

# Former Ohio State Running Back Maurice Clarett Working As Consultant For Connecticut Men's Basketball Program



Former Ohio State running back Maurice Clarett has spent the last decade-plus as a motivational speaker, openly sharing his past mistakes as a lesson to others. And last summer, an opportunity to chat with the Connecticut men's basketball program presented itself.

The 36-year-old Clarett told the story of how he went from the starting running back on the Buckeyes' 2002 national championship team to imprisoned for armed robbery, as well as the steps he took to rebuild his life, which resonated with several of the players.

"When he told his story, I was just in shock how he bounced back," senior Tyler Polley told the New York Post. "He pretty much lost everything. It's inspiring."

That one-time meeting turned into a full-time opportunity, as head coach Dan Hurley hired Clarett to be a consultant for the Huskies. Before the coronavirus outbreak, he was spending as many as three days each month with the players while also making himself available by phone.

"My thing isn't to talk to them," Clarett said. "My thing is to listen to them."

A former five-star prospect from Warren (Ohio) Harding, Clarett rushed for a then-freshman record 1,237 yards and 16 touchdowns to help Ohio State to a 14-0 record, which included a 31-24 double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl. He was suspended ahead of his sophomore season in 2003 and eventually dismissed from the program for receiving improper benefits.

Clarett unsuccessfully challenged the NFL's eligibility rules, but was eventually selected by the Denver Broncos in the third round of the 2005 draft. He was cut by the team after an underwhelming preseason and a series of on-field incidents with members of the coaching staff, however.

In 2006, Clarett was arrested on multiple charges of armed robbery, released on bail and then arrested again after he made an illegal U-turn and led police on a chase that ended with officers finding swords, loaded guns and an open bottle of alcohol in the vehicle. He was sentenced to more than seven years in prison as part of a plea bargain, though he was granted early release after three and a half years.

While in prison, Clarett blogged about his life by writing and sending entries to his girlfriend, who published them online since he could not. He's since dedicated his life to speaking at prison, juvenile detention facilities and working with young athletes to make sure they do not repeat his mistakes.

Clarett also founded The Red Zone, an Ohio-based behavioral health agency that offers counseling to both children and adults dealing with substances abuse, mental health problems or other issues.

"(He's) just a great resource for the guys," Hurley said. "He's awesome."

One of the players Clarett has worked with is guard James Bouknight, who was an all-conference freshman selection but was also suspended for three games this past season after was charged with evading responsibility, interfering with a police officer, traveling too fast for conditions and operating a motor vehicle without a license following an accident. He encouraged Bouknight to accept responsibility for his actions but not let it define him.

"I've built a trust, I think, with the guys," Clarett said. "We've been able to get together and work one-on-one, and have started to explore what does life look like outside of basketball, what encourages and motivates them."

"At the state that America is in right now, I'm pretty sure a lot of what I said to these guys resonates. Life is a lot bigger than basketball. It's a lot bigger than going out there and getting in shape, running and dunking and jumping. It's about the impact you have on people and the impact you have on the world."

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