

# H2P

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
ATHLETICS MAGAZINE  
WINTER 2021

## ALL-AMERICAN:

JONES AND WEAVER  
ADD TO THE PITT  
FOOTBALL TRADITION





A high-angle, wide shot of a large indoor arena filled with a massive crowd of people. The arena is dimly lit, with stage lights illuminating the performers on the floor. In the foreground, a large blue banner with white text is superimposed over the image. The background shows the arena's seating and the stage area with various equipment and performers.

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ATHLETICS MAGAZINE  
WINTER 2021

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## On the Cover:

Patrick Jones II (left), and Rashad Weaver add to the Pitt Football tradition. Story on page 24.

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS



Dear Pitt friends,

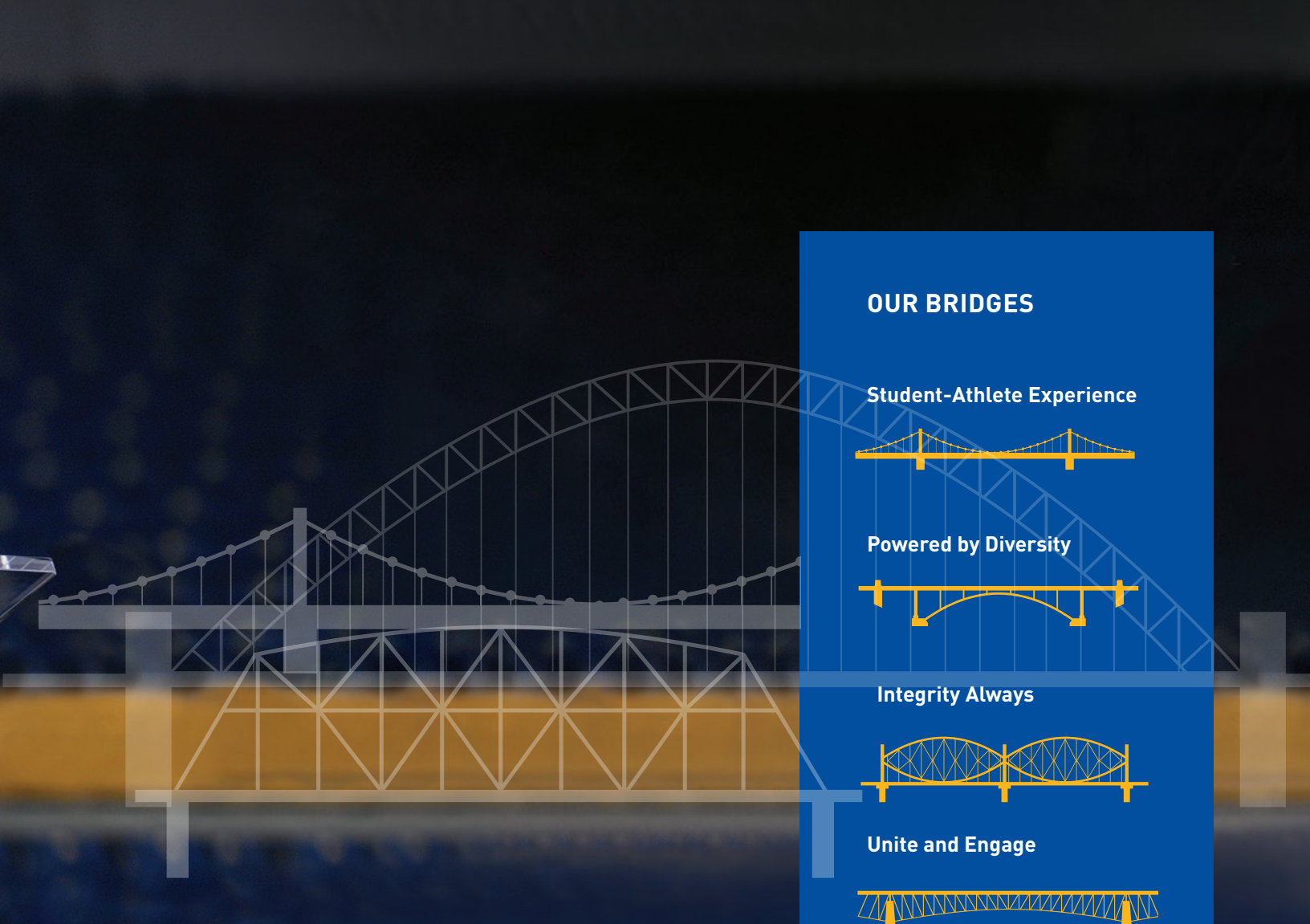
**W**elcome to the inaugural edition of our magazine, H2P. I hope you and your families are enjoying a promising start to 2021. It is incredible to note that we are coming up on nearly a year of Zooming, binge-watching and social distancing. While technology has made it easy for us to communicate, it doesn't replace seeing one another at a Pitt Athletics contest or having a conversation over a cup of coffee or—my personal preference—hot chocolate.

I appreciate that everyone is hungry for a more personal connection, and that is why I'm proud of our department's launch of H2P. This publication gives us another way to share our student-athletes' stories and provide insight into our department, coaches and staff. In particular, we are excited to share our student-athletes' successes and passions and the positive impact that athletics is having on their continued development at Pitt and beyond.

Recently, our staff discussed the idea of purpose as a driving force that energizes individuals, teams and organizations, and the winter break offered an opportunity to reflect and rediscover the "why" of what we do. Above the entrance to my office is a quote that reads, "The decisions we make every day impact the lives of other people's children." I hold these words from the former Ohio State director of athletics and my mentor, Andy Geiger, close to my heart and offer them here to bond the entire Pitt community under our shared mission. Our "why" is the student-athletes who choose to become Pitt Panthers, and our mission is ensuring that being at Pitt is one of the most extraordinary experiences in their life, and they are prepared to thrive in life after Pitt.

The decisions we make are guided by Our Bridges, which represent our core values. Our Bridges are fundamental in driving our vision for Pitt Athletics. In light of the social justice and racism





## OUR BRIDGES

### Student-Athlete Experience



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### Innovate and Create



### Champions Live Here



issues facing our country, we have added a new bridge called Powered by Diversity, which emphasizes the importance of diversity and embracing an environment that celebrates our differences.

The challenges will continue in 2021, but I am confident in our student-athletes, coaches and staff, whose resilience and adaptability have been key to navigating these uncertain times. I am especially grateful to you for your unwavering support and belief in what we do.

We hope that you will enjoy H2P. It showcases the very best of Pitt Athletics, and the stories within are unquestionably tied to your passion for Pitt and the tremendously impactful role you play in helping to provide our student-athletes with an extraordinary experience.

We wish you all the best in 2021.

Hail to Pitt!

