

# TROJAN PLAYBOOK

DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS MAGAZINE



TROJANS  
DAKOTA STATE®

## CONTRIBUTORS

### **DSU Marketing & Communications**

*Andrew Sogn, Chief Marketing Officer*

*Jane Utecht, Strategic Communications Coordinator*

*Jen Burris, Strategic Communications Coordinator*

*Nick Huntimer '05, Sports Information Director*

*Andrea Tanner, Senior Graphic Designer*

*Jena Martin '05, Production Center Coordinator*

*Aiden DeBoer, Athletics Multimedia Coordinator*

### **Photo Contributors**

*DSU Marketing & Communications*

*First PREMIER Bank/PREMIER Bankcard*

*DSU Sports Information*

### **On the Cover**

*Trojan fans celebrate Trojan Nights. Photo courtesy of First PREMIER Bank and PREMIER Bankcard.*

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*Send information and address updates to: [advancement@dsu.edu](mailto:advancement@dsu.edu) or DSU Alumni Office, 820 N Washington Ave, Madison SD 57042*

*Dakota State University in Madison, South Dakota offers undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs through its Colleges of Arts & Sciences, The Beacom College of Computer & Cyber Sciences, College of Business & Information Systems, and College of Education & Human Performance.*





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# A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

## WHAT'S THE TROJAN PLAYBOOK?

Greetings, alumni and friends of Dakota State University.

You may be looking at this magazine, and asking yourself, "What's the Trojan Playbook?"

*It is the first example of bold steps we are taking with our university magazines. We plan to publish three unique magazines each year, featuring a distinct size, content, and format to help set them apart.*

You are familiar with the traditional university magazine, and the Dakota State Magazine will continue to be created each fall, featuring an overview of events and accomplishments taking place with our campus.

Each spring we will publish this Trojan Playbook to feature Dakota State athletics. In the summer, we will publish a "year-in-review" magazine. We call this "The DSU Edge" because it will capture all the cutting-edge, high-level accomplishments that have taken place throughout the academic year.

This planned schedule provides us with an opportunity to showcase the distinctive people, programs, and purpose of Dakota State University across all facets of our mission.

With this spring's Playbook, we will highlight the changes in Dakota State's athletics that make this department stand out. There have been numerous developments with Trojan athletics over the last year or so, and this magazine looks at the new facilities and our plans for additional growth in the Beacom PREMIER Complex.

But the most distinctive part of our athletics department is its people, so in this first edition, we offer an overview of the experiences of our student-athletes. We will share what drew them to DSU, the motivation that drives them to succeed, and the friendships they will take away from their time as Trojans. You'll be inspired by the stories that demonstrate the personal impact of every athletic achievement, every performance breakthrough, and their academic milestones.

Success stories are nothing new to Dakota State student-athletes. There have been many impactful legacies over the years, but with the dynamic changes in the future of the facilities and programs, it may be that equally impressive stories are ready to rise on the horizon and will add to the legacy that is Trojan Athletics.

I hope reading about our players and game plan in this Trojan Playbook inspires you and motivates you to embrace the changes ahead for Trojan athletics! And watch for The DSU Edge coming this summer!

Warmly,



Dr. José-Marie Griffiths  
President, Dakota State University



# LETTER FROM THE ATHLETICS DIRECTOR

Dear Fans of Dakota State University,

I am excited to welcome you to this new magazine to read about the incredible year we have had at Dakota State University! We have been growing, and these edge-of-the-seat developments reflect our commitment to excellence both academically and athletically.

Our athletics programs are expanding, with new facilities and enhanced training resources for our student-athletes. The addition of the Brian Kern Family Stadium in the Beacom PREMIER Complex is set to provide our teams with state-of-the-art equipment, and our new partnerships will further elevate DSU's presence on the regional and national stage. These upgrades are a direct result of your support, and we can't wait to share these new experiences with you!

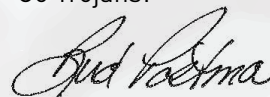
This past year was an exciting one with these new facilities; however, we are not finished. Fundraising efforts are ongoing to continue DSU's growth with facilities both in the athletic and academic worlds to truly make DSU the place to be. Whether you're an aspiring athlete or looking to stay active while having fun, DSU provides a space for all students to engage in sports and fitness.

Our student-athletes continue to excel both academically and athletically, embodying the dedication and hard work we value so deeply. Their performances and accomplishments inspire us all, and we are committed to fostering an environment where everyone can thrive.

*As we continue to celebrate these exciting changes, I encourage you to join us at the games, cheer on your favorite players or your peers, and be a part of the Trojan family's success. Together, we are building a strong future—one where our students and teams shine.*

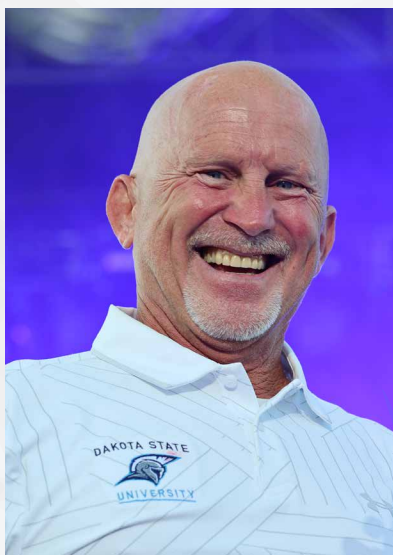
Thank you for your continued support, and here's to more unforgettable years at DSU!

Go Trojans!



Bud Postma

Athletics Director  
Dakota State University





# FIRST GAMES ON BLANKLEY FIELD

The famous line “If you build it, they will come,” originally applied to baseball, but it applies to football as well.

Dakota State’s new football stadium, named for the Brian Kern family, was completed last August. It has reengaged numerous fans and inspired new audiences to experience the many amenities of the stadium while watching games on Blankley Field.

And what an experience it’s been for the players, the coaching staff, and the fans.

“Playing on the new field has been an incredible experience for my teammates and I,” said Tyce Ortman, senior running back from Canistota, South Dakota “The atmosphere in the new complex is electrifying. Playing in this type of environment makes every moment on the field more exciting and memorable.”

Head Coach Josh Anderson sees advantages to practices, too.

“Practices have been far more efficient when we do not have to worry about weather, uneven ground, or the ability to complete drills without the possibility of injury outside of the actual contact of the game.”

The facility – that includes upgraded locker rooms, new weight room and training room along with the new field with artificial turf – also helps with bringing new student-athletes to Dakota State, Anderson said.

“Our recruiting interest has been far greater than ever before, which allows us to be far more selective in filling our needs with quality student-athletes,” he said.

