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UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH ATHLETICS MAGAZINE SUMMER 2021

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### On the Cover:

Jimbo Gets His Canton Call: Jimbo Covert is latest Pitt player to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Story on page 32.

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**28** THE BUSINESS OF ATHLETICS



### A Message from Quarterback Kenny Pickett

### Dear Pitt fans,



t is my honor to address you in this edition of H2P. But I have something to admit: For the longest time, I did not anticipate being in this position, preparing for the 2021 football season at the University of Pittsburgh.

Before the pandemic and the uncertainty of last year, I fully expected the fall of 2020 to be my final season playing quarterback at Pitt. I was going to be a senior, and my eligibility would be up after 2020.

But then the NCAA announced that every collegiate student-athlete would have the option to use an extra year of eligibility. Senior football players in 2020 were given the chance to return in 2021.

Even so, when we walked off the field after the win at Georgia Tech last December, in my mind, that was it: My Pitt career was over. I was ready to begin focusing on professional football.

Entering the 2021 NFL Draft had always felt like my destiny. Ever since my first start at Heinz Field as a freshman, upsetting undefeated Miami in 2017, the goal of playing in the NFL was always in the back of my mind. How could I pass up that opportunity now that my lifelong dream was staring me straight in the face?

But as the days passed and after having numerous conversations with my family, I kept thinking, "What if I returned to Pitt? What would that look like?"

Then I started to imagine myself at Heinz Field, throwing touchdowns to Lucas Krull and Jordan Addison and all the gifted receivers and tight ends that we have returning.

I thought about one more season with all the offensive linemen that we have coming back. I remembered what it's like to run out of the tunnel with fans cheering and the band playing. I imagined breaking Pitt records and leaving a special legacy at one of the most storied programs in college football.

When I considered everything, another season of college football at Pitt just felt right. So I sent out a tweet that read: "One more year. #H2P"—and I haven't regretted my decision for a second.

I want to win a championship with this team. And I believe 100% that we can do that. With Coach [Pat] Narduzzi and the coaching staff at Pitt and the returning talent in our program, anything is possible.

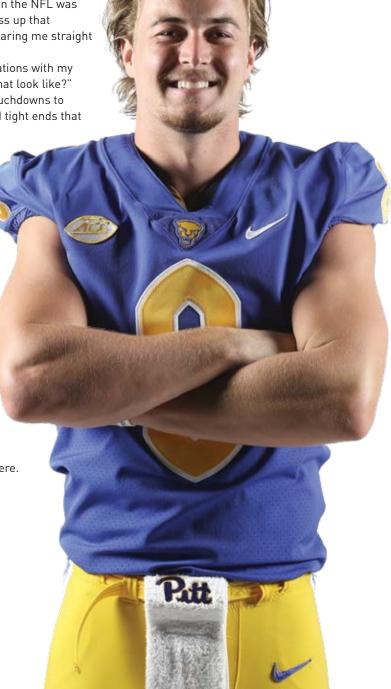
I hope you are as excited as I am to be back at Heinz Field this fall.

We need you on September 4, September 18 and September 25.

We need you against Clemson, Miami, North Carolina and Virginia.

We need you at Heinz Field this season. I hope to see you there.

Hail to Pitt! Kenny Pickett





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### EGRITY ALWAYS

### NAME, IMAGE AND LIKENESS

ecent changes to the rules on student-athletes' ability to profit from their name, image and likeness (NIL)—also known as the "right to publicity"—will allow student-athletes to receive compensation for nonathletic performances such as business ventures, autographs, sport camps and endorsements. In response to those changes, the University of Pittsburgh created and implemented an NIL program, called Forged Here, to provide Pitt student-athletes with the information and tools necessary to maximize their NIL potential.

Pitt's Department of Athletics will follow Pennsylvania state legislation related to NIL along with Pitt NIL Policies. NIL rules took effect July 1 and will continue to evolve in the coming months. Donors should use the helpful information below as it relates to NIL.

### What can I do as a donor?

All agreements with student-athletes must be disclosed to the compliance office regardless of who is involved. Additionally, you will need to disclose your status as a donor (or representative of Pitt's athletics interests) when entering into a business arrangement with a Pitt student-athlete. All agents, financial advisors, attorneys, etc. must be registered with Pitt's compliance office and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

If you own a business, you must provide student-athletes with benefits consistent with the market value of their services. After entering into a business agreement with a student-athlete, there is a seven-day disclosure period before a student-athlete can participate in the agreement.

If you own a business that wants to use a student-athlete's NIL, you must follow all Pennsylvania state legislation and Pitt NIL policies. A business whose product conflicts with Pitt's, such as banned substances or gambling, cannot enter into endorsement agreements with our student-athletes. Please check with our compliance office if you are unsure whether a student-athlete can be engaged in your business.

### What can I not do as a donor?

You cannot communicate with, make contact with or direct payments to a prospective student-athlete (recruit) in high school or another university, directly or indirectly, in order to influence their decision to come to Pitt.

You cannot compensate a student-athlete for their NIL without the exchange of consideration. If you want to purchase a student-athlete's autograph or gear, or attend a student-athlete's clinic, etc., you must pay the market rate for those items

> For more information on Pitt's NIL Forged Here Program or NIL policies, view pittsburghpanthers.com/forgedhere. Please feel free to direct questions related to NIL, or any other compliance questions, to the Compliance, Financial and Student Services Office at 412-648-8218 or compliance@athletics.pitt.edu.







## **Around** the Rim!

Elite Season Propels Champagnie into the

Written by Nick Macdonald

n just two years as a member of the University of Pittsburgh men's basketball team, Justin Champagnie not only broke a number of records but left behind a story that will be told for years to come—a story about a kid from Brooklyn, New York, who came to Pitt to achieve personal growth and success and managed to completely captivate Pitt's fan base in the process.

While he broke multiple records and earned countless accolades in his two years at Pitt, Champagnie's time as a Panther was most exemplified by his grit and determination. In fact, the 2021 AP Honorable Mention All-American came to Pitt to prove others wrong and prove to himself that he could be an elite athlete.

"Things have never been easy for Justin," says men's basketball head coach Jeff Capel. "He is a guy who has had to constantly prove people wrong. There were a lot of people that told him that he wouldn't play here at Pitt and that he wouldn't play in the ACC [Atlantic Coast Conference] and that he wasn't good enough. But he has always had this unwavering belief in himself, and one of the reasons he chose Pitt was that we believed in him like he believed in himself."

hampagnie's journey as a Panther began April 19, 2019, when he signed his letter of intent. Playing in his first game against Florida State on November 6, 2019, he recorded eight points and six rebounds in the 23 minutes he played, all while helping Pitt to upset the Seminoles at home. His scoring and rim-protecting abilities were quickly on full display as he registered the first double-double of his career just five games into his rookie season, racking up 12 points and 10 rebounds in a home win over Monmouth.

When the 2019-20 season came to an unexpected early end due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Champagnie led the team in scoring (12.7 points per game) and rebounding (7.0 rebounds per game) and was second in blocks (28). And yet he received no postseason awards or recognition, pushing Champagnie to prove once again that he was capable of going above and beyond.

When he returned to Pitt in the fall of 2020, Champagnie did just that.