Heather Lyke  
Director of Athletics



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE, THE McKAMISH WAY

Written by Tessa Sayers



**"We've been fortunate to be in the position that we are in, and you get more blessed by seeing the fruits of what you are doing for other people's lives."**

**—Dennis McKamish**

Dennis and Janet McKamish in front of the conference rooms at the Petersen Events Center named in their honor

**I**t has been 10 years since Dennis and Janet McKamish walked into the University of Pittsburgh women's basketball locker room to meet their first endowed scholarship recipient, Ashlee Anderson, yet they remember the moment as if it was yesterday. Anderson hugged them; thanked them for the opportunity; and jokingly told Janet, "You're going to be my mom now."

"Mr. and Mrs. McKamish were truly a blessing during my time at Pitt," says Anderson. "I am forever grateful for their generosity as their scholarship recipient. Their contributions to my college basketball career went beyond monetary value. The McKamishes' presence in my life was impactful because we spoke often, and they were always there if I needed them. A part of my success today is due to them, and for that I am thankful."

The McKamishes and their three daughters Maria, Melissa and Lindsey love sports, especially Pitt sports, but it is knowing that they are making a difference that inspires them.

"What touches my heart most, I would have to say, are the students and the student-athletes that you get to meet," says Janet. "You know that without sports, they

may never have had the opportunity to be where they are or get the education they are receiving, so I feel that generosity changes lives."

Over the years, the McKamish family has donated countless resources to the University of Pittsburgh, starting with the McKamish Family Endowed Scholarship to support student-athletes in 2009. Since then, the McKamishes have added an endowment to support scholarships for local students, and in 2017, along with Dennis' brother, David, they signed a multiyear commitment to support Pitt Athletics.

Most recently, Dennis and Janet made a significant commitment to the Victory Heights campaign, which is a series of state-of-the-art athletics projects that will provide Pitt student-athletes with national-caliber competition, training and sports performance facilities. In recognition of their support, the new conference rooms at the Petersen Events Center have been named in their honor.

The McKamishes also give their time to Pitt. Dennis is a member of the Champions Advisory Board, which was formed by Director of Athletics Heather Lyke in 2019 to advise, assist and provide feedback to her executive team on critical department initiatives. They are season ticket holders for football and men's and women's basketball and show their support all over the country, traveling on the annual Pitt Football Playbook trip.

The McKamishes have always been Panther fans. Even after Dennis' father, Harold, founded the family's company

**Over the years, the McKamish family has donated countless resources to the University of Pittsburgh, starting with the McKamish Family Endowed Scholarship to support student-athletes in 2009.**

# PANTHER CLUB



Janet has been a Pitt fan for as long as she can remember, and attending Pitt games with Dennis has always been part of their relationship. When they were in a position to give back, it made sense that Pitt, and its student-athletes, would be a top priority.

and money was tight, they made it a priority to keep their football season tickets. Dennis remembers going to the old Pitt Stadium with his father to cheer on Tony Dorsett and the 1976 national championship team.


“When [my father] started our business in 1975, he took a gamble because he didn’t have a lot to start,” says Dennis. “Even when things were tight and the company struggled, he would still buy his Pitt tickets, and from a company perspective, we just always stuck with supporting Pitt over the years.”

Janet has been a Pitt fan for as long as she can remember, and attending Pitt games with Dennis has always been part of their relationship. When they were in a position to give back, it made sense that Pitt, and its student-athletes, would be a top priority.



From left: Janet McKamish, Heather Lyke and Dennis McKamish

But the University of Pittsburgh is not the only place the McKamish family has made a significant impact. When Harold McKamish took a trip to Mexico more than 30 years ago and saw the conditions in which the children there were living, he was inspired to establish Caring Hearts Ministry. What started as an orphanage soon grew to be much more and now sponsors job training programs for young men and women.

Through their generosity, McKamish family members have provided many children with opportunities they may have otherwise been without. 



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# COMPLIANCE CORNER

The NCAA continues to closely monitor COVID-19, take proactive measures to mitigate the impact of the virus, and execute actions in response to regulations and policies impacted by COVID-19. Below are three important compliance changes.

## Incoming Freshman Student-Athlete NCAA Eligibility

Due to SAT/ACT cancellations resulting from COVID-19, the NCAA Eligibility Center made the determination to provide flexibility for students unable to take a test prior to enrollment in college. For incoming freshman student-athletes initially enrolling full-time at a Division I institution during 2021-22, they will not be required to take the SAT/ACT in order to be immediately eligible to receive athletics aid, practice and compete. The NCAA will continue to require incoming freshman student-athletes to present a minimum 2.3 GPA in 16 core-courses to be immediately eligible upon enrollment.

## Extension of Eligibility

Beginning in March 2020, the NCAA released guidance enabling institutions across the country to self-apply season-of-competition and extension of eligibility waivers for student-athletes. While there are different ins-and-outs for each respective sport, the net effect is all spring 2020, fall 2020, and/or winter 2020 sport student-athletes, regardless of year in school, may receive an additional year of athletic eligibility and all student-athletes who competed in fall/winter of 2020 may do so without using a season of competition. At Pitt specifically, the relief afforded 88 senior scholarship student-athletes the ability to return to school and experience a traditional final year of competition.

## COVID-19 Temporary Dead Period

In response to the pandemic, the NCAA enacted a temporary COVID-19 recruiting dead period for all Division I sports. During the temporary COVID-19 recruiting dead period, in-person contact, including on-campus visits, may not occur between Pitt coaches and prospective student-athletes. In addition to no in-person contacts, providing prospective student-athletes complimentary admissions to Pitt home events was deemed impermissible.





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# DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

Written by Tessa Sayers

**W**

hen an opposing basketball team would come to the University of Pittsburgh from 2005 to 2008, the men's basketball team had a saying: "Welcome to the Zoo. It's time to let the animals out."

That "Zoo" is the Oakland Zoo, the now well-known student cheering section that has become synonymous with Pitt men's basketball.

It started with Matt Cohen and nine of his friends showing up at the Fitzgerald Field House on Jan. 13, 2001, when Pitt upset number 15 Seton Hall 77-65 and launched what has now become one of the best traditions in collegiate basketball.

As former head coach Jamie Dixon would later tell prospective Oakland Zoo members, it all began with Cohen and his buddies storming the court following the win over Seton Hall.

The Oakland Zoo's name is a direct result of that game: According to legend, when the students stormed the court, someone said, "They look like a bunch of zoo animals out there."

The rest is history.



Since that game 20 years ago, Pitt's basketball program has seen some changes, from a new venue to four different head coaches, but if one thing has remained the same, it is the Oakland Zoo. The only difference when it comes to the Zoo is that instead of 10 friends, there are now hundreds of Pitt students who fill the stands to cheer Pitt on to victory.

A venue change only two years into trying to start a new student section would not be ideal for most schools. But the students, with backing from the University, took the idea and ran with it. The end result was the Oakland Zoo in prime position to fuel the atmosphere at the 12,508-seat Petersen Events Center.

"When you talk about the area right behind the teams down on the floor in the Pete, all the credit goes to the Pitt administration," former head coach Ben Howland says. "The administration had the vision to do that; it was brilliant. It really creates an atmosphere, and you saw a lot of other programs copy that. Pitt was on the cutting edge of doing that."

