

# H2P

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
ATHLETICS MAGAZINE  
SPRING 2023

## THE ULTIMATE TRAILBLAZER

Herbert P. Douglas Jr.  
(1922-2023)

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

WELCOME,  
COACHES

NATIONAL  
CHAMPION NINO

MEN'S  
BASKETBALL  
MAKES MAGIC

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SPRING 2023

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## On the Cover:

**THE ULTIMATE TRAILBLAZER**  
Oldest living Olympic medalist, University of Pittsburgh alumnus and emeritus trustee Herb Douglas has died at the age of 101. See the cover story beginning on page 32.

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## Dear Pitt friends,

I want to dedicate this space to expressing my appreciation for four people who have made indelible impacts on the University of Pittsburgh as well as its Department of Athletics.

As this issue's cover story reflects in more detail, **Herb Douglas** led a truly remarkable life. His passing on April 22 at the age of 101 prompted hundreds of tributes that spanned the country and even the world.

Whether it was as an Olympic medalist, a business executive or a personal mentor, Herb influenced and inspired so many people. That was very evident at his memorial service, held at Heinz Memorial Chapel, where an incredible array of attendees celebrated his life and legacy.

Roger Kingdom, another Pitt Olympian, summed up Herb so well by saying, "He's a great pillar of this university. He's almost like the Cathedral of Learning. That's Mr. Douglas ... you look at him as that pillar to inspire you."

He certainly inspired me. One of the great blessings during my time at Pitt was getting to know Herb. I'll always cherish our time together, the stories he shared and the lessons he taught me.

That his name will grace our future indoor track is fitting and will ensure that his legacy lives on to inspire future Panthers.

If you have ever been to a football game at Acrisure Stadium, you very likely have walked past—or even posed for a photo with—the epic Panther statue located by Gate A.

That statue was the result of the vision and generosity of **Charles "Corky" Cost** and his wife, Frances, who, upon the stadium's opening, wanted Pitt fans to have a place to meet up on game days.

The statue represented two of Corky Cost's biggest passions: his alma mater and building great structures.

Corky passed away on April 28 at the age of 87. At Pitt, he completed an engineering degree while earning nine varsity letters in three different sports (football, baseball and basketball). He then went on to lead Cost Company, one of this region's top construction companies, for six decades.

There are two athletic facilities on upper campus named in his honor: our baseball stadium, Charles L. Cost Field, and the Cost Sports Center, which is used by varsity, club and intramural teams throughout the year.

Corky was a true Pitt and Pittsburgh original. His impact on both won't soon be forgotten.

**Dick Groat** was not a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh. You'd be forgiven for thinking he was, given his passion for all things Panthers and especially Pitt basketball.

For four decades, he served as the colorful, enthusiastic and proudly partisan radio analyst for our men's basketball team. He and Bill Hillgrove will go down as one of the most beloved broadcasting duos ever in Pittsburgh.

Dick's exploits as an athlete himself are well documented: a two-time All-America basketball player at Duke, drafted by both Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association, the 1960 National League MVP and a two-time World Series champion as a member of the Pittsburgh Pirates and St. Louis Cardinals.

Upon his April 27 passing at the age of 92, one observer described him as the "humblest Hall of Famer you'll ever meet." For the record, Dick was inducted into no fewer than five halls of fame, most recently gaining that honor with the Pirates.

His diploma may have read Duke, but for legions of Panthers fans, he will always be considered one of Pitt's finest ambassadors.



Chancellor Patrick Gallagher and Director of Athletics Heather Lyke greet Herb Douglas at a Victory Heights press conference at the Petersen Events Center in January 2020.

As we enter the month of June, **Patrick Gallagher** is in his final weeks serving as chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh.

His Pitt tenure has been characterized by incredible progress, steering us through the challenges of the pandemic and further strengthening our institution's brand as a national leader in higher education and research. Pitt is strong and getting stronger every day thanks to his leadership.

On a personal note, I will forever be indebted to Chancellor Gallagher for providing me with the opportunity to become Pitt's director of athletics in March 2017. His support and belief in our vision for Pitt Athletics has been invaluable and unshakable.

As of this writing, the former green space adjacent to the Petersen Events Center is a large, highly active construction zone. Each day, big machines are digging and pushing dirt on the site of our future state-of-the-art arena and sports performance center—also known as Victory Heights—that will dramatically impact the experience of 16 of our 19 teams.

Chancellor Gallagher was our earliest advocate for this facility. He understood and embraced our goals for comprehensive excellence. We did not want to achieve in just a few sports. We didn't want to compete for a championship only once in a while. "Building champions and committed to excellence" is an all-day, every day mission for Pitt Athletics, and Chancellor Gallagher has been invested in those efforts from the very beginning.

Thank you, Chancellor Gallagher, for your belief; your support; and, most of all, your friendship. On behalf of Pitt Athletics, I wish you and Karen only the very best in your next chapter.

Hail to Pitt!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather Lyke".