Retention has also been far greater, he added, which “creates a brighter future when the athletes we have developed stick around from year to year. It also takes less time to fill our depth needs moving forward each off-season.”

Fans also feel the positive benefits of this new complex, which was built with \$41 million in private funding from numerous. Just over 30 families and organizations provided over 99% of the funding, including Miles and Lisa Beacom, T. Denny Sanford, the Brian Kern family, Shirley Blankley, Sanford Health, Madison Regional Health System, Heartland Energy, City of Madison, Madison School District, Dairy Queen of Madison, and Mustang Seeds.

Chris Kreul, executive vice president and chief technology officer of First Bank & Trust, attended the facility’s opening concert on August 27 and knows the real legacy of this facility will come in future days.

“Facilities that allow for a positive experience create a differentiating factor for student journeys,” he said. “The new complex adds to a strong overall platform being built out at Dakota State University, and for me, it grants additional strength to the individuals who tirelessly work for Dakota State.”

“The new facility significantly enhances the legacy we are building,” Kreul said.

These future opportunities will benefit the surrounding area as well as Dakota State. Anderson said “I honestly cannot think of one thing where our new facilities have not benefited our entire athletics department, as well as our local communities, other than in a positive manner.”

“The City of Madison and local businesses will all see a positive economic impact from this wonderful addition to our community,” said Adam Shaw, Madison City Commissioner.

A community housing development being built north of the complex demonstrates how the facility is already impacting the Madison community.

Beyond its role in enhancing athletics offerings for all ages, the Beacom PREMIER Complex will also become a gathering place for the community. As a full-service facility available for rent, “it has the potential to host a variety of local events, bringing together families, alumni, and supporters to celebrate sports and community pride,” Shaw stated.

Fellow alumnus Miles Beacom agrees.

“People want to be part of the continued success of Dakota State,” said Beacom, who is a generous donor to the facility, and CEO of First PREMIER Bank and PREMIER Bankcard.

“My wife Lisa and I are proud to be a part of this legacy, and I hope other alumni come back and see what was built, and that inspires them to get involved in future projects.”

Anderson said that this facility with its legacy of community support is a huge advantage for the student-athletes.

“It is such a great feeling coming back after a road game to a home that lights up our soul, feels like a warm and welcoming home,” he said, and “feels like it is all worth our time and effort when we feel the appreciation from the university, our athletics department, the donors, and the city of Madison.”

He said, “we are extremely grateful and have a big smile on our face as we move forward at Dakota State University.”



Coach Josh Anderson joins Shirley Blankley on the field named for her late husband, former coach George Blankley.



THE  
HEXAGON

# SEEING DOUBLE

Kate Van Rooyen and Reagan Van Rooyen are both exercise science majors who play volleyball at Dakota State.

They are also identical twin sisters, and are used to being called by the wrong name. "But here at DSU," Reagan began, "everybody has gotten to know us and know us apart," Kate finished.

It's actually quite common for the team to have family members on the roster.

"Our volleyball team has had several pairs of siblings over the years," said Reagan, like the Groft sisters, Peyton and Madalyn, and Hailey and Macey Wathen, which these twins agree is a good thing.

"If you do have a chance to play with a sibling, you should do it, because it gives you one person to rely on, to support you, and who will be there for you," Reagan said. However, family is not the only support system they have found at DSU.

"We've really found our group of people through volleyball," said Kate, including other athletes and members of the Madison community, Reagan added.

"It's an experience you should take if you have the opportunity to play in college," Kate said.

The twins weren't sure they wanted to continue playing volleyball after their high school career, but when an assistant coach invited them to watch a Dakota State scrimmage in Sioux City, they started to consider DSU.

"It was a good option for us because we wanted a smaller campus where we can get to know other people," said Reagan.

"And we wanted to go to college together, whether we were playing or not," Kate added. An added bonus is it's not too far from their home in Dakota Dunes, S.D.

In exercise science, "We like the hands-on classes, where it's not just a lecture," Reagan said. Kate said it's also nice that the program integrates technology so they learn to work with applications they'll use in their careers.

**They also appreciate the learning labs, currently located in the Kennedy Center, but potential new lab space in the building at the new Beacom PREMIER Complex presents an exciting opportunity for their education.**

They are also looking forward to playing in the new conference starting next fall. "This next year is going to be a new experience for all of us," Reagan said, and Kate added that it will be fun to compete against new teams in the Frontier Conference.





## A JOURNEY OF FIRSTS AND FASTBALLS

Cristhian Rodriguez grew up playing a lot of baseball, but he never expected to play at the college level.

Then when he was 10 years old, his family moved from Puerto Rico to Hayti, South Dakota, and he began the process of learning to read, write, and speak English. Cristhian spent the next three years learning these skills with the help of the school's English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor.



He learned from other ESL students and received help from an older student mentor who had also gone through the program. When he was a sophomore in high school, he was fluent enough in the language to take on the mentorship role for younger students.

Throughout this process, Cristhian made friends and discovered his passion for athletics.

"I found out I loved sports, so I tried doing every sport that I could," he said.

While he played a variety of sports, such as football, powerlifting, and track and field, baseball remained Cristhian's favorite.

He was inspired by his dad, grandpa, grandma, and great grandpa, who all played baseball in Puerto Rico. By his junior year of high school,

Cristhian realized he loved the sport enough to want to play four more years while attending college.

He participated in a few DSU baseball camps, and had great talks with the coaches, excited by the fact that DSU would be close to home. He's now part of the Trojan program, and knows that every team member wants to be there.

"In Puerto Rico, every kid who played baseball wanted to be there, but in high school in America, some wanted to be there, and others were expected to be there. So, being here now and having 20, 30, 40

players who actually want to be here made me glad I decided to come here and play baseball."

His favorite memory of DSU so far is pitching his first scrimmage game against the SDSU club last fall.

As a first-generation college student, he has decided to major in business management and marketing, in hopes that he can help his mom meet her goal of opening her own restaurant.

"I hope that I can use what I learn in college to help her achieve that in the future," Cristhian said.

***"...being here now and having 20, 30, 40 players who actually want to be here made me glad I decided to come here and play baseball."***



# BASKETBALL IS ABOUT MEMORIES AND MEETING PEOPLE

Brayden Pankonen fully admits he came to Dakota State for basketball.

“As a high school kid, I really didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life,” but he knew basketball needed to be part of it.

The sport has always been his go-to, stress-relieving activity, and when Coach Darren Tighe recruited him to play for DSU, it was not a hard decision. His parents are alumni who were student athletes, so it’s like a family tradition to attend DSU.