Despite its envious position courtside, the

A venue change only two years into trying to start a new student section would not be ideal for most schools. But the students, with backing from the University, took the idea and ran with it. The end result was the Oakland Zoo in prime position to fuel the atmosphere at the 12,508-seat Petersen Events Center.

Oakland Zoo has never stormed the court at the Petersen Events Center. When the Panthers play at home, they expect to win. There are no upsets. That is what makes the Zoo unique to Dave Jedlicka, who was a member

of the Zoo from 2001 to 2008 and its president from 2004 to 2008.

"I think we are one of the few [Atlantic Coast Conference] teams in the last 20 years that hasn't had a court storming. And I just think that shows the level of success we've had for such a long time," says Jedlicka. "The fact [is] that when Pitt wins, you don't have to worry about the students rushing the court or anything. That, to me, I think, is the biggest tradition—just expecting to win."

Even after camping out in the Petersen Events Center lobby for more than a day in advance of Pitt's upset over the number-one-ranked University of Connecticut, 70-60, on March 7, 2009, the students stayed in their



ESPN college hoops icon Dick Vitale declared the Oakland Zoo to be "one of the greatest spectacles in all of college basketball."







seats to celebrate the win.

And while one tradition was upheld, another was born.

During the 2008-09 season, some students had started ripping up their copies of the Zoo News, the newspaper that students hold up to show their disinterest when the opposing team is being announced.

The only problem was that at this particular game, students started to rip up the newspaper prior to UConn's roster being announced. Not wanting to lose any more papers, Jedlicka ran and found blue and gold paper for students to throw in the air following the Panthers' first basket of the game. The next year, it really took off. Now the Oakland Zoo members wait until the starting lineups are announced to rip their papers into pieces for the confetti toss after Pitt makes its first basket.

"I love the thing that they do when you score your first basket, when they throw the paper in the air," current head coach Jeff Capel says.

"I've always loved that, even before I got here. Since I've been here, sometimes it's taken too long for that to happen for us, but I do love that."

The newspapers also serve another purpose: giving Zoo members some information to use to heckle the opposing team. The newspapers were introduced around the same time that Facebook started to gain popularity. In an effort to make the most of it, Jedlicka started using the site to search for information on the opposing team's players and look for fun facts that could be used against them. From their favorite singers to embarrassing nicknames, the Zoo leaders leave no stone unturned.

"We usually start with Twitter," says current Oakland Zoo President Hope Gast. "It is super easy to filter tweets and look for certain words and time ranges, so we usually look back to 2011-15, since we find the most embarrassing stuff from those years. From there, we just look for any funny tweets or pictures



we can find and include them in a 'cheat sheet.' One of my favorite cheat sheet facts we found was a Duquesne [University] player's sound cloud. We really wanted to play one of his songs in the arena, but I don't think we ever did. It was fun to yell at him about how bad his sound cloud was, though."

The first animal costume to appear was a student dressed as a gorilla for every game. Now the Zoo "animals" have become a staple, to the delight of the men's basketball staff and their families.

The effort the Oakland Zoo members put into game days does not go unnoticed. Former Pitt standout and current assistant director of basketball operations Ronald Ramon got chills every time he walked out right before tip-off. Just hearing the Zoo cheer, he knew it was game time.

While scoring a buzzer beater to beat West Virginia University on Feb. 7, 2008, ranks as one of his most memorable moments playing in front of the Zoo, Ramon appreciated their creativity throughout his playing days.

"They had a poster and they had my face with Ray Romano," says Ramon. "So I thought that was pretty funny."

Posters and costumes have been a key part of the Zoo since it was formed. In the beginning, there were people who would show up wearing basketball hoop and net hats along with hot pink track suits. One student even wore Mickey Mouse gloves so that his mother could pick him out more easily on TV.

The first animal costume to appear was a student dressed as a gorilla for every game. Now the Zoo "animals" have become a staple, to the delight of the men's basketball staff and their families.

"I have younger kids, and when they would watch the game with me, the replay, they would go crazy when the television cameras would flash up into the stands and there would be a giraffe or a bear or some other kind of animal up there cheering during the game," says Brian Regan, director of basketball operations. "The students are always very creative, and they bring a lot to the table."

As much as the Oakland Zoo brings to the court, it also has made sure to take that same energy to its community service efforts. As a group, the Oakland Zoo has participated in the Pitt Dance Marathon, sponsored a family through the Salvation Army at Christmas and even hosted a charity

three-on-three basketball tournament.

"If you look historically at this program, the Oakland Zoo has been one of the best student sections in all of college athletics, especially in basketball," says Capel. "They have a passion about their team, their university. They have a passion and a pride that is really special, and it creates a bond with the guys who wear the uniform."





## REMEMBERING THE ZOO: AARON GRAY



Pitt men's basketball has enjoyed one of the top home court advantages in the NCAA since the opening of the Petersen Events Center in 2002. The Panthers rank in the top 10 in the NCAA in home wins since the 2002-03 season, with former Pitt standout Aaron Gray crediting much of that success to the impact of the Oakland Zoo.

"Obviously, as Pitt players, we are biased, but we just felt like the energy, the enthusiasm, the wittiness, the ability to give us energy when we were down, when we needed that, it was just unmatched," says Gray. "In big games, both at home and on the road, we never felt like another team had a bigger advantage than we did."

Memories last a lifetime, and the one that continues to resonate the most with Gray is his final home game in front of the Oakland Zoo. He walked off the court after Pitt's 80-66 win over West Virginia and sat in the locker room, reliving the past four years and embracing his journey from a first-year student who did not see much playing time to a junior who earned Big East All-Conference and Big East Most Improved Player accolades to a senior season that included All-America honors

and a second-consecutive NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 appearance.

