UAlbany Weekend MBA Stories – Melanie Madden  
Director of Marketing and Publicity, JR Sports Enterprises

One of the millions addicted to the wildly popular word building game, Words With Friends (WWF), Melanie Madden understands when someone posts their new WWF handle name on Facebook, they are easy prey. So when Washington Redskins linebacker Lorenzo Alexander posted he was new to the game, Melanie expected he’d require a few warm-up games before she’d show him her mad skills.

“He kicked my butt,” she recalls with a laugh. “Twice!”

Director of marketing and publicity at JR Sports Enterprises in Niskayuna, New York, Melanie is no stranger to celebrities. Her boss, JR Rickert, is one of the most successful agents in the country today, representing more than 100 professional athletes, entertainers, personalities, and performers.

“I love working with athletes,” conveys Melanie, “in part because no matter how big a star they become, they consistently have to work hard for the position they have. I admire that kind of resolve.”

Working alongside JR for the past year and a half, Melanie has rubbed shoulders with the likes of Hakeem Nicks, wide receiver for the 2012 Super Bowl champion New York Giants; well-known American rapper, extreme athlete, and home improvement television personality Robert Matthew Van Winkle – better known by his stage name, Vanilla Ice; and Sheree Whitfield, socialite, fashion designer, and cast member of the Real Housewives of Atlanta.

“I’ve learned celebrities are people just like everybody else,” shares Melanie. “They want to make a connection, find common ground, and be respected like a normal person. That’s why I love doing what I do.”

And since Melanie’s M.O. is being authentic in order to get to know people at a deeper level, she’s great at what she does.

“Relationships are everything,” says Melanie. Which is precisely why she instills the value in her sons, Israel “like the country”, who is 13 and Liam, who is 15 and has already written a business plan for the iPad app he developed.

“I believe that having a well-balanced life is essential,” imparts Melanie. “When I think about being a successful person, it’s important for me to be successful in my personal life as well as in my career.”

Recently recognized by the Capital District’s Business Review as a member of the 40 Under Forty Class of 2012, Melanie prides herself in continually striving to learn. It’s one of the reasons an accomplished smile impregnates her voice when she shares she’ll graduate this summer from the University at Albany School of Business’ Weekend MBA Program.
“The Weekend MBA Program has taught me to think like a business leader,” says Melanie. “Ideally I’d like to have my own sports-centric PR and marketing company and this program has given me the tools I need to be successful.”

As exposed as Melanie’s life has become to the public eye, not a lot of people know she fluently speaks Spanish and is heavily interested in Latin culture. In fact, her love of Spanish can be credited for getting her to where she is today.

A half dozen years ago, Melanie was a high school Spanish teacher at Niskayuna – the same school at which JR Rickert served as principal. A few years after moving into the private sector with a Spanish manufacturing company based out of Madrid, Melanie read about JR being recognized by The Capital District’s Business Review as a member of the 40 Under Forty Class of 2009, so she sent him a note of congratulations.

“Soon thereafter, we ran into each other at Siro’s Cup,” explains Melanie. The upscale cocktail party is the biggest annual fundraiser for the Albany’s Center for Disability Services but in this case, also doubled as an opportunity for the one-time high school teacher and principal to reconnect. Acknowledging he needed someone with social media savvy and website development skills, the colleagues agreed to once again work together.

“JR represents a boxer who speaks Spanish,” beams Melanie, who is pleased to find practical use for her aptitude.

Defining the most significant turning point in her life as the births of her sons, Melanie divulges her time abroad was, “The most eye-opening, life-changing experience because of the opportunity I had to experience a different culture and a profoundly different way of thinking.”

Immediately upon graduating from high school, she was an exchange student in Spain. Eager to return, she spent her junior year of college in Madrid as part of UAlbany’s Study Abroad Program.

“It’s very humbling to experience a new culture and language,” she explains. “It changes you on the inside.”

This past summer, Melanie traveled with her Weekend MBA cohort to Munich, Germany. The July international trip is an integral part of UAlbany’s Weekend MBA Program, providing students the opportunity to visit foreign companies, hear from corporate leaders, and explore different ways of doing business.

“The international trip was an extraordinary experience,” advises Melanie. “Professionals should consider pursuing UAlbany’s Weekend MBA Program because of the trip, the amazing professors, the cohort format, the schedule flexibility, and... the food! The catered lunches and dinners are so good, we all complain we put on a little weight!”

Connect with Melanie Madden here:
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For additional information on the program, please contact Program Director Don Purdy at dpurdy@albany.edu, at 518.442.4964, or at @UAlbanyMBA.