

— Fox Cities —

MAY 25

# SPORTS

SARA MEYER IS ONE

**TOUGH**  
*Mother*

Bikini-Class Natural Bodybuilder  
and co-owner of Limitless Elite Gym

Cover photo by Limitless Elite Fitness

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2 bed, 1 bath, 0 car, 878 sq ft, built 1930, 0.16 acres						
50304100	Under Contract	Single Family Home	\$295,000	901 Beechwood Ave.	Little Chute	Little Chute
3 bed, 2 bath, 2 car, 2,234 sq ft, built 1974, 0.20 acres						
50304488	Under Contract	Single Family Home	\$145,000	510 Lincoln St.	Neenah	Neenah
2 bed, 1 bath, 2 car, 875 sq ft, built 1911, 0.10 acres						
50305059	Under Contract	Single Family Home	\$320,000	32 W New York Ave.	Oshkosh	Oshkosh
4 bed, 2 bath, 2 car, 2,384 sq ft, built 1905, 0.32 acres						
50305069	Under Contract	Single Family Home	\$233,000	1605 10th Ave.	Green Bay	Green Bay
3 bed, 1 bath, 2 car, 1,248 sq ft, built 1958, 0.15 acres						
50305153	Under Contract	Single Family Home	\$224,900	2509 W 8th St.	Appleton	Appleton
3 bed, 1 bath, 2 car, 1,224 sq ft, built 1960, 0.26 acres						
50305378	Under Contract	Single Family Home	\$430,900	1972 Quindalee Rd.	De Pere	De Pere
3 bed, 3.5 bath, 2 car, 2,848 sq ft, built 1996, 0.32 acres						
50305673	Active - No Offer	Single Family Home	\$199,900	217 E 8th St.	Kaukauna	Kaukauna
3 bed, 2 bath, 2 car, 1,146 sq ft, built 1891, 0.14 acres						

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## From the Publisher



As we dive into this May issue, we celebrate an incredible group of women: mothers! Across the Fox Valley, there are countless moms who juggle the tough and often thankless roles of caregivers, professionals, friends, and athletes. Being a mom takes strength to balance the many demands that come with it. This issue is a tribute to their resilient spirit, determination, and love.

It's no secret that being a mother is one of the toughest jobs out there. Moms do it all, tirelessly supporting their children, spouses, and communities. But what's often left out of the conversation is how these women manage to balance their work, home lives, and their own personal well-being. It's no small feat.

Fox Valley moms remind us that it is possible to wear many hats—sometimes all at once—and still come out smiling. Whether it's a mother working full-time to provide for her family or one managing her household while pursuing a career, these women excel in ways that inspire us all. And amid the craziness of their day-to-day, many also find time for fitness, ensuring that they stay healthy and strong—not just for themselves, but for their families as well.



This May, we honor these tough moms: They are not only the glue that holds families together but also a shining example of perseverance, love, and hard work.

No one exemplifies this like our cover mom, Sara Meyer. A mom, wife, businesswoman, and professional bodybuilder, Sara is an inspiration to everyone who knows her. Andi Heesaker and her daughter, Teagan, talk about life as a rugby-playing mom with a teenage daughter following in her footsteps. We'll also go one-on-one with Aerial Dance Appleton instructor Kelly Wolff.

Tough moms Carrie Miller, Kristen Eichstaedt, Molly Van Zeeland, Sara Benzal, Shannon Brooks, Sharalynn Anderson, Tricia Rosche, and Tamrah Ellenbecker share their thoughts on their respective sports and offer insights on what it takes to be a mother.

So, to all the moms out there in the Fox Valley and beyond, we say thank you. Your strength, dedication, and passion for both family and personal well-being are inspiring. You are truly the heart of our community, and it is an honor to celebrate you this month.

With admiration and gratitude. ■

*Dale*

## — Fox Cities — SPORTS

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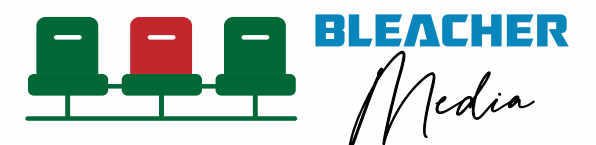
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Have feedback, ideas or submissions? We are always happy to hear from you! Deadlines for submissions are the 15th of each month prior. Email your thoughts, ideas and photos to:  
**[dale@foxcitiessports.com](mailto:dale@foxcitiessports.com)**.

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# Unlocking the Power of Cold Plunges: A Game-Changer for High School Athletes

BY DEB EMMERT AND SHARON CHRISTENSEN

For high school athletes, recovery is just as important as training. A new trend in athletic recovery—cold plunges—has been gaining popularity, and for good reason. Submerging your body in cold water after intense activity can help reduce soreness, speed up recovery, and enhance performance. Let's dive into why this method, especially when experienced at facilities like *Revive Thermal Recovery*, could be your secret weapon.



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**WHAT IS COLD PLUNGE THERAPY?**  
Cold plunge therapy, also known as cold water immersion, involves immersing your body in cold water (around 47–50°F) for 3–10 minutes. This practice is designed to reduce muscle soreness, lower inflammation, and speed up the healing process after strenuous activity. Professional athletes have been using this technique for years, and now it's becoming more accessible to high school athletes.

- WHY SHOULD YOU TRY COLD PLUNGES?**
- 1. Reduces Muscle Soreness and Inflammation**  
After a tough workout or game, muscles often feel sore and inflamed. Cold plunges help by constricting blood vessels, flushing out metabolic waste like lactic acid. When you exit the cold water, blood flow returns, bringing fresh oxygen and nutrients to your muscles. This promotes faster recovery and less soreness.
  - 2. Boosts Mental Toughness**  
Cold plunges aren't just good for your body—they also build mental strength. The discomfort of cold water forces you to push through discomfort, which can help you develop resilience and mental toughness. Over time, this can improve your focus and determination on the field or court.
  - 3. Improves Circulation**  
Cold water immersion enhances blood circulation, helping to deliver vital nutrients and oxygen to your muscles. This increased circulation speeds up recovery, preventing injury and helping your body bounce back faster after each workout.
  - 4. Faster Recovery Between Workouts**  
For athletes balancing practices, games, and schoolwork, fast recovery is crucial. Cold plunges help your body recover quickly, allowing you to train harder and more frequently without being held back by fatigue or soreness.

**A CONVENIENT PLACE FOR COLD PLUNGES**  
For athletes who want to experience cold plunge therapy, *Revive Thermal Recovery* offers a controlled, professional environment. With state-of-the-art equipment, Revive provides a range of recovery options—cold plunges, saunas, and infrared therapies—to enhance recovery and performance. Whether you're a seasoned athlete or new to cold plunge therapy, Revive offers the perfect space to maximize your recovery.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**  
Cold plunge therapy isn't just a trend; it's a proven recovery method that can help you perform at your best, recover faster, and build mental strength. Adding cold plunges to your routine could be the key to maintaining peak performance all season long. Facilities like *Revive Thermal Recovery* are ready to help you unlock the full potential of cold therapy, giving you a competitive edge both physically and mentally. Stay strong, stay focused, and dive into recovery! ■

# INSIDEMAY

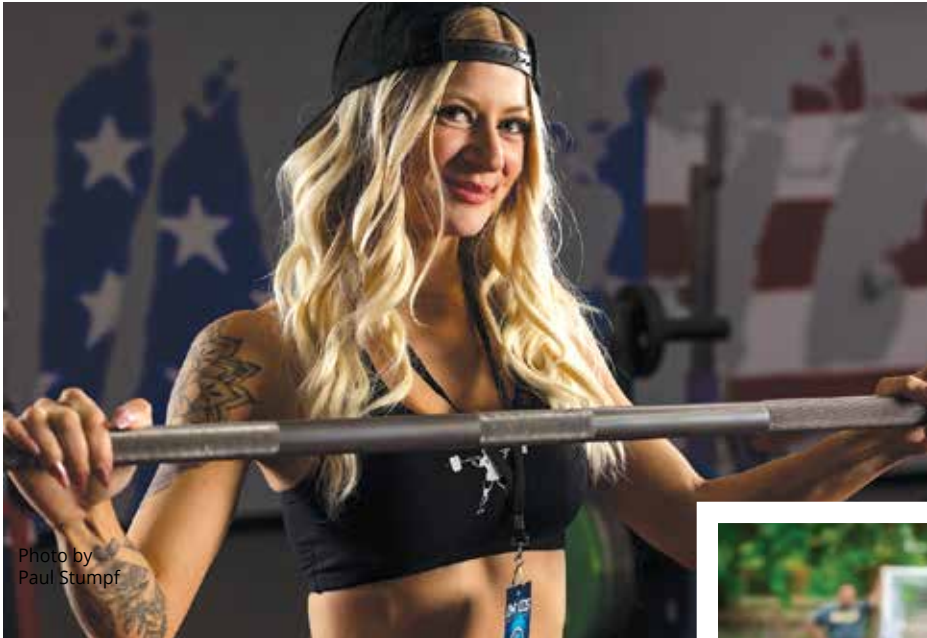


Photo by Paul Stumpf

◀◀ **12-15**  
**SARA MEYER**  
As a child and young adult, Sara never considered herself an athlete. She wasn't involved in sports, and she didn't see herself as someone with the strength or ability to compete. "That all changed," she says, "when I discovered my passion for fitness in the gym."



**7 ▶▶▶**  
**CHAMPION MOMS:  
THE BEST ADVICE FROM SPORTS MOMS**  
Long-time sports moms here in our community share some great advice to pass on to the next generation of sports moms.



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Mothers demonstrate mental and physical fortitude that push them beyond limits.

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With mom and aerial dance instructor Kelly Wolff.

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**AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM DODEN**  
Looking back over 50 years as a Commissioner, Referee, and Umpire.



# Mini Pumpkin Protein Donuts

BY KIRSTEN RICE

These are a family favorite at our house.  
Prep time: 30 minutes  
Cook time: 10 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup white whole wheat flour
- 1/2 cup vanilla whey protein
- 1/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1-1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup canned pumpkin puree
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 2 large egg whites
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

## SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

- Mini-donut pan

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.  
Coat the cups of the donut pan with nonstick spray



2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, protein powder, brown sugar, baking powder, pumpkin pie spice, and salt.
3. In another bowl whisk together the pumpkin, butter, egg whites, and milk.
4. Pour the wet mixture over the dry ingredients and stir until moist.
5. Scoop the batter evenly into the donut pan. Bake for 8-10 minutes until

the donuts are lightly browned and spring back when touched. Cool for 5 minutes.

6. Combine the cinnamon and sugar in a small bowl. Dip each donut into the melted butter and then into the cinnamon sugar.
7. Serve warm or at room temperature. Store in an airtight container or freeze. ■

*Kirsten Rice is the Operations Director at the Ogden YMCA and Valley Tennis Center. She has her bachelor's degree from Michigan State University in Kinesiology with an emphasis in Health Promotion Specialization. She is a certified personal trainer through the American College of Sports Medicine and a Certified Group Exercise Instructor. She has been working in the field for 17 years and loves working with clients one on one to achieve their health and wellness goals and teaching to groups as a fitness instructor. If you would like to talk with Kirsten, you can contact her at [krice@ymcafoxcities.org](mailto:krice@ymcafoxcities.org).*

# Champion Moms: The Best Advice from Sports Moms

BY ABBY McDANIEL, SPORTS MARKETING MANAGER, FOX CITIES CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



May is all about celebrating mothers! They are the support system that is in the stands and on the sidelines, playing a big role in an athlete's success.

