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Passing the Baton

05.11.2011 | Business, Campus and Community, Athletics Ron Morton credits his training as an athlete to success later in life as the nation's largest franchise owner of H&R Block offices.

"Athletics and business are a perfect mix," said Morton, who ran track and cross country at Dayton's Meadowdale High School and landed an athletic scholarship to Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tenn. "When you're done competing, you still want to compete. Business is very competitive."

That's his motivation behind a \$2.1 million commitment to the University of Dayton for scholarships for students competing in non-revenue sports and majoring in business fields.

"It's the way I pay back for what I've been given," said Morton, a men's basketball front-row season ticketholder for 10 years. "I picked UD because of its mission. It's more than a big basketball school. It stands for community service, too."

Matt Shank, dean of the School of Business Administration, said Morton's gift will help recruit University of Dayton athletes who want to make their mark in the business world. "This gift will advance the University's mission of educating the whole person by providing assistance to student-athletes who are interested in developing their academic skills in business and physical skills in competition," he said.

Since nearly 30 percent of the University's student-athletes are enrolled in the business school, "Ron's gift will provide a significant boost to a number of our sports programs," said Tim Wabler, vice president and director of athletics.

When Morton graduated from Austin Peay in 1970 with a degree in physical education, he joined the Peace Corps. He lived in Tunisia, where he coached basketball and taught physical education for two years.

"I wanted to help people, learn a language and see a different part of the world," he said.

Although Morton did not graduate from the University of Dayton, he did ace the only course he took here — a driver's education class in 1977. For more than 30 years, he owned driving schools, ran driver's education programs at Milton-Union and Brookville High Schools and taught students how to drive.

Morton, who now owns 62 H&R Block offices in Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Indiana and West Virginia, attributes his success to his competitive drive.

"As a business owner, I wanted to get bigger. My goal is to get one more. Then my goal is to get one more."

Morton hopes his gift will encourage others to reach out and help other people chase their dreams. "I believe in smaller government, that people should take care of other people. If you believe that, then you need to step up," he said.

Today, he shares time between homes in Tipp City, Ohio, and Sumter, S.C., where he's been active in the Rotary Club's youth exchange program that sends high school students to live with host families in Europe and South America. He's also sponsored athletic tournaments and chaperoned students at Sumter High School on trips to Europe when his three children were younger. Like their father, all are college graduates.

Morton looks back on his days as a competitive runner with appreciation for the life lessons he took away from the track. "I wasn't an All-American or anything like that," he said. "Success is what you do afterwards. Athletes learn discipline and focus. That makes a good business person.

"And it made me a better person."

For more information, contact Cameron Fullam, assistant director of media relations, at 937-229-3256 or fullam@udayton.edu.