Brayden’s decision to major in business finance was not part of a family tradition. “That I owe to my roommate, Isaac Sumption,” who is also a finance major and fellow teammate. There are many options with a business career, and DSU provides him with the chance to gain expertise with technology. He is working on earning a technology minor, which “can help you in so many aspects of what you do.”

Brayden also admits it’s a challenge managing classes and athletics. “It’s 100% time-consuming, but if you like a sport, there’s no point in stopping,” he said. “It’s like anything in life – if you enjoy, you should do it a bit longer.” It’s worth it for the benefits of making memories and meeting new people, he said.

“I’m meeting friends I’ll spend the rest of my life with, and I will not take that for granted.”

He’s also making memories that will never be taken away, including one particular memory from December 2024.

Brayden’s dad, McCord, is with the Army National Guard, and was deployed overseas for 10 months in 2024. Though he missed a lot of games, he was able to surprise Brayden at a home game on December 14.

“It was pretty special to see Pops come back and see his face and hear his voice in person,” he said. “It warmed my heart.”

His dad and the rest of his family have been able to cheer him on through the rest of the season including successes like being named offensive basketball player of the week by the NSAA.

Brayden’s goal over the next couple of seasons is to win a conference tournament.

“We’ve beaten a Division II team so we know we can do it,” he said, “and I hope I can help the team win it.”



KELO News featured a story about Brayden Pankonen’s dad surprising him at a game in December.

## AUSTRALIAN BASKETBALL PLAYER FINDS SECOND FAMILY IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Australian basketball player Caitlin Dyer first learned of Dakota State during her recruiting process.

"One of the main pillars of the program is family, which was one of the reasons why I was so interested in joining the DSU women's basketball team," she said.

"The coaches are the reason I chose to continue my athletic career at DSU. They made me feel like they would become my second family, which was really important for my family and me as I would be across the world from them."

Basketball has always been an important, family-centered part of Caitlin's life. Her dad coached her since she was 7, and her older brother, Joel also played basketball in the United States, in Indiana.

"Being a part of a sports team at a college has been the best decision I have made as I am surrounded by motivated people just like me who all love the game of basketball," Caitlin said.

The sport has provided lots of positive memories of her time at Dakota State so far.

"I would have to say one of my favorites would be making it to the final four my freshman year," she said. "I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to play as a freshman, and being trusted by my coaches in big moments gave me the confidence I needed

to hit the winning shot in our elite eight game against Indiana Wesleyan."

As a student-athlete, Caitlin has appreciated that being involved with college athletics has improved her organization skills, which have helped her juggle classes, homework, film sessions, practices, and lifting sessions.

However, this year has been a bit different for Caitlin, a junior physical education major, as she has spent the year recovering after tearing her ACL during the final game of her sophomore season.

The injury, which caused her to redshirt this year while she rehabs her knee, has given her a new perspective, not only as a player, but also as a person.

"Going through my ACL recovery, I have learned to live in the moment. I have many options for what my future looks like, I just haven't decided which way to go yet," Caitlin said.

"I am currently studying physical education, so my future goal is to work with younger kids at schools and to coach."

Dyer expects to graduate in spring of 2026, but will have the option of playing a fifth year of basketball due to her ACL injury, so she is considering pursuing a master's degree at DSU as well.

*"Being a part of a sports team at a college has been the best decision I have made..."*



# RUNNING IS THE ANSWER

Big goals do not intimidate Taylor Myers.

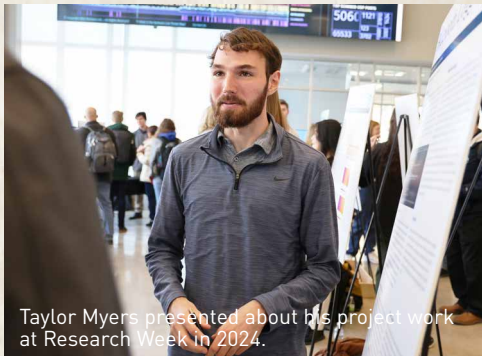
At Dakota State, he has taken on significant academic goals, completing a bachelor's degree in cyber operations in 2022, his cyber defense master's degree in 2024, and is now working on his Ph.D. in cyber defense.

A Department of Defense Cybersecurity Scholarship program led him to his current job as a civilian with the Cyber Protection Brigade, a part of Army Cyber Command at Fort Eisenhower, Georgia.

He also has lofty athletics goals. "My new running goal is to run one marathon in each of the 50 states," starting with the 2025 Boston Marathon.

Long distances have always been his favorite, and he competed at DSU all through his four and a half years at DSU. "Running is something that's not computers. It's a way to step away from what you do all day and relax."

It also works for problem-solving.



Taylor Myers presented about his project work at Research Week in 2024.

"There's often a time with a project when there's one thing you can't quite figure out. But if you step away and go for a run, an idea will just come to you."

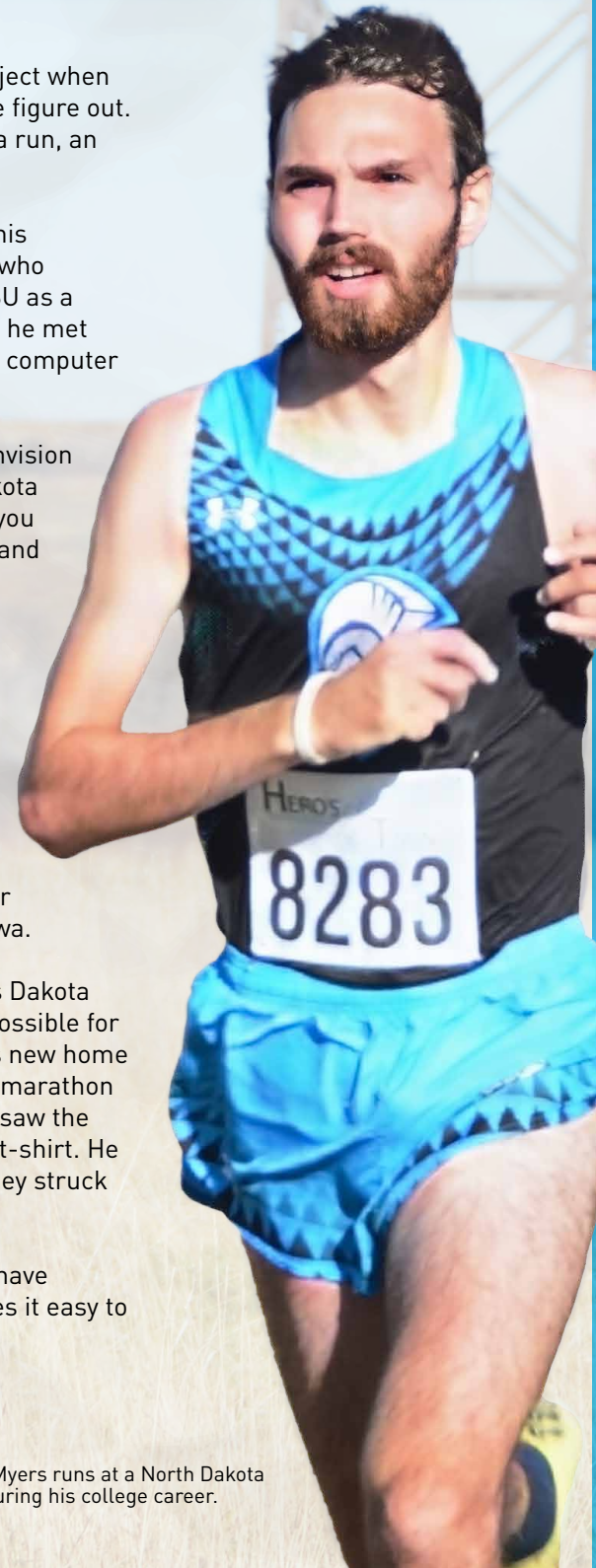
It was a high school teacher in his hometown of Estherville, Iowa, who encouraged Taylor to look at DSU as a college option. When he visited, he met Coach Anthony Drealan and the computer faculty and liked what he saw.

