

— Fox Cities —

MAY 26

# SPORTS

LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY  
TRACK AND FIELD PROGRAM  
GETS COMPETITIVE  
TRANSFORMATIONS

*Elena Hartung,  
First Year | Oronoco, Minnesota*



Cover photo by  
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## From the Editor



Welcome, readers, to the May issue of Fox Cities Sports magazine—a bloomin' garden full of remarkable student-athletes, coaches, parents, and more!

We're pleased to feature Nicole's report on the competitive transformation taking place in track and field at Lawrence University. Key investments have been made in facilities, staff, and athlete recruitment, and hopes are high for a successful season! The article pairs nicely with the Appleton Historical Society's piece on the Banta Bowl.

Nicole also brings news of the amazing success of the Chuters Boxing Team, which sent seven young boxers to the Silver Gloves Championship in February. All seven placed among the top ten boxers in the country! Congratulations especially to Leonardo Gasca Ramirez, who took first place at the championship this year.

Congratulations as well to Maya and Sasha Sanchez, Appleton sisters who will play for Team Latin America at the Heritage Cup lacrosse tournament in late May. More than 120 teams representing 40 countries will participate in this unique opportunity for American players to represent their heritage.

Greg catches up with Drew Mears, who played football at Fox Valley Lutheran and Wisconsin Lutheran College. Having graduated in December 2025, he admits, "It's weird watching college sports now and realizing they're all younger than me ..."

Looking for a sport on the more unusual side—one that's appropriate for athletes of all ages? How about paddling with the Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club? The club's free "Try It Day" is coming up on June 6 in Winneconne.

A kayaker myself, I find it difficult to imagine 20 people successfully paddling in the same direction! But I might just give this a try ... see you there?

In the meantime, enjoy this issue ... and the May flowers! ■



*Diane*

# — Fox Cities — **SPORTS**

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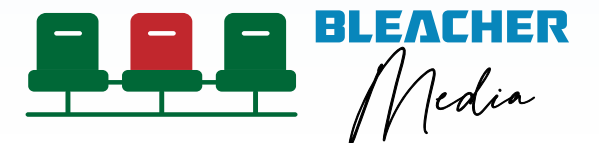
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Have feedback, ideas or submissions? We are always happy to hear from you! Deadlines for submissions are the 15th of each month prior. Email your thoughts, ideas and photos to: [dale@foxcitiessports.com](mailto:dale@foxcitiessports.com).

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~ Peyton, Julia, and Layla Tanith

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~ Easton



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# INSIDEMAY



Photo by Charles Del Viscio

◀◀ 12-15

## LAWRENCE TRACK

Though the university has a long and rich history, its athletics have not always kept pace with the strong academic programs. The track and field team in particular has not won a single conference title since the 1940s.

Finn Lee - Junior | Ivins, Utah and  
Zach Meyer - Sophomore | St. Joseph, MN

7▶▶▶

## BUILDING MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Training, coaching, and playing sports is an ever-evolving art with more light being shed on the mental aspects of the game today than ever before.



◀◀ 26-27

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## 11 A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

"We hope Ali is able to build her confidence through hard work and perseverance."

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# Building Mental Toughness

BY ABBY MCDANIEL, SPORTS MARKETING MANAGER, FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



I recently had the privilege of coaching alongside some old teammates at a volleyball tournament. While in the huddle between sets, the coaches asked the girls what it would take to win the game. In my head, I rattled off pointers on defense, zones to target for serving, and open areas on the court for hitting, but instead I was surprised by the girls' responses.

They mentioned having the right mindset going into the game, having a positive attitude, and being a supportive teammate. This team had been coached all season not only on the physical skills of the sport but also strengthening their mental approach to the game.

Training, coaching, and playing sports is an ever-evolving art with more light being shed on the mental aspects of the game today than ever before. The development and physical skills are still vitally important to success, but building the mental toughness of an athlete and a team can be a significant differentiating factor.

Here are some strategies to build the mental game:

**Visualization:** Closing your eyes and imagining the game in detail helps to control and condition first your mind and then your body for success.

**Positive Self-Talk:** Before being a good teammate to someone else, you have to think about how you communicate with yourself. Instead of negative self-talk during a game or practice, think of words of encouragement, positive affirmations, and highlight your successes.

**Routine and Preparation:** Work to develop a pre-game routine and pattern for yourself and your team to build consistency and reduce anxiety. This can be a specific meal, a body warm-up or stretching sequence, a playlist to listen to, or even the same clothes you wear.

**Mindfulness and Breathing:** Controlled breathing and elements of meditation slow down the heart rate, reduce anxiety, and center the mind. In moments of high stress or tension in a game, breathing is a simple act to focus on and center yourself before your next move.

**Goal-Setting:** Goal-setting for mental toughness is beyond how high you can jump and winning a game. Instead it is a focus on process-oriented goals over outcome goals. Examples of process-oriented goals can include making 100 left-handed layups in practice or running a consistent 6:30 pace for the first two miles of a race. These goals are focused on the action of development, not the end result.

**Reframing Mistakes:** View setbacks and errors as opportunities for learning and development. Think about what to change in your approach and what you can learn to improve upon for the future.

Whether you have tried some of these strategies before or are looking for a new coaching angle, think about these intentional strategies to build the mental game, find what works best, stay consistent, and build upon it. ■

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# Appleton Sisters Will Compete in Heritage Cup Lacrosse Tournament

BY DIANE BAST

On May 22–25, more than 120 teams representing 40 countries will descend on Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey for the 2026 Heritage Cup lacrosse tournament.

Appleton sisters Sasha and Maya Sanchez will be among the hundreds of student-athletes playing that weekend. The sisters will be honoring their Mexican heritage by playing for Team Latin America.

"The Heritage Cup is a way for Americans to represent their heritage to other countries," explained Nico Prandi, who put together the U13 and U15 Latin America teams.

"Last year," he continued, "representatives from Argentina, Peru, and Mexico created the first Latin America team because there were not enough players from each country in the U15 division. This year we opened it up to all Latin American nations because we were hoping to add a U13 team as well."



Heritage Cup "advertised the opportunity to all players with Latin heritage using Instagram, email blasts, and word of mouth," Prandi said. "These teams exist to provide an opportunity for players of Latin descent to get involved in the international lacrosse world."

## BRANCHING OUT

Sasha, an Appleton North High School freshman who will graduate in 2029, started playing about six years ago when she was 9 years old. She plays attack and midfield positions for the 2029 Black Lax

National travel lacrosse club and Appleton United co-op team.

Maya, who is in the 6th grade at Einstein Middle School, started playing the year after Sasha did. She's also an attack and midfield player, for the Appleton Lacrosse Club.

"We heard about [the Heritage Cup] through social media," Sasha said. "Some girls that I know have played for Team Korea, and they had a really good experience, so I was kind of curious about how we could benefit from this."

## THANKS, DAD ... AND COACHES

Maya was quick to thank their father, Rolando, for his support in their lacrosse journey.



"One reason we got into lacrosse," Maya said, "was our dad. He's been a big part of getting us to the level that we're at."

"Some of the ways that he's supported us is buying stuff and building stuff," she continued. "For example, he built us a wall in our backyard to practice 'wall ball' to get us better at stick skills. And he recently built us a machine that helps us get stronger and faster on the draw that starts the game. He also put a turf area in the basement with a goal so we can practice in the winter during the off-season to stay strong. And he does an online program with us a couple of times a week to improve our dodging skills."

Sasha credits her Black Lax coach, Aubrey [McLaren], as "one of the reasons I like the game so much. She is one of the most

supportive people I've ever met. I used to struggle with my confidence a lot, and she is very supportive. The team is very positive and supportive of each other."

Maya agreed. "My club-season coach, Grace [Schaeffler], has had a really big impact on my playing. She's a great coach. She always has great drills. She helps me in my confidence a lot in the mental aspect of the game, and she really helps me become a better player. I notice a huge difference from the beginning of the season to the end of the season whenever I'm with her."

## WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Although just a freshman, Sasha is already looking ahead to life after high school. She wants to focus on her academics and is considering "D3 schools that have strong academic programs" and good lacrosse programs as well. She says "a lot of them are on the East Coast, in this conference called the NESCAC [New England Small College Athletic Conference]. They are very good 'baby' Ivy League schools. Very good players, amazing coaches, amazing resources."

"I want to go into something in oncology," Sasha said. "Whatever that looks like, I'm not quite sure yet."

Maya sees herself "playing throughout high school in the Black Lax program, as Sasha does. After that, I'm not really sure what I want to do. I think I'll just decide based on what happens during that point."