I recently chatted with some long-time sports moms here in our community, and they shared some great advice to pass on to the next generation of sports moms. Julie has a son who played baseball, basketball, and football, and a daughter who plays volleyball and basketball. Jennifer has a daughter in softball.

## What makes up your sports mom survival kit?

**Julie:** I have a backpack with snacks, first aid kit, ponytail holders, extra knee pads, and of course candy for the spectators. I rarely use anything out of it — but I always bring it!

**Jennifer:** My backpack must-haves include an extra inhaler, hair ties, Advil and Band-Aids, sunglasses, sunscreen, baseball hat, snacks, phone charging unit, water bottle, and a sweatshirt. We also always bring our own chairs — splurge on a good bag chair and don't forget the car blanket for cold outdoor games.

## What do you say to best encourage or motivate your child before and after competition?

**Julie:** My line to my daughter before the game is always, "Play Hard, Do You, and Play YOUR game." After the game, I don't highlight things that

didn't go well, because she already knows that. I always say "great game — I'm proud of you!"

**Jennifer:** This is supposed to be fun. Learn from every play and always keep your head in the game! We also emphasize compassion and being kind to the opposing team. It's best to let the Coach coach, so I usually just tee up a couple of questions to get her thinking about improvements she could make. What did you learn? What would you do differently?

## What is one piece of advice you would give to a first-time sports mom?

**Julie:** Enjoy every minute! It seems like a lot and you will give up things that you want to do — but don't miss a game and embrace it as family time! If you travel — try to enjoy each location and do all the touristy stuff.

**Jennifer:** Take time to meet the other parents and encourage the team to get to know each other off the field.

## Your kid joined a new team and you don't know any of the parents on the sidelines. How do you make friends with these new parents?

**Julie:** Each parent only wants what is best for their child — but that sometimes makes it difficult to connect. I've seen success in using a group communication tool (GroupMe is a great one) and including all parents on it. Don't rely on the Coach to connect the parents — his/her job is to coach your children, not plan get-togethers!

**Jennifer:** Share snacks! Ask if they want to take a walk between games — often it is a lot of sitting. ■

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Thank you for pushing us hard this summer and making us stronger faster players. Love the challenges. Can't wait to return next year! See you at the games!  
~ Peyton, Julia, and Layla Tamih

I thought I was strong when I arrived. You made me so much stronger now. You found my weaknesses and built me up. Thanks for the push and believing in me.  
~ Easton



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# Fueling the Female Athlete

BY KATE HARRELL JENKINS, MS, RD, CSSD, LD | YMCA DIETITIAN AND PERSONAL TRAINER, NEENAH-MENASHA

The nutrition needs of female athletes are unique. Fueling optimally is critical to both performance and overall health. Below we will explore needs specific to female athletes, across their lifespan.

## Energy

When working with female athletes, whether it be high school, college, or adult, I see a trend of undereating, missing the goal needs to best support training and performance. This can be intentional, due to dieting behaviors or eating disorders, or unintentional, due to a lack of education or understanding of true calorie needs for sport.

Working with busy moms for example, I often see very low intake during the day and a catch up or backloading of calories later in the day when they are finally able to find time for themselves. This can lead to fatigue and can make it challenging to exercise or train well.

Female teen athletes are another population that may be susceptible to a low energy intake, where body image concerns or busy school and extracurricular schedules can affect intake. Energy needs are particularly high during this period of time, to meet the needs of both training and growth.

Low energy intake can affect many systems of the body, increasing the risk for injury or illness, loss of muscle mass, decreased performance, changes in hormones and the menstrual cycle, loss of bone density, and more! There is a condition called Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport that captures the consequences for both health and performance.

So how much does a female athlete need? Each athlete has unique needs based on height, weight, age, body composition, activity level (both exercise as well as daily activity), and other factors. A dietitian or sports dietitian can help you establish your unique energy needs.

## Carbohydrates, Protein, and Fat

As a result of low energy intakes, athletes may also be falling short on key macronutrients like carbohydrates, protein, and fat.

Carbohydrates supply energy and quick energy to fuel busy schedules and support training and performance. Female athletes may be susceptible to diet messages such as those promoting a low carbohydrate diet. As the duration and intensity of exercise increase, athletes will need to add more carbohydrates, not less, to best fuel performance.

**Carbohydrates sources include fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, beans/legumes, and sport fuels.**

Protein is key for maintaining and building muscle, but also for maintaining other key proteins body-wide, such as those important for bone health, hormone and enzyme production, cell structure, and more. Protein's role in supporting muscle mass can be especially important for those females in peri- or post-menopause to stave off potential losses of muscle. For young female athletes, additional protein is needed to support sport but also growth and laying down new tissue. The general recommended range for protein for sport is 1.2–2.0g/kg but this will vary athlete to athlete. It is also recommended to distribute protein intake out across the day to continue to promote muscle protein synthesis.

**Protein foods include meat, poultry, fish, nuts, seeds, eggs, dairy and non-dairy alternatives, beans, tofu and other plant-based proteins, quinoa, and even some vegetables.**

Fat also has many important functions specific to the female athlete, such as for hormone production. Fat is also a dense energy source, so it can be helpful in meeting high energy demands. Fats are also part of the cell structure and help us to absorb nutrients from our food.

**Healthy fats include nuts, seeds such as pumpkin, flax or chia, oils, avocado, olives, and fish such as salmon.**

## Iron

Iron needs for female athletes are much higher than for their male counterparts (18mg vs. 8mg per day before menopause). It has been estimated that up to 35% of females are iron-deficient, and 52% of adolescent female athletes (Cleveland Clinic). Needs are elevated due to blood loss related to the menstrual cycle but may also be affected by other factors such as foot strike hemolysis, which is damage to the red blood cells that may be due to the pounding or impact of the sport.

With these elevated needs, if iron intake is inadequate, athletes may start to experience symptoms such as shortness of breath and fatigue. If you are concerned about iron status, it's important to check in with your doctor to assess your iron status.

Including iron-rich foods in your diet is a great starting point to making sure you are getting sufficient iron.

**Whole food sources of iron: meat, poultry, fish, beans, greens, breakfast cereals, and enriched grain products. Animal sources of iron are absorbed better than plant-based sources, however, you can increase the iron you get from plant foods by pairing them with a source of vitamin C.**

## Calcium and Vitamin D

Calcium and vitamin D are important for athletes at all stages. Calcium is the mineral key to bone health as well as muscle function, and vitamin D aids in calcium absorption in the body. Adolescent athletes should be building up to their peak bone mass, while female athletes may start seeing a loss of bone mass after menopause. Both calcium and vitamin D are critical to bone health. The bone is very dynamic, and turnover of bone is constant. Without sufficient energy and nutrients, bones may become weaker rather than stronger. This can make an athlete susceptible to fracture and will impact the body long-term.

**Calcium-rich foods include dairy like milk, yogurt, and cheese; non-dairy alternatives with calcium added such as plant-based milks and yogurts and calcium set tofu; as well as some leafy greens like kale, seeds such as chia seeds or sesame seeds, white beans and edamame, and more!**

Female athletes have specific nutritional needs, and these needs change over the course of the lifetime as the body transitions. For example, pregnant athletes would have even greater iron needs as well as other nutrients such as folate to support growth.

Nutrition is a key player for female athletes to feel energized and stay healthy through the demands of life and sport. ■

**Kate Harrell Jenkins** is a registered dietitian, certified sports dietitian, personal trainer and group fitness instructor. She loves all things wellness, and is an avid runner with over 20 marathons and ultramarathons under her belt. She also has a passion for working with Parkinson's and is certified in Rock Steady Boxing, PWR! Moves and Pedaling for Parkinson's. Kate believes in bringing together nutrition and fitness and would love to talk with you! Feel free to email Kate at [kharrell@ymcafoxcities.org](mailto:kharrell@ymcafoxcities.org) or [kateharrellrd@gmail.com](mailto:kateharrellrd@gmail.com).

## BUSINESS PROFILE

# Lake Park Swim & Fitness

BY JANE DIAS

Located in Menasha, along the north shore of Lake Winnebago, Lake Park Swim & Fitness has established itself as one of the Fox Valley's premier fitness and wellness destinations. Since opening its doors in 2008, the locally owned fitness club has built a solid reputation for offering a comprehensive range of fitness services in a welcoming, community-oriented environment.

Lake Park Swim & Fitness operates with a clear mission: to promote healthier lifestyles through accessible, high-quality fitness and wellness programs in an environment that is welcoming and supportive. The business is managed by a dedicated onsite leadership team, which includes owners Jane Dias, Megan Collins, and Felicia Christianson. Lake Park is committed to providing personal attention, modern amenities, and diverse fitness options that meet the needs of a wide membership base.



The facility features a full-service fitness center equipped with state-of-the-art cardio machines, a well-organized strength-training and free weight area, plus six newly renovated outdoor pickleball courts that can be reserved. Members can also take advantage of more than 65 weekly group fitness classes, including yoga, Zumba, cycling, Les Mills, TRX, and kickboxing — all included with membership. Highly

experienced and certified personal trainers are available for one-on-one sessions, providing customized workouts and guidance for members pursuing specific health goals. Additionally, licensed massage therapists are available, and tanning is offered.

One of Lake Park's most distinguishing features is its aquatic center, with floor-to-ceiling windows for natural light. The large, heated indoor pool offers lap swimming, water walking, water aerobics, swim training, and GlideFit (standup paddleboard workout) weekly. Lake Park offers some open swim times, but also the ability to reserve lanes online.

In addition to its fitness and aquatic offerings, Lake Park Swim & Fitness emphasizes community involvement. The business regularly hosts member events, health seminars, and wellness workshops, fostering a supportive network where members and staff build lasting connections. Even walking through the front doors the first time, there is an immediate sense of belonging, which aligns with the Club's mission statement of: Inform. Connect. Inspire.

Amenities at Lake Park include modern locker rooms with steamroom facilities, complimentary towels and shower amenities, a comfortable cafe' area with complimentary coffee, and seasonal outdoor fitness activities such as pickleball and pondside yoga. The business continually updates its programming and equipment to stay aligned with current fitness trends while maintaining the personalized service that defines its local character.

In its second decade of service, Lake Park Swim & Fitness remains a trusted resource for Fox Valley residents seeking a balanced, community-based approach to fitness and wellness.

For more information and to schedule a tour for a complimentary trial pass, please call 920-882-8900. ■

**Jane Dias**, along with Megan Collins and Felicia Christianson, locally own and operate Lake Park Swim & Fitness. Since 2008, Lake Park Swim & Fitness has offered a unique fitness experience in the Fox Valley area. The 25,000-square-foot facility provides boutique-style amenities, professional staff, and a welcoming atmosphere that sets it apart from typical health clubs.