"You think of universities and envision 'big lectures,' but that's not Dakota State. Class sizes are small so you can get to know the professors and coaches."

Taylor is finishing his degree remotely while working from Georgia, which is another step in his college experience. "Living in a bigger area is a whole new world to me." For example, there's a Walmart across the street, and not 45 minutes away, like in Madison or his hometown of Estherville, Iowa.

His passion for running, and his Dakota State connection, has made it possible for him to get to know people in his new home area. He was running at a local marathon in Georgia, and another runner saw the "Dakota State" logo on Taylor's t-shirt. He knew where Madison was, so they struck up a conversation.

"You get to be with people who have similar interests, and that makes it easy to find lifelong friends."



Taylor Myers runs at a North Dakota meet during his college career.



## COACHES' IMPACT

Coach Anthony Drealan is a classic example of the stellar coaching staff at Dakota State.

During his 13+ years coaching, Drealan has guided Dakota State teams to multiple, consecutive national championships. Individually, almost two dozen cross country and track & field athletes, both men and women, have been named NAIA All-Americans, and others have won at the national level.

Coach Drealan's success has been noted by being named the NSAA Coach of the Year five times in the last several years in three sports -- men's cross country, men's indoor Track & Field, and men's outdoor track and field.

This is Drealan's last season at DSU, as his wife has been offered her dream job West River, so the family is moving this summer.

"My wife and sons and I are excited for the future but without a doubt we are saddened to leave Madison and DSU," Drealan said. "I'm indebted to DSU and will forever be a supporter."

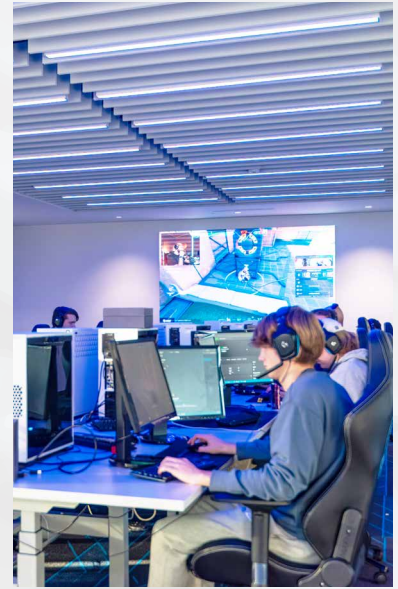
Coach David Moe is another example of an excellent coach, driven to succeed for the benefit of the team and athletes. This spring he was named the NSAA women's basketball coach of the year for the sixth year in a row.

The coaches also impact student-athletes' academic efforts, interpersonal skills, and character. The full list is long, but here are a few examples: Coach Darren Tighe makes sure players create a respectful relationship with their faculty by introducing themselves at the start of the semester. Coach Josh Anderson's football players are encouraged to give back to the community through public service activities like the annual Service Day. Coach Amy Veenhof's volleyball players assist with kids' activities at the annual DSU night for DownTown in MadTown.

These hard-working coaches are the driving force behind the success of the athletics programs at DSU.

"In my opinion, the people here are what make it special, and it is fundamentally tied to the overall success of the university. That is what I've appreciated most in my time here -- everyone is focused on student success, and I know that will continue," Drealan said.





# FRAMING THE PLAYBOOK

A picture is worth a thousand words, and these photos speak volumes about the exciting 2024-2025 athletics season, from the opening of the new Brian Kern Family Stadium at the Beacom PREMIER Complex, to the achievements of our student-athletes, and the constant support of our fans who are always [#LoyaltoBlue!](#)





## WOMEN'S SOCCER JOINING DSU ATHLETICS THIS FALL

Under the leadership of Head Soccer Coach Todd Stank, Dakota State University will add women's soccer to the athletics roster this fall.

The program will start in August with two scrimmages and 16 games scheduled for this fall. There are 13 players who have signed on to play and will add a few more players prior to August.

Transfer student Estefania Gonzalez was thrilled to learn that DSU was adding a soccer team. She chose to transfer to DSU from Kansas, where she was playing on a collegiate team, to save money.

A lifelong soccer player, she grew up playing soccer in Mexico before moving to Phoenix, Arizona in high school, where she played as well.

She is looking forward to joining a collegiate team again, while earning her degree in business management. Gonzalez will be a junior next year and play in the striker position.

"I'm just looking forward to having a team and working together," she said.

This is Stank's second time starting a brand-new program. "What I'm looking forward to most is just getting started," he said. "Getting started with a new program means the possibilities are endless and infinite."

### KEEP UP TO DATE ON THE LATEST SOCCER NEWS

Roster updates, and schedule at [dsuathletics.com/sports/womens-soccer](https://dsuathletics.com/sports/womens-soccer).

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**AUG 15**

The Trojan Women's Soccer Team is kicking off their first season this summer at the Beacom PREMIER Complex, and you won't want to miss the action!

*Friday, August 15, 2025*  
*Trojans vs. Gillette College*

The Trojan Women's Soccer Team is ready to make history, and we're thrilled to announce that 13 talented athletes have already signed to the roster, with more expected to join us soon! Mark your calendars, and support the team as they embark on their very first match! We can't wait to see you there!