The sophomore scored in the double digits in Pitt's season opener against Saint Francis, something he would go on to do in every game in 2020-21. He tallied his first double-double of the season with 22 points and 10 rebounds against Northern Illinois before putting himself and the Pitt Panthers on notice

Champagnie's evolution as a player at
Pitt, under the guidance
of Capel and his staff,
culminated in late July,
when Champagnie signed a
two-way contract with the
Toronto Raptors.
"The Raptors are
getting a guy who is
incredibly tough [and]
competitive and

during a road victory at Northwestern. Champagnie scored 20 points and gathered 20 rebounds, including dunking the gamewinning basket with five seconds to spare in Evanston. His 20/20 performance was just the fourth of its kind in a 40-minute game by a major conference player, with Champagnie joining the company of Ben Simmons, Kevin Durant and Tim Duncan. He followed this performance with 24 points and 21 rebounds in a home victory over Gardner-Webb, becoming the first ACC player since 1970 to record consecutive 20/20 games. He joined Caleb Swanigan (Purdue) and Blake Griffin (Oklahoma) as the only players in the NCAA in the past 25 years with consecutive 20/20 games.

will do anything to

organization win,"

says Capel.

help their team and

As a sophomore, Champagnie dealt with adversity throughout the season, injuring his knee against Miami and forcing him to miss a month of action. But Champagnie's determination to get back on the court to help his team was strong, and exactly one month after being forced out of a game, Champagnie scored 24 points and gathered 16 rebounds in a 20-point home win over Syracuse.



Head coach Jeff Capel with Champagnie

e followed that performance by matching a careerhigh with 31 points on 12-of-15 shooting and grabbing 14 rebounds in a 79-73 win over Duke at the Petersen Events Center. In the postgame press conference following the Panthers win Duke's Hall of Fame coach, Mike Krzyzewski, proclaimed the Panthers "have the player of the year in the conference in Champagnie." This was high praise for a player less than two years removed from people questioning his ability to compete in the ACC.

Champagnie's name was being mentioned alongside Panther greats. He joined Clyde Vaughan (1983), Larry Harris (1976-78), Billy Knight (1974) and Don Hennon (1958) as the only players in program history to score 10 or more points in every game played in a season. He became the first Panther since DeJuan Blair (2008-09) to average a double-double in a season

and the first player to average better than 18 points and 10 rebounds since Billy Knight (1973-74). His 2020-21 production of 18 points and 11.1 rebounds per game made him the only major conference player in collegiate basketball to average a double-double for the season.

The accolades after his sophomore year were far from none. Along with his AP All-America honor, he was named to the Dick Vitale/ESPN All-America Second Team. He earned U.S. Basketball Writers Association All-District II, National Association of Basketball Coaches All-District First Team and Basketball Times All-District (Northeast) honors and was named a Karl Malone Award finalist. He also became the first player in program history to be named to the All-ACC First Team.

Champagnie's evolution as a player at Pitt, under the guidance of Capel and his staff, culminated in late July, when

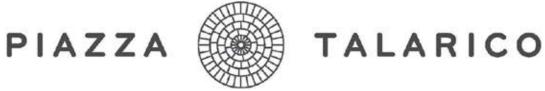
Champagnie signed a two-way contract with the Toronto Raptors.

"The Raptors are getting a guy who is incredibly tough [and] competitive and will do anything to help their team and organization win," says Capel. "He's a guy [who] offensively can be versatile, especially in the NBA. He can shoot the ball from the perimeter but also is efficient and elite 17 feet and in."

The NBA's two-way contract construct will allow Champagnie to play in both the NBA and its G League while being under the control of the Raptors for the 2021-22 season.

"The work doesn't stop when you get to the league," said Champagnie. "It's got to keep going and it's going to be rough. I'm going to be going against guys who have been playing in the league, guys who are stronger than me and move faster. It's all about adapting. I feel like I'm pretty good at that."

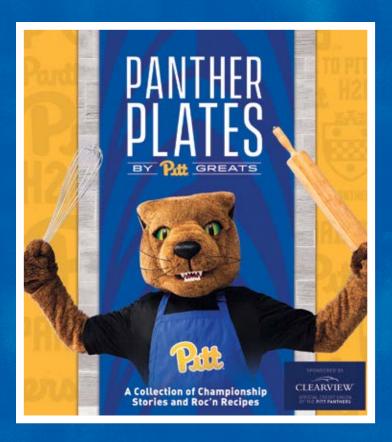




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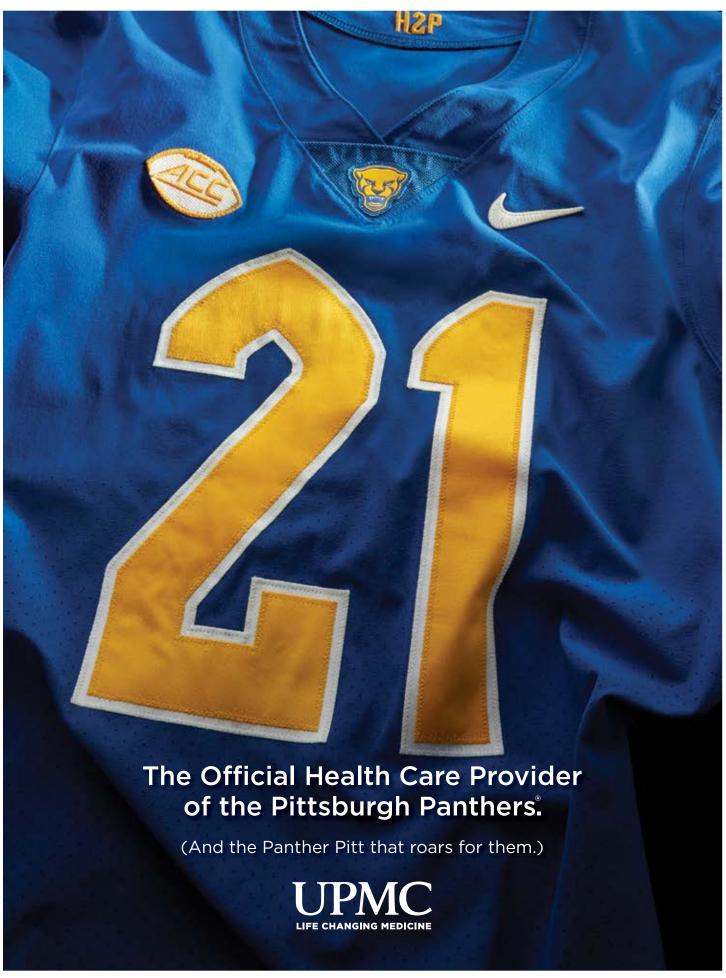
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### Aloha, Ohana



Kamalani, left, and Lexis Akeo

Written by Josh Rowntree



ore than 4,600 miles from Pittsburgh, in a Hawaiian community called Kapolei, just outside Honolulu, the Akeo sisters dreamed of one day playing college volleyball. They agreed that there was one goal they had in common:

they wanted any prospective college volleyball program to be "ohana."

It was during
Kamalani's time at
Kamehameha High
School that she
got to know Fisher,
who coached
the University
of Hawaii men's
team from 2009 to
2011 and took over
Pitt's program in
2013.



Kamalani Akeo at Pitt's March 2021 home match against Virginia

"Ohana" means family in Hawaiian. And that is exactly what led Kamalani and Lexis Akeo to the University of Pittsburgh, along with Pitt volleyball head coach Dan Fisher.

hree years after Kamalani
Akeo finished a decorated
career at Pitt—one that
included the third-most
assists by a setter in program
history—the two sisters have united on
the same team for the first time in their
lives: Kamalani as director of volleyball
operations and Lexis as a rising
junior and member of the Panthers
team boasting the longest NCAA
tournament run in program history.

It was during Kamalani's time at Kamehameha High School that she got to know Fisher, who coached the University of Hawaii men's team from 2009 to 2011 and took over Pitt's program in 2013.