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# A Parent's Perspective

BY ANDI HEESAHER | PHOTO BY PAUL STUMPF



Andi with Teagan (13)

I wanted to play rugby in high school, but there were no girls teams around at the time. Fast forward to college in my late 20s. I had a classmate playing for UW-Oshkosh, and she invited me to their annual Prom Ball tournament — yes, they play in prom dresses! The team invited me to try it out. I found Fox Valley Chaos at the end of 2019 and have been playing ever since.

Teagan had been coming to my practices since she was 7 or 8. I let her decide if she wanted to participate in flag when I started coaching 3rd and 4th graders. She has played flag rugby for about three years, and she will be playing tackle this spring. She also plays basketball and volleyball and has just recently signed up for track.

Not surprisingly, scheduling is our biggest challenge. I can't always make it to her games because I have work, coaching, or my own practices/games. I am thankful

for other families in our sports that are willing to help with rides when needed.

When Teagan has a big win, we often celebrate with a nice dinner or a sweet treat. But the biggest reward is seeing Teagan grow and gain skills, meet new friends, and be a positive influence to her teammates.

I want her to continue to have a positive outlook and have forward-thinking, even after mistakes are made or a big loss. Dwelling won't change what happened, but learning and looking forward from it can change the next outcome.

Teagan hasn't been injured yet, and I'm not very worried about that. Having sustained my own injuries, I know it can be scary and discouraging — but listening to doctors and removing the fear of re-injury are key to healing.

I don't necessarily want her to follow in my footsteps. I would hope she would continue on her athletic journey beyond school and not wait until she's 30 to be a part of a community she feels welcome in, can thrive in, and loves what she does. There are so many more opportunities now in sports, especially rugby, than when I was her age. I believe staying in sports as an adult helps in many ways besides just getting physical activity.

The best thing about being a mother is just witnessing Teagan being herself. She is caring, kind, empathetic, and loves her friends. Although she dislikes school, I know she's constantly learning new things and watching her evolve, on and off the court, has been truly amazing

My parting advice to moms: Let your daughter play sports! Let her try all of them. You never know what she might like or be good at. Just because you have a girl that loves to dance and pick flowers doesn't mean she can't run with a ball, make plays, and score. Playing in full-contact sports doesn't make her any less of a girl. It's empowering and motivating. ■

# 20 QUESTIONS

## TEAGAN HEESAHER

MENASHA BLUEJAYS AND FOX CITIES YOUTH RUGBY

**MY TOUGHEST RIVAL IS:** Greenville and Neenah.

**SOMETHING THAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT ME IS:** I had stomach surgery when I was 3 days old and I'm allergic to peanuts.

**I WILL NEVER GO:** Sky Diving.

**IF YOU COULD PICK ONE ANIMAL TO HELP YOU WITH A FIGHT, WHAT WOULD IT BE:** Black panther.

**IF I RULED THE WORLD:** I would make food free.

**MY FAVORITE ATHLETE IS:** LaMelo Ball.

**SOMETHING IN MY HOMETOWN I'D LIKE TO CHANGE:** The time we have to go to school.

**MY MOST MEMORABLE SPORTS MOMENT:** Making my first 3 pointer.

**MY FAVORITE JUNK FOOD:** Takis and taquitos.

**I PLAN TO GO TO COLLEGE TO:** UW-Oshkosh.

**IN 10 YEARS, I WILL BE:** 23.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPORTS MOVIE:** Like Mike.

**HOW DO YOUR TEAMMATES MAKE PRACTICE FUN:** They don't make you feel bad about your mistakes.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SONG TO LISTEN TO PRIOR TO COMPETING:** Lose Yourself - Eminem.

**WHAT DO YOU DO TO CALM YOUR BUTTERFLIES WHILE YOU COMPETE:** Taking deep breaths.

**WHO WAS YOUR FAVORITE COACH AND WHY:** Coach Craig Korth - I've known him the longest, he's been my coach since elementary school.

**WHO WAS YOUR ACTOR/ACTRESS CRUSH:** I don't have one (she says this, but it's definitely one of the guys from Cobra Kai).

**IF YOU COULD START A NEW COLLECTION, WHAT WOULD YOU COLLECT:** Sneakers.

**WHAT BAND WOULD YOU BE EMBARRASSED TO ADMIT YOU LISTEN TO:** Drake.

**IF YOU HAD TO USE A FAKE NAME, WHAT FAKE NAME WOULD YOU MAKE UP:** Jamal James.





# Setting a Powerful Example

BY DIANE BAST | PHOTOS BY LIMITLESS ELITE FITNESS



*Sara with Quinley (7), Quianna (4), and Quest (1)*

**Sara Jean Meyer – Bikini-Class Natural Bodybuilder and co-owner Limitless Elite Gym**

Like mothers across the globe from the beginning of time, Sara Jean Meyer wants to set a “powerful example” for her three children: Quinley (7), Quianna (4), and Quest (1).

“I embrace the fact that by showing my children dedication, perseverance, and the importance of self-care,” Sara says, “I am setting a powerful example. I want them to grow up understanding

that chasing goals and working hard for what you want is a sign of strength, not selfishness. Whether it’s through late-night workouts, early mornings, or meal prepping between running businesses, I’ve learned that success isn’t about having time—it’s about making time for what matters.”

Sara also seeks “to inspire other moms to prioritize their health, knowing that taking care of themselves allows them to show up as the best version of themselves for their families.

“I hope that by sharing my story, I can encourage other women—whether they’re moms or not—to step into their own power and take ownership of their health, happiness, and goals,” Sara says. “The road might not always be easy, but the journey is always worth it.”

## **Confident and Beautiful**

Sara and her husband Quintin (and now you understand where the kids’ names come from!) own Limitless Elite Gym on Prospect Avenue in Appleton. Sara has been competing as a natural bodybuilder in bikini class for 13 years and has participated in 17 competitions.

She’s also a photographer and owner of The Studio SJ, “a luxury boudoir photography studio that empowers women to feel confident and beautiful in their own skin.”



*Photo by Josh Russel Studio*

“As a natural bodybuilding bikini competitor, my personal goals extend far beyond just stepping on stage,” Sara explains. “I aim to continually improve my physique through disciplined training, strategic nutrition, and unwavering consistency while maintaining a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

“More importantly,” she continues, “I strive to set an example for my children and other women, proving that strength, confidence, and perseverance can coexist with motherhood.

“Competing isn’t just about aesthetics—it’s about dedication, resilience,

and proving that with hard work and commitment, anything is possible. Ultimately, I want to push my limits, grow as an athlete, and hopefully inspire others to chase their own fitness goals, no matter where they are in their journey.”

## **Showing Up for Yourself**

As a child and young adult, Sara never considered herself an athlete. She wasn’t involved in sports, and she didn’t see herself as someone with the strength or ability to compete. “That all changed,” she says, “when I discovered my passion for fitness in the gym. Lifting weights, building my physique, and committing to a structured training and nutrition plan gave me something I had never felt before—pride and confidence.

“Now,” she continues, “I love that this sport is about personal growth, not just physical transformation. It teaches patience, dedication, and the power of showing up for yourself every single day.”

Natural bodybuilding “is truly me vs. me. It isn’t about beating someone else—it’s about pushing past my own limits, growing stronger, and becoming the best version of myself. It’s a constant test of discipline, perseverance, and resilience, and that’s what makes it so rewarding.”

## **Months’ Worth of “Ritual”**

Sara says pre-game or pre-competition rituals aren’t as common in bodybuilding as in other sports. “For me,” she says, “the entire prep process is my ritual. From the moment I commit to a show, I stay dedicated and focused, ensuring that every detail is executed with precision.”

Unlike most bodybuilders, Sara takes full control of her own competition prep. “I handle everything from my training and nutrition to final show-day details: stage tan, hair and makeup, the final touches of my physique. I don’t rely on others to create my stage presence; instead, I trust my own expertise, hard work, and discipline to bring my best package to the stage.

“To me, the true ‘ritual’ is the months of early mornings, late-night workouts, strict nutrition, and unwavering commitment that lead up to that one moment on stage,” Sara says. “My success is created by my own hands, and that’s what makes it so rewarding. Win or lose, I know that I gave it everything I had—and that is the ultimate victory.”



### Managing Challenges, Overcoming Mistakes

Now that she's no longer a young amateur in college, but a seasoned professional and mother of three, the challenge of giving "everything I have" has changed. "My current biggest challenge," Sara says, "is finding balance—juggling the demands of being a mother, a business owner, and an athlete all at once. Each of these roles requires my full attention, and at times, it feels like there just aren't enough hours in the day."

"To manage this challenge, I rely on structure, discipline, and a strong mindset. I plan my days with intention, ensuring that my workouts, meals, and recovery are prioritized without taking away from my responsibilities as a mom and entrepreneur. I also remind myself that balance doesn't mean doing everything perfectly—it means making the best possible choices in each moment."

In her early days of competing, Sara admits, she was not "nearly as experienced or educated in nutrition as I am now. I thought I was doing everything right, but looking back, I realized that my approach required a lot of trial and error before I truly understood what worked best for my body."

"One of my biggest mistakes was not properly fueling myself for optimal performance. I either wasn't eating enough or wasn't timing my nutrition in a way that supported my training

and recovery. This led to unnecessary struggles—low energy, difficulty building muscle, and not achieving the physique I knew I was capable of."

Sara says she overcame those youthful mistakes "by investing time in learning, studying nutrition, and truly understanding how to nourish my body for both performance and aesthetics. I experimented, adjusted, and found what works best for me."

And the learning never ends, she says. "Even now, I continue to learn every day because the body is always evolving, and there is always more to improve."

"This journey has taught me that mistakes aren't failures—they're lessons," Sara points out. "Through experience and dedication, I've become not just a better competitor, but a stronger and healthier version of myself."

### Strength from a Higher Power

Sara is quick to acknowledge there's a higher power at work in her life, and she seeks His help often. "The best advice I was ever given," she says, "was to NEVER give up and ALWAYS ask for strength in God."

"Life will always present challenges, whether in fitness, motherhood, business, or personal growth, but perseverance is what separates those who succeed from those who quit."

She admits "there have been moments when I felt exhausted, overwhelmed, or discouraged." In those dark moments, she says, "I've learned that when I lean into my faith and trust in God's plan, I always find the strength to push forward. Nothing worth having comes easy, and every struggle is an opportunity to grow stronger—not just physically, but mentally and spiritually."

"This advice has carried me through the hardest days, reminding me that setbacks are not failures but lessons," Sara says. "As long as I keep going, keep believing, and keep working, I will always move forward. It's the same message I hope to pass on to my children and to every woman who thinks she's not strong enough—because she is."

### Family Is Everything

"Being a mother isn't always easy," Sara says, "but it is always worth it. My children are my biggest inspiration, my greatest achievement, and my reason to keep pushing forward every single day."

"I love the simple, beautiful moments" with family, she says. "I love creating healthy meals in the kitchen with my kids, teaching them the importance of fueling their bodies while making it fun and enjoyable. We also love going on family adventures, whether it's exploring new places, taking weekend trips, or simply enjoying quality time together."