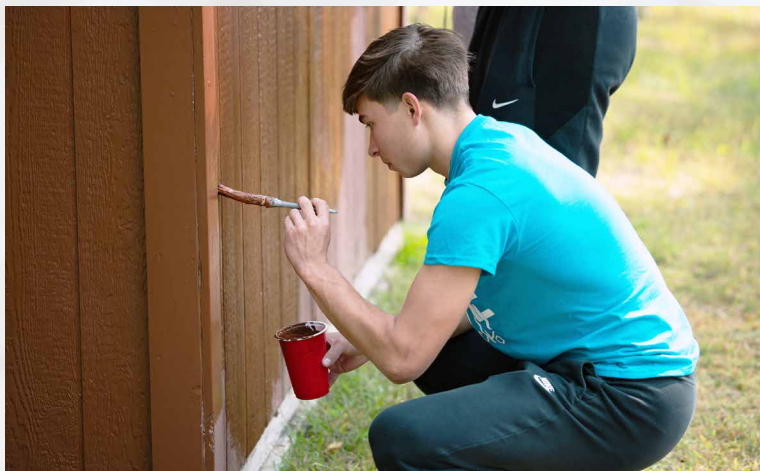
**GO TROJANS!**

**TROJANS**  
DAKOTA STATE

# CHAMPIONS OF CHARACTER



Athletes participate in Trojans Give Back Day (formerly Day of Service).



Dakota State are winners in the competition arena, in the classroom, and in their communities.

Proof of their good character is official, having been granted an NAIA's Champions of Character institution award winner for more than 10 consecutive years.

DSU was one of 209 member institutions named Champions of Character® Five-Star winners for the 2023-24 academic season, which was the second straight season that the Trojans earned the 'Silver' level of the Champions of Character initiative program. These recognitions continue with 2024-2025 teams being named to the program.

Institutions are measured on a demonstrated commitment to Champions of Character and earn points in character training, conduct in competition, academic focus, character recognition, and character promotion. The schools earn points based on exceptional student-athlete grade point averages and by having minimal to no ejections during competitions throughout the course of the academic year.

The NAIA Champions of Character Scorecard measures growth in training, promotion, conduct in competition and commitment in five key areas – integrity, respect, responsibility, sportsmanship, and servant leadership.

## NSAA Champions of Character 2024-2025:

Men's Cross Country: Caleb Saylor

Women's Cross Country: Lindsey Roth

Football: Braxton Lacher

Volleyball: Madalyn Groft

Women's Indoor Track & Field: Shakiera Gronenthal

Men's Indoor Track & Field: Houston Lunde

Women's Basketball: Kristine Biniek

Men's Basketball: Brayden Pankonen

## CYBER STUDIES & ESPORTS

A lifelong interest in the latest technology led Micah McRunnel to enroll at DSU as an online cyber operations student. As a full-time employee with a child on the way, Micah appreciates the opportunity to further his career and education online.

Micah's interest in technology also includes a passion for gaming and esports, so when his friend Brock, who also attends DSU, let him know about the esports team, he decided to get involved. He plays on and leads the DSU League of Legends team. Competing in esports benefits him in the classroom.

"I think being a student-athlete has really helped me with the online schoolwork," he said. "Making sure my grades are up to compete is a great motivator for me." Participating in the sport also allows Micah to connect with other students and build relationships, even as an online student. "This has been a really great opportunity to communicate and make some friends at DSU," Micah said.

"It builds a lot of camaraderie, as we practice several nights a week and are all working toward winning those championships." He has found that participating in collegiate esports has improved his communication skills.

"As a longtime player, I have a lot more information on the game than I can then bestow upon new players and help make them better at the game, which in turn improves the team as a whole," he said.

Micah's favorite part of being on the esports team is the competitive aspect. "Winning the Collegiate Champions League (CCL) Championship in back to-back semesters has to be my favorite DSU memory so far," he said. "It's really nice to travel and meet the teammates that you play with so often, and it helps out even more when you are able to win to meet the goal you've been working toward the whole semester."

Micah lives in Minnesota and expects to graduate in 2027.

