



Massage therapy student MacEwan Massage Therapy student Gabriel Simard works with an Edmonton Elks player after practice during spring training camp (courtesy Edmonton Elks)

Tuesday, May 30, 2023

MacEwan Massage Therapy students part of the team with the Edmonton Elks during training camp

Edmonton - The spring training camp for the Edmonton Elks has some MacEwan students getting some valuable hands-on experience, supporting the team to prepare for the season.

“I knew immediately I would be signing up,” says Spencer Pon, a second-year student in the [Massage Therapy](#) program. “This is a chance to practice my skills in a high-stakes environment with professional athletes from all over North America. This is not practice to them; training camp has the potential to make or break these players’ careers.”

Pon and about 20 of his classmates are taking part in the initiative, honing their massage therapy skills on professional football players at Commonwealth Stadium.

It’s a project that came about one year after [MacEwan signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Edmonton Elks](#). That strategic partnership is aimed at giving students valuable real-life educational opportunities in a collaborative and supportive learning environment.

“We want lots of opportunities, diverse opportunities,” says [Darren Tellier, associate professor and chair of the Department of Allied Health and Human Performance](#). “Who doesn’t want to go and do something with a professional sports team? This is the optimal version of community-engaged partnerships.”

The Massage Therapy program includes a field-placement requirement that sees students practicing their skills in situations ranging from seniors’ lodges to the [MacEwan Griffins varsity teams](#). “We knew that our students would be very motivated to go and work with a professional sports team,” says Tellier.

For their part, the Edmonton Elks were committed to the idea of having the students on site, realizing both the students and the players benefit.

“The students from the MacEwan program bring a fantastic skill set to our training camp,” says Brian Cheeseman, director of Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation with the Elks. “We are very fortunate to have their services available to assist in keeping our players healthy and on the field in the high-paced and high-pressure CFL training camp environment.”

“Our theme this season is *Our Team. Our City*. We are building on that by beginning what is hopefully an ongoing partnership with the MacEwan Massage Therapy program.”

The students are at training camp three days a week. The hours they put in are on top of what is required for the program, but Tellier says there was no shortage of volunteers.

“We knew there was lots of interest from students and the Elks had no hesitation, so we just kept moving forward.”

The students also had the opportunity to learn from the Elks’ on-staff massage therapists.

“They were beyond helpful and were so eager to teach us,” says Pon. “They went out of the way to show us tips and tricks in a one-on-one environment with the athletes. And the athletes helped us learn by giving us feedback on how our techniques felt in comparison to when the team therapists performed them.”

For Pon, it’s invaluable experience as he finishes up the two-year program at MacEwan.

“This has added another layer to my education and has provided some real-life experience in a professional sports environment while also providing me with more tools to feel confident starting my practice after graduation.”

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