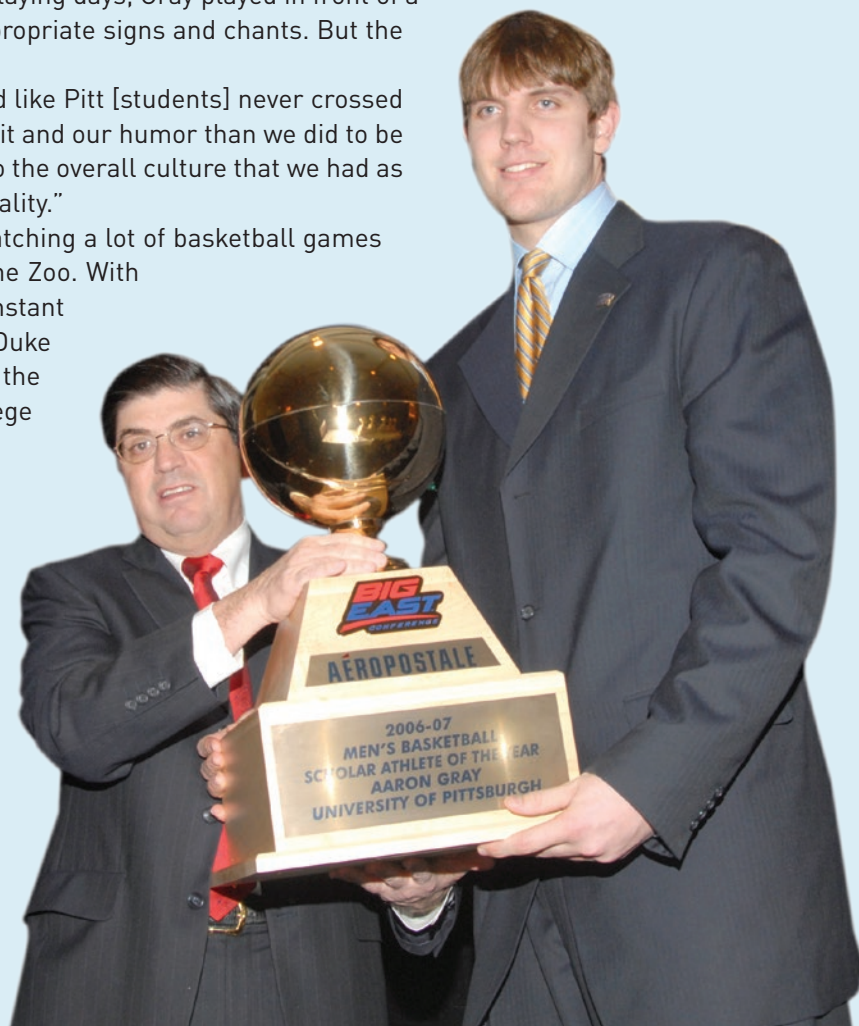
The day Gray saw his name appear on a sign in the Oakland Zoo was "huge" for him, with a "Gray All Day" sign ranking among his favorites. He also had his own personal cheering section when a group of students started wearing shirts reading "Big City," a nod to Oklahoma State University All-American and NBA first round draft pick Bryant "Big Country" Reeves.

While he appreciated the support the Oakland Zoo showed Pitt players, he also enjoyed what they did to get under opposing players' skins. In his playing days, Gray played in front of a lot of crowds that crossed the line with inappropriate signs and chants. But the Zoo never did that.

"I just always appreciated that it seemed like Pitt [students] never crossed that line," says Gray. "We used more of our wit and our humor than we did to be derogatory or antagonizing. I think it added to the overall culture that we had as the blue-collar, work hard, grind-it-out mentality."

To this day, Gray does not remember watching a lot of basketball games on TV where the crowd was as involved as the Zoo. With their close proximity to the court and their constant energy, he feels that the Oakland Zoo and Duke University's Cameron Crazies provide two of the biggest home court advantages in all of college basketball.

"I don't think people give the Oakland Zoo enough credit," says Gray. "They are organized, there are leaders, there are choreographed things that they do. I hope that they know that the players understand that and appreciate it. And I hope that they continue to get the recognition that they deserve." 📌





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## CHANGEMAKER

**R**aised in a military family, senior track and field student-athlete Monica McNeil lived in eight U.S. states before coming to Pennsylvania and attending the University of Pittsburgh. The many family relocations, while challenging, helped McNeil learn to adapt, relate to others and become self-confident.

That confidence has paid off at Pitt, where McNeil has balanced athletics and academics with a leadership role as the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee chair of diversity and inclusion.

McNeil's energy and passion for strengthening the support system for her peers make her a valuable bridge between Pitt student-athletes and the Department of Athletics administration. After the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020, she organized a town hall meeting of student-athletes and members of the administration to discuss how to move forward and do better. That meeting led to the creation of Panthers United, a collaborative effort among staff, coaches, administrators and student-athletes to promote an environment of inclusion through education, dialogue and the celebration of differences.

"We realized the importance of having a community and a strong support system," McNeil says. "With more than 500 student-athletes, there is no reason why anyone should have to feel like they are alone."

They formed affinity groups focused on bringing their peers together and providing a space to support one another. "These groups not only allow us to support and uplift our underrepresented student-athletes but also are another way to provide tools and resources and

**"We realized the importance of having a community and a strong support system," McNeil says. "With more than 500 student-athletes, there is no reason why anyone should have to feel like they are alone."**

help push for change," McNeil says.

McNeil, who also is a Panthers United board member, has joined other student-athletes in bringing about change by lending their voices to public service videos and participating in Panthers United initiatives that range from placing student-athletes on campus committees to represent the student-athlete community to providing education on voting and assisting with the registration process.


"We are part of a collective that is creating a precedent of unity throughout Pitt athletics that will last long after we graduate," says McNeil. "This is something we want ingrained in the culture and the framework. We created something that showed we would stand with each other and have each other's backs regardless of the identities one holds." 🌟



# PANTHERS UNITED







# PANTHERS TO PROS

After graduating from Pitt as a standout football player, Lousaka Polite went on to play nine seasons in the National Football League, achieving a dream relatively few student-athletes realize: going pro.

Written by Adam Reger

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Building the foundation for a successful career shouldn't be just a backup plan for student-athletes, says Lousaka Polite, assistant athletic director of the Varsity Letter Club and mentorship at the University of Pittsburgh.

He should know. After graduating from Pitt as a standout football player, he went on to play nine seasons in the National Football League, achieving a dream relatively few student-athletes realize: going pro.

Polite leveraged mentorships during his time in the NFL and earned an MBA once his football career ended. "But a lot of athletes don't plan for after that ball stops bouncing," he says.

Now, with Panthers to Pros, a first-of-its-kind mentoring program, Polite and his colleagues are helping current student-athletes to prepare for life after college. Launched in January 2018, the program pairs students with mentors from a wide network of community partners and so-called Forever Panthers—alumni who participated in athletics while at Pitt.

Once paired up, each mentor-mentee duo connects a few times a month. These connections can range from phone calls to site visits and shadowing experiences.

"It's very à la carte," says Polite.

Program staff suggest monthly themes to direct conversations, highlighting relevant topics like building a LinkedIn profile or honing interview skills.

"Athletes have [some of] the tools already—the discipline and attention to detail, the work ethic that is instilled in you as an athlete," says Polite. "We just want to highlight and strengthen areas that an individual needs help in."

Part of the Cathy & John Pelusi Family Life Skills Program, whose mission is to prepare student-athletes for success during college and afterward, Panthers to Pros has more than 100 matched mentor pairings.



Polite visits with track and field student-athlete Ade Jones-Roundtree during their monthly mentoring check-in meeting.

Many mentors are in Pittsburgh, though technology has made it possible to create long-distance matches. The emphasis is on finding the best possible fit with the student-athlete's career plans and goals.

Lailah Issac A&S '06, a sports medicine physician at Nova Southeastern University, is mentoring Olivia Miller, a gymnast majoring in rehabilitation science.

"I would've loved to have [had] this program while I was a student-athlete," says Issac, who was a member of the women's soccer team while at Pitt.

"Dr. Issac understands what a packed schedule looks like," says Miller. "She has helped me to figure out my best plan of action by sharing her own experiences."

For emergency medicine physician David Natali, a member of the swim team while at Pitt, mentoring is



Lailah Issac during her time as a Pitt athlete (above) and today (right)



a special way to support Pitt athletics. After working in emergency rooms across Southwestern Pennsylvania for 38 years, Natali now helps to manage ERs for Allegheny Health Network and is mentoring student Serena Buchwald, helping the junior diver as she prepares to apply to medical school.