"My greatest joy comes from spending time with my husband and children. Family is everything to me, and no matter how busy life gets, I always prioritize making memories with them."

"For me, life isn't just about competing—it's about balance, love, and living with purpose. My sport has taught me discipline, but my family is my biggest motivation, and everything I do is to inspire them to chase their own dreams, just as I do mine."

### Anything Is Possible

"Competing isn't just about stepping on stage," Sara says. "It's about proving to myself that I can do hard things and showing my children that with hard work and self-belief, anything is possible."



"Motherhood has pushed me to be the best version of myself—not just for me, but for them," she says. "I want my children to see firsthand what dedication, perseverance, and self-belief look like. Whether it's in my sport, my businesses, or everyday life, I strive to set an example that they can achieve anything they set their minds to."

Sara doesn't expect her children to "follow in my exact footsteps or compete in bodybuilding." But like every mother reading this article, she does "want them to find a passion they truly love—something that excites them, challenges them, and gives them a sense of purpose."

"What matters most to me," Sara says, "is that they learn the value of dedication, perseverance, and setting goals. Whether they choose sports, art, business, or any other path, I want them to experience the fulfillment that comes from working hard for something they believe in. I want them to understand that success doesn't come overnight, that mistakes are part of growth, and that resilience is what separates those who succeed from those who quit."

"More than anything, I want my children to be confident in themselves and fearless in chasing their dreams. If they can take those lessons from watching me, then I know I've done my job as their mother."

### You Can Do Both!

"The best thing about being a mother," Sara says, "is the unconditional love and purpose that comes with it. Nothing compares to the feeling of seeing my children grow, learn, and become their own unique individuals. Being their mother is my greatest honor and the most rewarding part of my life."

"The journey of being both a mother and an athlete has been empowering," she's quick to add. "It has taught me that you don't have to choose between being a great mom and pursuing your own dreams—you can do both. It's about finding balance, prioritizing your health, and showing your children the value of hard work, resilience, and self-care."

"Every challenge I face, whether in fitness, business, or family, only strengthens my belief that we are all capable of more than we realize—we just have to show up, commit, and keep pushing forward."

"As mothers, we have an incredible opportunity to not only shape our children's lives but to inspire them to chase their own dreams, embrace their own strengths, and believe in their potential." ■

*After 35 years as senior editor for the Illinois-based Heartland Institute, Diane Bast returned to the Fox Valley and now enjoys with her husband, Joe, a retirement of bicycling, kayaking, long walks, and tennis.*



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# CELEBRATING TOUGH Mothers

Whether it's playing sports or caring for a family, a tough mother demonstrates mental and physical fortitude that pushes her beyond limits. In the realm of sports, she is not afraid to get her hands dirty, challenge her body, and show up even when the odds seem stacked against her. She teaches her children the value of perseverance, hard work, and pushing through adversity.

At home, a tough mother is the backbone of her family. She juggles multiple roles, from ensuring the household runs smoothly to providing emotional support. Her strength lies not only in her ability to manage responsibilities but in her unwavering love

and dedication to her family. She handles challenges with grace, whether it's dealing with everyday stresses or facing tough situations that require tough decisions.

Her toughness is not about being impervious to emotion but about showing up and giving her all, no matter what life throws her way. It's about being a role model of resilience and grit, and demonstrating that strength is found in vulnerability and the willingness to keep moving forward, no matter the obstacles.

From all of us at *Fox Cities Sports*, we want to give our sincere thanks and gratitude for mothers everywhere. You are all truly amazing!



## Molly Van Zeeland

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** After playing three team sports in high school and two team sports in college, I switched to running and triathlons when I was in graduate school. I have continued endurance sports in some capacity since then, which is coming up on 18 years. I've competed in 3 Ironman triathlons, over 10 marathons, and several 70.3 triathlons, half marathons, 5ks, and sprints.

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?

I love that triathlon/running training gets me outdoors all year round. Fresh air, especially in the Winter, helps fight cabin fever and depression. I also love that I can enjoy both sports with my friends and family through group rides, runs, and races across the country. I love the community of motivating people I've met along the way. And, finally, I love that endurance sports make me feel fit, confident, and overall happier.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** The best part of being a mom for me is watching my girls grow to be kind, compassionate young women. I love watching them develop passion for their own sports and activities. My girls truly make me proud.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** My advice for active moms is to never ever feel guilty about prioritizing your health and fitness. I truly believe that mothers can't pour from an empty bottle. Carving out at least an hour/day to focus on YOU, will allow you the energy and patience to care for your family with grace and love. ■



Molly and husband with Paige (10), Marcy (in heaven would be 8), and Grace (5)

## Tamrah Ellenbecker

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** I've spent more than half of my life in martial arts. It's who I am. From my first classes as a teenager to co-owning my school and working with Krav Maga Worldwide, this journey has shaped every part of me. Training, teaching, and leading have given me a deep appreciation for what it means to grow. Martial arts have been my foundation, my challenge, and my passion ... a dream my husband and I made into reality.

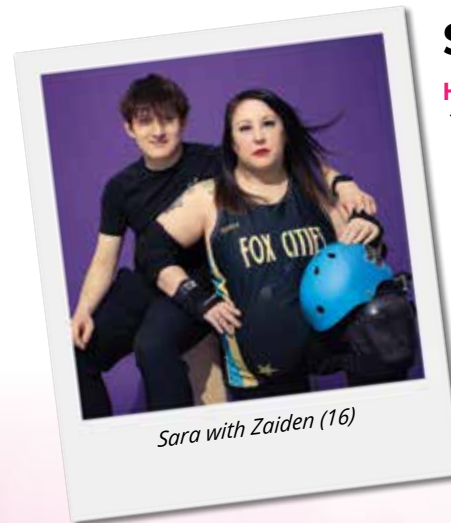
**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** Krav Maga is about more than self-defense; it's about empowerment. It teaches us to be strong when we feel weak, to push forward when things get tough, and to trust our instincts in any situation. It's a mindset as much as a skill set. Watching people walk into a class unsure of themselves and leave standing taller is one of the most rewarding parts of what I do.



Tamrah with Theo (6) and Lincoln (5)

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** The small, everyday moments are the best part: They remind me what really matters. Watching my boys' imagination take off, seeing their confidence grow, and knowing I get to be part of shaping the loving, strong, incredible boys they are. Parenting teaches us to adapt, to fight for what's important, and to lead by example.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** As a mom and survivor of ovarian cancer, fighting for those I love comes naturally to me. What I've learned the hard way is that I can use that same fight to care for myself. You don't have to choose between taking care of yourself and taking care of others—you can do both, and doing both makes you (and your family) stronger. Your kids don't need a perfect mom; they need a mom who shows up, who pushes through challenges, and who takes care of herself so she can take care of them. Find ways to integrate movement, mindfulness, and resilience into your life, whether it's through training, setting boundaries, setting goals, or just making time for yourself. It's not selfish—it's essential. ■



Sara with Zaiden (16)

## Sara Benzel

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** This is my 13th year skating with Fox Cities Roller Derby.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** I love that it is a full-contact sport. My body shape and size are an asset in Roller Derby. Roller Derby provides me with a great workout that is both endurance and short high-intensity interval training. Someone once told me that you can do anything for two minutes. That's how long segments, aka "jams," are. That advice has served me well throughout my derby career. The derby community is also amazing! I've had jobs that required a lot of travel, and the best part about the derby community is that you can find a league close to your travel destination. Most of the time you can hit up a practice with the local league. If you don't think that there is Roller Derby close to where you live, dig into

it, there's over 400 leagues across six continents.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** The pride I have from watching my son grow and learn while becoming his own person, a unique individual. I also love seeing mannerisms in my son where I am like, "oh, that is so my kid." There are definitely times where Mom skills help in Roller Derby, such as patience and perseverance and persistence.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** An hour workout is 4% of your day. You can commit to an hour and you will feel glad that you did. Take time for your physical and mental health! But also know sometimes you need to take a mental health day, so if you need to take a break that is ok too. ■







Shannon with Taylor (14) and Parker (16)

## Shannon Brooks

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** I have been the Head Coach of Orangetheory Fitness and actively participating in our workouts since the Appleton location opened 6.5 years ago.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** The Orangetheory workout is a blend of endurance, strength, and power all mixed into a 60-minute workout. I love that every workout I get a chance to hop on a treadmill and a water rower and use a variety of strength equipment. The absolute best part of the workout is the fitness community. We have the most supportive and motivating Coaches, and extremely fun and inspirational members.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** The best part of being a mom for me is getting to experience and support my kids in the activities and sports that they love. I get to be my kids #1 Fan at their proudest and happiest moments, but also their #1 Supporter at the times when they may need it the most.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** Allow yourself the time to focus on just YOU and your health and fitness goals. That time gives your mind and body an energizing re-set so when you get back to your family you can be at your best! ■



Sharalynn and Husband with Lexi (20), Wally (18), Piper (12), Hunter (10), and Ember (8)

## Sharalynn Anderson

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** I have been doing karate for four years. Got my 1st degree black belt about six months ago. My oldest daughter started us off seven years ago. Then my middle child wanted to do it, and he has been in it for six years. And then my younger watched her older sister and brother doing karate and she wanted to join as well. She has been in karate now for five years.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** What I love about karate is that I am learning a lot and it's something that my family and I all do and love.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** There is so much that makes it the best part. Growing close with my kids and something we can do as family. Now that they are older it's harder to get through to them. But doing karate with my kids and enjoying a sport that we all love has been great. It's something that we can do together and my kids want to do and be with me.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** Find something that you love and your kids can do with you. My kids love the fact that they can teach me things because they know it and I don't. For karate you have days where you are working out and feel it and some days you are doing things you don't even know it's a workout. ■



## Kristen Eichstaedt

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** I've been running for as long as I can remember, but I officially started training for long-distance races about nine years ago. I ran my first half marathon in May of 2016 in Green Bay and am currently training for the Sydney Marathon in August.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** Running is my therapy. It challenges me physically and mentally, but it also gives me time to clear my head and push past limits in ways I never thought possible. I love the runner's high, the amazing community of runners, and that feeling of accomplishment after a tough run. Plus, it's an incredible way to honor my Dad's fight against leukemia when I trained and raised money to run in the New York City Marathon this past November.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** Everything! But if I had to choose, it's the little moments—the hugs, the laughter, and watching my girls grow into their own personalities. Being a mom makes me want to be the best version of myself so I can show them that hard work and perseverance pay off. I also love that they get to see me setting big goals and chasing them down.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** Make yourself a priority. It's easy to put everything and everyone else first, but staying active makes you a better mom. Find movement you love, whether it's running, Orangetheory, or just chasing your kids at the park. Also, give yourself grace—some days will be tough, and that's okay. Just keep moving forward! ■



Kristen with Leighton (2) and Harper (6)



## Tricia Rosche

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** I have been kickboxing consistently at 9Round for four years.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** I love that I can alternate this with other activities, like running, to have a whole-body workout that makes me stronger overall. I can drop in on my schedule as there are no class times, so it's flexible.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A MOM?** The best part of being a mom is watching my daughter grow into a strong, loving mother herself. Seeing her raise her little ones with care and grace makes me feel like I've done something truly right. My heart is full, knowing the love I gave her is now shaping another generation.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** My advice for active moms is to make sure you're carving out time for yourself. It's like the saying on every flight I've taken: Put your own mask on before helping others. Once you're taken care of, you can be able to help others succeed, and that's just a win for everyone. ■



Tricia with Daughter Heather Kantelberg (31)





Carrie and Paul with Mia (17), Anna (16), Aaron (13), Molly (11), Miles (8), Allie (4), and Maggie (18mo)

## Carrie Miller

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR SPORT?** About 20–25 years! I had a desk job after college and started running to move more. Someone encouraged me to run a half marathon. I enjoyed the challenge, so my husband, Paul, and I decided to run a full marathon. My first full was the Chicago Marathon in 2004. I have now run 104 fulls, including 13 Boston Marathons. In 2017, Paul and I started On Pace. We pace roughly 50 events every year across the country!

