



PEAK NUTRITION FUELS PEAK PERFORMANCE

How 3 Higher Ed Campuses Feed Athletes
Through the Aramark Training Table Program



“Proper nutrition — eating the right food at the right time — is vital to enable student-athletes to train, compete, recover, heal and learn”

— [Collegiate and Professional Sports Dietitians Association](#)

A significant percentage of higher education athletes wish their coaches and administrators would talk to them more about proper nutrition for athletic performance. This includes 42 percent of male student-athletes and 56 percent of female student-athletes. — [National Collegiate Athletic Association \(NCAA\)](#)

Eating properly and maintaining an appropriate diet is a critical factor in game-day preparation for all athletes — including college athletes. Well-designed and perfectly executed nutritional programs on campus set athletes up for success on multiple levels — from strength training to conditioning to recovery. To meet athletes’ unique nutritional requirements, many higher education institutions are implementing training table programs to optimize their athletes’ diet and ensure they have the nutrients they need for their body type and sport.

The concept of training tables for athletes began at Yale in 1903 to ensure players had enough food to eat. Over the years, coaches and campuses evolved the concept of basic dining programs into more sophisticated nutrition-focused programs. As advancements in science brought new knowledge to sports, the campus dining programs adopted new ideas and expanded their focus.

The training table meal is a great opportunity for student-athletes to learn about nutrition and develop healthy eating behaviors that can last a lifetime.

— [Collegiate and Professional Sports Dietitians Association](#)



Today, the best training table programs include specialized menus created by chefs, nutritionists and dietitians that cater to athletes' special dietary needs. They also meet the guidelines of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The healthy performance of college athletes is foundational work of the NCAA Sport Science Institute. Its guidelines promote adequate nutrition, hydration, sleep, strength and conditioning, and the responsible use of supplements.

Aramark has helped numerous campuses across the nation launch and manage training tables for their athletes. Successful programs include Clemson University, the University of Cincinnati and the University of Virginia, to name a few. The following provides an overview of these programs, including highlights, power plays and successes.

Advantages of On-Campus Training Table Programs

- Meals specially designed for sports, body types and goals
- Customize meals to meet student athletes' individual nutritional needs
- Nutritional education fuels student athletes' lifestyle
- Athletes don't have to wait in long lines to get nutritional needs met
- Athletes eat as a team to build camaraderie
- Cultivate a culture of excellence around a shared dining experience
- Athletes are healthier and better prepared to win more games



Clemson University launched its training table program in 2009, and the program has evolved since its inception. Today the program includes a chef, nutritionist and dietitian who manage the program and develop menus. They are supported by a staff of 12 from Aramark who prepare and serve the food. Aramark has worked with Clemson for 50 years and supported the training table since it launched. The team chef even travels with the athletes to ensure proper meal preparation on the road.

Training Table Highlights

Clemson's Aramark training table team performs the following functions:

- Stocks the kitchen with foods required to fulfill the customized menus
- Prepares the food according to exacting nutritional guidelines
- Serves the food at the designated meal and snack times

Power Plays

The Clemson chef, dietitian and nutritionist team are in charge of meeting the nutritional guidelines of the NCAA. Aramark helps ensure the requirements are implemented, including:

- The recommended caloric intake for male and female athletes
- All-day food and beverage choices based upon practice sessions
- Weight training recovery needs
- Hydration needs

Scoring Success

The financial structure of Clemson's training table program evolved to provide more transparency. In this program, Aramark assists the athletic department with budgeting and labor. This approach delivers two key advantages: Athletes, coaches and dietitians get the resources they need to deliver a high-quality nutritional program, and the university gets complete budgeting transparency.

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI “VARSITY CLUB” DINING VENUE

Prior to 2018, the University of Cincinnati had a full athletic program except for a dedicated nutrition program. In the fall of 2018, the campus launched the Varsity Club with a dedicated dining venue and nutritional team to meet athletes' nutritional requirements and provide them with customized menus.