In the more immediate future, the sisters are excited to be playing in the Heritage Cup later this month. Every team across all divisions will play at least five games on the weekend—more if they advance deeper into the tournament ... which of course we hope they do! ■



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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# 20 QUESTIONS

PHOTO BY PAUL STUMPF

## ALI RADDATZ

SENIOR, APPLETON WEST SOFTBALL  
GOLF AND FLAG FOOTBALL

**SOMETHING THAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT ME:** I have been to 10 countries since 2023. Will be 11 this summer.

**WHAT I LIKE ABOUT MY HOMETOWN:** Something I like about the West community is the school spirit and culture.

**IF YOU COULD PICK ONE ANIMAL TO HELP YOU WITH A FIGHT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?** A horse so I could run away.

**I'M PROUD THAT:** I've had the opportunity to play so many sports throughout my life, because it has taught me many important life lessons.

**MY FAVORITE TEAM:** Milwaukee Brewers.

**MY FAVORITE TEAMS TO ROOT AGAINST:** Chicago Cubs and Bears.

**THE BEST THING ABOUT MY SPORT:** There are so many different pieces that go into it. It takes an IQ to effectively play.

**MY MOST MEMORABLE SPORTS MOMENT:** Hitting my first home run.

**MY FAVORITE JUNK FOOD:** French fries and cheese curds.

**I PLAN TO GO TO COLLEGE TO:** Become a nurse and play softball at Carroll University.

**TWO REASONS YOU LIKE BEING PART OF A TEAM SPORT:** The lasting bonds and friendships it creates, and having to work well with others.

**HOW DO YOUR TEAMMATES MAKE PRACTICE FUN?** We say a lot of brain rot and jokes, and at flag football there is a lot of dancing.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPORTS MOVIE?** A League of Their Own.

**WHAT QUALITIES MAKE A TEAMMATE A GOOD TEAM CAPTAIN?** Communication, effort, passion, encouragement, perseverance, selflessness, dedication, and adaptability.

**WHAT AGE WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED YOUR SPORT?** I started playing T-ball at 5.

**WHO WAS YOUR FAVORITE COACH AND WHY?** My former basketball coach, Julie, because she still is always there for me. She taught me more than just basketball, including essential life skills and most importantly how to be a good person. She was my coach from 4th grade through junior year, so she knew me more than just as an athlete.

**WHO WAS YOUR ACTOR/ACTRESS CRUSH?** Michael B. Jordan.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CONCERT?** Elevation Worship's Elevation Nights Tour.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EVER AUTOGRAPH?** I got a baseball signed by Josh Hader and Chase Anderson at a Brewer game.

**WHAT SPORT DID YOU FAIL AT AS A CHILD?** Tennis, dance, and karate.

## A Parent's Perspective

BY DAVE AND JESSICA RADDATZ | PHOTO BY PAUL STUMPF



student. Softball was always secondary to that decision.

Carroll is that school—it has an amazing nursing program, great student/academic resources, and a softball team that she is excited to be a part of.

Ali also golfs and plays flag football; both are newer sports for her, starting in her junior year. She is on the Appleton West teams for both sports and was named captain of the flag football team by team vote last year. She also played basketball from 4th grade through junior year but stepped down to be a manager of the girls' varsity team this year so she could focus more on softball.

She has been involved in sports since she was little: She tried soccer, volleyball, tennis, and dance, none of which she really enjoyed. She started playing T-ball through Grand Chute Baseball and she loved it. Once she moved up to kid pitch, we switched her to softball through Appleton Little League. She was so mad at us when we told her she had to switch to softball because she wanted to keep playing baseball, but she quickly realized that softball isn't much different from baseball, and she found her love for the sport. She eventually moved on to play travel ball through Midwest Warriors, then Rhino/Five Star.

Our son Charlie, who is 15, plays baseball and is a sophomore at Appleton West. Most of his baseball games are on the same night as Ali's softball games, so we have a very busy spring! With two kids in sports in the same season, it can be a challenge to ensure that we are at both kids' games. It's a lot of divide-and-conquer, but it is important to us that we are there to watch them and they both feel supported, so we make it work.

With two kids that have always been active in multiple sports, there was a lot of time spent in the car shuttling to and from games and practices. It got a lot easier when Ali started driving!

She has always been a multi-sport athlete on top of playing travel softball. Her club team would practice multiple times a week year-round, so even when softball wasn't in season, she would have to juggle practices for multiple sports, sometimes on the same day. Sometimes we were able to arrange a carpool, but it was just a lot of going with the flow. If Ali needed to be somewhere we made sure she got there. We are lucky that we have family and friends that were always willing to lend a hand when we had to be in too many places at once.

Balancing sports with school and family is one of the more important lessons a student-athlete learns. Ali is a great student and takes pride in her grades, so she has always made school a priority. She has taken many AP courses and has maintained a high GPA throughout high school. On top of participating in multiple sports at West, Ali is part of National Honor Society, and

Ali is committed to playing softball at Carroll University. She always said that she would like to play softball in college, IF it fit with the college that she wanted to go to. Her first priority was choosing a school that had the degree she wanted and was a good fit for her as a

she serves on the Student Athlete Leadership Team. She uses her free periods at school to work on her schoolwork so that her evenings can be dedicated to practices/games/friends.

We have made sure that both of our kids know that the scoreboard does not, and should not, determine their enjoyment or passion for the sport. A person, or a team, can learn so much more by overcoming a difficult loss than never having to face a loss. We try to focus on the positive and don't dwell on the losses. Take the loss, learn from it, and move on. Wins, we are always



excited for, regardless of how big or small. No matter what, we always make sure Ali knows that we are proud of her.

Ali has dislocated her kneecap a few times, and it still tends to pop out occasionally. At this point, we are so used to it that we don't really worry too much about it when it happens, but it still causes her pain which is always hard to see. Luckily, this seems to be more of a basketball injury for her and has not really been an issue with her playing softball, even as a catcher. As parents, we will always be worried about injuries. Our biggest worry is that she will be injured during another sport and she will miss softball because of it. We would hate to see her not be able to do something she loves.

Ali has a passion and joy for softball, and you can't help but feel her excitement when you watch her play. She gives 100% at every game and every practice. The hard work pays off, and that is probably the biggest reward for us—seeing her succeed in a sport she loves and has worked hard at and never losing the joy that comes with that success.

There are so many important life skills that we hope Ali has learned through sports: resilience, leadership, accountability, self-advocacy. Most importantly, we hope she is able to build her confidence through hard work and perseverance. We want her to learn that she can grow from both success and failure, how to handle setbacks, show up for others, even when things get tough, and how to communicate her concerns effectively and in a respectful manner. ■

# LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY TRACK AND FIELD PROGRAM GETS COMPETITIVE TRANSFORMATIONS

BY NICOLE CAMPUZANO | PHOTOS BY CHARLES DEL VISCIO

Founded in 1847, Lawrence University is a private liberal arts college and music conservatory located on an 84-acre campus in downtown Appleton. Lawrence was only the second college in the nation to be founded as a co-educational institution. The university is known for its academic rigor, top-tier music education program, and amazing staff-to-student ratio.

Walking through the beautiful campus, which is split by the Fox River, brings feelings of veneration for the rich history that has blossomed over the nearly 180 years of the university's existence. Lawrence University was the seed from which the city of Appleton sprung, with the founding of the original settlement coming as a result of the founding of the school.

Though the university has a long and rich history, its athletics have not always kept pace with the strong academic programs. The track and field team in particular has not won a single conference title since the 1940s. However, all that might be about to change thanks to the vision and focus of the university president, Laurie A. Carter, a dedicated group of coaches, and an influx of talented athletes.

Five years ago, when Carter arrived on the scene, she prioritized athletics at the school. She herself was a former All-American hurdler. Carter immediately began pushing for fundraising for athletics. The university leveled the old

track facility and built a new one in the same footprint. The new facility, completed in the fall of 2023, has a better layout with a focus on safety. There are nine lanes, allowing Lawrence to host track events more competitively than they could with the old facility.

## CALLING COACH KRUG

Carter also advocated for the creation of a new full-time head track coach position to ensure that the program continues to trend in the right direction. The person chosen to fill this position, which covers both the men's and women's teams, is Elizabeth Krug, who began coaching at Lawrence in the fall of 2024.

Krug went to a small Division 3 college very similar to Lawrence, where she was a heptathlete and national Division 3 champion. In her athletic career, she qualified seven times and won once. She was also an All American five times and had a short stint as a Division 1 athlete. Being a very competitive athlete herself, she was excited to coach student-athletes who shared her strong competitive nature. Another reason she was drawn to the coaching position at Lawrence was because of the academic rigor the university is known for.

Prior to coming to Lawrence, Krug coached at St. Norbert for eight years, which allowed her to see things from the competitor's perspective. She explains that when she was a coach at St. Norbert, they stopped bringing athletes to



Jorja Miller - First Year | Green Bay, WI.