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR SPORT?** I love helping newer runners achieve their goals. Pacers act as in-race coaches to the runners who run with us. I try my best to motivate them. I keep a steady pace so it's one less thing they have to worry about. I also love that Paul runs and paces. I love passing this sport on to my kids. Our oldest—Mia (17), Anna (16), and Aaron (13)—have all run at least one full and over 20 halves. Molly (11) has run eight halves and is training for her first full. Miles (8) is training for his first half. Allie (4) ran her first 5K when she was 3. Maggie is 18 months and will be running before we know it!

**WHAT IS THE BEST PART ABOUT BEING A MOM?** Helping them grow to be kind, thoughtful, hard-working, compassionate people who are good friends and siblings. Watching them succeed in school, sports, and life is so much fun! I try to coach as many of their sports as I can. I love cheering them on and being in their corner. I love having both a senior in high school and a 1-year-old and being able to be part of all of those stages of life at the same time.

**ANY ADVICE FOR ACTIVE MOMS?** I know how hard it is to find time for yourself, but it's so important! It will help you be the best mom you can be. Try to be consistent and get into a routine. Your kids will pick up on what you are doing for yourself and hopefully will want to prioritize a healthy lifestyle for themselves. As the kids grow older, try to bring them into some of your active hobbies—it's so much fun to take part in sporting events as a family! ■



# Where You Are Is Where You Start

BY PAULA BRUSKY, PHD

As the owner of two aerial and pole exercise studios I often hear, "I would LOVE to do that, but I need to go to the gym first to get strong." While going to the gym is always a good thing, let's be honest: If you wanted to go to the gym you'd already be there. You aren't going to the gym because it doesn't interest you.

Then you see something that does interest you, in this example Pole Fitness, and you create a roadblock for yourself by deciding you can't start until you do something you don't want to do before you do the thing you do. *Start where you are!*

In all things fitness, if you like the activity you'll be more likely to do it. Moving your body should be enjoyable, not a chore you trudge through. When asked in the Huberman Lab podcast what is the most important thing a woman in the 20–40 age bracket should do for her long-term health, Dr. Stacy Sims said, "find activities you enjoy." According to Sims, a world-renowned researcher on women's health, finding enjoyment is the most important thing you can do for your body in these critical health years.

If you're interested in an activity, whether it be Aerial Silks or Cycling, the best thing to do is to start it. Your interest matters a lot more than any perceived required level of fitness, flexibility, or strength. Never underestimate the power of your interest!

Starting doesn't mean trying to go into your new activity all-out, as that sounds like a recipe for injury. Instead, go into your new interest with curiosity and a willingness to be a BEGINNER. Gasp!

I know. As adults we have become accustomed to being good at things. We have forgotten what it is like to be absolutely horrible at the start of learning something new. But when your children learned to walk and fell down the first dozen times, did you tell them "maybe walking isn't for you" and encourage them to go back to the crawling they were good at? No! You played games and sang songs to make it fun and you cheered like heck anytime any little, tiny progress was made.

You need to do the same things for your own new activity journey as you pursue things that interest you. It will take time to feel successful. All that matters is that you find the FUN in each session and KEEP SHOWING UP.

Starting also doesn't require all the things. We'll go out and we'll buy the perfect outfit and all the perfect equipment and then we'll feel like a failure when we look the part, but we are in fact still a beginner. Buying a crazy-expensive road bike isn't going to make you a cyclist. Putting in the miles on whatever you got with wheels is going to make you a cyclist.

But notice I said MAKE. It is a process. It won't happen overnight, and every new activity that interests you will take time to develop. Every time you do the activity you are voting for it being part of your life, but like any good relationship it's going to take lots of dates.

Starting where you are means doing the activity with whatever you have; this attitude breaks down a cost barrier, takes the pressure off, and gives you room to learn about what you truly want to invest in gear-wise as you get better at the sport.

Starting doesn't mean doing it perfect. A woman and I were discussing lifting the other day and why it is critically important as



women past age 40 that they are able to lift their body weight and have bone density strengthening activities as part of their lifestyle. She expressed an interest in standard gym weightlifting but hesitates to start because she knows that dumbbells would be better than machines. She's right: From a clinical perspective a dumbbell is a better workout and better for long-term health goals. But ANY weight she lifts in any form is better than what she is doing now.

That's the key: You don't have to do the perfect workout or join the perfect team, you just need to start with whatever you can in the activity that intrigues you.

Give yourself the grace to learn something new. If it interests you, TRY IT. And make a commitment to yourself to find the FUN and TRY IT for many weeks, because it will take time to get through the awkward "this is new, and I am uncomfortable" stage. If it interests you enough to make time to try it, set a reasonable timeframe to keep trying it before you decide it isn't for you.

In my Pole Exercise program, I see this often. A woman comes to the first class, feels awkward and isn't "good" at this crazy challenging new sport she is trying for the first time. I respond to her "I'm going to quit" email with compassion and tell her to keep showing up; she does, and after eight weeks she is excited to take her next pole course.

It takes time to learn anything new. Give yourself compassion as you are struggling with the new and celebrate the heck out of being brave enough to try. Keep trying. Hold on to your interest, find the fun, and give yourself permission to start where you are a true beginner. ■



**Dr. Paula Brusky** is the owner of Aerial Dance, with locations in Appleton and De Pere. Visit [www.aeriodancewi.com](http://www.aeriodancewi.com), 920-750-1441.

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# ONE ON ONE

BY DIANE BAST

WITH  
AERIAL  
DANCE  
INSTRUCTOR

**KELLY  
WOLFF**



*Kelly with Izzy (4)  
and Este (2)*

**What sport or competition do you teach?** Aerial – Pole, Hoop, Hammock, and Silks.

**Years in current sport or competition:** 13 years (10 years as an instructor).

**Where do you teach?** Aerial Dance Pole Exercise (Appleton and Green Bay).

**What is your background in this sport?**

Like most of the women who have walked through the doors of Aerial Dance, I had zero experience in the sport and relatively little upper body strength. I always got a zero on the hang bar in gym class! That is no longer the case. That I have become who I am today is a credit to Aerial Dance, where anyone can become a better, stronger, and more confident version of themselves.

**What is your teaching philosophy?**

I want every student to leave my class feeling like they succeeded and are excited to come back. This is because it is not only about physical exercise, it is also about changing the state of mind of the student to believe in themselves and their ability—not only at Aerial Dance, but in all aspects of their lives.

**What are one or two things that a student can do in training to foster success?**

Real simple: Sign Up and Show Up. Success isn't an overnight thing. It takes effort and perseverance.

**What's the best piece of advice or motivation you can give to a student?**

Focus on the fun! A class at Aerial Dance is not an obligatory chore. It's an opportunity to do cool things and hang out with awesome women!

**Describe your proudest teaching moment.**

I'm proud of what we do at the studio every day. It's not just a moment, it's every moment. A recent one was when some beginner pole students shared how they felt significant improvement after just four weeks. They were surprised how much more confident and comfortable they had become with their bodies. While they may have built a little muscle or gained some flexibility, the biggest shift they were experiencing was a mental one from being in a "body positive" environment.

**What is the biggest life lesson you've learned from being a teacher?**

In a nutshell, it's that our bodies are amazing and can accomplish so much—no matter

our age, shape, or background. Our body's ability to respond to exercise, and the biological and psychological benefits that accrue as a result, are a critical component to leading a happy, healthy, and well-lived life. And at Aerial Dance, it's not just exercise, it's also the social connections and the support that we get from and give to each other.

**What legacy do you hope to leave as a teacher?**

A legacy is such a big thing and I really don't like to think in that manner. Teaching is just sharing yourself with others. It's all the little things, much like being a mother, a daughter, a partner. It's about showing up, doing my best, and being fully present. It's about living in the moment, this moment, all the time.

**What's the best thing about being a mother?**

The sweet, sweet chaos! As anyone with young children knows, it really can be complete chaos at times. But you must embrace that, because that is what happens in times of massive change. And young kids change and grow up so fast. I love watching the girls play together and the personality of each emerge, blossom, and grow.

**Would you like your children to follow in your footsteps?**

They already have a lot of fun imitating my workout routines in our home studio, and they are fearless! It's a lot of fun right now, but their interests very well may change as they grow. If they do, I will support the girls in whatever they want to do. But they will continue to be raised in inclusive environments where they can see people helping and supporting each other. So you will be seeing them cheering on everyone at future Aerial Dance performances!

**Anything else you'd like to add?**

I couldn't imagine my life without Aerial Dance. Even after 13 years, I am still having a blast learning cool stuff and hanging out with my sisters at the studio. There is no better time than right now to try something that can change your life: What are you waiting for? ■

*After 35 years as senior editor for the Illinois-based Heartland Institute, Diane Bast returned to the Fox Valley and now enjoys with her husband, Joe, a retirement of bicycling, kayaking, long walks, and tennis.*



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# A Safe Haven for Expectant Families

BY AUBREY WILLIAMS

Throughout the Fox Valley and Green Bay areas, interest in out-of-hospital birth has steadily increased since 2020. COVID precautions and strict hospital policies have caused women to search for solutions that support their autonomy throughout their prenatal care, labor, birth, and the postpartum period. With a strong desire for informed decision-making during their



Alexa with husband Vincent and baby Zadie-Simone.

pregnancy, women within our community are increasingly exploring birth options outside of the traditional hospital setting. Serving women since 2008, Alba Birth Center has provided out-of-hospital maternity care and birth options at its birth center in Menasha as well as home birth options. Alba has established a reputation for being a safe haven for expectant families looking for a holistic and natural birth experience. Led by a team of midwives, Alba Birth Center treats birth as a natural physiological process. Viewing pregnancy and birth as a normal part of life — something that women's bodies are well-designed for — Alba's midwives focus on a mother's right to have personalized, non-

authoritarian, individualized care. After all, women are the best decision makers for themselves and their babies!

Alba's mission is to support and empower women throughout their maternity journey. Alba's staff believe that pregnancy is a unique and individual experience. Alba mom Alexa Oghobaase's birth story is a perfect example of the importance of trusting your motherly instincts and embracing the philosophy that birth is something women's bodies are designed to do!