He recruited Kamalani and helped to ease her concerns about what she described as a "cultural change" in moving to Pittsburgh. He also was tough on her on the court, which was something she appreciated.

As Fisher was recruiting Kamalani, he was introduced to Lexis, who was around 10 years old at the time. "I knew he was really tall, and that's all I can really remember," jokes Lexis about her 6'6" coach.

A couple of years later, Lexis started getting reports from the mainland: Kamalani loved Pitt and Pittsburgh. She realized that it was a spot where she could live after her playing days were over. And her positive reviews, mixed with the budding success of Pitt's program under Fisher, were

all Lexis needed to convince her to follow Kamalani.

Lexis calls Kamalani her idol and credits her and Fisher primarily for the astounding surge of Pitt's volleyball program. That is why she was not at all surprised to see her sister become part of the staff last season. "[Kamalani] knows how we, as Pitt, operate and where we want to be," Lexis said.

Dan Fisher



Pitt won 15 matches in a row, including three in the NCAA tournament, before losing in five sets to Washington in the Elite Eight. Lexis was an integral part of the attack, posting 51 assists in the final two matches of the year.

After the fall portion of the 2020 season, Pitt sat with a record of 4-4 after going a combined 60-4 in

the previous two seasons. Then, due to COVID-19 rescheduling, the Panthers restarted the season on Valentine's Day-with Kamalani on board and went on a tear. Pitt won 15 matches in a row, including three in the NCAA tournament, before losing in five sets to Washington in the Elite Eight. Lexis was an integral part of the attack, posting 51 assists in the final two matches of the year.

hen Kamalani began her Pitt career in 2015, she often glanced around a scarce crowd at the Fitzgerald Field House. "We had about 100 fans my freshman year and ended up with about 3,000 by the end," she said. "It was amazing."

Her success established the ohana that the Akeos wanted in a college experience. Now, it's a way of life for the Pitt volleyball program.

"First and foremost, we're a family," Lexis says. "We're all sisters. The coaches are our family, too. When you love and care about each other a lot. you want to work hard for each other, and our hard work leads to our success on the court—and to our championships."



# PASSION IS BACK!

Written by Josh Rowntree

hroughout the fall of 2020, Emma Finucane anxiously sat on the couch in her parents' home in Malvern, Pennsylvania. Decked out in her typical fall Saturday apparel—a Panther Pitt shirt, a Pitt hat, a Pitt football pennant in hand—she

cheered on the Pitt football team. Her mother, who Finucane admits is not a big football fan, kept her company.

She yelled out "First down!" as she heard the prerecorded audio of the Pitt Band play over the Heinz Field loudspeakers every time Panthers quarterback Kenny Pickett and his offense were able to move the chains. Finucane tried, as much as she could, to make her Saturdays feel as ordinary as possible.



Panther Pitt President Emma Finacune (right) with former Panther Pitt President Kiara Parker at a Panthers football game

But, as she and the rest of the world learned over the last 17 months, "ordinary" has been difficult to achieve.

"It was pretty sad," Finucane says, thinking back to those lonely months outside Philadelphia. "Game day is such a part of my identity as a Pitt student. All my friends will tell you that I'm probably one of the biggest Pitt fans.

"It was shocking just to think that we can't do half of the things that we used to do."

inucane is now a fifth-year senior and communication major at Pitt. She is a manager for the women's basketball team; plays club ultimate Frisbee; and was recently named president of the Panther Pitt, serving as a liaison between the football student section and the Pitt Department of Athletics.

Her passion for Pitt is deep—so deep, in fact, that she took the 2020 fall term off from school to, as she put it, "bet" that her college experience would return to a state close to what

Gradisek manipulates his work schedule around watching the Panthers play, whether that be at Heinz Field or venues across the country. From James Conner's MVP performance in the 2013 Little

Caesars Pizza
Bowl to the 2018
game at Miami,
Gradisek saw
every Pitt football
game, home and
away, in person.

she was familiar with before the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world.

Finucane's love for Pitt is young. Others, however, had decades of traditions wiped out because of the virus.

They include Rick Gradisek, a man with extensive roots in Pitt football. His father, Rudolph, played for Jock



Left to right: Tim Padovese, Ted Padezanin and Rick Gradisek

Sutherland and was part of the 1937 Rose Bowl team. Rick was a manager for the 1976 national championship squad and spent eight years in Oakland studying to become a dentist, a profession he has practiced in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, for 40 years.

radisek manipulates his work schedule around watching the Panthers play, whether that be at Heinz Field or venues across the country. From James Conner's MVP performance in the 2013 Little Caesars Pizza Bowl to the 2018 game at Miami, Gradisek saw every Pitt football game, home and away, in person.

"Last year was just sort of surreal," says Gradisek, who had to shut down his dental practice for 11 weeks in the early stages of the pandemic. "The season was there, but we only were allowed to go to two home games and no away games. It was a whole different world.

"It was football season, but it wasn't. There were no tailgates; there were no road trips. It was different."

Following months of doubt, the Panthers were able to take the field in fall 2020 and complete the season by navigating a rigorous COVID-19 testing schedule and mitigation measures. But to many longtime fans, college football without tailgating and camaraderie was an uninvited change.

There also was much more than football to think about. And the reality of the pandemic was never lost on Lisa Golden.





Lisa Golden with a spirited fan of legendary Panthers Wide Receiver Larry Fitzgerald

An emergency room doctor in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Golden has always used Pitt football and basketball games as a regular getaway from the seriousness of her day-today life. That escape was halted when her hospital started filling up.

"So much of what we do revolves around Pitt athletics," says Golden, the immediate past president of the Pitt Alumni Association, "Our social lives and our friendships ... we really missed out. We haven't seen our tailgating crew in over a year.

"Not getting to see anyone for so long has been really hard."

Golden, whose father ran track and cross-country for the Panthers, estimates that a normal tailgate averages 30-75 people, depending on the gravity of the game. They show up five hours early and rotate who provides the food each week. Last fall, instead of gathering, she and her Pitt friends, like so many, watched the season from home and texted each other during the games.

In late October, as COVID-19 cases began to climb, the separation and loneliness hit her hard. Typically, Golden fills a plastic pumpkin full of candy to celebrate Halloween outside



Lisa Golden (center, back row) with Nancy Merritt, vice chancellor for alumni relations (to the right of Golden in the photo) and Pitt friends at a road game

Heinz Field. Last year, however, she placed her pumpkin in front of her television, took a photo and solemnly sent it to the group.

"We had this grand plan towards the end of [last] summer to put a TV in the garage and tables in the yard," she says of her scheme to watch games with her regular gang. "We thought, 'We can do this.' And then it got uglier and uglier."

Inside the stadium, Pitt's athletics department tried to create an environment that replicated a regular game day atmosphere for its players. Artificial crowd noise blared, and audio and video recordings of the band and dance team played. That let the players focus on their opponents and assignments instead of the sweeping oddity of playing their sport in front of more than 68,000 empty seats.

"It was definitely an adjustment," says Pitt Quarterback Kenny Pickett, who is set to return for a fifth season in 2021 and has a shot at becoming the program's all-time leading passer. "Honestly, I don't think guys were too focused on that. But when we have the energy of the stadium and have the fans, that builds a lot into it.

'So much of what we do revolves around Pitt athletics," says Golden, the immediate past president of the Pitt Alumni Association. "Our social lives and our friendships ... we really missed out. We haven't seen our tailgating crew in over a year. Not getting to see anyone for so long has been really hard."

When they were gone, it was like, alright, we're playing regardless, whether they're here or not. We have to focus on what we're here to do."

o one has been excluded from having comforts and enjoyments taken away since March 2020. But as the start of the 2021-22 school year and the 2021 football season near, a restoration to life as we knew it is coming.