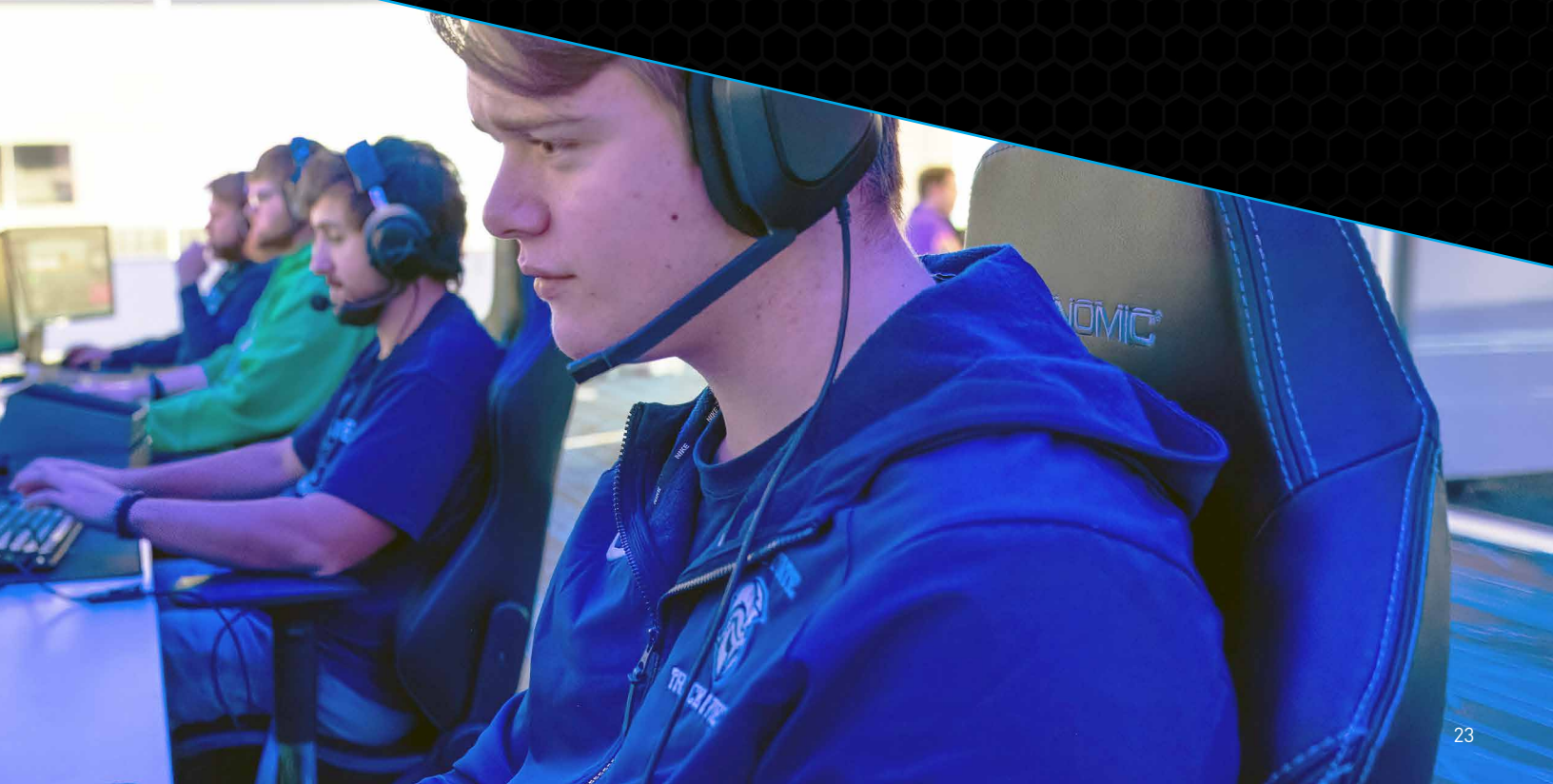
## ESPORTS ARENA

With the opening of the Beacom PREMIER Complex in August, Dakota State University's Esports team has a brand-new arena for the ever-growing athletics team.

With well over 100 athletes, the original esports space in the Trojan Center was quickly outgrown.

In the Beacom PREMIER Complex the esports arena has a much larger space with room for 40 to 50 stations and an enhanced set up, including a new direct-view LED display from Daktronics. The display measures approximately 7 feet high by 12 feet wide with a narrow pixel pitch of 1.8 millimeters allowing for high resolution imagery during esports events.

"I can't stress enough how important this space is to our program," said Head Esports Coach Andy Roland. "Just the initial idea of new facilities instilled so much passion in our community and will continue to provide incredible opportunities for years to come."





Cooper celebrates after a game on Blankley Field during the 2024 season, with his brother Carter, mom Rachel, and dad Johnny.

## FAMILY FOOTBALL LEGACY

Cooper Vincent is a Dakota State legacy student-athlete in football.

His dad, Johnny, played football here, and so did his great-grandmother. Yes – his great-grandmother.

Because most male students were still in the military shortly after World War II ended, the female students of then Eastern State Teachers College formed two teams and played the homecoming game in the fall of 1945.

He recalls her talking about putting on her make-up before the game. (The game ended early in a 7-7 tie between the “Townies” and the “Dormies.”)

While growing up in Gray’s Lake, Ill., Cooper heard many DSU stories from his parents, who met on campus. When the Champion Scholarship and child of alumni tuition rate made DSU so affordable, it was the best college option for him. When he had the opportunity to play football, that was even better.

"I've gone from playing on the grass field to a soccer field to the new turf in a new stadium. I still see the facility and think, 'Wow, look at this.'"

He also looks forward to watching the team build on this success of the 2024 season. "It's been really exciting and I'd like to see what the future holds for them."

Cooper is set to graduate this spring with finance and marketing degrees, and a digital accounting minor. He's also been involved as a Trojan Ambassador and an officer in the Future Business Leaders of America Club. After graduation, he will be heading to graduate school in Wisconsin at Carthage College, where he'll study for his master's degree in sports management, and also wrestle.

The skills he's learned here, particularly time management, will help him in graduate school and in his career. He remembers struggling in his first semester, but DSU resources helped him find success in the classroom as well as on the field, through team study tables, the tutoring center, and helpful professors.

This is part of the small town feel at Dakota State.

"DSU is big enough meet new people but small enough to get to know people," he said. "It has the right balance."



Cooper's great-grandmother (#48, Laurel Caldwell) played in the 1945 homecoming game.



1. Bellevue University, Bellevue NE
2. Valley City State University, Valley City, ND
3. Mayville State University, Mayville, ND
4. Bismarck State College, Bismarck, ND
5. Dickinson State University, Dickinson, ND
6. Rocky Mountain College, Billings, MT
7. Montana State University Northern, Havre, MT
8. University of Providence, Great Falls, MT
9. Carroll College, Helena, MT
10. Montana Tech, Butte, MT
11. University of Montana Western, Dillon, MT
12. Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, OR
13. College of Idaho, Caldwell, ID
14. Southern Oregon University, Ashland, OR
15. Simpson University, Redding, CA
16. Arizona Christian University, Glendale, AZ



This fall, Dakota State University Athletics will begin competing in the Frontier Conference. DSU and several other institutions from the North Star Athletic Association (NSAA) joined Frontier after the NSAA announced it was going to disband at the end of the 2024-2025 season.

Frontier is affiliated with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and has member institutions located in Montana, Arizona, Idaho, and Oregon. They sponsor athletic competitions in men's and women's basketball, men's and women's cross country, men's football, men's and women's indoor and outdoor track and field, and women's volleyball.

# 3.25



average cumulative GPA of student-athletes

## ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

Dakota State University (DSU) student athletes are enrolled across various levels of degree programs, ranging from associate to doctorate.

While some of the most common majors among these athletes include exercise science and physical education, there is a significant representation in other fields as well. Business, cyber operations, and computer science are also popular choices, highlighting the diverse academic interests of DSU's athletic community.

*\*All data are from the academic year 2024-2025.*

### Athletics Enrollment by College

The Beacom College of Computer & Cyber Sciences

147

31.3%

College of Arts & Sciences

90

19.1%

College of Business & Information Systems

110

23.4%

College of Education & Human Performance

123

26.2%


MALE | FEMALE

360


97

### Popular Majors for DSU Student-Athletes

 **101**  
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN  
EXERCISE SCIENCE

 **43**  
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN  
PHYSICAL EDUCATION

**113**   
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN  
CYBER OPERATIONS

**45**   
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN  
COMPUTER SCIENCE

**116**   
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN  
BUSINESS





## DSU IS BURGOS' SECOND FAMILY

A couple of weeks before Analia Burgos began her freshman year at DSU, her mom was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"My family means the world to me, so I wanted to take that year off, but my mom told me I was coming here to prove something to myself and make my parents proud," she recalled.

Leaving her home in Severance, Colorado, was hard, but once she was here at Dakota State, Analia discovered a second

family, other students from all around the country she would not have met if she'd stayed in home.

"Cancer is something that can take a turn for worst, and seeing what people have to go through is hard, but having friends here helped me the most," she said.