Reuben Keuler - Sophomore | Milwaukee, WI.



Brady Dilworth - First Year | Chandler, AZ.



Francis & Leigham Alexander - First Years | Lawrence, KS (identical twin brothers).



Alease McLain - First Year | Oregon, IL.



Ben Baldwin - First Year | Blue Hill, ME.



Jacqui Malm, First Year | Appleton, WI.

certain events hosted at Lawrence. "No one was really servicing or maintaining the track," she says. The new facility and future plans are proof the track and field teams are a priority to the university now and moving forward.

The track and field program has two additional full-time coaches and six part-time coaches: Jason Fast, head coach, Men's/Women's Cross Country; Shelby Baldwin, assistant coach, Jumps; Abby Martin, assistant coach, Throws; Emily Uitenbroek, assistant coach, Throws; Max Schermacher, assistant coach, Vault; Robby Cicciarelli, assistant coach, High Jump; Jess Buss, assistant coach, Hurdles; and Olivia Ship, assistant coach, Long Sprints. Having a robust coaching staff allows the track and field team to cover all the event groups they need to. Collectively, the group has four NCAA D3 National Champion Titles and 18 NCAA D3 National Championship appearances as athletes themselves, making them an experienced group indeed.

## GROWTH POTENTIAL

Though the distance program has been substantial since Fast was hired in 2009, the track program has not been

prominent—but it is becoming much more competitive as of late. In the past couple years, Lawrence has worked hard to transform the athletics department. The women's basketball team recently recorded the most wins in the school's history, men's basketball had a winning season, and women's volleyball made it to conference for the first time in its history.

Krug says, "Track and field has a huge growth potential. We have a smaller roster now, but we are heavily fundraising for a new indoor facility. Once we have the new indoor facility, we are hoping to have a regular roster of 80 to 100 athletes." The current indoor facility has a dated wellness center from the 1990s and a limited amount of space available. "We are going to continue to grow, even if there's not a shovel in the ground in the next couple of months," Krug adds. Krug is pleased the university is showing a tremendous amount of support for the program, with weight rooms, the new outdoor facility, and added staffing, putting an all-around bigger emphasis on the track and field program.

Nick Lubin - Sophomore | St. Albans, NY.



Izzy Baumgardt - First Year | Mt. Pleasant, WI.



Anna Vanden Acker - Senior | Nennah, WI

Corbin Schneider - First Year | Fond du Lac, WI



Krug explains that the university's former athletic director, Jason Imperati, was a great asset to the program as well, setting high standards. He recently took a position on the East Coast, where he is originally from, and the Lawrence University position has been filled by James Downer, who is coming from St. Francis in Pennsylvania but originates from the Midwest. Downer was a Division 1 coach and expressed to Krug that he's always had a good impression of Lawrence University.

**PHENOMENAL ATHLETES**

Krug is thrilled about some of the phenomenal athletes currently on the track and field team, as well as those who have been recruited for next season. Some of the local athletes who will join the team next fall are America Cackowski of Little Chute High School and Adrion Rogers of Appleton North High School. Krug also wanted to give a shout-out to freshman high jumper Jacqui Malm, an Appleton West High School graduate, and sophomore Caleb Hardy, an Appleton North High School graduate. Hardy is on both the cross country and track and field teams.

Krug explains that Lawrence wants to be more accessible at the high school level, too. The coaches are hoping to draw more athletes from local schools to engage in upcoming summer youth camps.

"We host three total camps over the summer, led by our coaching staff and assisted by student-athletes. All events (hurdles, sprints, distance, high jump, horizontal jumps, vault, and throws) will be offered in the skilled camps (grades 8-12). Our novice camps are directed at athletes just getting interested in the sport. Those camps will cover

multiple movements related to track and field and will allow them experience across all events," Krug says. For anyone interested in learning more about the summer camps, see the QR code accompanying this article or visit <https://www.lawrencetrackandfieldcamps.com/>.

With President Carter's strong support for raising funds, updating facilities, and fully staffing the program, the track and field teams are being transformed competitively. The strong coaching staff is using their expertise to help their athletes grow and thrive, pushing the program in the right direction as more amazing athletes join the team and add their own talent to the pool.

The track and field events are always open to the public, and anyone who wants to join in on the excitement can come watch. "The program is more competitive-based, better funded, and more supported now," Krug affirms. She is excited to see what the future brings and wants to show the community the amazing changes that are transpiring for athletics at Lawrence University. ■



**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.

# The Real Mental Game: Why Supporting Young Athletes Is Harder Than It Looks

BY ANNA BOMBER, MS, CMPC



## WHAT YOUNG ATHLETES ACTUALLY NEED

While every child is different, research and experience consistently point to a few key needs:

- A sense of foundational psychological safety, regardless of performance
- Encouragement that focuses on effort, growth, and the process
- Space to process feelings without immediate correction
- Clear, consistent support not just during wins, but especially during struggles
- A normalization of mistakes
- Reminders to utilize mental performance tools ■

For more information, please schedule an informational session with Anna Bomber at Bomber Performance Consulting, LLC, phone 920-470-8118, website [Bomberperformance.com](http://Bomberperformance.com), email [bomberperformance@outlook.com](mailto:bomberperformance@outlook.com).

From the outside, youth sports can seem straightforward: practices, games, effort, improvement. But for parents, there's a quieter, more complicated challenge happening in the background when it comes to figuring out how to support a child's mental performance.

You want to help your child stay confident, resilient, and focused. You want to say the right thing after a tough loss. You want to build them up without adding pressure. But, in those key moments after a mistake, during a slump, or before a big game many parents find themselves wondering what actually helps. Pressure doesn't just form for youth athletes, but parents of athletes experience it too.

## WHY MENTAL PERFORMANCE IS SO TRICKY

Unlike physical skills, mental performance isn't always visible. Confidence, focus, and resilience ebb and flow, and they're influenced by subtle cues from parents, coaches, recruiters, and teammates.

Well-intended comments can sometimes feel dismissive or misunderstood to a nervous athlete. Silence after a tough game can be interpreted as disappointment. Even enthusiasm can sometimes feel like pressure if a child believes their value is tied to performance. There's no simple script, which is what makes this so challenging.



**Anna Bomber** is owner of Bomber Performance Consulting, LLC, where she specializes in one-on-one and team sessions to help athletes thrive in their performance arena. Anna is a Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) through the Association for Applied Sport Psychology and works with athletes through a holistic approach on areas such as motivation, confidence, teamwork, communication, concentration, and so much more.

Bomber Performance Consulting will be hosting a **Mental Performance for Parents Informational Session** on **Wednesday, August 12 at 5:30pm.**

The Zoom session will be geared towards parents of athletes and will highlight key areas such as helping athletes reduce pressure and build confidence and resilience in sport—just in time for fall sports to start ramping up. Registration information will be included in the July issue in Fox Cities Sports Magazine.

Stay tuned!



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

**NAME:** Brett Singler

**AGE:** 17

**GRADE:** 11th

**SCHOOL:** Shiocton High School

**SPORTS:** Football and basketball

### 1. HOW DO YOU BALANCE ACADEMICS, TRAINING, AND COMPETITION?

Find a time for each thing and stay consistent. Don't fall behind

in the classroom. Take advantage of every opportunity to train and study when you can. Sometimes you just have to find time even when there isn't any. Use all your resources that are available to you.

### 2. WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO PUSH THROUGH TOUGH PRACTICES AND GAMES?

Knowing that I have put all this time, effort, and energy into getting to this point, and knowing I'm not going to give up on myself or more importantly my teammates and coaches that are counting on me. "Tough times make tough players" is the mentality you need to have at all times to push through. Never give up and always give 100% effort, because you never know when it could be your last time.

### 3. WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED THAT APPLIES BEYOND SPORTS?

Working hard no matter what. It will get really tough at times, but most importantly never give up, and lead your team with a positive attitude. Never go into something with a negative attitude that brings you and others down.

### 4. HOW DO YOU HELP BUILD A POSITIVE TEAM CULTURE?

Always build up the people around you, communicate with each other and trust your teammates no matter the situation. Bring energy no matter where you go on and off the field. Lead with a positive attitude and hold everyone accountable for their actions. Setting a high expectation for your team so you have something to work for has been a huge part of our success and continues to be one of the things that pushes me every day. Celebrate the good things and learn from the bad. The biggest thing is telling people what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. Telling somebody what they want to hear will not make them better, but telling them what they need to hear can help them succeed.