Beginning in 2013, Aramark provided a minimal athletic dining program for the athletes, which included a room with tables, chairs and chafing pans for food items. The food was prepared at an off-site kitchen and transported to the campus. In the new Varsity Club, the program has significantly advanced to include a fully equipped on-site kitchen and dedicated cooks fulfilling the specialized menus and preparing specialized meals to order. The dining venue includes everything the Dining Services team needs to adjust to the rotating daily menu options. This includes mobile hot and cold service bars with full Gatorade and juice options. The Athletes are also given the option to take their meals to-go to meet their busy class and training schedules.

Registered dietitians and chefs worked together to develop an extensive database of recipes complete with nutritional data. The campus now uses those recipes to provide Athletic Department partners with specific meals to meet their nutritional requirements.

The Varsity Club is run by the campus residential department. All freshmen are on mandatory meal plans. The athletic department purchases meal plans for all other athletes, this allows all of the teammates to dine together in one location. Meal swipes are used to pay for all the meals.

Training Table Highlights

Cincinnati's training table team delivers the following benefits:

- Nutritionally focused menus for student athletes to ensure they can focus on their training and not worry about their diets
- Onsite dining that gives athletes easy access to the nutrition they need for training and recovery
- Customize meals upon request, such as for food allergies and sensitivities



Power Plays

The Aramark team helps the campus meet NCAA guidelines in the following ways:

- Communicates with coaches to assist with specific athletes' nutritional support needs
- Delivers freshly prepared food for breakfast, lunch and dinner at designated time slots Monday through Friday
- Provides the option to expand its dining hours for teams upon request
- Opens the facility to feed the teams during off-hours or on the weekends, upon request

Scoring Success

The athletic department invested in significant training table improvements by funding new kitchen equipment, buying more meal plans for student athletes and bringing more campus athletic teams into the program. Aramark's purchasing power ensures that food and supplies are purchased with cost savings. Advancements in the program have strengthened the relationship between the campus and Aramark teams.



“EDUCATION, NOT DEPRIVATION” APPROACH

The University of Virginia Athletic Department has offered its athletes a training table program since 2007. Today, more than 600 athletes participate in the Cavalier Sports Nutrition program at dinner five days a week (Sunday through Thursday) using their meal plan swipes to access meals specially created for their nutritional needs. Virginia became one of less than two dozen NCAA Division I schools to have a full-time nutrition specialist on staff for their student athletes.

A certified specialist in sports dietetics helps educate the student athletes and coaches on appropriate food choices to enhance performance. Meals and recipes are created by a certified executive chef. A staff of chefs, cooks and attendants make sure the food is prepared and served to the highest standards, focusing on locally sourced ingredients prepared fresh to maintain their nutritional integrity. Aramark’s chef and registered dietitian plan menus for the training table and for pre- and post-competition meals.

Training Table Highlights

Virginia’s training table team delivers the following benefits:

- Through a customized individual plate program, athletes talk to a chef and get specially designed meals
- The institution runs a snack program, which includes stocking locker rooms
- A True Balance program in every residential dining hall for the athletes
- The men’s basketball team has a separate dining space with a private chef, with the potential for expansion into additional sports



Power Plays

With a staff of six, the Aramark team helps the campus meet NCAA guidelines through the operation of the dining venue five days a week for dinner, serving about 350 students and athletic managers at each meal. Aramark also caters meals, snacks and desserts for the John Paul Jones Arena.

Scoring Success

Working with Aramark provides the campus with several advantages that has made its training table program a success with its student athletes, including expertise in dining and sports nutrition, industry connections to meet specialized resource needs, and a broad scope of performance capabilities to meet every need and bridge every gap in sports nutrition — from staff management to menu planning to food preparation. The partnership includes a continuous communication stream to support the athletic department's goals.

Is your campus ready to give your athletes a nutritionally focused training table program?

If your campus is ready, Aramark is a dining partner that will help your training table program score high points. While dietitians often see nutritional support in terms of percentages and quantities, the culinary team members at Aramark view nutrition-driven dining as a passion. As such, the Aramark team works hard to ensure that campuses' student athletes get the food they need so they can excel in their sports and win big for their schools.

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