"I've met friends here that I'll have for the rest of my life," she said, friends who supported her and her mom. "For games, I'd wear pink bows for my mom, and my friends would do it with me."

That supportive, small-community atmosphere is what Analia loves about DSU. Besides the friendships, "I love the small classes, the one-on-one opportunities with professors, and the community."

***"I LOVE THE SMALL CLASSES, THE ONE-ON-ONE OPPORTUNITIES WITH PROFESSORS, AND THE COMMUNITY."***

In addition to softball and exercise science classes, she participates in Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and has a work study job at the Trojan Zone, so she admits she's "pretty busy."

She finds balance by keeping organized through checklists, and resources the university provides, such as softball study halls to keep up with homework so student-athletes can stay successful in the classroom and on the field.

These organizational skills will help her throughout life, especially as she moves toward her dream job of opening her own physical therapy practice.

Her mom is now cancer-free, and while it was definitely hard not being closer to her mom during treatment, Analia said, "I do not regret coming here, and I would do again," because her friends helped her get through it.

Her mom's example helped too.

"Seeing her be able to fight through it, when even on her worst days she had a smile, helped me get through."



Analia Burgos' mom is now cancer-free.



Analia Burgos teammates all wore pink hair ribbons to support her mom through cancer treatment.





“ HOW LUCKY AM I TO BE A STUDENT-ATHLETE AT A SCHOOL LIKE THIS? ”

## PERSISTENCE + COLLABORATION

When senior Bella Maxwell first toured Dakota State, she was struck by the close-knit, supportive, family atmosphere she saw between coaches, student-athletes, and support staff.

“From the first day of practice, I’ve felt like I belonged, and I’ve never regretted my decision,” she said. “Seeing how DSU supports student athletes in balancing academics and athletics, I knew this was the perfect place to grow as a student and an athlete.”





A lifelong member of the Madison community, Bella originally chose to attend DSU to be a thrower on the track & field team, not knowing what career path she would want to follow.

Her coach suggested cyber operations, and she quickly fell in love with the program. “Just like in athletics, solving security challenges requires persistence and collaboration,” she said.

As she learned more, she was excited to find Dakota State has prestigious accreditations and designations, being one of only 10 institutions nationwide to hold all three National Security Agency Center of Academic Excellence designations for cybersecurity education, cyber operations, and research.

“How lucky am I to be a student-athlete at a school like this?” Bella queried.

This also inspired her to become involved on campus, so she could help make an impact beyond the classroom.

“I’m actively involved with CybHER®, a non-profit organization promoting STEM education,” she said. “I manage their social

media and help organize outreach programs.”

She also serves as the CybHER Club vice president, helping organize outreach events for women currently in the cybersecurity field, to support women in STEM.

Additionally, she enjoys competing in cybersecurity and Capture the Flag (CTF) competitions. Her most unique experience as a DSU student has been participating in the CyberForce Competition for the Department of Energy.

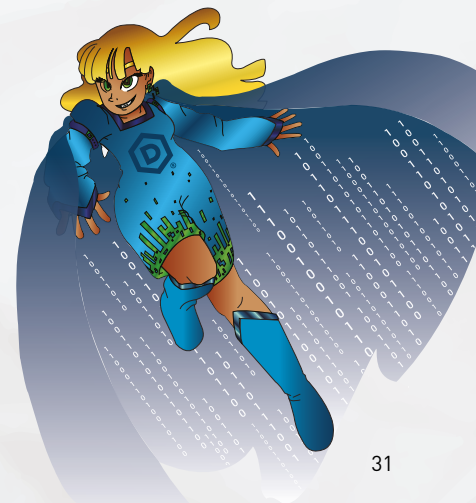
“Representing DSU on such a prestigious platform and solving real-world cybersecurity scenarios was a transformative experience,” she said.

Bella has had success with multiple competition teams, last fall earning first place in the Cybersports LTD CTF Summit in Minneapolis on an all-female team. “I get to compete on them with my friends and learn more about cybersecurity in the process, so it’s a win-win.”

She’s also found success in her throwing career, posting a personal record 52 feet, 11 inches to win the weight throw title for the Trojans at the Mount Marty (South Dakota) Last Chance meeting in February.

Bella will graduate in fall 2025 with a degree in cyber operations with minors in digital forensics and network security administration.

She plans to continue her education by pursuing her master’s degree in cyber defense at DSU.



## MEET THE NEW STAFF



**BRAXTON LACHER**

*Alumni Relations Officer*

### What year did you graduate from DSU and what degree did you earn?

I graduated in 2024 with a Bachelor of Science in integrated biology and a minor in chemistry.

### What is your role within Institutional Advancement?

I currently serve as the Alumni Relations Officer for the university and Alumni Association. In this role, I am privileged to oversee the connection and engagement of our vibrant alumni community, which exceeds 16,000 members. My responsibilities include creating and nurturing meaningful relationships, organizing events, and fostering a sense of unity among DSU alumni. My goal is to build a network

that celebrates our shared love for DSU and the strong community we continue to cultivate.

### What's your favorite DSU memory?

One of my most cherished DSU memories was winning the AG Bowl in my final season at the new Brian Kern Family Stadium. It was a moment of triumph that I had the privilege of celebrating with my teammates and family, a testament to the strength of teamwork and dedication.

### What are you looking forward to most in your new role?

I am truly excited about the opportunity to forge new relationships and reconnect with alumni who haven't been back to campus in some time. My goal is to rekindle their fond memories of DSU, while also learning from and celebrating the impact they've made in the world. It's an exciting time to share in the growth of both our alumni and the university.

### Why should people support DSU and its students?

People should support DSU because it is a place that feels like home. This institution

is extraordinary, and right here in Madison, S.D., we are accomplishing incredible things. DSU is a tight-knit community that is rising to new heights, and now is the perfect time to give back and help fuel its continued success.

### How does it feel to work for your alma mater?

It's truly surreal to work at my alma mater. It feels like just yesterday I was walking through campus as a student, and now, as a staff member, I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of DSU's ongoing growth. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this institution that has shaped me in so many ways.

### What surprised you most to learn about the foundation since joining the staff?

What has surprised me the most since joining the staff is the overwhelming support and warmth I've received. The DSU community has welcomed me with open arms, and it's inspiring to be surrounded by such a collaborative and caring group of individuals.



**KERSTIN BOSN**

*Assistant Director of Finance & Administration*

### What year did you graduate from DSU and what degree did you earn?

I graduated in December 2013 with a degree in business management.

### What is your role within Institutional Advancement?

I serve as the Assistant Director of Finance & Administration. I help manage the foundation budget, financial information, and help plan for the future.