Heather Lyke  
Director of Athletics





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# NAME, IMAGE & LIKENESS

## NIL in Motion



### Kenny Pickett FOOTBALL

**M**any football fans know Kenny Pickett as Pitt's Heisman Trophy finalist who is now the starting quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers. But Pickett was also a leader in the Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) space in the first full season of the new rules allowing collegiate student-athletes to profit from their success.

Pickett was nationally lauded for his NIL initiatives, which emphasized philanthropy as well as his teammates. Pickett's volunteerism while on campus included efforts with the Boys and Girls Club of Western Pennsylvania, Make-A-Wish of Greater Pennsylvania and West Virginia, the Dollar Energy Fund and Voting Matters campaign.

Pickett used a partnership with The Oaklander to take his offensive linemen out to dinner each week during Pitt's 2021 ACC title campaign and also donated his student-athlete per diem so that local youth teams could have resources to purchase bottled water for practices and games.



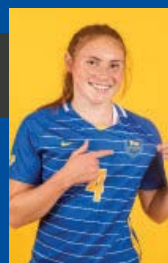
### Julianna Dalton VOLLEYBALL

Julianna Dalton joined the Pitt Volleyball program in January 2022 and immediately began taking advantage of the NIL opportunities within the city through partnerships with nine different businesses: TIY, Dunkin, Roots Natural Kitchen, Hyperice, CVS, Nude Skyn, Girlfriend Collective, Pura, and Firefly. She is using her status as a starting outside hitter for a Pitt Volleyball team that has reached back-to-back Final Fours along with her already strong social media presence to exemplify the successful modern student-athlete both for her teammates and the entire Pitt Athletics Department.



### Jamarius Burton MEN'S BASKETBALL

Jamarius Burton set out to create organic partnerships that align with his personal values and goals during his final season at Pitt. An avid student of marketing principles, he used NIL opportunities to grow his brand and develop his own platforms. The launch of his podcast, "Just Buckets," enabled him to explore his own voice on a variety of topics beyond the sport of basketball. He also found local businesses, including Gussy's Bagels & Deli and The Scoring Factory, to partner with for commercial inventory within the podcast. Burton also has been actively exploring the fashion space, appearing in a number of photo shoots for local apparel lines.



### Ellie Coffield WOMEN'S SOCCER

Ellie Coffield has taken part in several NIL deals, including an exciting partnership with her favorite place to eat, Piada Italian Street Food. She attended the grand opening of the chain's newest location in North Fayette, got to try its newest and most popular dish and also has received other great benefits when ordering from Piada. Coffield's partnership with the clothing brand Vuori is very special to her because it is a brand that she has always loved. The partnership has benefited her friends and family as well as her. Being a student-athlete at Pitt in the NIL era has created a great deal of opportunities and opened new doors to making connections for Coffield.



# YOUR NIL TOOLKIT



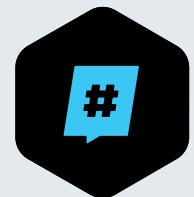
Alliance 412, the preferred collective for Pitt Athletics, provides innovative solutions to establish and monetize the brands of Pitt student-athletes. **Founded by Chris Bickell, a 1997 alumnus and philanthropist who made the largest single donation in Pitt Athletics history, the deep Pittsburgh roots of Alliance 412 enable impactful relationships with our community to develop and creatively execute NIL opportunities for Pitt student-athletes.** Pitt Athletics is committed to excellence in everything we do, and we are proud to partner with Alliance 412 which shares our vision and values. To learn more about how you can support Pitt student-athletes through Alliance 412, visit [Alliance412.com](https://Alliance412.com).

The Pitt NIL Exchange is a student-athlete NIL business registry, custom designed for businesses, donors, alumni and any other interested parties wishing to connect with student-athletes regarding NIL opportunities. Registered businesses can search, filter and initiate conversations with Pitt student-athletes to discuss an NIL deal as well as create a transaction that will produce a direct payment to the student-athlete and automate a disclosure to compliance once the deal has been completed. **Since its launch in September 2022, the Pitt NIL Exchange has been one of the most visited sites of its kind in college athletics.**



Pitt has partnered with industry leader The Brandr Group for a comprehensive group licensing program to allow student-athletes to monetize their NIL opportunities in conjunction with the usage of official Pitt Athletics marks (logos, name, colors). **Joining the Pitt group licensing agreement enables student-athletes to receive royalties off replica jerseys, video games, shirseys, specialty t-shirts, and additional apparel and merchandise.**

Pitt uses its partnership with INFLCR to provide its student-athletes with all the tools needed to grow their individual brand while educating themselves on all aspects of the NIL space. INFLCR is your one-stop shop to have unparalleled access to digital content, top-notch education, social media value metrics, and NIL monetization opportunities. **Throughout its two-year partnership with INFLCR, Pitt has consistently ranked among the top schools in the country in both digital content provided and student-athlete content downloads.**



Advance, an industry leader in NIL consulting, education, life skills development and due diligence technology solutions, enhances the NIL education process of Pitt student-athletes. The diversity and real-world experiences of the Advance team provide enhanced relatability and unparalleled engagement. **Advance strategically brings together experts across sports business, athletic administration, education, finance, law, marketing, branding and risk/compliance for the benefit of Pitt student-athletes.**

The Cathy & John Pelusi Family Life Skills Program, the nation's largest such program, has been preparing student-athletes for success academically, athletically, and in their personal development for more than 25 years. **The Life Skills team has now expanded its individualized approach to student-athlete growth to include NIL education and mentorship.**



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Pitt student-athletes have a direct link to their Pitt NIL Exchange profile from their bio page on [PittsburghPanthers.com](https://PittsburghPanthers.com).





