

WHILE MOST PEOPLE ENJOY PRO FOOTBALL from the confines of their own living rooms, Hiroki Uchino, G'13, once spent game days on the sidelines working for the Detroit Lions. As an intern, NFL stadiums, practice fields and training rooms were his classroom.

"Working in the National Football League was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience," said the native of Ako, Japan, who earned his undergraduate degree in Japan at Waseda University. "Working with professional athletes in one of the most intense environments has allowed me to further enhance my skills and knowledge in this field. It is definitely a very hard job, but I would never trade the hours worked and the things I learned for anything."



BY JOHN WINTERS, G'11

While excited by the opportunity to "go pro," Mr. Alvarez is equally happy to be helping Spanish-speaking players stay healthy and in the lineup. "Being that English is my second language, I understand what it is like to be provided with health care in a language which one doesn't understand," he said. "A lot of times information gets lost in translation, and then confidence and trust between clinician and patient is lost. I will be able to communicate with these young athletes and provide them with treatments, protocols and educational concepts in Spanish."

Mr. Hoefs, G'13, was a teacher when he heard the siren song of America's pastime. He responded by coming to BSU, earning a master's degree in athletic training and, along the way, working as an intern with the Miami Marlins. He is now the Dominican Republic athletic trainer for the Oakland Athletics.

"The experience at BSU relates to being a professional athletic trainer, because the injuries you see while in school are very similar to what you encounter when you graduate and are a full-time paid athletic trainer," Mr. Hoefs said. "They also give you the confidence that you know what to do when you are on your own, because you have done it before."

His duties, and those of his fellow pros, include everything from providing medical supervision for the players, handling on-call medical assistance for on- and off-field injuries and illnesses, and implementing pre-game and pre-practice player preparation designed to prevent injuries. The trainers are also responsible for providing injury and illness rehabilitation and therapy for players and staff, and implementing medical and training room administrative services, such as scheduling doctor's appointments, ordering supplies, documenting injuries and completing insurance forms.

When he was looking for internship opportunities, Mr. Uchino sent résumés to every team in the NFL. The only response was from the Lions. In June 2013, he joined the team for minicamp and then spent the entire 2013-2014

season in the trenches. His duties included preparing the athletic training room for daily treatments, practice and game field set-up, coverage for home and away competitions, performing daily treatments with therapeutic modalities and therapeutic exercises, and taping the players prior to all practices and games.

"My education at BSU and clinical experience that I had interning at Stoughton High School and Brown University provided great preparation for the Lions internship," he said. "I was able to conduct myself as an athletic trainer in the professional setting with confidence, thanks to the experience and knowledge I gained during my time at BSU."

Working at the highest levels of the profession is a big job, and these graduates say BSU's practice of having students participate in four clinical rotations was key to preparing them for the pros. For example, Mr. Hoefs worked at two high schools and two colleges before earning his degree. Meanwhile, one of Mr. Alvarez's internships was with a Cape Cod Baseball League squad.



These three hard-working alumni are well positioned for future success in their chosen field. They point to BSU's graduate program in athletic training for providing the knowledge, skills and opportunities that launched them. They found their passions, and with the right preparation, are doing the work they love.

Mr. Hoefs hopes his combined experience will help him further his career as a full-fledged major league athletic trainer. After completing his internship with the Lions, Mr. Uchino set his sights on working for a college team or possibly returning to his native country. "Athletic training in Japan is not as familiar as here in the U.S., especially in the local areas like where my hometown is. So my goal is to provide the same quality of care that you can get in the U.S. for the student athletes at local high schools and colleges."

Likewise, Mr. Alvarez hopes his career goals align with a personal mission of his. "My passion has always been baseball," he said, "and now I can put my education to use to help athletes, not just in the USA but in Latin American countries such as Mexico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela and many more." ■



Photos, clockwise from far left:

DR. SUANNE MAURER-STARKS, associate professor in the Department of Movement Arts, Health Promotion and Leisure Studies, and director of the athletic training program; JOSE ALVAREZ, G'13, works with the Chicago Cubs organization; HIROKI UCHINO, G'13, interned with the Detroit Lions; and KENNETH HOEFS, G'13, was an intern with the Miami Marlins and now works for the Oakland Athletics organization.



# Turning pro

BSU athletic training students make the grade at top levels of sport

Also recently "turning pro," were Jose Alvarez and Kenneth Hoefs, alumni of the athletic training graduate program, who are among many that BSU has put in the game.

The combination of classroom instruction, internships and faculty mentorship is the key to the students' success, said Dr. Suanne Maurer-Starks, associate professor in the Department of Movement Arts, Health Promotion and Leisure Studies, and director of the athletic training program.

"These three young men really represent what we are doing here at Bridgewater," she said. But, she was quick to add that the program's alumni work at all levels of sport, and even in the performing arts. "The perception is that the professional ranking is the highest you can go," she said. "I applaud the efforts of these graduates; it takes a lot of dedication and time to work at that level. However, that being said, all our students, whether in a high school, college or professional setting are doing important work. The program here allows them to give the highest quality care to their patient base."

When Mr. Alvarez, G'13, was growing up in Arizona, working with a Major League Baseball team was a distant dream. The son of immigrants from Mexico, he learned English as a second language and attended a high school in West Phoenix where only 450 graduated. Not even five percent of those students went on to a university.

Mr. Alvarez did, first attending Arizona University to get his bachelor's degree in kinesiology, then BSU for his master's degree in athletic training. Today, he works for the Chicago Cubs organization, as head athletic trainer certified in the Dominican Summer League, as well as supervising ATC of the Cubs Academy in Venezuela. In the winter, he works for the Aguilas de Mexicali team in the Liga Mexicana del Pacifico, Mexico's highest level of professional baseball and a recognized AAA level squad with the majors in America.