

# Momentum is high for Tulane Athletics with a new athletic director and new football head coach

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Jon Sumrall, Green Wave football head coach

Tulane Athletics is currently enjoying remarkable success, with an even brighter future on the horizon. The pivotal contributions of alumni and donors have been instrumental in driving this success.

Tulane President Mike Fitts recently spoke to the importance of the Green Wave's

alumni and fans. “Our teams have had historic success in recent years, the result of dedication and hard work of our student athletes, coaches, administrators, and staff. This would not have been possible without the steadfast support of the Green Wave nation — our alumni, our friends and fans — who have cheered for our teams every step of the way.”

Fitts made that statement at the news conference December 11 announcing the hiring of Green Wave football head coach Jon Sumrall.

Only two weeks earlier, on November 27, Fitts held a news conference announcing the hiring of David Harris as the Green Wave’s new director of athletics and the Ben Weiner Director of Athletics Chair.



David Harris, Green Wave's director of athletics

All this change comes at an exciting time for Tulane athletics, which in 2023 launched the [Investing in Excellence](#) capital campaign, which Fitts said will build a “world-class athletics infrastructure.”

Longtime Tulane supporters Don and Lora Peters have increased their recent commitment to Tulane Athletics to over \$10 million, which will serve as a lead gift for the campaign.

Primary goals of the Investing in Excellence campaign include renovating the James

W. Wilson Jr. Center and building an attached sports performance facility, installing a multipurpose indoor practice facility, upgrading the turf in Yulman and Turchin Stadiums, and building a new tennis complex. The campaign has already supported the recently completed [renovations to the natatorium](#), and will also fund a [new multipurpose headquarters for Tulane's varsity sailing program](#) and Community Sailing New Orleans thanks to a \$2.75 million gift from Libby and Robert Alexander.

New Athletic Director David Harris comes to Tulane after serving as director of athletics at the University of Northern Iowa, where he was named Athletic Director of the Year by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics in 2021.

Harris said the momentum that Tulane is experiencing now is part of the reason he was drawn to the university.

"Some schools want to maintain what they've already done," he said at his introductory news conference. "Tulane is looking to move forward with a commitment and investment in athletics excellence. The Investing in Excellence campaign is a great example of that commitment. We're excited about working to build an athletic legacy that will continue to grow for the good of our student-athletes and fans. We have every expectation Tulane's current success will continue and reach even greater heights."

Fitts said Harris was chosen after an extensive national search. "He stood out — both his winning track record and with his student-centered approach," Fitts said, explaining that Harris began his career in academic services at Ole Miss where he played football as an undergraduate. "This gave him firsthand insight into how student-athletes could benefit from holistic support, and it has informed his career ever since. At Tulane, we are every bit as invested in our student-athletes' academic performance and long-term career success as we are in their athletic accomplishments. This is one of the reasons David was clearly the right choice for Tulane."

Harris is originally from Baton Rouge and has numerous family members in the New Orleans area. "It feels so good to be home in south Louisiana," he said. "We know firsthand that the city of New Orleans is an amazing community with great people, great culture, great music, great sports. And yes, great food, which I missed a great deal."

New Head Football Coach Jon Sumrall also mentioned the draw of New Orleans at his introductory news conference.

"It's got a vibrant culture, and it's full of life," he said. "You know, if you're juiceless, you're useless, and this city's got a lot of juice."

Sumrall comes to Tulane from Troy University where he experienced a very successful last two years, leading them to a 23-4 record, two Sun Belt Conference championships and a pair of double-digit winning streaks. He was named Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year and was twice named a finalist for the Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year honor.

"Yulman Stadium is a fantastic venue to play home football games on this campus, and we need it rocking every time we play here" says head football coach Jon Sumrall.

Sumrall returns to Tulane after serving as the Green Wave's co-defensive coordinator from 2012 to 2014.

Fitts welcomed Sumrall back home: "Coach Jon Sumrall is one of the most successful and winningest football coaches in recent history. Jon brings a wealth of experience and a profound understanding of what it takes to instill excellence, to cultivate remarkable athletes and exceptional individuals on and off the field."

Sumrall said he is committed to helping student-athletes succeed holistically, winning in the classroom and career and on the gridiron.

"This job is not about me. It's about others, and I will serve the young men in our program in every way possible, academically, on the field, socially, character, spiritually, leadership, it's about whole-person development. ... We will develop men of character who earn their degree. They will win championships. And they'll make a positive community impact."

He acknowledged that winning is a team effort and included alumni and fans in that endeavor, urging them to back the team.

"The young man that works so tremendously hard to put a good product on the field,

they need your support in every way. They feed off your energy when you're at the game. If the stadium is full, I can promise you they're going to play with just a little extra juice. ...Yulman Stadium is a fantastic venue to play home football games on this campus, and we need it rocking every time we play here, and when people come to play here, they know they're going home with a loss."

His comments were met with cheers at the standing-room-only news conference.