### 5. HOW WILL YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A STUDENT-ATHLETE SHAPE YOUR FUTURE?

Learning how to perform under pressure and working hard no matter what have been the two biggest things I have learned from sports. Sports teach you many lessons, but those are the things that stuck out to me the most. Later in life you will need to show up when you don't want to. There are people counting on you and you can't let them down. Working hard no matter what is another great lesson sports have taught me. You can show up every day and give half effort and not see the results, or you could show up every day and give maximum effort and see the results you want to see. Your results are decided by the amount of effort you put in. ■



# Speed Starts at the Ground

BY DR. JASON D. NOWAK | NORTH SHORE FOOT AND ANKLE

Soccer and track athletes rely on powerful acceleration, controlled deceleration, and efficient stride mechanics. The foot and ankle act as the foundation for force transfer. Supporting foot and ankle strength enhances performance and reduces injury risk.



Track and turf surfaces amplify loading forces through the calves, Achilles tendon, and forefoot. Rapid increases in sprinting volume can overwhelm tissues if not progressed gradually.

A common scenario occurs as an athlete transitions from off-season conditioning to sprint-intensive training. They may notice increasing calf tightness that persists beyond typical soreness. This reflects increased elastic load demands on the tendon system.

Strengthening calves, hips, and glutes improves alignment and power transfer. Gradually introducing plyometrics trains tendons to store and release energy efficiently, supporting sprint performance.

Recovery is essential. Progress happens between training sessions, not only during them. Rotating surfaces—grass, turf, and track—reduces repetitive strain.

If pain alters an athlete's running stride or persists beyond warm-up, evaluation can help prevent chronic tendon overload. ■



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## SPRING SPORTS WORD SEARCH

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| Ace      | Goal      | Pass    | Softball  |
| Baseball | Golf      | Pennant | Spike     |
| Bat      | Homeplate | Pitch   | Sprint    |
| Cleat    | Hurdles   | Putt    | Stopwatch |
| Club     | Javelin   | Race    | Tee       |
| Dash     | Jump      | Racquet | Tennis    |
| Dive     | Kick      | Relay   | Track     |
| Dugout   | Lacrosse  | Serve   |           |
| Fairway  | Lap       | Shotput |           |
| Glove    | Net       | Soccer  |           |
- Answers on page 25

## SPORTS REPLAY

Brought to you by the



# Banta Bowl: Home to Decades of Athletic Success

BY JOE VANDEN ACKER

Lawrence University's iconic Banta Bowl was the brainchild of Lawrence alumnus George Banta Jr., a member of the class of 1910 and president of Banta Corporation. His love of the football team, deep affection for the college, and devotion to the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, whose Lawrence chapter was traditionally made up of many football players, spurred the birth of the stadium.

Constructed in a natural amphitheater, the ravine was cleared and bleachers were built into the hillsides. The Lawrence Bowl opened for the 1965 season, and a symbiotic relationship between the stadium and the natural beauty surrounding it was immediately formed.

Lawrence had a new head coach—the man who would become Lawrence legend Ron Roberts—when they faced off against St. Olaf College in the home opener on October 2, 1965. In front of a crowd of more than 5,000, Beaver Dam native Bob Schoenwetter scored the game's first touchdown and the game-winning score in a 26-21 victory over the Oles.

Appleton natives Chuck McKee and Gary Hieptas were part of that 1965 squad and Lawrence's first All-Americans to play in the Bowl when they were honored in 1967. The Vikings have had nearly 60 players earn All-America status during their tenure in the stadium.

The 1967 squad is among Lawrence's finest in a football history that dates to 1893. The 1967 squad went 8-0 to win the Midwest Conference title and was inducted into the Lawrence Hall of Fame in 2017.

Since funds for the stadium had been donated anonymously, it was known as the Lawrence Bowl when it opened. That changed when Banta died in January 1977. It was widely known among the football players that Banta had donated the funds for the stadium, and he was honored as the "Number one fan of Lawrence Athletics" when the stadium was dedicated in 1965.

After Banta's death, the stadium was renamed the Banta Bowl for the 1978 season. Lawrence would rout Lake Forest College 41-6 for the stadium rededication and renaming on September 23, 1978.

The Vikings ripped off three consecutive Midwest Conference championships in 1979, 1980, and 1981, and Lawrence has won seven league titles while playing in the Bowl. The 1981 season broke new ground for Lawrence football when the Vikings went 10-1 and were one of just eight teams invited to the NCAA Division III playoffs.

Lawrence hosted the University of Minnesota-Morris in the national quarterfinals on November 21, 1981. College Football Hall of Famer and Appleton native Scott Reppert ran 78 yards for a touchdown to give Lawrence a 14-7 lead over the Cougars, but Morris rallied to tie it. Menasha native and All-America tight end Pat Schwanke won it for Lawrence when he caught a 13-yard touchdown pass from Dean Walsh in overtime. All-America defensive back Graham Satherlie intercepted a fourth-down pass on Morris' overtime possession to seal the 21-14 victory.

Lawrence grabbed the 1986 conference title in dramatic fashion as the Vikings rallied to beat visiting Coe College 14-10 in the league championship game on November 15, 1986. All-America quarterback Bill McNamara threw for a school-record 466 yards and finished the game-winning drive in the final minute with a 26-yard touchdown pass to Steve Johnson.

The Vikings have put together some memorable wins in the Banta Bowl in the 21st century, as well.

On September 8, 2001, Lawrence trailed visiting Macalester College 10-7 in what has been dubbed "The Immaculate Deflection Game." Facing third-and-goal from the Macalester 5 in the final minute, quarterback R.J. Rosenthal rifled a quick slant to Appleton native and Lawrence Hall of Famer Zach Michael. The pass was a touch behind Michael and deflected off his shoulder pad, into the waiting arms of Lawrence tight end Chris McGinley in the back of the south end zone. Final: Lawrence 13, Macalester 10.

Lawrence had a brother-to-brother connection to win in dramatic fashion while hosting Knox College on November 9, 2013. Trailing the Prairie Fire 20-17, the Vikings drove to the Knox 17-yard line and called timeout with three seconds left. Quarterback Luke Barthelmess went back to pass, was flushed right, and threw to the north end zone. The pass was snared by his younger brother, former Appleton North star Isaac Barthelmess, for a touchdown and 23-20 victory.

The Banta Bowl underwent a \$4.5 million renovation to coincide with the stadium's 50th anniversary in 2015. The stadium was completely redone with a turf field, new bleachers, and construction of the Gilbo Athletic Center to house the football team, restrooms, and concessions. The stadium was renamed Ron Roberts Field at the Banta Bowl.

A new press box opened in 2018, and the multi-million-dollar Team Complex was added in 2023 to house the men's and women's soccer and lacrosse teams.

The Banta Bowl was conceived as a stunning palace for Lawrence football more than 60 years ago, but it now serves as the home for five teams. Banta would take great pride in seeing how his stadium has grown to serve generations of Lawrence student-athletes.

Lawrence President Thomas S. Smith wrote of Banta for the renaming in 1978, "Si monumentum requiris, circumspice."

Translated from Latin: If you are seeking his monument, look around. ■

Joe Vanden Acker served as Lawrence University's sports information director for 26 years from 1999 to 2025. He continues to work as the "Voice of the Vikings" on the livestream for multiple sports and as chair of the university's Hall of Fame committee.

# FVL Graduate Mears Got His Kicks at Wisconsin Lutheran

BY GREG SEUBERT

His football-playing days are behind him now, but Drew Mears isn't ready to close the book on the sport just yet. A three-sport athlete at Appleton's Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Mears went on to play four seasons of football at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Wauwatosa before graduating in December 2025.

Mears also competed in basketball and baseball at FVL before graduating in 2022.

"I'd say basketball and football were the sports I was best at—probably a little better at football—and that's why I went to college for that," he said. "I just enjoyed the camaraderie with the football guys. We were pretty successful at football, so that's always fun."

Mears played quarterback and defensive back for the Foxes and also punted, which helped him stand out for his new team.

"I loved the idea of having the ball in my hands every play," he said. "My offensive coordinator was also my neighbor, so we were pretty close. I was at his house all the time. We also had a pass-friendly offense and as a quarterback, that's a nice thing to have."

Mears headed to Wisconsin Lutheran to study marketing.

"Initially, I was either thinking about going as a receiver or QB my freshman year," he said. "They saw I was super-athletic and I chose the receiver route to get on the field faster. I'm glad I chose that route."

## FVL TO WLC

It didn't take long for Mears to make his mark with the Warriors, as he took over the punting duties as a freshman and never gave it up in four seasons.

"I didn't play right away as a receiver my freshman year, so I was very thankful to do the punting role," he said. "They didn't have a punter and they saw a little bit of my film from when I was in high school."

Wisconsin Lutheran's special teams coach had experience with two NFL teams—the San Francisco 49ers and Seattle Seahawks—and helped Mears work on his punting skills.