### What's your favorite DSU memory?

My favorite memory is singing the national anthem at many DSU basketball games.

### What are you looking forward to most in your new role?

I look forward to the daily opportunity to expand my knowledge in finance, administration, and leadership, which will prepare me for even greater responsibilities in the future.

### Why should people support DSU and its students?

By supporting DSU and the students, you encourage the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and creators to achieve their dreams and contribute to society.

### How does it feel to work for your alma mater?

Working at DSU for Institutional Advancement honestly feels like home and gives me a sense of belonging.

### What surprised you most to learn about the foundation since joining the staff?

I'm impressed with how hard the staff here works to treat each athletic sport and all academic fundraising to be as equal as possible, which gives everyone an equal opportunity to grow and become great.



## TROJAN MONOGRAM CLUB

*Honoring past athletes, while celebrating and supporting current athletes*

Two retired DSU alumni have expanded their support for Dakota State athletes far beyond just attending games.

Carlos Cornay (BS '82) and Mark Thomas (BS '85) developed the Trojan Monogram Club, a group of DSU alumni who support Dakota State's athletics programs. This is now part of the Trojan Athletics Club. The duo started driving to Madison together for games.

At one game, they bought hot dogs for DSU players, as well as athletes on the opposing team (Dakota Wesleyan) and fans. That inspired them to reconnect with more alumni, and encourage others to attend games, meets, and tailgates.

The mission of the club is to support university events, foster alumni engagement, and provide varsity letters to athletes who never received them, Mark explained.

Carlos and Mark learned that the university stopped awarding varsity letters to athletes at some point and that women athletes never received letters at all.

"So, our goal is when you join, if you never got your letter, we're going to buy you a letter," Mark explained.

Since starting the club, well over 100 alumni have joined, and Mark and Carlos are excited to see that number grow even larger.

The group is excited to partner with the DSU Foundation and the

Institutional Advancement team to reconnect with former athletes while building involvement with younger alumni through events.

When members get together to attend DSU athletics events, there is often a strong sense of nostalgia, with attendees sharing stories of their athletics experiences when they attended Dakota State.

While athletes and athletics programs are the focus of the Trojan Monogram Club, membership is open to anyone who supports DSU.

Alumni and supporters interested in learning more about the Trojan Monogram Club can contact Braxton Lacher, alumni relations officer.

# NEXT STEPS AT THE COMPLEX

The Beacom PREMIER Complex opening in August 2024 was something of a dream come true for Trojans athletics fans and student-athletes. But this was only phase one of an even more dynamic vision for Trojan athletics.

Inspired by the visionary leadership of President Griffiths, DSU alumnus Miles Beacom '81, former athletics director Jeff Dittman, and athletics director Bud Postma, the facility will continue to motivate alumni and friends to dream as we complete the project with:

- » Locker rooms for baseball, softball, women's soccer, and officials
- » Coaches' offices
- » Three additional suites for game viewing
- » Large classroom and biomechanics lab

The philanthropic goal for these opportunities is \$3 million, said Mike McKelvey, vice president for Institutional Advancement, and will help elevate all athletics programs at DSU.

## Dome/Indoor Practice Facility

Another phase would add a permanent dome practice facility. To begin construction, \$5 million in additional current gifts need to be secured. This will be a game changer for DSU Athletics by providing space for baseball, football, track & field, softball, and soccer programs

The dome also has the potential to serve as a hub for youth sports and adult leagues, fostering athletic growth in the

region, inspiring the next generation of athletes, and becoming an economic engine for Madison.

## Beyond the Dome — the Dream Continues

The dream for the complex extends to baseball and softball stadiums, and a basketball/volleyball arena that will rival the best in NAIA. These future facilities will provide student-athletes with the tools and environment to thrive, ensuring that they have the very best resources available to compete at the highest levels.

The fundraising goal for these facilities is over \$60 million so involvement of alumni, fans, and stakeholders will be pivotal.

"We are relying on the continued support of our champions to help turn this bold vision into a reality," McKelvey said.

"The Beacom PREMIER Complex is a symbol of ambition and the bold future of our university, built upon the unwavering support of champions like our donors and stakeholders," said McKelvey.

"Together, we can create a legacy that will inspire future generations of DSU athletes, students, and community members."

The entire Beacom PREMIER Complex requires 100% private funding to bring this vision to life. Gifts of all levels are welcome and necessary to fulfill the dream of transforming DSU's athletics programs and the broader community.

For more information, contact Mike McKelvey at [503-828-5705 \(cell\)](tel:503-828-5705) or [mike.mckelvey@dsu.edu](mailto:mike.mckelvey@dsu.edu).





## SCHOLARSHIPS ARE NO. 1 FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

NAIA athletes across the country are widely recognized as some of the best undergraduate students, both on and off the field. At Dakota State University, our student-athletes exemplify this distinction.

DSU continues a rich tradition of academic excellence, where student-athletes are not only recognized by the conference but also nationally for their exceptional accomplishments in the classroom. This academic success complements their achievements on the fields, hardwood courts, tracks, and gaming consoles, demonstrating the true spirit of a student-athlete.

Dakota State is able to recruit these extraordinary young adults through a unique combination of academic and athletics scholarships, made possible through the generosity of champions of DSU. Stakeholder support plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our student-athletes, enabling them to excel in their studies while competing at the highest levels of collegiate sports.

As the university continues to foster the growth of our student-athletes, alumni and fans can consider contributing to the DSU Scholarship Fund, for academics, athletics, or a combination of both. Contributions directly impact the lives of the next generation of DSU champions, empowering them to reach their full potential and carry forward the rich legacy of success that DSU student-athletes have established over the years.

Please consider visiting with your professional financial advisor(s) about the benefits of utilizing appreciated securities, real estate, or commodities. Also, if you are 70.5 years or older, consider visiting with your professional advisor(s) about the advantages of utilizing your IRA to support scholarships.

**For more information, contact Mike McKelvey, vice president for Institutional Advancement and CEO of the DSU Foundation, at 503-828-5705 (cell) or [mike.mckelvey@dsu.edu](mailto:mike.mckelvey@dsu.edu).**





**JOIN US ON THE ROAD TO ARIZONA!**

**Trojans vs. Arizona Christian  
Saturday, Sept. 20, 2025**

**Fan events taking place from  
Sept. 18 - Sept. 20. Blend  
camaraderie, competition, and  
sunshine!**

**TO SECURE YOUR SPOT CONTACT:**  
Braxton Lacher '24, Alumni Relations Officer  
Cell: 605-880-4925  
Email: [braxton.lacher@dsu.edu](mailto:braxton.lacher@dsu.edu)



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