"Doing emergency medicine at different places, you touch base with all sorts of people in different specialties," says Natali. "I'm there as a resource to help students make decisions as they figure out what they want to do with their lives."

While Polite made good use of his time in the NFL by seeking out mentors, he wishes he'd begun mapping out his post-NFL career earlier. "You're not just an athlete," he says. "If you don't address the elephant in the room—that you're not going to play forever—you're putting yourself behind the eight ball."





Pitt gymnast Olivia Miller

The program provides general education to student-athletes in their first year followed by a more personalized approach during the student-athlete's sophomore year. As students select majors and refine their career interests in their junior year, Panthers to Pros staff determine the best possible mentor for them.

A computer algorithm handled that process until a year or so ago, when Polite and his colleagues decided to go

“old school.” Now the team, which also includes Lisa Auld, John Pelusi and Michaela Burton, deliberates together to find the right mentor for each student-athlete.

Mentors and mentees are paired for a one-year period. Many pairs decide to stick together after that, but connecting with a new mentor can be a powerful way for a student-athlete to build their network.

Student-athletes rarely wait more than a week or so to be paired with an outstanding mentor, Polite says,

because of the tremendous support from former student-athletes (Forever Panthers) and other alumni.

“When we talk about ways to give back, it’s not all about money,” Polite says. “It’s about time, too. This is a great way to give back to Pitt and keep the Pitt community close.”

While not all student-athletes will go on to a career as a professional athlete, Polite says, “They already have the tools to go pro in something other than their sport.”



# H2P



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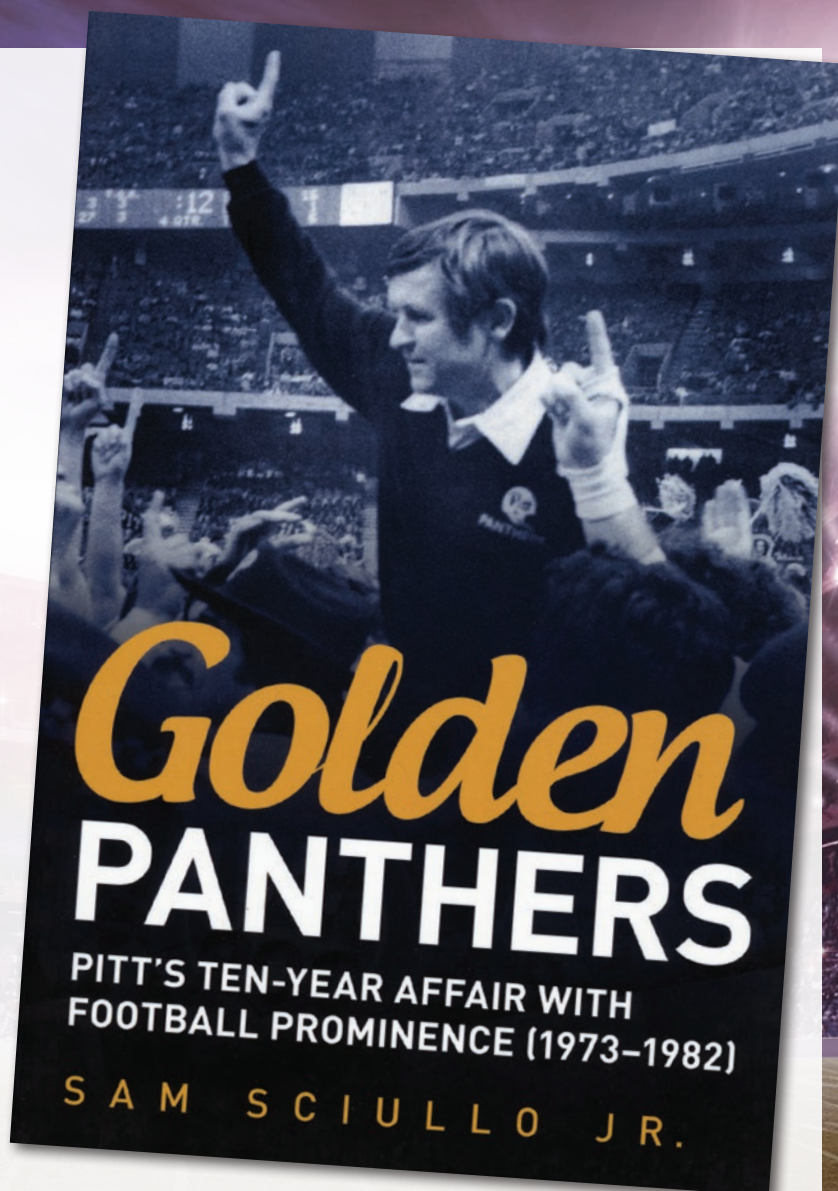
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An inside look at a remarkable period during Pitt's long football history. From 1973 through 1982, Pitt had one of the nation's most successful football programs, culminating with the 1976 national championship season featuring Heisman Trophy winner Tony Dorsett. From 1976 through 1982, no team in college football won more games than the University of Pittsburgh Panthers. This new book chronicles that memorable time period featuring comments from many of the key players, coaches and team officials who made it happen. Plus, a 16-page photo section.



"I don't think I've ever seen a team that won a national championship that had more complete balance. We had the complete arsenal in 1976."

— Coach Johnny Majors

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# ALL-AMERICAN:

## Jones and Weaver Add to the Pitt Football Tradition

Written by E.J. Borghetti

P

itt's Duratz Athletic Complex is part football practice facility and part shrine.

The structure nestled along the Monongahela River functions as the Panthers' football team headquarters. With the exception of game days, all team activities take place at the Duratz—workouts, meetings, training table, academic support. There's even a place to hang

out and play video games or Ping-Pong in the recently refurbished players' lounge.

Beyond those traditional applications, the building also serves as a showcase for Pitt football history.

Each day, players and coaches walk down a main hallway adorned with the images of the Panthers' first-team All-Americans. The display is intended to be educational and inspirational. These were the men who set the highest performance standards while wearing the blue and gold—call them forefathers of Pitt's tradition of gridiron excellence. The listing begins with center Robert Peck, who became the Panthers' first All-American in 1914. It goes on to include such iconic names as Jock Sutherland (a hard-nosed guard before his legendary coaching career), Marshall Goldberg, Joe Schmidt, Tony Dorsett, Dan Marino, Hugh Green, Jimbo Covert, Bill Fralic, Larry Fitzgerald, Aaron Donald and James Conner.

With the 2020 football season now concluded, that hallway display is due for an expansion. Prior to this season, Pitt players had earned 92 first-team All-America citations. Now two more names can be added to the list.



**D**efensive ends Rashad Weaver and Patrick Jones II both earned entry into Pitt's All-America fraternity following exceptional senior seasons.

Having one first-team All-American is impressive. Having two players earn that distinction at the same position is extraordinary.

Pitt believed all year it had the best pair of ends in all of college football. Now that claim has been validated.