"He knew everything about angles, technique, a bunch of different stuff when it comes to special teams," Mears said. "I'd say it was my main position freshman and sophomore years. I really got to see the field more as a receiver my junior and senior years."

Mears showed steady improvement over his four seasons as Wisconsin Lutheran's punter. His longest punt—62 yards—came as a freshman in a game against Concordia Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Football Coaches Association selected him as its Private College Special Teams Player of the Year in 2025 following a senior season that saw him average a school record 41.3 yards per kick, which led the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference. He also made the all-conference first team and ranked 13th among all NCAA Division III punters.

"The last year is when I succeeded in the numbers, awards, and things like that," Mears said. "The Special Teams Player of the Year (Award) was for private schools and recently I went to a cool



awards ceremony at Lambeau Field where I got that award. It was a heck of an experience."

Mears said there's more to punting than just kicking a football.

"A game-winning field goal puts a lot of pressure on a kicker, but there's also some pressure on a punter if there's a blocked punt," he said.

Not many college athletes have an opportunity to play the same position at the same school for four seasons. Not only did Mears punt for four seasons, he also played receiver and had a career-best seven receptions for 98 yards in September 2024 against Lakeland College.

"A lot of people aren't fortunate to play a position due to injuries and stuff like that," Mears said. "I'm grateful to finish my career playing all my games. I got to play two positions as well. It's kind of weird being a receiver and a punter because I just stayed on the field. It made me punt a little farther for a couple of extra yards because I'm angry that we didn't get the first down. I could take the anger out on the ball, I guess."

Mears had to try out for the punting position each season.

"Our special teams coach kind of knew I was the guy, but there were tryouts for the second spot," he said. "The year before I came, they had a pretty good punter that played for years. They weren't able to recruit a punter. They knew I punted a little, but that's not what they recruited me for."

Less than six months after graduating from FVL, Mears won the punting job on a college team.

"I was very thankful and blessed to have that opportunity," he said. "Not a lot of people can see the field right away as a freshman. I enjoyed every game I played and had a desire to get better over four years."

## A PERFECT FIT

Mears said he knew Wisconsin Lutheran would be a good fit after football coach Eric Treske recruited him.

"He made me feel like it was a family at WLC and throughout my four years I definitely lived that and got to experience that with the brotherhood," he said. "I made friends that I'll know the rest of my life. I'd say the big difference (between FVL and WLC) is everyone coming from everywhere to play football."

The transfer portal that allows players to change schools wasn't that big of a factor at WLC, according to Mears.



Drew Mears spent four seasons as the Wisconsin Lutheran College football team's punter from 2022-25.

Photo Courtesy of Wisconsin Lutheran College

"We'd get guys transferring out because we always had a lot of extra guys and people would leave because of playing time, being homesick and a lot of different stuff," he said. "We'd get a handful of good transfers that come in. Two years ago, we were pretty successful at 7-3 and got a couple of good transfers just from the overall recognition of the team that year."

Mears majored in marketing and Spanish.

"I'm going into finance to try and be a financial adviser," he said. "I'm in Wauwatosa at Prudential Financial. I like the Milwaukee area. A lot of my buddies from out-of-state are staying in Milwaukee. It's not too far away from my parents in Appleton, less than two hours."

## NO MORE SPORTS

Mears has spent much of his time over the summers preparing for an upcoming football season, but that won't be the case this year.

"I'm definitely going to miss it, but I'm grateful to even have the opportunity to play," he said. "Not a lot of people get that chance."

It's weird watching college sports now and realizing they're all younger than me and now I have to go to work. I enjoyed and appreciated my time, but I'm ready to move on and maybe coach a little here and there down the road."

Mears was able to build relationships with coaches and athletes over the years. "I know so many coaches and players," he said. "I can reach out if I need anything and they'll get back to me right away or hang out. I'd say I'm a pretty social guy, so I connect well with different people."

"The beauty of being on a football team is there are so many different teammates," he added. "We had 90 to 100 guys on the team each year at a smaller college with just over 1,000 kids. That's 10% of the school's population. You run into football guys and have them in class all the time. It's good to have those relationships."

Mears' plan for the upcoming WLC football season is to catch as many games as he can.

"Of my roommates that were captains last year, two of them are graduate assistants on the team," he said. "They're very connected with the team and I get to know the inside scoop. I'm definitely going to be supporting them. I'll always be connected through the WLC community. Down the road, I'd love to get involved with coaching, maybe at the high school I went to. I'm pretty close with the current coach at FVL and he said if I ever lived in the area, he'd have me on the coaching staff. I may look at that in the future."

"I'd definitely love to give back when it comes to sharing the knowledge of X's and O's," he said. "It's a passion of mine. I love watching film and dissecting defenses. I'd love to get involved." ■



**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. 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.

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# How Group Training Is Leading to Big Wins for the Electric City Chuters

BY NICOLE CAMPUZANO | PHOTOS BY PAUL STUMPF

The energy one feels upon walking through the doors of Electric City Chuters Boxing Academy is, in fact, *electric*. The space is filled with energetic voices and bodies in constant motion. There are parents animatedly talking together in the front room while kids gear up for practice, entering the ring for warm-up drills.

The boxing gym has been open since July 2023, owned and operated by Nick Maher, who was himself a successful professional boxer at the national level. More than 90 kids train with Maher; seven of these young athletes placed in the 59th annual Silver Gloves National Championship in February.

The Silver Gloves National tournament was founded by Frank Hess and Frank Granados in 1967 to create competitive opportunities for young boxers. In 1992, the championship partnered with Ringside and established a permanent base for the national tournament in Kansas City, Missouri, for boxers between the ages of eight and 15. Competing in the Silver Gloves National Championship is often a key stepping stone for young boxers to move into higher levels of competition, such as the Golden Gloves Championship or even the Olympics.

Maher explains this is the second year in a row that athletes from his program made it to the national tournament in Kansas City. It is also the second year in a row that he's had multiple boxers make it that far. Last year, six of their athletes placed in the Silver Gloves Championship, with Zion Frank Reed of Chuters coming in first in the nation. Maher says this year they sent seven young boxers to

the Silver Gloves Championship, and all seven placed in the top ten in the country. Leonardo Gasca Ramirez of Chuters took first place this year, proving to Maher and everyone else that the first year was not a fluke, but the result of a recipe for almost guaranteed success in the ring. Maher explains that having so many kids from the same program place at such a high level is very unusual.

Maher's program is unusual in a number of ways. First, he offers his training free of charge. "I'm in the sport of boxing, not in the business of boxing," Maher emphasizes. Anyone who wants to box is welcome at Chuters, so long as that young person is dedicated. Maher expects his boxers to train between three and five times each week, but he says the ones who are most successful are the ones who are there every day, putting their full heart and soul into the sport.

Secondly, Maher employs a unique training approach. He explains that most coaches work one-on-one with an athlete for years, but he feels strongly that success can be accomplished in a radically different way. He attributes his athletes' success to "the fact that we are training in such a large group. Critics say it's not the norm to train so many boxers at a time. I'm changing minds about the group training method. We're mass-producing the boxer."

The seven kids who placed at the Silver Gloves Championship were Phoenix Kasperek (age 12), Tripp Ahrens (age 11), Legend Gerhartz (age 9), Majestic Gerhartz (age 11), Calon Dahlheimer (age 14), Subhan Habibi (age 13), and Leonardo Gasca Ramirez (age 13), who was the ultimate winner of the championship back in February.



Top row left to right:  
Leonardo Gasca Ramirez,  
Calon Dahlheimer, Legend Gerhartz.

Middle row left to right:  
Subhan Habibi, Majestic Gerhartz,  
Tripp Ahrens.

Bottom row:  
Phoenix Kasperek.

These seven boxers expressed a wide array of emotions about the anticipation they felt leading up to the Silver Gloves Championship. Subhan Habibi says, "It was difficult because the guy I was fighting was really good. I was nervous. But once I got to the ring, I thought, this time it will be easier, so I shouldn't be nervous."

Majestic Gerhartz also felt nervous before her fight. "I was a little between nervous and excited. Once I was in the ring and fighting, I felt more confident because I knew I had more experience and was taller than the other girl," she says.

Legend Gerhartz, Majestic's younger brother, felt his fight was challenging. "It was hard because the other kid kept throwing punches and it was a little challenging to move around. It was my very first fight," the nine-year-old explains.

Leonardo Gasca Ramirez, who won the national championship this year, explains he had a mixture of emotions at the tournament. "It was very intimidating. There were a lot of people there, a lot of noise. The atmosphere was thick. When I got into the ring, it all just went away. I was very excited to be there. I had confidence that I was going to go in and win."