Golden and her partner, Scott Pearson, will leave their house more than seven hours before kickoff, pick up meatballs and hot sausages and make the two-hour drive to Pittsburgh.

Finucane's bet will have paid off, as she will be in the front row of the Panther Pitt, screaming "First down!" along with the actual Pitt Band and her fellow students.

Gradisek will meet up with his pal Jay Irrgang in the Heinz Field Gold 1A lot. They will talk about that magical '76 season, watching

Dan Marino play and golf outings and will prognosticate about Pat Narduzzi's 2021 team.

And Pickett will be with that team, on the field, trying to give them all a reason to cheer again.

"I'm really just looking forward to having my family and friends be able to come to all the games they want to come to and watch me play my final season, as well as all of the fans who support me and support our team," says Pickett. "I'm just really excited to see that and enjoy those moments again."

Those moments—a few hours each Saturday—will help to subdue the thoughts of the torment and trials of the previous months. They will provide a needed outlet for those who love game days, whether they're in school or far removed from it.

More than anything, they will bring people together again.

"If you look around right now, everybody's excited to be out, getting back to doing regular things, seeing actual people and kind of reconnecting," Golden says. "And that's what a lot of Pitt football is about for us."

She is, quite clearly, not alone.







### "Community service is a beautiful blend of building relationships, spreading positivity and staying connected to those around us."

-Olivia Miller, women's gymnastics team member



Assembly completed: The Cathedral of Learning served as the perfect backdrop for this Bike Day team shot at the Petersen Events Center.



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### **VARSITY LETTER CLUB: MEGAN BEASLEY**

n 1996, the University of Pittsburgh expanded its athletics program to include women's soccer. Megan Beasley was a member of the inaugural soccer team and scored the program's very first goal—a shot from just outside the penalty box four minutes into the season opener against Baylor. During her Pitt soccer career, while earning a bachelor's

degree in psychology, she scored 11 goals and laid the groundwork for a successful career as a coach with the Colorado Rush Soccer Club.



Beasley, right, with husband and former Pitt baseball player Lou Melucci

### What inspired you to travel from Longmont, Colorado, to Pittsburgh to be part of a brand-new team?

"Pitt coach Roland Sturk had been my ODP [Olympic Development Program] coach before he took the job at Pitt. I knew that I wanted to experience a new part of the country in college, so when he contacted me and asked me to take a look at Pitt, I was happy to do so. I was blown away by the view coming through the tunnel, the feel of the campus, and the idea of being able to start a new program. Knowing that we would be a young team had its advantages and disadvantages, but I was excited to know I could come in and make an immediate impact on the field."

#### How was your transition to Pitt?

"My transition was bumpy, as it is for most first-year students. I was used to having a good amount of success on the soccer field and in the classroom, and it was much more competitive in college. The resources that Pitt provides [for] student-athletes allowed me to work through my challenges and find success again."

#### What is your favorite memory from your days as a Pitt student-athlete?

"There are so many wonderful memories! We used to go to the Family First Sports Complex in Erie for our preseason. We were pretty secluded and ate in the cafeteria there, so I remember being so excited to get to go to Wegmans and grab 'real' food. I also remember scoring the first-ever goal for the Pitt women's soccer program in our game against Baylor. One of my most proud moments was when we qualified for the Big East tournament my junior year."

### How did your education and athletics experience at Pitt prepare you to be a professional soccer coach?

"I use my psychology degree on a daily basis working with young athletes. I also fall back on my experiences of working through adversity and learning to find the small victories in life that I learned on the soccer field at Pitt."

### What has been your greatest professional accomplishment to date?

"It was when one of the girls that I first coached became a coach. To me, that meant that I had helped to foster a love for the game that she in turn wanted to pass on."

### Your teammates came from all across the country. Do vou keep in touch?

"We do keep in touch, and we often find ways to see each other. Since most of us scattered after graduating, we make a point of contacting each other when we are in town. A group of us went back for homecoming on the 20th anniversary of our inaugural season. It was amazing how quickly we all fell back into rhythm, and it was so much fun to reminisce about our time at Pitt and to see what had changed and what had stayed the same. There is something wonderfully unique about the relationships you build with your teammates, especially in college, because they become more like family. I feel like no matter where life takes us, we will always have those years at Pitt to tie us together."

### What was your favorite thing to do on campus when you weren't in the classroom or involved in your athletics activities?

"I loved to spend time in Schenley Park, eat at Fuel and Fuddle and Mad Mex and hang out with friends in the Cathedral [of Learning]."





Beasley, center, back row, with her Rush team. At right, Beasley with her teammates at a reunion at Pitt.

### How far has the Pitt women's soccer program come since you first set foot on campus 25 years ago?

"My years were spent practicing behind Trees [Hall] in the baseball outfield and lifting weights in Fitzgerald Field House. To see the state-of-the-art facilities and the beautiful Ambrose [Urbanic] Field makes me extremely proud to have been part of Pitt's humble beginnings. Coach [Randy] Waldrum was at the powerhouse, Notre Dame, when I played, so to have him guiding this team now gives me confidence that we will become a national title contender. These female student-athletes continue to impress me with their ability to multitask and succeed in the classroom as well as on the soccer field!"

### What one piece of advice would you give to current student-athletes?

"Take advantage of all the educational resources that are offered to you. While we all love playing our sport and want nothing more than to be able to make a living doing it, chances are you will not. That's why it is so important to make your education a priority and use those resources to help you stay on top of your work and to reach out for help when needed."



Beasley at Pitt, c. 1997

## **Running for Unity**

Written by Adam Reger

When Matt Wilson first came to the University of Pittsburgh, his identity revolved around track and field "and nothing else." That was all right for his first two years, says the senior hurdler. But the tumultuous summer of 2020, marked by the murder of George Floyd, "completely shifted

the landscape," Wilson says. He returned to campus wanting more from his time at Pitt.

ilson talked to his friend Monica McNeil, a fellow track and field athlete who took a leadership role on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and was the first chair of its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) subcommittee. McNeil pushed Wilson to get involved, first by joining SAAC and then by speaking out.

Wilson spoke with teammates, gave speeches and recorded videos to make his voice heard.

"I don't have a problem speaking up about hard topics [that] people maybe don't want to address," says Wilson.

He'll have ample opportunity to do just that as he steps up to lead EDI this year, succeeding McNeil as chair of the group, which aims to promote diversity and inclusion in all facets of the student-athlete experience.

Wilson is more than ready and credits McNeil with both preparing him to lead and setting the bar high. "She created an incredible framework," Wilson says. "She made sure I know I can do this and that I remain confident in my skills and abilities."

One of last year's most memorable and meaningful events, Wilson says, was a town hall meeting bringing Pitt police officers, including Chief James Loftus, together with students and administrators. Wilson was one of the students who participated in the 90-minute virtual event, and one of his main goals as EDI chair is to arrange a second town hall, with the goal of making it a permanent event.

High on Wilson's list for this year is holding an on-campus unity walk to demonstrate solidarity among Pitt student-athletes.

"I'd like everyone to understand the importance of an open, judgment-free environment," Wilson says, "and to help create a safe place for all our student-athletes to take aspects that may make them different and celebrate those things."

As EDI chair, Wilson also will play a leadership role in Panthers United, a collaborative effort bringing staff, coaches, administrators and student-athletes together to find ways to celebrate differences and promote inclusion across the Department of Athletics.

Kelsi Schaer, director of student-athlete development, credits students like Wilson and McNeil with inspiring the Department of Athletics to make diversity and inclusion core values.