The last time the Panthers produced two first-team All-Americans at the same position in a single season was

**"This is a dream come true. From the time I arrived at Pitt as a freshman, it was my goal to join that wall of All-Americans."**

**—Rashad Weaver**

1982, when offensive tackles Covert and Fralic were honored. And the last time Pitt had two first-team

All-Americans on the defensive side of the ball in the same season was 1977 (tackle Randy Holloway and safety Bob Jury).

"When you look at the names and faces on our All-America wall, those

players set lofty standards," Head Coach Pat Narduzzi says. "They are all-time greats, not only at Pitt but in the history of the game. Patrick and Rashad are highly deserving to be added to that list. They have made us extremely proud."

The significance of joining this roll call of greatness is not lost on these newly minted All-Americans.

"It's just mind blowing," Jones says. "I walked past those All-Americans' pictures nearly every day for five years. To be joining that list of Pitt's all-time greats, it's truly an honor. It's a blessing, and I'm so thankful."

"This is a dream come true," Weaver says. "From the time I arrived at Pitt as a freshman, it was my goal to join that wall of All-Americans. I wanted to give this program everything I had and be the best player I could be. Earning this honor while wearing that Pitt helmet means everything because I really loved the school I played for."

So how does one officially "make the wall"?

While a Google search can give you a seemingly endless list of unofficial All-America squads, there are only five selectors that are recognized by the NCAA: the Associated Press, American Football Coaches Association (AFCA), Football Writers Association of America (FWAA), Sporting News and Walter Camp Football Foundation. These selectors rank among the oldest and most respected in college football annals.

Jones garnered his first-team All-America status from Sporting News and Walter Camp. Weaver was selected first team by four of the selectors (AP, AFCA, FWAA and Walter Camp).

Both players earned prestigious "consensus" All-America recognition from the NCAA for receiving the most first-team selections at their respective positions. A minimum of two first-team honors are needed to earn consensus All-America status.



Rashad Weaver



“It’s just mind blowing. I walked past those All-Americans’ pictures nearly every day for five years. To be joining that list of Pitt’s all-time greats, it’s truly an honor. It’s a blessing, and I’m so thankful.”

—Patrick Jones II

Pitt was one of only four schools to have multiple consensus All-Americans this season, joining the University of Alabama, Ohio State University and the University of Notre Dame. The Panthers now have 53 all-time consensus All-Americans and rank ninth among all Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) programs.

**T**he players’ high statistical production no doubt caught the eye of voters. Weaver totaled 35 tackles, 14.5 tackles for loss, 7.5 quarterback sacks, three forced fumbles and a fumble recovery in just nine contests this season. He led the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) in sacks per game (0.83) and tackles for loss per game (1.6).

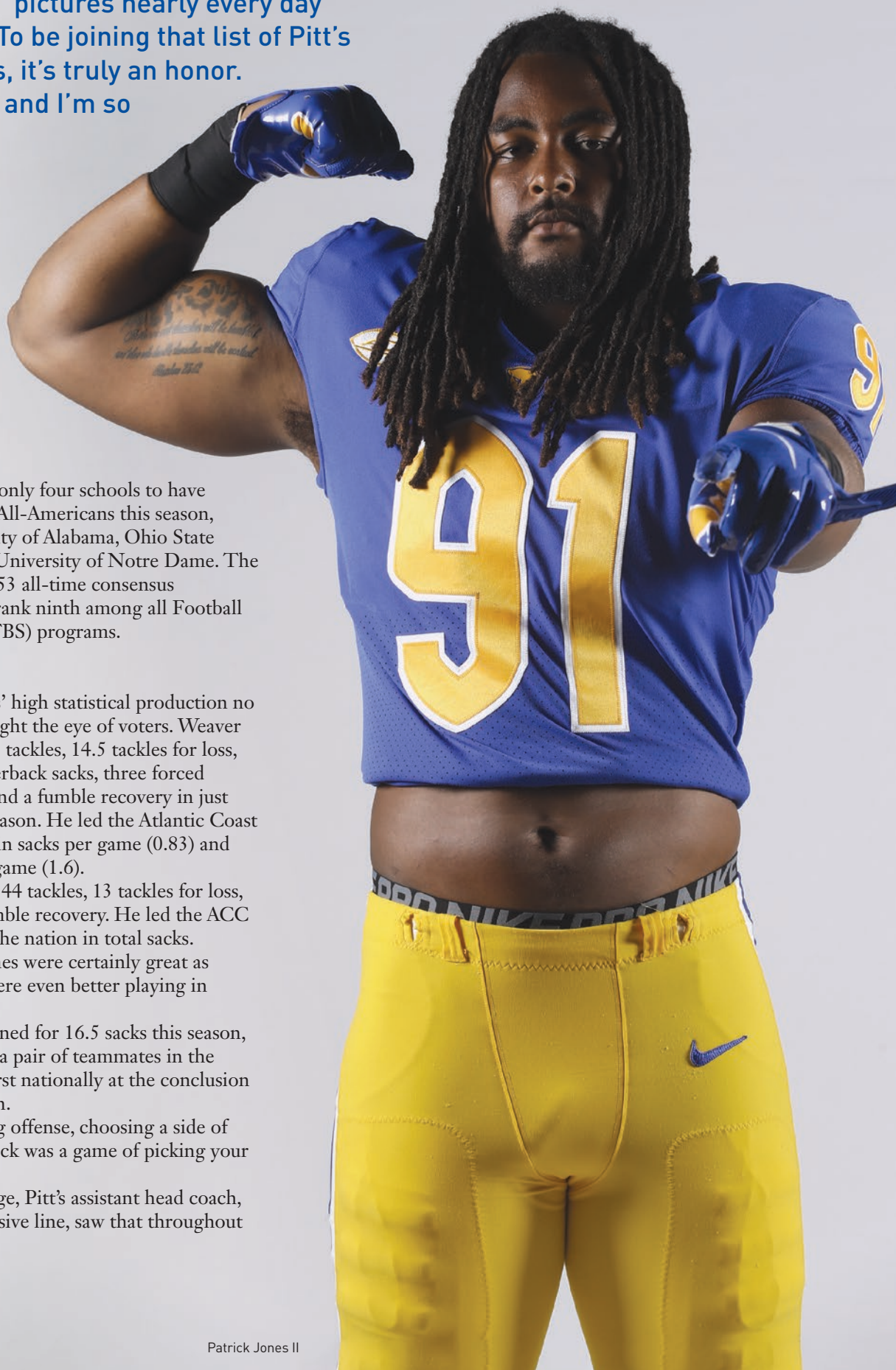
Jones compiled 44 tackles, 13 tackles for loss, nine sacks and a fumble recovery. He led the ACC and ranked fifth in the nation in total sacks.

Weaver and Jones were certainly great as individuals. They were even better playing in tandem.

The pair combined for 16.5 sacks this season, the highest total by a pair of teammates in the ACC and tied for first nationally at the conclusion of the regular season.

For an opposing offense, choosing a side of Pitt’s defense to attack was a game of picking your poison.