Part of Gasca Ramirez's success can be ascribed to the support of his family. He says that he's been training since he was seven years old, at first with his dad using a boxing bag, before joining the gym a couple years ago. His sisters, ages 17 and 18, are his biggest cheerleaders. His sister Aurora also trains at Chuters. Gasca Ramirez explains that to help him pursue his passion for boxing, his older brother has purchased new boxing gloves for him more than once.

It's clear that boxing is more than just a sport to Gasca Ramirez. He says, "Boxing distracts me from the stress of life. Almost every night of the week, I come to box. It was hard when I started; there's a lot of things to learn. It got easier when I went to my first nationals for Ringside two years ago. Because of the high level of competition, I gained confidence." There is no doubt that Gasca Ramirez's dedication and hard work will take him far. He hopes to continue boxing for years to come, eventually becoming a professional.

Coach Maher believes it is important to get the kids to a high level of performance as quickly as possible. He sees his job as getting each of his boxers to the next level to open more doors of opportunity for them. "I don't think this will be the last year that this group of kids sees that level of competition. Most of them are registered for the Junior Olympic Nationals this summer, which is by invite only. The kids who work the hardest here get the most out of things," he explains.

Maher emphasizes that his training technique does not involve a lot of hand-holding. The kids who are most dedicated will take every ounce of instruction to the maximum degree. "These kids are cut from a different fabric," he adds.

Under the tutelage of a coach who sees a unique spark in his athletes, there is little doubt this group of young boxers will continue to amaze as they push for excellence through their dedication and perseverance. ■

Leading up to the championship, these seven young people worked diligently to prepare. They attended practices regularly, trained hard, and made the necessary changes to be ready to step into the ring in Kansas City. Some of them focused on cardio outside of practice to enhance their stamina. Others went on strict diets to cut weight. All of them self-reflecting on their own personal weaknesses in the ring and made changes to their techniques to improve. Some of them even envisioned themselves sparring right before they went to sleep every night to be mentally prepared.

Though most of these kids have been boxing for only a year or two, they all show an extreme passion for the sport. Many of them became interested in boxing because they had a parent or older sibling who was interested in or participated in the sport. For others, such as Phoenix Kasperek, it was a great way to stay out of trouble and refocus his energy on something positive. He says, "Before I started boxing, I sometimes got in trouble. My parents wanted me to start boxing." Since he started boxing, his grades have improved and he has had no more trouble. "It taught me respect and how to be mature. Coach Nick has strict rules about behavior," he adds.

That sentiment was echoed by most of the other athletes. They all touched on the high expectations and strict rules that Maher has laid out for them. Tripp Ahrens says, "I used to want to punch everybody, but once I started boxing, I just hit the bags." Legend Gerhartz agrees; he says boxing helps him "get out my frustrations in a safe way."

The kids also agreed boxing in this program has helped them grow a sense of community and strong relationships with others. Calon Dahlheimer, who is a co-team captain, explains that boxing at Chuters has improved his life in many ways. "This is a great community to hang out and make friends. It has helped me a lot in my normal, everyday life," he says.



It's a full house for The Electric City Chuters!



**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.

# ONE ON ONE

BY DIANE BAST | PHOTO BY PAUL STUMPF

## MATT TEN HAKEN

DIRECTOR OF SPORTS MARKETING,  
FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



### What first got you interested in sports marketing, and what led you to your role at the Fox Cities CVB?

Sports was a major part of my youth, but I knew my very average athleticism would only take me so far. Staying involved in sports, but being behind the scenes of the competition, really interested me, so I went to UW-La Crosse to study Sports Management and then St. Thomas to get my Masters in Athletic Administration. After graduating, I spent six years working in collegiate athletics in Minnesota, which I loved. But in 2010, with a growing family, we wanted to move closer to home and I found my current role as Director of Sports Marketing at the Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB).

### What does a typical day look like for you as Director of Sports Marketing?

One of the great things about my role is that there are no typical days. I can move from focusing on soccer to axe throwing to hockey easily over the course of a few hours. Oftentimes our role here at the CVB is that of a connector. There are many aspects of an event that need to come together in order for it to be a success, so we often are connecting the right event director, volunteer group, venue, hotel, vendor, etc. to put the event puzzle together. Abby McDaniel, our Sports Marketing Manager, does the majority of work with local sports organizations and our area hotels, while I work more with state, regional, national, and international events. Some bigger roles in my job include working on grants and funding for events, attending national tradeshows and convincing event directors to bring new events to the Fox Cities, and overseeing venue development, like the Community First Champion Center.

### How important is sports tourism to the Fox Valley?

In 2025 alone, 264 sporting events brought visitors to the Fox Cities and those visitors spent over \$14 million in area businesses. That's \$14 million coming out of the pockets of people who normally wouldn't be spending money in the Fox Cities. They leave that money behind and help business owners and their employees. Beyond the business side of things, sports is such an important piece of the culture of our community. From pro to college to high school to youth, playing, watching, and supporting our teams is what this community does so well. I have had the good fortune of traveling the country for the past 16 years seeing venues and

events and talking with people who work in the world of sports and I can say without a doubt, the Fox Cities is one of the best sports communities in the country.

### What are some of the biggest / weirdest sporting events you've helped bring to the area?

Our venues and host organizations in the Fox Cities help us to be a really strong host of events for youth team sports. It's now pretty common for us to have weekends with youth basketball tournaments with 100+ teams or youth soccer tournaments with 200+ teams thanks to having great venues and great local hosts. But sometimes the less mainstream events get more notoriety. We hosted the World Axe and Knife Throwing Championships in 2022 and 2025 and we will host that event again in 2027 and 2029. The championships are shown on the ESPN family of networks and we welcome about 400 throwers from around the country and the globe to Appleton for that weekend. We just hosted the Wisconsin Foolsball Championships for the eighth consecutive year. That event sees about 200 players of all levels compete for cash prizes and championship awards. Whether it is robotics, cribbage, billiards, cornhole, or any other competition, we love to host all events in the Fox Cities!

### How would you describe the current state of sports in the Fox Valley?

Sports, specifically youth sports, are changing at a rapid pace, but our sports organizations, venues, coaches, referees, and administrators in the Fox Cities do a great job to keep our sports scene very strong. We have offerings for all levels of play in most every sport you can think of, so no matter your age or skill level, there are opportunities for everyone.



## SPRING SPORTS WORD SEARCH

Puzzle on page 18

— Fox Cities —  
**SPORTS**

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### Where do you see the biggest opportunities for growth in the Fox Valley sports scene over the next few years?

With such a strong sports-focused community it's difficult for many to find available time to practice the sport they love. If we can expand our sporting venue inventory in the coming years, it will unlock doors for more residents to train, practice, and compete in their favorite sports while also expanding opportunities to host more and bigger sporting events. I think the expansion or improvement of existing venues or the building of new venues needs to be a collaborative community-wide effort, but has the potential to have incredible impact.

### What's been the most rewarding part of your work so far, and what keeps you excited about the future of sports in this region?

I love the benefits that come along with hosting sporting events. Local non-profits who host events and local businesses see an infusion of cash. Community members get to participate in high-level events and are still able to sleep in their own beds at night. Local hosts are proud of pulling off a great event for their community. Every event is a small victory for us. Beyond the impact of events, I am really excited for what the future holds in terms of venue development in the Fox Cities. The exponential growth in participation and economic impact that will be seen if we can work together to increase our competition spaces is a huge motivator for me.

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

We always want to work with more people who are passionate about hosting any sort of competition in the Fox Cities. Please reach out to [mtenhaken@foxcities.org](mailto:mtenhaken@foxcities.org) if you would like to have a conversation! ■

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# Paddling Together: The Power and Promise of the Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club

BY AMY ROLPH

Dragon boat racing is one of the fastest-growing water sports in the United States—and for good reason. It offers something rare in today's athletic world: a sport where success isn't defined by individual stardom, but by complete unity.

The Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, is bringing that experience to Northeast Wisconsin in a powerful way. This club offers a unique opportunity where you can get a full-body workout that is mentally engaging, surrounded by nature.



Dragon boating is a team paddling sport with deep cultural roots and a modern competitive edge. A standard dragon boat stretches 41.5 feet long and carries 20 paddlers, a drummer at the front, and a steersperson at the back. What makes the sport truly special isn't the size of the boat—it's the synchronization of the team. In most sports, standout athletes carry the spotlight. In dragon boating, the opposite is true. The magic happens when every paddler moves as one. When timing, rhythm, and effort align perfectly, the boat lifts and glides across the water in a way that feels almost effortless. That shared moment—when the boat gets “on plane”—is what hooks people for life.

Rod Halbleib, who is president and coach of the newly formed club, brings more than 20 years of experience in the dragon boat world. Long before the club existed, Rod saw the potential for building something special in Northeast Wisconsin—not just a team, but a community.