Here's Alexa's beautiful birth story ... with an unexpected twist!

"I always dreamed of having a homebirth, but it felt out of reach, buried under fear-based warnings and discouragement from people around me. The mainstream narrative around birth, especially for Black women, centers on risk and danger. So, like many, we started our pregnancy in the hospital. While nothing terrible happened, everything felt cold and rushed. Even with a doctor I liked, appointments were brief and impersonal. I was labeled high-risk because of my age and pushed into more appointments and interventions, despite having a typical pregnancy.

"As my due date got closer, more red flags appeared. I wanted a doula, but my doctor might not be on call when I delivered and others might not support it. I was interested in a water birth, but it wasn't guaranteed, and tubs were only for pain relief, not actual birth. That's when a friend told me about Alba Birth Center.

"My husband and I toured the space and met Katie, one of the midwives. That first conversation changed everything. We shared our concerns as new Black parents — how we didn't feel seen, and how Black women's voices are often dismissed in medical settings.

Katie listened. She spoke directly to those fears and shared how Alba is built on trust and relationships, not just medical care.

"After that visit, we transferred our care at six months pregnant and began weekly check-ins. Every visit felt like coming home: warm, personal, and full of love. We went from being a number to being truly known and cared for.

"We planned to labor at home before heading to the center, but our daughter had her own plan. Unexpectedly, I gave birth on our bathroom floor, with the Alba midwives speeding to get to us and coaching us over FaceTime. My husband caught our baby girl with their guidance.

"It wasn't the plan, but it was the dream: no fear, no chaos, just love, strength, and trust. The midwives arrived shortly after to care for us. Their support didn't end with birth, it carried us into parenthood. And now we know: We want all our babies born at home, supported by midwives who see us, hear us, and honor our journey." ■



**Aubrey Williams** is the CEO of Alba Birth Center. She has a masters degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology with a specialization in Organizational Effectiveness from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Spanish. Aubrey lives in Neenah with her husband, Dan, and their three sons.

### WOMEN IN SPORTS WORD SEARCH

R	A	P	I	N	O	E	A	F	G	N	I	K	A
I	H	A	X	K	C	I	R	T	A	P	M	S	P
C	O	M	A	N	E	C	I	U	F	P	B	O	Y
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A	V	O	L	I	T	A	R	V	A	N	N	E	K
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W	H	A	F	F	G	I	B	O	V	B	A	L	L
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# Where are they now?

**Kimberly's  
Gemie (Goerl) McLeod**

BY NICOLE CAMPUZANO



Dr. Gemie McLeod (nee Goerl), or Dr. Gemie as she prefers to be called, “was a three-sport standout at Kimberly High School” (www.fvasports.net). Between 1987 and 1989, she led the Papermakers to win multiple state titles in basketball, volleyball, and softball. In college at Eastern Michigan University, she was an all-conference pitcher. In the early 2000s, Dr. Gemie spent some time playing for the Minnesota Vixen football team. When asked when she began playing sports, Dr. Gemie says, “I do not recall ever NOT playing sports.”

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Dr. Gemie grew up in Combined Locks, Wisconsin, in a neighborhood that provided the quintessential Gen X childhood. Between running the neighborhood playing sports with her friends, participating in sports programs through Parks and Rec, and playing on school sports teams, Dr. Gemie grew up living and breathing athletics from a very young age.

At Janssen Elementary School, she started playing with the boys teams until the girls sports programs became established. “I played on the boys basketball teams, baseball teams, and football teams. I actually continued to play with the boys until about junior high,” Dr. Gemie says. This was to be only the beginning of her impressive sports career.

In high school, Dr. Gemie played and lettered in volleyball, basketball, and softball. She played on several conference championship and state championship teams. “I had some FVA and WIAA individual awards along the way (too many to recall). I do remember wearing my letterman's jacket was nearly impossible due to the weight of all the medals,” Dr. Gemie says. She is also recognized in the Kimberly High School Sports Hall of Fame.

After high school, Dr. Gemie attended college at Eastern Michigan University on sports scholarships. There, she was an all-conference collegiate softball pitcher and was recognized as the Mid-American Conference player of the week several times, as well as Region Team Selection. Despite her success as a ball player, she found that the adjustment to college out-of-state was challenging. She explains, “Adjusting to the changes in culture, expectations, being away from home, not having familiar faces in the stands, new teammates and coaches with very different styles/approaches all contributed [to the difficulty]. Overall, the entire experience taught me a great deal and, although less than what I had hoped for, it fostered many positive changes.”

Dr. Gemie played softball there for two years before making the difficult decision to surrender her scholarships and return home. But she does not see this chapter of her life as a failure. Instead she says, “I have learned that education is an ongoing process of self-improvement and understanding, not just the acquisition of specific knowledge or degrees.”

After losing both of her parents, as well as her two oldest brothers, to cancer, Dr. Gemie was exploring many lifestyle changes to improve her own health and longevity—many of which she would not recommend to her own patients today—but without the level of success she was hoping to achieve. Eventually, Dr. Gemie chose to pursue an education in alternative healthcare. At the time, in

the early 2000s, there were somewhat limited options to explore in this field. Dr. Gemie says, “I met a naturopathic doctor outside of Minneapolis and my whole world changed.” A career in naturopathy seemed like the perfect fit for her. She explains that within a few years, “I found myself enrolled in medical school at Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine in Tempe, Arizona, and now I practice as a primary care provider with a very wide scope of practice, serving patients from all over the world.”

When asked if being an athlete earlier in life influenced her career path, Dr. Gemie says, “In some ways, yes, it has influenced my career path. Being an athlete provided me a path to grow and develop an acumen and a high regard for personal discipline, teamwork, physical fitness, mental health, self-confidence, and the need for a community and support. This is the very thing that I help my patients establish and develop in their lives. I draw from my experience and application from athletics every day as a physician and teacher.”

Dr. Gemie also stressed the importance of her support system throughout her academic and athletic careers, and her life overall. It was the amazing support of her family, coaches, teachers, and community members that left a lasting impact on her. One memory she cherishes is that of playing hide-and-seek at Alpine Valley Resort after winning the state softball tournament. Her coach, John Malin, and “team mom,” Mrs. Mulry, got in on the fun with the whole team.

Such memories are priceless, and they prove that a team is so much more than just a group of athletes playing a sport together.

In the years since beginning her healthcare practice, Dr. Gemie has not participated in any organized sports, though she says she has remained active and engaged with many of her young patients who play sports locally as a face in the crowd (“AKA an obnoxiously loud fan,” she jokes). Prior to med school, she also coached her daughters’ travel softball teams and provided individual pitching and hitting lessons for more than 20 years.

These days, she has little time for hobbies, as her medical practice is flourishing. “I am always reading and studying [the Bible, medical journals, homesteading, and personal development are some of her favorite topics], and I am a lifelong learner,” Dr. Gemie reports. “I do enjoy going to classic car shows and auctions with my husband. We have a few vehicles we are actively restoring and playing with.” She also enjoys hiking and golfing, the latter of which she says is “a very humbling game” for her.

Dr. Gemie is the mother of two daughters, three step-sons, and one step-daughter. She and her husband, James, who is also her business partner, reside in Prescott, Arizona. She practices naturopathic medicine at her clinic, Innate Wellness and Medical Center, which she and James established in March 2013. ■

**Nicole Campuzano** is an Antigo, Wisconsin native. She earned her bachelor's degree in English Education from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. She taught high school English Language Arts for several years. She and her family recently relocated to the Fox Valley, where they are enjoying the many exciting opportunities the area has to offer.

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# Fit Moms on the Move: Empowering Women Through the Seasons of Motherhood

BY NICOLE CAMPUZANO

What new mother hasn't struggled with the challenge of getting back some semblance of her pre-pregnancy body and strength? Between the sleepless nights, endless feedings, and postpartum hormones of having a new baby, it can feel confusing and overwhelming to imagine returning to a fitness routine.



Britney Suttner and Andrea Renkas.

Sisters Andrea Renkas and Britney Suttner say they saw a huge void in the fitness industry regarding prenatal and postpartum fitness and recovery. To fill that void, they founded Fit Moms on the Move in 2014 (originally under the name 360\* Fitness). Since the business was launched, it has shifted and grown, changing with the needs of clients and the times, much like the

metamorphoses a woman's body undergoes during and after pregnancy.

Andrea, who gave birth to her first child in 2013 and was surprised by her physical limitations postpartum, wanted to create a space for new mothers to find community while pursuing fitness at their own pace. She quickly brought her sister Britney onboard to help pioneer the new endeavor. Britney was not yet a mother at the time, but she had a Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science—a great asset for a new fitness business.

Together, the sisters began the painstaking and demanding process of building a business from the ground up.

They started with stroller fitness classes, which new mothers could attend in-person and bring their little ones along for the ride. By 2015, Andrea and Britney received Prenatal and Postpartum Fitness certifications to enhance their knowledge. Also, for nine years, they ran Fit Moms Outdoors, in which mothers and their children would meet outside to participate in group fitness (this has since been converted into a virtual class). At times, they had as many as 20 or more women in this unique fitness class.

By 2020, the sisters had already been contemplating going online with their fitness options, but when the pandemic hit, the idea was forced into overdrive. They offered many free online classes during lockdown, in order to help moms cope. It was also at this time that the sisters earned their ACE Personal Trainer and Postpartum Corrective Exercise Specialist certifications.

In 2022, Andrea and Britney decided to launch a course called Prepared 4 Postpartum. From this course The Motherhood Alliance was born. The Alliance is a list of local businesses that help moms with questions during and after pregnancy. The sisters realized that they were experts in fitness, but new mothers had



The sisters checking for diastasis recti and core strength.

other needs as well. The Motherhood Alliance eventually became its own separate business in 2024.

The sisters say their business is currently in transition. They noticed that, since the pandemic, there has been a saturation of high-quality online/virtual fitness materials, which prompted them to reexamine their approach. They are currently transitioning their MVMT Studio to YouTube and updating their website to a more user-friendly design that better highlights their specialty fitness programs and free offerings.



Andrea Renkas and Britney Suttner.

The sisters explain that their main goal is to reach moms during pregnancy, catching them prior to giving birth. They want to educate, empower, and support women as they transition from pregnancy to postpartum by giving them tools to fearlessly move forward through all the seasons of motherhood. All of their fitness programs, along with links to free workout videos, can be found at [www.fitmomsonthemove.com](http://www.fitmomsonthemove.com). ■

# May is for Mothers

BY JUSTIN DROESSLER, PT, DPT, CSCS

Mothers bring precious life into this world. Ensuring they can be a mother and do what mothers do *without pain* is valuable!

Pain, most commonly in the low back and/or pelvis, limits the very activity they love most, which is to be a mom. This includes lifting their children, playing with their children, going to their sporting events, and/or something as simple as joining their child for a walk or run. Pain is such a limiting factor for many mothers ... and a physical therapist can help. After all, a physical therapist is a movement expert with training on how to find the root cause of pain and develop an individualized plan to fix it. Treatment of the symptom alone (the pain) does not provide a long-term solution, but only a short-term fix.