"We need to be better," Schaer says, "and it took student-athletes holding us accountable to be better." Wilson is grateful to the mentors he's had and honored to be able to encourage younger student-athletes' voices. He hopes that his tenure leading EDI will be part of a long tradition that began with McNeil and continues long past his time at Pitt.

"Getting to this position is just a blessing," he says. "Getting involved, being able to accomplish some of these things, is the greatest decision I've made."



## The Business of

Written by Adam Reger

The Pitt Script for Life Internship Program is exclusively for Pitt student-athletes who are interested in pursuing a career in, or learning more about working in, college athletics. Summer interns gain professional experience working in Pitt athletics department offices, including: and video production, business/human broadcast resources, equipment, media relations, nutrition and sports administration.

> ne of Therese Pitman's favorite summer internship moments took place far from her desk.

Pitman, a lacrosse player who dreams of one day serving as a college athletics director, is a sports administration intern in the University of Pittsburgh Department of Athletics. The graduate student is one of 18 studentathletes participating in the third year of the Pitt Script for Life Internship Program, which seeks to prepare these student-athletes for careers in athletics. After several

rounds of interviews, student-athletes are placed in one of 15 areas within the department based on their interests.

"This internship was the perfect opportunity to work with athletic directors at a Power Five school and get some real-life experience with what they do every day," says Pitman.

But a not-so-everyday task made the biggest impression on Pitman. She sifted through piles of unneeded Pitt gear, sorting more than 200 t-shirts, jackets and hoodies into plastic tubs.

With Senior Associate Athletic Director for Sport Administration Jennifer Tuscano and others, Pitman took the tubs to St. Mary of Mercy church in downtown Pittsburgh, where they donated the clothes for distribution to the needy. Afterward, the group helped to serve bagged lunches to more than 80 people who lined up outside the church's famous red doors.

"It was such a cool project because it embraces what Pitt is about: community and giving back," says Pitman.



"Being an athlete, you don't always appreciate what the business office does for us. Without them, we wouldn't get anything paid for or get approvals for team travel. An internship like this lets you learn about the people who make our jobs possible." -Kylee Levers



or Kylee Levers, a volleyball player interning in human resources, the program has sparked a new appreciation for the department that has supported her athletic career. Levers does everything from data entry to creating PowerPoint presentations and frequently observes employees in other areas to get a broad picture of how the department runs.

"Being an athlete, you don't always appreciate what the business office does for us," says Levers. "Without them, we wouldn't get anything paid for or get approvals for team travel. An internship like this lets you learn about the people who make our jobs possible."

Levers, currently earning her master's degree in management, is considering a professional volleyball career after graduation. But she is finding her experience in human resources to be intriguing and valuable no matter where her career path may lead.

"I'm a people person," she says, "and that helps [to] make any business experience better."

### **Internship Cohort**

Lexis Akeo (volleyball), development Max Amadasun (men's basketball), equipment Jaylyn Aminu (track and field), business office Matt Bailey (men's soccer), marketing Matt Gilbertson (baseball), facilities and operations

Dayshanette Harris (women's basketball).

**Kylee Levers** (volleyball), human resources Shannah Mallett (track and field), signature events and donor relations

Monica McNeil (track and field), Life Skills Marcus Minor (football), broadcast Therese Pitman (women's lacrosse), sport administration

Leah Raeder (dance), nutrition Amy Read (swim and dive), sport administration **Dylan Reed** (swim and dive), ticketing Cole Rickert (wrestling), external initiatives/

corporate engagement

Sarah Seamans (softball), camps

Dante Watson (track and field), Panthers United Emily Yaple (women's soccer), media relations

he internship of football player Marcus Minor was a perfect opportunity to delve more deeply into a long-standing passion for broadcasting.

"I always wanted to be a broadcaster, maybe for ESPN or something," says Minor. Now earning an MBA from the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business, Minor saw the internship as a chance to link his career goals with an interest in business. "I had the idea of going into business and creating my own podcast or having my own show."

During a prior internship, he had the chance to produce his own radio segments, but the Pitt Script program has given Minor a chance to explore the profession more broadly. So far, he has tried his hand at editing and creating on-air graphics and has had the chance to talk with broadcasters who cover Pitt sports.

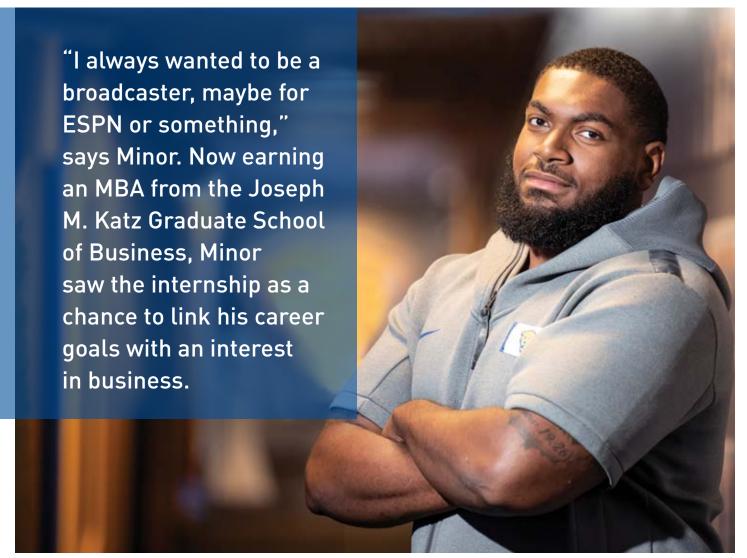
In addition to placing students in internships, Tuscano and her department staff offer a busy and varied slate of professional development programming. This summer, student-athletes have learned about topics ranging from leadership lessons to networking and employee wellness. They've also heard from guest speakers as varied as Tom Richards, chair of Pitt's Board of Trustees, and star soccer player Abby Wambach.

"We're developing the holistic student-athlete," says Tuscano. "We provide them [with] an opportunity to experience working in collegiate athletics and hopefully at the same time prepare them for life after sport."

One valuable aspect of the Pitt Script program is that it gives student-athletes a chance to intern at a time other than during the hectic school year, when juggling an internship alongside academics and demanding training schedules simply may not be possible.

"As an athlete, it can seem like you don't have time for professional development," says Levers. "But everyone involved has been really flexible, and they make sure that you do have the time."

Making the Pitt Script for Life Internship Program accessible is key to exposing student-athletes to the many professional opportunities that await them in the world of athletics. •





Covert is the latest Pitt player inducted into the Hall of Fame

Written by E.J. Borghetti

oe Moore was not on the faculty at the University of Pittsburgh. He did not have a doctoral degree. But during Moore's tenure as a Pitt football coach from 1977 to 1985, some would claim he

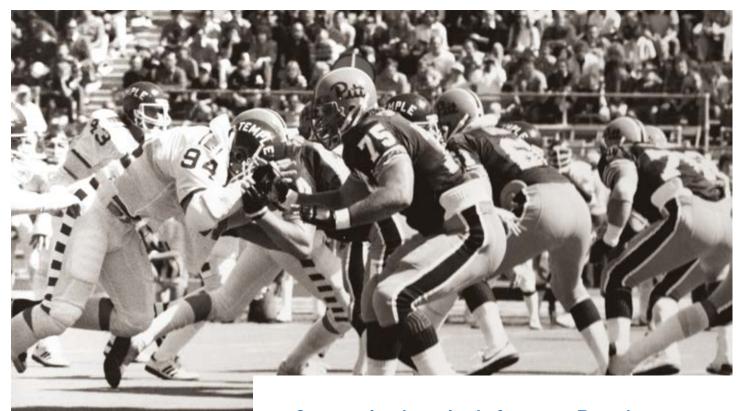
was the best teacher on campus. His area of expertise? Offensive line play.