About 15 years ago, Rod met Amy Otte, now vice president of the club, at the Oshkosh Dragon Boat Festival. At the time, Amy was new to the sport—but after just one race, she was hooked. When the Oshkosh festival returned in 2023, their shared passion brought Amy and Rod back into conversation, this time with a bigger idea in mind. What started as a simple connection quickly grew into a vision to introduce dragon boating to the Fox Valley and create an opportunity for people of all ages and backgrounds to be part of something truly unique and powerful.

As the vision grew, so did the commitment. The club officially moved from idea to reality in early 2025, with momentum building through monthly meetings, community outreach, and early fundraising efforts. A major turning point came when the decision was made to secure a boat, knowing that true growth would happen once people could see and experience the sport firsthand. The club acquired its boat, held a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and

launched a founding membership drive in September 2025. The boat was on the water for about a month before being placed into winter storage. That short but powerful debut confirmed what the founders already believed—the excitement and potential for dragon boating in the Fox Valley was real. From that moment forward, the Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club was fully set in motion.

In less than seven months the club has grown to more than 60 members and continues to expand even before its inaugural on-the-water season. The paddling season runs from mid-May through mid-October, and excitement is building as launch day approaches. While the off-season temporarily paused time on the water, it did not slow the energy of the club. During the winter months the club had a holiday potluck and two fundraisers, shared in team-building activities, and participated in community outreach by serving a meal at the Day by Day Warming Shelter.

“We can feel the energy building every single week,” says Rod. “To see this vision come to life, to watch people discover the sport for the first time—it's incredibly exciting. This is just the beginning of something really special for our community.”

As the club grows, the focus is on building three core teams:

- a youth team ages 13–18 (can be 12 if turning 13 in this calendar year),
- a breast cancer survivor (BCS) team, and
- a competitive mixed adult team.

Dragon boating attracts a wide variety of people. Some come from athletic backgrounds looking for a new challenge. Others are new to sports and are drawn by the supportive environment. Many are seeking connection, community, and a sense of belonging.

The youth program is designed to give students ages 13–18 more than just a sport: It builds lifelong skills that carry far beyond the water. In this 12-week program youth athletes gain teamwork and leadership skills in a true full-team environment where everyone matters equally. They build confidence and self-discipline through structured training and measurable progress. They develop physical fitness and endurance through a low-impact, full-body workout suitable for all fitness levels. They strengthen mental resilience and focus, learning how to stay calm and coordinated under pressure. They gain community connection and purpose by being part of something larger than themselves. In addition, youth participants can earn community service hours through club events, festivals, outreach programs, and community engagement activities. In a world where many sports emphasize individual performance, dragon boating teaches youth how powerful they can be when they succeed together.

For breast cancer survivors, the sport offers something even deeper. Groundbreaking research by Dr. Don McKenzie in 1995 challenged long-held beliefs and demonstrated that dragon boating provides not only physical benefits—including improved strength, mobility, and a reduced risk of lymphedema—but also powerful mental and emotional healing. At a time when many survivors were told to limit upper body activity, this research opened the door to reclaiming strength and confidence.

Beyond the physical gains, dragon boating creates a space where survivors are surrounded by others who truly understand their journey. There is an unspoken bond in the boat—a shared resilience, a shared courage, and a shared determination to move forward. The rhythm of paddling together becomes symbolic of something greater: rebuilding, reclaiming, and redefining life after cancer.

For many BCS paddlers, this is where the shift happens—from simply surviving to truly thriving. Confidence is rebuilt. Strength is rediscovered. Joy returns in a new and meaningful way. What keeps people coming back isn't just the workout; it's the connection, the support, and the powerful reminder that they are not alone.

Club practices are designed to be welcoming, structured, and energizing. A typical session includes 30 minutes on land for warm-up, gear check, and technique, followed by 60 minutes on the water building rhythm, timing, and endurance. Practices will primarily take place at The Landings on the Wolf in Winneconne, with additional outings to promote the sport across the region.

This season includes two planned races—in Minocqua on August 15 and Oshkosh on August 29—with long-term goals of sending athletes to national and international competition, expanding youth development, and strengthening community partnerships. There are many ways to get involved—joining a team, attending a Try It session, volunteering, becoming a corporate sponsor, hosting a corporate team-building workshop, or simply cheering the team on. The club is committed to ensuring financial barriers never prevent participation.

One common question is “how will everyone in your club fit in the boat”? The answer is simple: We grow into it together. As membership increases, the club will offer separate practice times for each team to ensure everyone has a meaningful experience on the water. When demand exceeds capacity, the plan is to explore adding another boat.

Where the sport truly comes alive is at festivals. Festivals bring a different kind of energy, with teams racing in short, high-intensity heats surrounded by cheering crowds and an electric atmosphere. One of the most powerful and emotional experiences in dragon boating comes during festival recognition of breast cancer survivor paddlers. These moments go far beyond competition. As BCS teams approach the dock or just finish a race, it is common for other teams to stop, stand, and honor them. Paddles are raised overhead, forming a tunnel—often called a paddle arch—creating a passage of respect as the survivors move through.

There are cheers, tears, and a deep sense of reverence. These are not just athletes stepping into a boat—these are individuals who

have faced one of life's greatest challenges and chosen to come back stronger, together. For many paddlers, both on and off BCS teams, it is one of the most unforgettable moments of the entire event.

For the survivors themselves, it is a moment of recognition—not for what they have lost, but for what they have overcome. It is a celebration of strength, resilience, and life. And for everyone witnessing it, it serves as a powerful reminder of why this sport is so much more than racing.

As a nonprofit 501(c)(3), the Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club is deeply grateful for the local businesses and organizations that have supported its launch and early growth. Current sponsors and supporters include Stoneridge Piggly Wiggly, Pickle & Bags Oshkosh, Fox River Brewing Company, Omro Pharmacy, Link Computing Solutions, Fortifi Bank, American Legion Giles-Luce Post 364, Fire Fitness, and The Landings on the Wolf, which has generously provided dock space and support for on-the-water development. Every sponsorship directly supports access to the sport, equipment, program development, youth programming, and the mission of making dragon boating available to everyone.

The club is also grateful to health care professionals and organizations across Northeast Wisconsin who are helping share the benefits of dragon boating, especially as a unique survivorship sport for breast cancer survivors.

The Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club will host a free “Try It” Day on June 6 at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. at The Landings on the Wolf in Winneconne. No experience is necessary. All equipment is provided. Participants will likely get wet—and have a blast doing it! Participants under 18 must have a parent or guardian sign a waiver form. Spots are limited and pre-registration is encouraged. Scan the QR code to sign up for the Try It Day.



To stay connected and follow the journey, follow us on Facebook at Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club. For questions or additional information, email [foxvalleydragonboatclub@gmail.com](mailto:foxvalleydragonboatclub@gmail.com).

Even before its first full season, the Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club has become something special. It is a place where strangers become teammates, teammates become friends, and individuals become part of something powerful. It is about connection, resilience, and moving forward—together. With the growth of its youth, competitive, and breast cancer survivor teams, the Fox Valley Dragon Boat Club is not just building a program: It is beginning to create a lasting legacy for generations to come. ■



# Pickleball Kingdom Launches “Next Gen” Program to Pioneer High School Pickleball in Wisconsin

SUBMITTED BY PICKLEBALL KINGDOM APPLETON

Pickleball Kingdom Appleton is taking a major step toward the future of youth sports with the launch of its **Next Generation Competitive Identification and League Program**, designed specifically for athletes ages 13–19.

The initiative is more than just a league—it’s a structured pathway aimed at developing junior players through competitive play, verified ratings, and team-based competition. Participants will establish official ratings through the widely recognized DUPR, while competing in organized tournaments and a nine-week summer league.

“This is about building something bigger than a program,” said Russ Crane, business development manager at Pickleball Kingdom Appleton. “We’re laying the foundation for pickleball to become a legitimate junior varsity and varsity sport across Wisconsin.”



The program begins in May with two competitive events, including an individual mixer and a team-based championship tournament featuring bracketed play. From there, players enter a structured summer league where rankings, performance tracking, and competitive development take center stage.

At the conclusion of league play, the top six male and six female athletes will be selected to represent Pickleball Kingdom Appleton in statewide team competition—marking one of the first organized junior pickleball team initiatives in the region.

With pickleball continuing to be the fastest-growing sport in the country, programs like Next Gen are positioning Wisconsin at the forefront of youth development in the game.

Registration is now open, with limited spots available. ■

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# LEARN AND PLAY PICKLEBALL DAY

PHOTOS BY DALE VER VOORT

The first annual Learn and Play Pickleball Day, put on by *Fox Cities Sports* magazine, Centerline Athletics, and Pickleball Kingdom, was a great success! More than 100 people came out to Pickleball Kingdom in Appleton to learn how to play the fastest-growing sport in America.