Charlie Partridge, Pitt’s assistant head coach, who leads the defensive line, saw that throughout the 2020 season.



Patrick Jones II

“There’s no doubt [that] with both of those guys coming from either side, it really makes it hard for an opposing offense to double-team,” Partridge says. “Are they willing to put Jones one on one with number 17 [Weaver] on the other side?”

**T**he All-America play of the two edge defenders raised the bar for the entire Pitt defense. Not coincidentally, the Panthers set a single-season record with 111 tackles for loss despite playing only 11 contests. To put that in perspective, the prior record (110) was set over 13 contests in 2002.

The road to All-America status was not, for some outside observers, an expected one for either player. Weaver and Jones came to Pitt as lower-profile prospects. The website rivals.com ranked them as two-star recruits when they signed with the Panthers in 2016. Moreover, Weaver had to overcome a knee injury that wiped out his entire 2019 season. Heading into last fall, he was absent from virtually every preseason all-star team.

The pair is no longer overlooked. Weaver and Jones both accepted invitations to play in the prestigious Reese’s Senior Bowl, the annual showcase of the country’s elite NFL prospects. They also are popular names bandied about in various mock drafts.

It should be noted that both Jones and Weaver depart Pitt not only as All-Americans but also as graduates. Both earned their degrees in four years before returning for their redshirt senior seasons this past fall, Jones with a bachelor’s degree in administration of justice and Weaver with a dual major

Top: Covert  
Above: Fitzgerald  
Right: Dorsett

in business information systems and finance.

Pitt football has a well-established history of excellence on the defensive line. Many discussions have popped up on social media asking where Jones and Weaver rank among Pitt’s great defensive end duos. Comparing different players from different eras has always made for fruitless debates. How do you rank this current combo against, say, Hugh Green and Rickey Jackson, who terrorized Pitt’s opponents from 1977

Pitt football has a well-established history of excellence on the defensive line. Many discussions have popped up on social media asking where Jones and Weaver rank among Pitt’s great defensive end duos. Perhaps the only correct answer is ... We should all appreciate that over the past four years, we have had the pleasure of watching two of Pitt’s all-time great defensive ends—by any criterion and no matter the era.

to 1980? Or Jabaal Sheard and Greg Romeus, who starred for the Panthers from 2007 to 2010?

Perhaps the only correct answer for Pitt fans is to pause and appreciate the fact that over the past four seasons, they have been blessed to watch two of Pitt’s truly all-time great defensive ends—by any criterion and no matter the era. And like those who preceded them, Jones and Weaver built upon a Pitt standard of excellence and raised the bar for future Panthers. 📌





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# Once a Panther, **FOREVER A PANTHER.**

Written by Sam Clancy



senior process improvement consultant and trainer at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, **Kimberly Green-Goldsborough**

(ENGR '81), has been in the Washington, D.C., area for 34 years, yet she remains deeply connected to her Pittsburgh upbringing and to the institution she loves. Kim has a relentless commitment to all things Pitt and is actively involved in the **Varsity Letter Club**, a network of varsity letter winners called **Forever Panthers**.

We recently caught up with Kim to ask about her life's work and her memories of her time at Pitt, where she earned four varsity letters in women's track and field.





Kim with her family after she received the Pitt Varsity Letter Club Awardee of Distinction honor in 2016

### Tell us about your current work?

As a process improvement specialist, I use tools like Lean and Six Sigma to help improve the procedural ways we deliver safe and clean air, land and water to the American people.

### What was the main reason you decided to come to Pitt?

I had a full scholarship from the West Virginia University math department, had my roommate assigned and was ready to go. I had this underlying and ridiculous belief that in order to prove my maturing, I needed to go away to school—outside of Pittsburgh since that's where I'm from. Thankfully, I had sense enough to make the choice that settled better with my head and my heart—Pitt.

Pitt has a phenomenal program designed especially for students like me. The Swanson School of Engineering IMPACT program offered six weeks of training for minorities and economically disadvantaged students interested in studying engineering. Without it, I don't believe I would have been equipped to manage the rigor and demands of class and athletics.

And last but not least, I felt at home on Pitt's track. Growing up in Pittsburgh and running since I was 10 years old meant having practiced or run at several tracks over the years.

Another fun note that exemplifies the connection between Pitt and local athletes is that Coach Alonzo Webb and I ran and jumped on the same team—Steel City Track Club—back in the early '70s. I first met him when we both represented Pittsburgh in the Fourth Annual United States Youth Games held in New York City in August 1970.



Kim at Pitt

### What was your favorite memory from your days at Pitt?

As insignificant as it may sound, my favorite memory was the daily rush with my teammates from practice at Trees Hall to the Nursing residents' cafeteria and making it in before the service ended for the general school body. While practices separated the sprinters, jumpers, throwers and distance runners, the end of practice and the rush to dinner brought all of us together for harmless and communal shenanigans before buckling down to serious study. Not surprisingly, food and laughter are at the heart of some of my best memories.

### How often do you stay in touch with your teammates from your playing days and what do those relationships mean to you?

Hands down, the best gift Pitt has given me is my deep and abiding friendships with my teammates, namely Gwen Murray, Pamela Gearing and Kathe Dvorsak, and Coach Freda Goff. That is not to diminish the valuable friendships I've maintained to a lesser degree with many other teammates, but these ladies are the people I talk to and spend time with whether feeling up or down. We had established our habits and commitment to stay connected long before social media and iPhones.

### In one word, how would you describe your experience as a Pitt student-athlete?

Let me see, one word for balancing academics and athletics: "Challenging." 📌

*For information on, or to join the Pitt Varsity Letter Club, visit [pittsburghpanthers.com/vlc](http://pittsburghpanthers.com/vlc)*





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The Pitt Script represents the rich history and tradition of excellence for the University of Pittsburgh and Pitt Athletics. Our student-athletes proudly wear the script as they train, compete, and represent Pitt on a national stage. Beyond its unique and recognizable design, the script serves not only as our primary logo, but as a symbolic reminder of our collective commitment to achieving comprehensive excellence and building bridges to our community, our supporters and our history.

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FEATURE

# Skills





# for Life



The transition to college can be a daunting adjustment for some student-athletes. Pitt students navigate that course with the help of the Cathy & John Pelusi Family Life Skills Program.

Written by Chris Peak

Photographs from Pitt Athletics archives

**I**n the world of collegiate athletics, where so much is driven by factors other than the experience of the student-athletes, the Cathy & John Pelusi Family Life Skills Program at the University of Pittsburgh exists exclusively for that purpose. There is no angle to the program, no hidden agenda; it has a lone purpose, a solitary goal, and that is to support and develop student-athletes and prepare them for life and success after graduation.

The program, which originated as a pilot program in the mid-1990s under the moniker CHAMPS (Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success), is now hailed as one of the finest life skills programs in collegiate athletics. Its ascendance began in 2007, when John and Cathy Pelusi made a seven-figure financial gift, fueling a vision to make the Life Skills Program a transformative experience for Pitt student-athletes.