In the spring of 1980, Moore approached one of the Panthers' most promising football players—James "Jimbo" Covert—about a change in his on-field "major."

Covert had spent his freshman year on defense in 1978 before redshirting the 1979 season due to an injury. Entering his third season in the program, Covert aspired to a starting role. And Moore was ready to use his untapped talent on the Panthers' offensive front







overt agreed, and the results of the change came quickly: It took just one spring practice for Moore, never one to mince words, to tell his new protégé, "You'll be an All-American someday."

Widely considered the greatest offensive line coach in college football history, Moore would prove to be clairvoyant on Covert's All-America potential at the college level. But the truly great players surpass even the loftiest of expectations.

Covert set new standards of excellence at the offensive tackle

Covert is the ninth former Panther to receive induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He joins defensive end/ linebacker Chris Doleman (enshrined in 2012), tight end Mike Ditka (1988), running back Tony Dorsett (1994), offensive lineman Russ Grimm (2010), linebacker Rickey Jackson (2010), quarterback Dan Marino (2005), running back Curtis Martin (2012) and linebacker Joe Schmidt (1973).

position while at Pitt and in the National Football League, where he starred for the punishing Chicago Bears teams of the 1980s.

Even Moore, a renowned perfectionist, would marvel over Covert's play.

"Jimbo is so good, it's like watching a clinic film," Moore would say. "After a play, I'm never surprised to see Jimbo and his man 10 or 15 yards downfield." A remarkable football career reached its pinnacle on the evening of Saturday, August 7, when Covert—donning his new Pro Football Hall of Fame gold jacket—gave his enshrinement speech at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, Ohio. Standing on the podium, his freshly revealed Hall of Fame bronze bust off to the side, Covert reflected on the journey that had brought him

to Canton. His days in Oakland were vital chapters and received a prominent mention.

"Pitt is an incredible place," Covert said proudly. "I was able to play with some of the greatest college football players of all time. I was very fortunate to play for the University of Pittsburgh."

And of course he punctuated his college reflections with an emphatic "Hail to Pitt!"

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Russ Grimm (2010), linebacker Rickey
Jackson (2010), quarterback Dan
Marino (2005), running back Curtis
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Covert was elected as part of the special 20-member centennial class of 2020 commemorating the NFL's 100th season; however, the pandemic postponed his official enshrinement until this August.

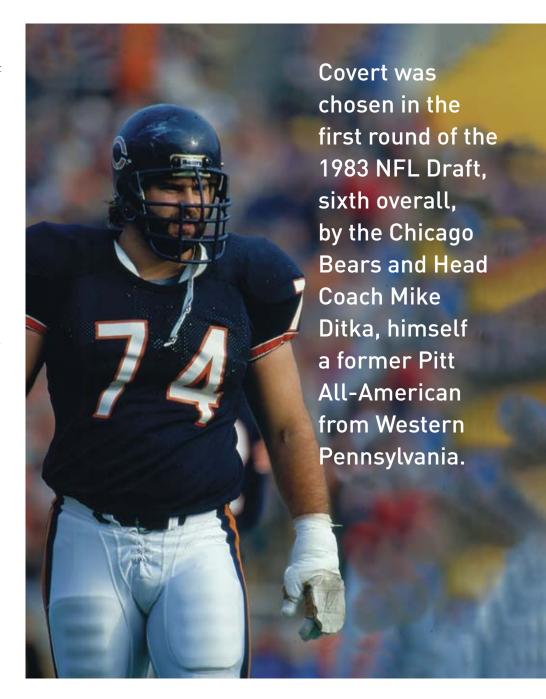
The extra 12 months were on top of a nearly three-decade wait following the conclusion of his NFL career. Many highly respected observers opined that Covert's election should not have taken that long.

But, Covert said, "Waiting for so long makes it even that much sweeter."

To fully appreciate that scene and his speech, one must go back to the beginning and trace the path that led to Covert's Canton call.

Raised in Conway, Pennsylvania, Covert has been described as the biggest athlete—both in physical stature and in level of accomplishment—the steel-making town ever produced. He was a highly decorated football player and wrestler at Freedom Area Senior High School in Beaver County.

His parents' work ethic and dedication to family were not lost on Covert growing up. "I always said I never had far to look for role models because they were right down the hall," he said of John and Patricia Covert.



Covert's athletic exploits gained him football scholarship offers from across the country. But Pitt, then under the direction of Coach Jackie Sherrill, was always it.

Covert began his ascension in earnest as a redshirt sophomore in 1980 at left offensive tackle. He became a fixture on Pitt's dominant offensive front his final three seasons, surrendering just three sacks during that span. As a consensus All-American his senior year, he did not give up a single sack.

Marino, his quarterback, was a big beneficiary of the airtight protection provided by his blind side tackle. "Jimbo made me look pretty good," said Marino, who was on hand to salute Covert in Canton.

"There were games when my uniform never got dirty. There were games when I never hit the ground. That's incredible."

Not coincidentally, Pitt went 31-5 during Covert's three years as a starter, finishing in the nation's top 10 each season. The 1980 and 1981 teams each went 11-1 and finished as high as number two in the national polls.

In his junior year, Covert was named a first team All-American by Football News and the Newspaper Enterprise Association—just as Moore had predicted.

As a senior, Covert earned consensus status by being named an All-American by no fewer than six different national selectors. Following his final Pitt season, he played in the prestigious Hula Bowl and Senior Bowl all-star

In a nod to his greatness while wearing the blue and gold, Pitt would retire Covert's number 75 jersey in 2015.

overt was chosen in the first round of the 1983 NFL Draft, sixth overall, by the Chicago Bears and Head Coach Mike Ditka, himself a former Pitt All-American from Western Pennsylvania.

Ditka said there was no debate on how the Bears would use their first-round pick in that draft.

"Jimbo's the guy we wanted. From day one, we put him at left tackle and moved on," Ditka said. "You don't get too many people who come along who can make that impact. He had the respect of all his teammates and all his coaches."

How did the rookie Covert earn such respect?

"By kicking [butt]," Ditka said. "But that's how we did it back then."

Covert quickly established himself as one of pro football's top offensive tackles and was a consensus All-Rookie Team pick. By his second NFL season, Covert was voted a Bears captain by his teammates.

With Covert as a spearhead, the Bears led the NFL in rushing four consecutive seasons from 1983 to 1986. His teammate, Hall of Fame running back Walter Payton, called him "the best offensive tackle in the NFL."

Covert was a vital part of Chicago's famed 1985 team—considered one of the finest in NFL history—that went 15-1 and demolished the New England Patriots 46-10 in Super Bowl XX.

It is an interesting footnote that the Bears' lone 1985 loss came against Marino's Miami Dolphins, 38-24. That



Dan Marino and Jimbo Covert during their NFL days

game is still considered a Monday Night Football classic and preserved the 1972 Dolphins' status as the only team in the Super Bowl era to go undefeated.

During that era, the Bears and the New York Giants were among the heavyweights annually vying to represent the National Football Conference (NFC) in the Super Bowl. Three times Covert squared off against the Giants and their devastating Hall of Fame pass rusher Lawrence Taylor. And all three times, Covert held Taylor without a sack.

"Covert was better than all of those guys in the NFC at the time—way better," former Giants coach Bill Parcells told Dan Pompei of The Athletic. "It's not close. He was one of the best in my 30 years in football. Other guys had to have help against Taylor."