Representatives from Network Health, North Shore Foot and Ankle, Stretch Zone, and Schubbe Resch Chiropractic & Physical Therapy were on hand to talk about injury prevention and recovery, while Centerline Athletics and Prolite were there with amazing pickleball apparel and products. And let’s not forget the food! Bowlicious Eats, Kickin Ash BBQ, and Locally Sauced rolled up with their food trucks and kept everyone from going hungry after their time on the courts. ■



# Outdoors

WITH GREG SEUBERT

## 'Hunting' for That Perfect Story

First off, let's get one thing straight. I'm not a hunter, I've never been a hunter, and I have no plans ever to be a hunter.

However, I have a greater appreciation for the sport after spending an afternoon last November with a childhood friend as he bowhunted for white-tailed deer in Marinette County.

Kevin Hamann and I met as kindergarten students at Grant Elementary School in Marshfield more than 50 years ago before attending St. John School and Columbus High School together. We lost touch with each other after high school and reconnected at our 40th high school reunion in 2021.

By that time, I had spent more than 35 years in the newspaper industry, including the last 25 as sports editor of the Waupaca County Post, while Hamann was about to retire as Oconto County's administrator, a job he held for almost 25 years.

Since the reunion, we've fished together on High Falls Flowage near Crivitz and on Lake Kristine near Saxeville.

Tagging along on a hunting trip never crossed my mind until he brought it up while we were making plans to meet for lunch.

I have no interest in hunting myself, but I've probably interviewed close to 100 hunters over the years. Two of my most recent interviews were with women from Wautoma and Waupaca who harvested their first black bear and each bear tipped the scale at more than 500 pounds.

I've also interviewed deer, turkey, and waterfowl hunters over the years, as well as someone from the lola area who has hunted in Africa several times and has a mounted giraffe and several other animals in his living room.

Hamann and I headed out on his late wife's family's property, more than 700 acres of prime deer habitat, a mix of farmland and woods that gives up several deer each year.

"I'm pretty much deer, but my brothers-in-law and nephews, they go turkey hunting," he said.

Hamann didn't start bowhunting until 2024.

"I retired and I have plenty of time to do it now," he said. "I use a crossbow instead of a regular bow. With my back surgeries, I can't draw a regular bow back. I'm still learning with the crossbow and trying to figure out what to do and what not to do. My brother-in-law Frank kind of showed me the ropes and I watch videos online. It's still a very dangerous weapon."

Bowhunting is very different from hunting with a gun, Hamann said, as we watched for deer while sitting in a stand built from trees on the property.



Kevin Hamann examines his crossbow while sitting in a deer stand in Marinette County in November 2025. He had never hunted until he married his late wife, Sheila, and has spent almost 30 years hunting with her family members. Greg Seubert Photo

"You load an arrow once and try to get it loaded again before the deer leaves," he said.

"I'm still a rookie, but maybe someone with a lot of experience can load it quick. You might be able to do it within 10 or 15 seconds, but not me."

Hamann admitted his first year of bowhunting in 2024 wasn't much to write home about.

"I didn't get any shots off and saw only a few deer," he said. "I only hunted three or four times. I bought it, went out, and tried to figure out what I was doing and how to use it."

Hamann uses a target to practice with his crossbow on the property.

"You put it out at about 20 yards, shoot, dial things in, and figure out what you need to do," he said. "I probably did a lot more target practice and getting to know the crossbow last year before I even went out. This year, I was target practicing for a few days. The first two days, I didn't see a thing and said, 'Oh boy, I don't know about this.' Then there were deer and I saw quite a few in a couple of weeks."

A typical bowhunting day for Hamann includes arriving at the tree stand by 3 p.m.

"I hunted a few times in the morning," he said. "I saw a few deer, but not as many as I see in the afternoon. I'll hunt for a couple of hours and usually try to stay for 10 or 15 minutes after shooting hours because you don't want to spook a deer if they see you coming from your stand. I had that happen the other day. I started talking loud, they snorted and left. Did they know where I came from? Hopefully, no."

Hamann had a chance earlier this season, but ended up missing a deer and said it was his inexperience with his crossbow that made the difference.

"I shot at the deer and I hit the tree in front of the deer," he said. "I was probably 5 inches off and that's way off. I was only 35 yards away. You should be able to hit a deer pretty good at 35 yards. For me, 35 or 40 (yards) is as far as I want to go. Guys that have bowhunted a long time, they're going to shoot from 60, maybe even longer. Not me."

Hamann expects to become a better bowhunter with more experience under his belt.

"The older I get, the worse my eyesight is," he said. "I just turned 63 a couple of weeks ago. The older you get, you don't want to sit out there a long time. Sitting out there for 2, 2-1/2 hours is about the most I want to be out there."

Hamann said he feels fortunate to be able to hunt on land that his in-laws' families have owned and hunted for years.

"There are five families that own it," he said. "It's pretty much hunting land. We've talked about what will happen in the future and it's going to stay in the family for many years."

"There are 16 nieces and nephews, and my two kids are now part owners. It went from Sheila to them and they have 10% of it. Most of the nieces and nephews live in the area and they hunt the land."

"The woods make up most of it, but there are a lot of nice hills and three or four ponds," he said. "Part of it borders a creek and there are probably 150 acres of farmland that's either corn or alfalfa. There are a lot of deer here, plus once in awhile, you'll see a coyote, bobcats, bear, wolves."

Hamann never hunted until he met Sheila's family.

"They're all hunters," he said. "I probably didn't start gun hunting until I was 35."

"Bowhunting has been nice because it's nice outside and I enjoy sitting out there. My massage therapist calls it forest bathing. You sit out in the woods and listen. Peace and quiet. No cell phone. Nobody else bothering me." ■



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. He joined the Waupaca County Post prior to the start of the 1996-97 school year and eventually covered sports teams from Waupaca, lola-Scandinavia, Weyauwega-Fremont, Little Wolf (Manawa), Amherst, Wild Rose, Almond-Bancroft, Stevens Point, New London, Clintonville and Hortonville high schools.



## THIS MONTH IN SPORTS HISTORY

**May 1, 1920** Longest MLB game by innings - Brooklyn Robins tie the Boston Braves, 1-1, in 26 innings

**May 2, 1970** Diane Crump (21) is the first woman jockey at the Kentucky Derby

**May 4, 1984** Dave Kingman's fly ball never comes down (stuck in Metrodome ceiling)

**May 5, 1904** Cy Young pitches the first perfect game in "modern" baseball as the Boston Americans beat Philadelphia Athletics, 3-0

**May 6, 1997** NHL Hartford Whalers become Carolina Hurricanes

**May 7, 1945** Branch Rickey announces formation of the US Negro Baseball League

**May 8, 1954** First shot-put throw over 60 feet (18.29 meters), by American Parry O'Brien

**May 10, 1967** Hank Aaron hits his only inside the park homerun off of Phillies' Jim Bunning, in Philadelphia

**May 11, 1980** MLB Philadelphia Phillies Pete Rose, 39, steals second, third, and home in the same inning

**May 13, 1888** DeWolf Hopper first recites the comedic baseball poem "Casey at the Bat"

**May 15, 1941** New York Yankees Joe DiMaggio starts 56-game hitting streak

**May 16, 1975** Muhammad Ali TKOs Ron Lyle in 11 rounds for Heavyweight Boxing title

**May 17, 1939** First televised baseball game is broadcast on NBC, with Princeton University defeating Columbia University 2-1

**May 19, 1935** NFL adopts an annual college draft to begin in 1936

**May 20, 1960** Baseball game in Milwaukee postponed due to dense fog

**May 22, 1938** Dodgers announce contracts to install lights at Ebbets Field

**May 23, 2018** NFL owners approve new NFL national anthem policy whereby players are required to stand if they choose to be on the field for pre-game presentations

**May 25, 1935** Legendary American athlete Jesse Owens equals or breaks four world records in 45 minutes at a Big Ten meet at Ferry Field in Ann Arbor, Michigan

**May 27, 1968** George Halas retires from coaching, finishing with 318 regular-season wins and 6 NFL titles

**May 28, 1962** Wide World of Sports with Chris Schenkel premieres on CBS radio

**May 29, 1980** Larry Bird beats out Magic Johnson for NBA rookie of the year

**May 30, 1942** Satchel Paige pitches 5 innings to defeat Dizzy Dean All-Stars 8-1

**May 31, 1859** Philadelphia A's organize to play "town ball", which became baseball 20 years later



Action from the semi-final game of the Fox Valley Broomball Tournament held at the Tri-County Ice Arena on Sunday, March 29.

*“Ultimately, it’s a sense of camaraderie and friendship with local people that is core to my journeys.” ■*

~ Tim Cope

# PARTING SHOTS

Photo by Dale Ver Voort

