networking.

Cross, who lives in Orlando, spent the last two weekends in Gainesville. Two weeks ago, it was to be inducted into the [UF](#) Hall of Fame. Last weekend, it was Danny Wuerffel's golf tournament. In both cases, there was a lot of glad-handing.

"I enjoy being around people and meeting people," he said. "I want to try to help as many people as I can. As my career was coming to an end, I started thinking about what I could do that I would enjoy for the rest of my life."

He understands what can happen when the cheering stops. He has experienced it and has friends who have been through it. "A lot of emotions take place," Cross said. "One of them being depression. You put so much time into one thing and when it ends if you can't find out what you want to do next, there is a lot of anxiety. It can affect your family. It can affect your relationships, your children.

"What does an athlete do when his career is over? A lot of my friends have gone through those same emotions."

The Web site survey asks for a player's thoughts about which emotions he or she has had to deal with.

"If I can help just by simply connecting an athlete to someone in a certain field that can help, well, that's what I want to do," Cross said. "The career of an athlete doesn't last that long. The University of Florida is my foundation that helped me reach my goals. The Gator Nation is very powerful. I just want to make it work for everybody."

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