John Pelusi was the starting center on Pitt's national champion football team in 1976. He went on to earn a BA at the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and a Master of Public Administration degree at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, and he has been a member of the Pitt Board of Trustees since 1996.

"Life Skills is a gift that keeps on giving—think about it!" Pelusi is quoted as saying on the program's website. "Helping student-athletes with the skills necessary to be the very best they can be, both on and off the field, as well as giving them the tools and a feeling of deep appreciation and gratitude to want to help others and give back to Pitt throughout their lives, is something that fulfills our need to help others."



"If [John Pelusi] has said it to me one time," says Pitt Director of Athletics Heather Lyke, "he has said it a thousand times: 'Heather, it's about the kids. If it's not for the kids, what are we doing and what are we here for?'"

That's what drives Penny Semaia, a former Pitt football player who serves as senior associate athletic director for student life and heads the Life Skills Program.

"Our mission is simple: to help prepare our student-athletes for success in life today and success in life tomorrow," Semaia says. "We're 'Forever Panthers,' and the beauty of that is [that] we exemplify what our mantra is: Family takes care of family."

**U**nder Semaia's leadership, the program touches all aspects of student-athlete life, from the transition to college to career counseling, financial education, leadership development, community service and professional etiquette training.

"It's [about] the education and the experience," Semaia says. "How are we helping you develop as a human being, as a person, to be successful for life beyond Pitt, life beyond the sport?"

The success rate speaks for itself. According to Semaia, every Pitt student-athlete who graduated in 2019 was placed in a job, an internship or a specific career program within six months of graduating. That's a 100% success rate, and it was the second year in a row with a 100% placement rate.

Semaia and the people who work with him haven't rested on their laurels, either. In 2020, the Life Skills Program

collaborated with the School of Education and the mental health team in Pitt's athletics department to launch a course called From Classroom to Community: Inter- and Intrapersonal Skills and Development. Recent years also have seen the Life Skills Program emphasize one-on-one interaction

**"Our mission is simple: to help prepare our student-athletes for success in life today and success in life tomorrow."**

**—Penny Semaia**

between staff members and student-athletes to deliver a more focused and personalized experience.

What further elevates Pitt's approach is that the Life Skills Program is staffed by former student-athletes, including several who spent their college years playing for the Panthers.

There's Lousaka Polite, who played fullback at Pitt, and John Pelusi (Cathy and John's son), who was a tight end for the Panthers; they both serve as assistant athletic directors of the Varsity Letter Club and mentorship. Sam Clancy, who starred on the basketball team for Pitt before playing in the NFL, joined the program in 2018 when the Varsity Letter Club, of which he is the director, was realigned under

the Life Skills Program in order to continue the connection with student-athletes beyond their time at Pitt.

There's also Kelsi Schaer, the director of student-athlete development, who ran cross-country and track at Oregon State University. Danny Bonaventura is the career consultant for student-athletes; he played football at Robert Morris University. And the most recent addition to the staff, Mentorship Program Coordinator Michaela Burton, was an all-conference gymnast at Pitt last season.

Lisa Auld (assistant athletic director for student life), Chase McIntyre (life skills community coordinator) and Kristen Marsters (director of strategic initiatives for life skills) round out the staff.

"You can ask anyone in the athletics department about our culture in our life skills space," Semaia says. "We love what we do. When you have



Semaia and football student-athlete Cal Adomitis at the Awardees of Distinction Dinner



people who are passionate about it and exhibit that, that's something that's going to stand out."


"When I came in, I was blown away by the impact and the relationships that the staff has with our student-athletes," Lyke says. "It's extraordinary. Most schools in the country have a life skills program with one or two people. We have 10 full-time staff members. It is, by far, the most comprehensive program in the country."

**T**he program makes a huge impact on Pitt's recruiting. Semaia and his staff regularly meet with high school prospects who visit campus as they consider Pitt. Those sessions are part of almost every recruiting visit, like when first-year wide receiver Aydin Henningham visited in the summer of 2019.

A native of Florida, Henningham had never been to Pittsburgh before. But of everything he experienced that weekend, the Life Skills Program presentation stood out the most.

"The way the program is set up for the football players is something different," Henningham said after his visit to Pitt. "With the Life Skills Program for the student-athletes and how the tutors are there for you 24/7, they just talk a lot about life after football, which got me and my dad's attention."

"When they were talking about the Life Skills Program, that's when it clicked for me. The way he was talking, it just caught everybody's attention. That's what made my decision and everybody's decision, I think. That was really impactful."

From recruiting to student life and the world beyond Pitt, the Cathy & John Pelusi Life Skills Program draws its success from two sources. One is the work and dedication of Semaia and his staff; the other is the extraordinary support of the Pelusi family, whose passionate commitment has made the program a leader in collegiate athletics. In 2020, the Pelusi family made another multimillion-dollar investment to ensure that Pitt student-athletes will benefit from the program for years to come. 

**Every Pitt student-athlete who graduated in 2019 was placed in a job, an internship or a specific career program within six months of graduating.**

Right: Women's swimming student-athlete Sarah Giamber and men's basketball student-athlete Au'Diese Toney participating in leadership exercises at the annual Panther Leadership Conference  
Below: Football student-athlete Todd Sibley at the annual Career Networking Night






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## SKILLED HANDS, COOL HEAD, CARING HEART

Written by Tessa Sayers

**P**itt women's lacrosse player Caroline Lederman is used to performing under pressure and feeling the adrenaline rush that comes in a big moment. But over the past six months, she has been experiencing those moments on a different field as an emergency medical technician (EMT) with Pittsford Volunteer Ambulance in her home state of New York.


A natural sciences major who hopes to pursue physician assistant studies, Lederman began working as an EMT in June 2020. She has seen firsthand how COVID-19 is impacting hospital systems and communities and has felt its effects personally, having lost her grandfather to the virus.

"He was in a nursing home, and we weren't able to say goodbye as a family," Lederman says. "It just provided me with a new way of understanding the effect this is having on people's lives."

While the long working hours and patient care can be exhausting, Lederman says that telling concerned family members that they can't go to the hospital with their sick loved one has been the most draining. "We are stepping up as caregivers and as human beings at the same time," she says.

While working as an EMT has provided her with great experience, she did have some reservations when it came to starting her work during a pandemic. In addition to caring for her patients, Lederman has had to worry about keeping herself, her family and her friends safe. She also has worried about her athletic career, because she had heard about athletes who contracted COVID and experienced long-lasting respiratory issues. But she felt that her employer provided her with the necessary personal protective equipment and procedures to be safe.

Lederman received her first dose of the Moderna COVID vaccine in January and is scheduled to receive the second dose in February. "I had a sore arm for a little bit, but that's nothing compared to getting COVID," she says. "I'm just feeling very blessed that there's a light at the end of the tunnel and we can get through this."

"There's a saying where I work: 'Skilled hands, cool heads, caring hearts.' Being able to perform all of the medical skills and assessments and treatments that you have to while staying composed is a really good practice for working as an EMT, for a game and for life. I think being calm, being effective and putting your best foot forward as a care provider or as a player is a very good talent to have." 







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