Susan is a mother of three children aged three, five, and ten. Recently, she has been unable to pick up her young children due to severe back pain that radiates down one leg, worsened by bending or lifting. Feeling isolated from her children because she can't bend, sit on the floor, or walk with them, Susan went to her doctor and learned she has a herniated disc. Instead of resting and hoping for improvement, Susan seeks a long-term solution without surgery to continue being an active mom.

Susan scheduled an appointment with a Doctor of Physical Therapy who specializes in helping individuals resume their active lifestyle and fix the pain at the source. It seemed like a perfect fit. After undergoing a full body movement assessment, she had many areas of tightness, weakness, and limitation because of the pain she had felt for the past few weeks. After her first session her pain had improved tremendously. Most importantly for Susan, she received exercises and stretches to help her pain decrease based on the findings from her evaluation. This allowed her to take self-control of her situation and play an active role in her recovery. Within four sessions she was pain-free with nearly all activities in her day-to-day routine.

Susan's physical therapist recommended she continue physical therapy. Now that her pain is gone, the next step of the process begins. That next step in preventing the pain for good is by improving her strength and ensuring no other limitations may cause this to return. Susan wanted the long-term fix to ensure she was never limited from being a mother again because of low back pain. After another four sessions she had returned to being a mom and felt better than ever!

Mothers are strong, courageous individuals who consistently put their children and families before themselves. It is important to consider that to be the best mother, you need to take care of yourself. If you are looking for the solution to your problem, a physical therapist can help you improve your life and ensure your body does not limit you from being the best mother you can be. ■



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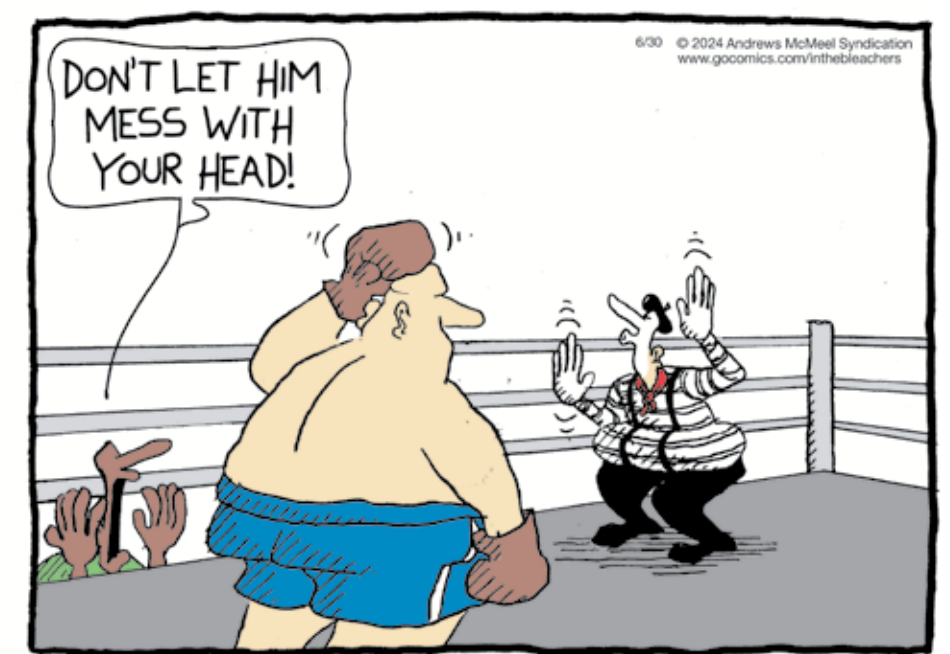


**Dr. Justin Droessler** is the owner and founder of Droessler Physical Therapy in Kaukauna. He is a Physical Therapist and Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist who helps active, health-conscious individuals improve movement, reduce pain, and return to their favorite activities. He assists individuals of all ages and activity levels in enhancing their movement.

## IN THE BLEACHERS



## BY BEN ZAEHRINGER





# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

**NAME:** Madi Lotten **SCHOOL:** Kimberly High School  
**AGE:** 18 **GRADE:** 12th **SPORTS:** Cross Country and Track



## 1. How do you balance academics, training, and competition?

During the season, my training and competition times are determined for me, since I have practice or a meet each day, so I need to fit my academic work around that schedule. This forces me to stay focused and use the small amount of time I have, wisely. In the off-season, balancing priorities can be more difficult. Personal events often come up that can get in the way of training or studying. But the principle I have employed in my life is to make these things non-negotiable. A unique feature of my sport is that running can act as a stress reliever, on top of getting me ready for competition. Going for a run as an act of training to be better at my sport can also help suppress my academic and personal stressors, leading to a more balanced and healthy lifestyle.

## 2. What motivates you to push through tough practices and games?

The thing that motivates me most while running is thinking about reaching my goals. Being able to work hard at something and see how that work can pay off is the most rewarding thing I have ever felt. Fortunately, I have felt a sense of accomplishment in this way before, so whenever I need something to get me through a workout, I can always reflect on how good it feels to have your hard work pay off. Another big motivator is my team. A lot of people don't realize how Cross Country and Track are team sports along with being individual sports. You can race to get a certain place, individually, but those places add together to get your overall team score. I owe a lot to my teammates, who get me through hard workouts and races and lift me up when I haven't done well. I want to make my team proud and happy, so I work hard to contribute to the team as much as I can.

## 3. What's the most important lesson you've learned that applies beyond sports?

The most important lesson that I have learned is that what you put in will be what you get out. I have been lucky to see this in my running career, as I have progressed throughout high school. I run 30 to 50 miles every week. I also push myself to the limit during each workout and run that we do during practice, trying to perfect form and improve my ability. Because of this, I have commonly been able to see growth at the beginning of a season and end of a season compared to where I was the previous year. The hard work that I put into the sport is given back to me in the form of me getting faster than I was at that meet or in that event the year prior. I will definitely carry this lesson with me as I move throughout life, whether it is in my future academics



or workplace. I know that if I prepare and set myself up for success by putting in work before a big test or project, good results will come out of it.

## 4. How do you help build a positive team culture?

When I was an underclassman, the thing that made me love Cross Country and Track the way I do now was the team environment. So when I became an upperclassman, that is one of the main things I focused on improving at practice (other than my actual running performance, of course). One thing that I always tried to implement was inclusivity and a welcoming attitude. I wanted everyone on the Cross-Country team or Distance Track team to feel like they had a place on the team, because another unique feature of these sports is that there is a place for everyone. There are no cuts on either team, which can make it challenging to unite a team of varying skill levels. But, by including others in conversations, running with different people each day and bringing a positive attitude to practice each day, I think I was able to create a welcoming, uplifting, and hardworking team culture and legacy for the next class to take on.

## 5. How will your experiences as a student-athlete shape your future?

My experiences as a student-athlete have been nothing but positive, and I am very grateful to be able to say that. I have learned various skills through Cross Country and Track and I wouldn't trade the journey that I've had for the world. Starting out as a mid-JV runner to being the top runner on Varsity has not been easy, but it has been the most rewarding thing I have ever done. This has taught me to never stop pushing myself, to trust my training, and to believe in myself more. I will take these lessons and use them as I pursue my bachelor's degree in psychology and continue my running career at UW-Green Bay in the fall. I can't thank my family, coaches, teammates, and friends enough for how much they have supported me through my journey, and I am so grateful for the opportunities I have had. ■

# Anika Olson: Discovering Strength, One Lift at a Time

## Appleton East sophomore's journey to nationals started with one spontaneous deadlift

BY JEFF OLSON

What started as a casual moment in the school weight room has turned into a life-changing journey for Appleton East High School sophomore Anika Olson. Less than a year into powerlifting, Anika is already climbing the



national ranks with eye-catching numbers, serious determination, and a passion that can't be coached.

Now lifting with the North American Powerlifting Federation (NAPF), Anika took the platform at nationals on April 13. She performed well, finishing first in her weight class—making her a national champion in the JV powerlifting nationals.

"It was like any other day," Anika remembers of her first time lifting. "I walked into the weight room just to find something to do. I saw someone deadlifting and thought it looked fun, so I asked if they could show me. It was a hex bar, and I just picked it up—no problem. From that moment, I wanted to get better and learn more."

That first lift lit a fire. Soon after, she tried a regular deadlift with a straight bar—and kept adding weight. A month later, her gym class introduced squats and bench press, and Anika was all in. She quickly realized that while the strength came naturally, the technique and safety required guidance. That's when she started training with Jeremy Fischer, owner of BDJ Strength and a seasoned powerlifter who now coaches her progress.

"Jeremy pushes me and believes in me, even when I doubt myself," Anika says. "A lot of lifting is mental. Sometimes I think I can't do something—and then I just go up and do it. It surprises me every time."

That mindset has propelled her to remarkable accomplishments in record time. Anika claimed first place in her weight class at the Winneconne meet and finished third at the Wisconsin State Championships in Appleton.

Her personal bests are impressive for any lifter, let alone one who just started: 160 lbs bench press, 365 lbs squat, and a 350 lbs deadlift.

"I think what motivates me most is how far I've come in such a short time," she says. "I thrive on progress. I love that I found something I enjoy—it's not something I have to do, it's something I want to do."

Anika's story is more than a list of stats—it's a reminder of what's possible when you follow your instincts, push past doubt, and trust your own strength. Whether or not she makes it to Costa Rica, [where regional championships will be held May 28 – June 1], she's already proving that powerful things happen when passion meets potential.

"I'm really glad I stuck with it," she says. "I'm amazed with my progress—and I can't wait to see what my future holds with lifting."

As this issue celebrates strong women in sports, Anika Olson stands tall as a shining example: fierce, focused, and just getting started. ■

Solution to the word search puzzle on page 25.



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# OTL OUTSIDE THE LINES

A look at sports from outside of the Fox Cities...

## Doden Looks Back on Years as Commissioner, Referee, Umpire

BY GREG SEUBERT

Jim Doden may not have been a star athlete, but he spent more than 50 years leaving his mark on high school and college athletics throughout Wisconsin.

Those years will come to an end in June, as the Appleton resident steps down as commissioner of the Fox Valley Association, a job he has held for 25 years.

He also has more than 3,700 games under his belt as a high school and college football and basketball referee and baseball umpire.

Doden played all three sports at Kewaunee High School before heading to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in the mid-1960s.

"I started officiating when I was in college," he recalled. "I almost put my way through school by officiating. I worked a few varsity basketball games in La Crosse. I loved officiating. When I went to college, I was never good enough to play the sport. I was on the baseball team at La Crosse. I didn't play, but I was a bullpen catcher."

Doden eventually found his way to Appleton and retired from the Appleton Area School District in 2003.

"I was the lowest rung on the administrative ladder," he said. "I was in charge of all the busing, transportation, truancy. Whatever anybody didn't want to do, that's what I did."

In the middle of a stint as a referee and umpire that began in 1974 and lasted until 2017, Doden found another way to stay involved in high school athletics.