Despite facing chronic back problems later in his pro career, Covert would play eight seasons in Chicago

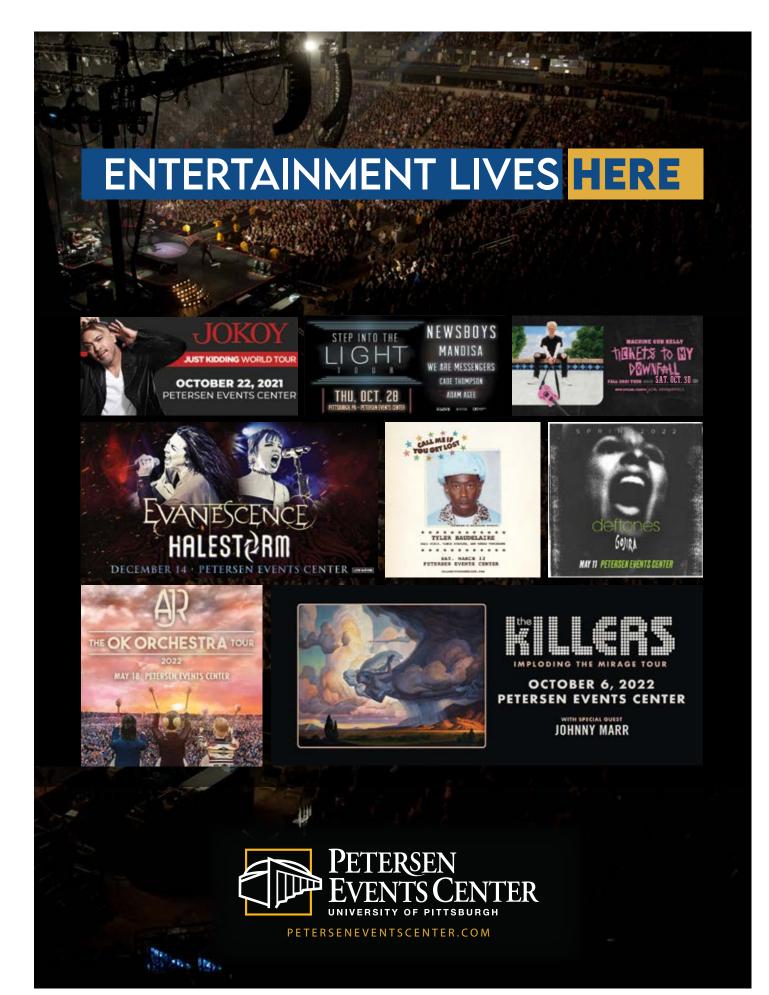
(1983-90), earning All-Pro honors four times, first-team All-NFL selection twice and Pro Bowl selection twice. He was twice named the NFL Offensive Lineman of the Year (1985 and 1986). Covert also was named to the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 1980s by the Pro Football Hall of Fame selection committee.

With nine former Panthers now enshrined, Pitt's pipeline to the Pro Football Hall of Fame is not likely to end anytime soon. An exceptional number of former Panthers are ready to be fitted for their own gold jackets in the coming years, including offensive lineman Ruben Brown, defensive tackle Aaron Donald, wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald, running back LeSean McCoy and cornerback Darrelle Revis.

It's a vivid reminder of Pitt's impressive pro football pedigree. The Panthers don't just become NFL players. They become NFL legends. **?** 

## Most Pro Football Hall of Famers by College

Notre Dame	13
Southern California	13
Michigan	11
Ohio State	10
Pittsburgh	9
Miami (Florida)	9
Alabama	8
Syracuse	8
Minnesota	7





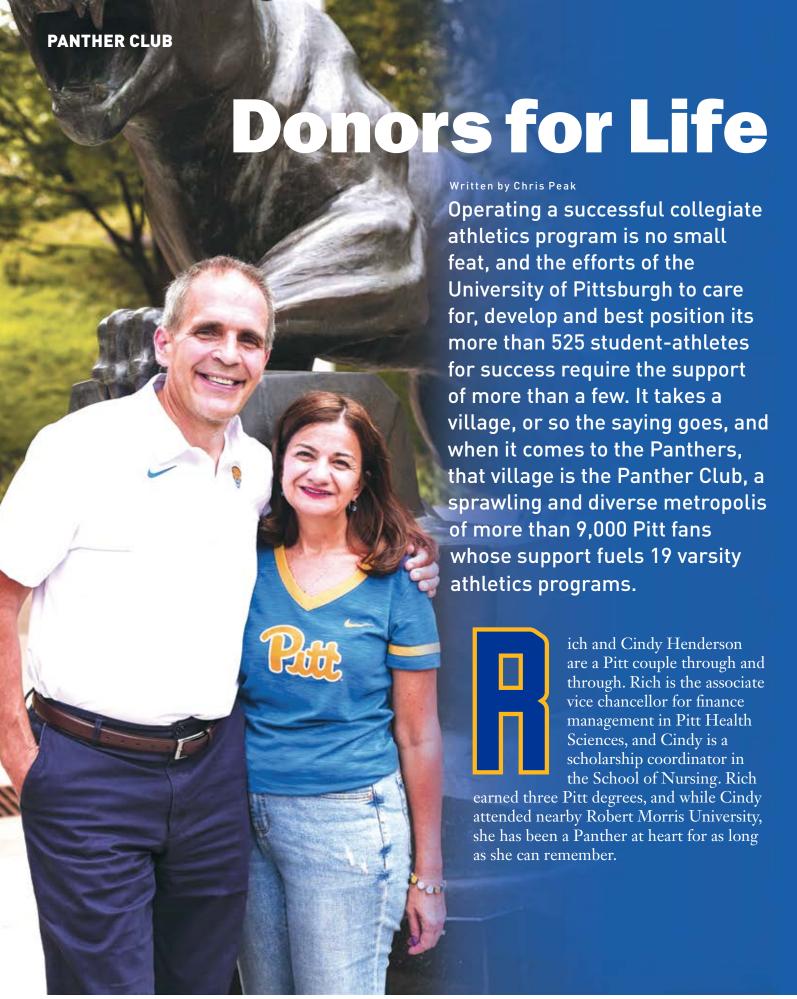




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\*National rankings derived from the REAL Trends 500 report; based on 2020 transaction sides.





"My dad was always a Pitt fan, so I just became a Pitt fan," Cindy says. "And a good friend of ours who played for Pitt, Bill Neill, became close with my family. We've just always been Pitt fans."

Like Cindy's, Rich's Pitt fandom runs in the family. "My dad went to Pitt and graduated in the Class of '59," he says. "He was always a Pitt fan, so I grew up a Pitt fan. It was the only school I applied to, and I've been a Pitt fan ever since."

Rich estimates that he and Cindy have had Pitt football and basketball season tickets for 20 years, and the Hendersons haven't let many—if any-of those tickets go to waste.

"Last year was the first year we missed basketball games, but we went to everything before that," Rich says. "We got invited to Jeff Capel's first press conference because we hadn't missed any games."

"I can't remember the last basketball game we missed before last year—or football," Cindy adds. "I just love going to Pitt sports. I missed it last year."

ich Feinstein has a bit in common with each of the Hendersons—he didn't go to Pitt, but his father did—but what he shares with both of them is a love for Pitt that has been passed down through generations.

"My father went to Pitt, and one of my sons went to Pitt," Feinstein says. "My son was in the Class of 2009 and my father was Class of 1928. He was a big Pitt sports fan, and he was a manager of the basketball team for Doc Carlson, so I had been raised to be a Pitt fan in all sports. When we moved back to Pittsburgh from Connecticut in the fall of 1960, I have a memory of going to a Pitt football game. I was 8 years old, and it was my first time at Pitt Stadium. I remember they played Miami and Mike Ditka was playing both offense and defense for Pitt."