Jim Doden sits at his computer in his Appleton home. He is retiring from his position as commissioner of the Fox Valley Association at the end of the current school year, a job he has held the past 25 years. Greg Seubert photo.

"I could see my time on the field or basketball court was coming to an end," he said. "Becoming a commissioner was still keeping my fingers in athletics and dealing with officials and schools. That's why I was interested in becoming a commissioner."

He was named commissioner of the Valley 8 Conference, an eight-team league that existed from 1999 to 2007 and included Clintonville, Fox Valley Lutheran, Freedom, Hortonville, Little Chute, Oconto Falls, Waupaca, and Xavier.

He joined the FVA in 2000 and held both positions until the Valley 8 dissolved in 2007.

The FVA, formed in 1970, currently includes 10 high schools: Appleton East, Appleton North, Appleton West, Fond du Lac, Hortonville, Kimberly, Kaukauna, Neenah, Oshkosh North, and Oshkosh West.

"Hortonville High School has grown quite a bit over the last number of years," Doden said. "Their athletic programs are good and they compete well. They wanted to come into this conference. It wasn't that they were forced to do it. That does happen with some schools, where they're forced to go into a certain conference. Hortonville wanted this."

As FVA commissioner, Doden concentrated on scheduling games, meets, and matches and also assigned varsity officials.

"Basically, it's creating conference schedules for all three levels: freshman, JV (junior varsity), and varsity," he said. "I start with developing the varsity schedules."

The FVA is considered one of Wisconsin's most successful athletic conferences.

"We're a Division 1 conference," he said. "Kimberly had their run of five straight (state football) championships and Kaukauna has now had five straight (state team) wrestling championships."

Doden doesn't keep track of the FVA's individual and team statistics. That job belongs to Jim Strick, the conference's statistician.

"Jim works with me and we've shared the commissioner job the last two years," he said. "I could see the end coming and he deals with all of the AD (athletic director) meetings. He now sets the agenda and runs the meetings. He's in charge of the stats and the website. I was always more interested in dealing with officials and the scheduling part of it."

Doden worked on schedules almost two years in advance.

"Schedules are on a two-year rotating basis," he said. "One year, Kaukauna will host Kimberly and the following year, it's the reverse. Once the varsity schedule is done, then everything below that—JV and freshman—really falls into place. For football, freshmen and JV will play on a different day, but for most of the sports, they will play on the same day."

Baseball and basketball schedules include several non-conference games each season, but scheduling is handled by each school's athletic or activities directors.

"They schedule their own because I don't really have knowledge of which teams or schools they want to play, so that's done between the two athletic directors of those schools," Doden said.

Doden's job also included scheduling and assigning varsity officials.

"I assign all officials in all the varsity sports," he said. "I don't assign the lower levels. That's done by either the school or they hire someone else to assign the lower levels."

Although the efforts of conference commissioners, referees, and umpires often goes unnoticed, that's not the case with Doden. He will be inducted into the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Hall of Fame this summer.

Matt Stanek, the WIAC's assistant commissioner for media relations, asked Doden how many games he's officiated over the years.

"I compiled a list," Doden said. "I always kept it because good old Uncle Sam and his buddy, the IRS, always wanted to know how many games I was working."

The numbers are impressive: 523 high school football games from 1974 to 2015; 451 high school basketball games (1974-90); 740 high school baseball games (1974-2017); 610 summer baseball and softball games (1974-2008); 185 college football games (1978, 1985-2010); 347 college basketball games (1979-97); and 909 college baseball games (1976-2017).

That's a total of 3,765 games.

"I'm sure there are officials that have worked quite a few more," Doden said. "A lot of stuff that they work may have

been recreation leagues, so they're working four softball games a night. That really adds up."

Doden often worked a high school football game on a Friday night, then traveled across the state for a WIAC football game the following day.

"It's another level," he said of the college game. "The kids are bigger, stronger, faster, and three or four years older. Athletics has grown so much over the years and the biggest thing is girls' basketball. I worked the first girls' state (high school) tournament back in '76 or '77. Those girls have advanced so dramatically. They play the game almost as good as the boys do."

"I worked with a lot of players that turned pro in baseball, basketball, football," he said. "I worked a lot of baseball games at Oshkosh, and they had some great teams over the years. I worked for Dick Bennett when he was at (Stevens) Point. I worked for Bo Ryan when he was at Platteville, so I got to work with some of the top coaches. That's why I can't hear today. They yelled too loud."

Doden eventually gave up officiating games in 2017.

"When I gave up the officiating on the field and the court, I really didn't miss that, and maybe that's because I still had my fingers in it with the commissioner stuff," he said. "I really didn't miss the officiating. It'll probably be a bigger adjustment now when I give this up."

Doden's officiating experience includes several state tournament football and basketball games and the NCAA Division III World Series in Salem, Virginia, in 1996.

One of Doden's most memorable games featured the UW-Stevens Point and UW-Whitewater men's basketball teams in the mid-1980s.

"They were the top two teams in the WIAC," he said. "It came down to a final shot where I had an interference call at the end that determined the winner. Thankfully, it was on film and it was the right call. That year, Whitewater went on to win the (NCAA) Division III championship and I think Stevens Point won the NAIA (national championship) or finished second, two really good teams."

Now that Doden is about to step down as commissioner, he'll have more time to enjoy one of his favorite pastimes: sports.

"I'm still a sports nut," he said. "All I watch on TV is sports. I'll still continue to do that, obviously." ■



Greg Seubert is a freelance reporter, photographer and editor based out of his rural Weyauwega home. He spent 28 years covering high school sports for the Waupaca County Post, a Waupaca-based weekly newspaper, before stepping down in April 2024. Before that, he spent 10 years as a reporter and editor at four other newspaper in Wisconsin: the Cornell and Lake Holcombe Courier in Cornell (1986-89); the Marshfield News-Herald in his hometown of Marshfield (1989-92); the Daily Jefferson County Union in Fort Atkinson (1992-95); and the Monroe Evening Times in Monroe (1995-96). He joined the Waupaca County Post prior to the start of the 1996-97 school year and eventually covered sports teams from Waupaca, Iola-Scandinavia, Weyauwega-Fremont, Little Wolf (Manawa), Amherst, Wild Rose, Almond-Bancroft, Stevens Point, New London, Clintonville and Hortonville high schools.



Wisconsin Blue Star Mothers Chapter One:  
A Beacon of Support and Service

BY SUSANNE OTTO, PRESIDENT, WISCONSIN BLUE STAR MOTHERS CHAPTER ONE

When we think of military service, we often think of the brave men and women who don the uniform and serve our country. But there's another group, standing behind the scenes, whose sacrifices and service are equally vital—the mothers of those who serve.

The Wisconsin Blue Star Mothers Chapter One is an organization dedicated to honoring these courageous women, offering support, and providing a community where military families can lean on one another.

As the president of this chapter, it's my honor to lead a group of women who are not just mothers, but proud mothers of military service members. Our chapter, based in Wisconsin, is part of a national network of Blue Star Mothers, a group founded during World War II. The mission of the Blue Star Mothers is simple: to provide support for one another, support our children who serve, and advocate for veterans and military families.

A History Rooted in Patriotism

The Blue Star Mothers organization was born out of necessity during the Second World War. Families with sons and daughters serving overseas found comfort and strength in each other as they navigated the complexities and challenges of wartime. The Blue Star flag, which became the symbol of mothers with children in military service, soon became a powerful symbol of sacrifice, love, and patriotism. Over the years, the Blue Star Mothers have



We exist to provide support and encouragement to our troops, veterans and their families.

ACTIVITIES/PROGRAMS

- ★ VA and Military Hospital Volunteers
- ★ Legislative Advocacy
- ★ Seat on VAVS Advisory Committee
- ★ Homecomings and Celebrations
- ★ Troop Care Packages and Letters
- ★ Blue to Gold Program
- ★ PTSD & Wounded Warrior Projects
- ★ P.O.W. / M.I.A. Awareness
- ★ Sew-Much-Comfort
- ★ Big Dipper Educational Funds
- ★ Wreaths Across America
- ★ Attending Ceremonies
- ★ Single Soldier Project
- ★ And many more

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Chapter 1 received its charter from the Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc., [www.bluestarmothers.org](http://www.bluestarmothers.org), on July 22, 2007. We serve the Northern one half of the state. Chapter 1 operates as a 501c-3 through the National charter and is recognized as a charitable organization in the State of Wisconsin.

**HONORING THOSE WHO SERVE**

expanded their work beyond wartime, offering a helping hand to all military families, regardless of the conflict.

In Wisconsin, Chapter One stands as the oldest chapter of the Blue Star Mothers organization. We are proud of our history and the role we play in providing a safe space for mothers of service members to connect, support, and uplift one another. Our membership includes mothers whose children serve in various branches of the military, and we stand united in our belief that no mother should ever feel alone in this journey.

Serving the Service Members and Their Families

At its core, the Wisconsin Blue Star Mothers Chapter One is a community built on camaraderie, love, and support. As a chapter, we are actively involved in organizing care packages for deployed troops, providing scholarships for military children, and advocating for policies that support our veterans. We also work closely with local military organizations and participate in various community outreach programs that benefit military families.

One of the most important aspects of our work is providing emotional and moral support to one another. As mothers, we understand the unique challenges that come with having a child in the military, whether it's the uncertainty of deployment or the daily worries that come with knowing your child is in harm's way. Being able to share those concerns with someone who truly understands is invaluable. At our meetings, we talk about everything from the struggles of deployment to the excitement of homecomings, and we celebrate each other's triumphs and milestones.

We also honor our children who serve, whether they are currently in active duty, veterans, or those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Each year, we host events to recognize their bravery and commitment. One of the highlights is our annual Gold Star Mother's Day ceremony, where we pay tribute to mothers who have lost a child in military service. These events are a reminder of the depth of the sacrifice made by military families and a way for us to come together in solidarity.

Looking to the Future

As we look to the future, the Wisconsin Blue Star Mothers Chapter One continues to grow and evolve. We are always welcoming new members, and we encourage any mother with a child currently serving in the military to reach out to us. Whether you are looking for support, friendship, or a way to give back to those who have served, there is a place for you here.

As president of this incredible chapter, I am humbled by the strength, dedication, and patriotism of the women I have the privilege to serve alongside. Together, we are a beacon of hope for military families, and our work is far from over.

The Wisconsin Blue Star Mothers National Convention will be held July 28-August 2 in Milwaukee. The last time the National Convention was held in Wisconsin was 1951 at the Pfister Hotel. The Big Dipper Auxiliary was formed to aid in schooling fees for veterans and their families. ■

We would love to talk with you and have you join us on our mission to serve our military, veterans, and their families. To join, or to make a donation, email us at: [wi1bluestarmothers@yahoo.com](mailto:wi1bluestarmothers@yahoo.com) or visit us online at [wibluestarmomsch1.org](http://wibluestarmomsch1.org).

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"I believe our flag is more than just cloth and ink. It is a universally recognized symbol that stands for liberty, and freedom. It is the history of our nation, and it's marked by the blood of those who died defending it." ■

~ John Thune



# PARTING SHOTS

Photo by Paul Stumpf, P.S. Portraits