Feinstein, who now lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland, first bought Pitt

football season tickets when his youngest son started attending Pitt in 2005. As the Panthers became one of the powerhouse teams in college basketball, his interest spread to the court as well.

"I got in the habit of going to the Big East tournament, which was a lot of fun," he says. "I was also in the Boston Garden for [Pitt's NCAA tournament loss to] Villanova and the MCI Center for [Pitt's NCAA tournament loss to] Butler two years

later. Those are powerful memories, even if they're not good ones.

"But I've been to a lot of good games, too. I was at the Pitt/ Clemson football game when they won at Clemson in 2016."

Feinstein has given to Pitt athletics and the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in the years since his son started attending classes on the Pittsburgh campus.

"I feel like it's a way of honoring both my father and my son," he says. "My dad was a season ticket holder, and I was raised to be interested in Pitt sports, so having my son go there reinforced those connections because we could go to games together. It's almost in my DNA."

hile Joe Timmerman didn't start his postsecondary education in Oakland, it didn't take long before he was studying in the Cathedral of Learning.

"I grew up in Gettysburg, and for my freshman year, I went to Pitt-Greensburg, thinking I would



Left to right: Linda Cumpston, Roc, Joe and Erin Timmerman, and Meghan Cumpston

ease into the Pittsburgh campus," Timmerman says. "I couldn't wait, though; I transferred after one year. I'm just a crazy Pitt fan."

Timmerman went to Pitt athletic events as a student, and when he graduated in 2001, he almost immediately grew into the role of alumni supporter.

"I became a lifetime member of the [Pitt] Alumni Association right off the bat, and I really stuck with athletics," he says. "I was a season ticket holder and jumped into the Panther Club and worked on my donations to get them up over the

"I saw the value in starting early and trying to build a bit of a standing. A couple [of] coworkers mentioned how they started donating when they finished up their degrees, and that seemed like something I wanted to be a part of."

During the last 20 years, Timmerman has worked to steadily increase his support for Pitt athletics. He and his wife, Erin, had season tickets to Pitt football games with seats near the 50-yard line, but they increased their donations to move to the club level, and Timmerman continues to look for

ways to support the University and the Department of Athletics.

"I mostly donate to athletics, but I have given some to specific things like civil engineering, and then on the [Pitt] Day of Giving, I spread some donations around," he says. "I look forward to the [National] Letter of Intent event every year; that is so much fun, and it goes by so fast. I like the kickoff luncheon a lot, and I sign up for the alumni association tailgates at road games, which I think are fantastic.

"I just really like the direction [Director of Athletics] Heather Lyke has things going."

ary Olup has seen Pitt's athletics programs go in a lot of directions over the years. Her late husband, Denny, had football season tickets when they got married in 1977, and she has been hooked ever since.

"We've had season tickets all those years," Olup says. "He's been gone 10 years now, but I still go. I have a group of fans that I know at the games, and a lot of it is about the tailgating and making connections that make it fun."

Olup has lived on Pittsburgh's South Side her entire life. "I can see the Cathedral of Learning from my bedroom window when it lights up at night," she says. She has a degree in business administration from Pitt, but that didn't come about in the traditional manner.

"I was working at U.S. Steel in the 1990s, and they had a tuition reimbursement program," she says. "I love Pitt so much that I took that program and graduated when I was 40. I'm a sports fan in general, but Pitt is my first love and only love."

Olup's fandom has taken her on road trips every year, from the thrilling 43-42 win at Clemson



Mary Olup

in 2016 to this fall's journey to Tennessee. She'll make those trips with some friends or on her own, but there's never any uncertainty about home games.

"I'm sure I have missed a home game somewhere in there, but I couldn't tell you what it was. There can't be many of them. I just can't stay away."

And while Olup's interests have primarily been in football and men's basketball, she has noticed the rising tide of Pitt athletics, too.

"There was a lot to root for this year," she says. "Our volleyball team, which I have started to come around with, they were great, and I went to a few games last year and ordered a 15-game package for this year. I wanted to see the softball team, and I bought

tickets for the women's basketball team. We have a lot to root for, and that's a great thing."

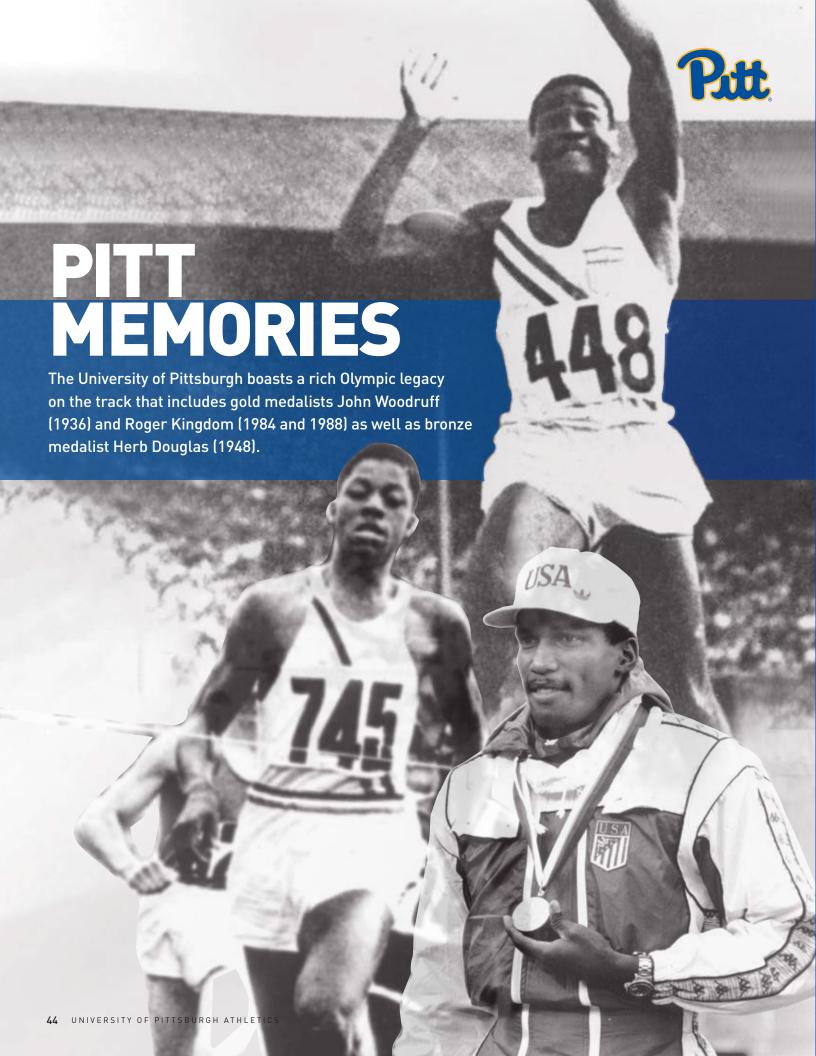
The successes Pitt has experienced throughout the Department of Athletics in recent vears have come through the hard work of the Panthers' coaches and athletes, but they could not have been achieved without the support of the Panther Club. Fans like the Hendersons, Feinstein, Timmerman, Olup and more than 9,000 like them create the foundation on which The Gold Standard for Pitt Athletics is built, and the continued growth of that support will further develop the world-class experience for all Panther student-athletes.



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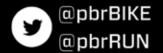
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