# NINO BONACCORSI

## Pitt Wrestling's 17th NCAA Champion

Written by R.J. Sepich

**T**wo years ago, Nino Bonaccorsi returned to the University of Pittsburgh after a heroic weekend in St. Louis at the 2021 NCAA wrestling championships.

As a number six seed at that tournament, Bonaccorsi surprised many college wrestling fans by advancing to the final at 197 pounds, accomplishing a lifelong goal of becoming an All-American and standing on the podium as one of the best wrestlers in the nation.

But despite outperforming his seed and finishing second, Bonaccorsi was not totally satisfied.

After returning to campus, Bonaccorsi walked into the wrestling room at the Fitzgerald Field House with head coach Keith Gavin to drop off some equipment. He took a moment and looked up at a plaque on the wall in honor of Gavin, who won Pitt's previous individual national title in 2008.

"Being a finalist was amazing, but I want to be on that wall next to you," Bonaccorsi told Gavin that day. "I want to be Pitt's next national champion."

Fast forward to 2023: On a Saturday night at the BOK Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Bonaccorsi returned to the 197-pound final with a national audience watching on ESPN.

Two more years of hard work and dedication had put Bonaccorsi back on the biggest stage in college wrestling. After a disappointing exit at the 2022 NCAA wrestling championships served as a reminder of how hard it is to win at nationals, he had returned for his final season with a refocused attitude.



Bonaccorsi embraces Coach Keith Gavin after winning the 2023 national championship in Tulsa. Gavin, Pitt's previous national champion in 2008, today leads a Panthers wrestling program that has produced 84 All-Americans and 17 national champions.

This time, Bonaccorsi entered as the favorite, the undefeated top seed facing seventh-seeded Tanner Sloan from South Dakota State. Seven minutes of wrestling separated him from his destiny: a national title.

Years of wrestling practices and hopes and dreams had led to this moment—his final match in a Pitt singlet and the final match of his six-season college wrestling career with Gavin and the Panthers.

For a moment, late in the first period, things took an unexpected turn. Sloan recorded a takedown and earned a 2-0 lead after the opening three minutes of action. That wasn't in the script.

Bonaccorsi turned to Gavin in his corner and was met with a simple message: "Keep wrestling."

Sloan then escaped to lead 3-0 halfway through the match. But Bonaccorsi kept wrestling.

The tide turned moments later, as he took down his opponent with a single leg, and the normally stoic Gavin



Nino Bonaccorsi took down South Dakota State's Tanner Sloan in the third period of the 197-pound NCAA final.



Bonaccorsi became Pitt's first national champion in wrestling since current head coach Keith Gavin won a title for the Panthers in 2008.

roared his approval and applauded his senior captain, sensing a shift in momentum. Bonaccorsi kept Sloan on the mat for the remainder of the second period and then, to the surprise of some, chose neutral in the third period, with the score now tied at 3-3.

"Two minutes on our feet. Let the best man win," Bonaccorsi thought.

Of course, for Bonaccorsi, it wasn't just two minutes. It was two minutes after two decades of dedication to something that is more a lifestyle than a sport.

In that final period, Bonaccorsi once again attacked a single leg of Sloan's—something he later told the media was a callback to his first-ever wrestling practice as a kid, when his

father, Mark, taught him how to attack and finish a single-leg takedown effectively.

"My dad has been my number-one fan my entire life,"

Bonaccorsi told reporters through tears after the match. "I remember my dad teaching me how to hit a single leg in my first practice. And tonight, I hit a single leg to win the national title. It was full circle. He's my best friend. I couldn't have done it without him."

Relying on his willpower as well as the support of his coaches in the corner and his family matside, Bonaccorsi took Sloan to the ground once again and finished the match on top, winning 5-3 as the sold-out crowd in Tulsa rose to recognize the winner.

Finally, after 15 years, Pitt wrestling produced another NCAA champion, the 17th in program history.

When Bonaccorsi returned to campus from NCAAs this year, he walked up to the Cathedral of Learning and saw the building lit with the famous victory lights in his honor, recognizing a historic achievement.

Gavin now has company on the wall of Pitt's wrestling room. Achieving the goal he set for himself, Bonaccorsi will always have a place next to his head coach—figuratively and literally.

Both came to Pitt as underrecruited prospects who failed to win a Pennsylvania title in high school. Both developed and dedicated themselves to their craft, advancing to the NCAA finals as upstarts before ultimately falling. And both returned to the national championship match as undefeated top seeds and validated that ranking by winning a first NCAA title in their final collegiate match.

And now they are forever connected as Pitt wrestling legends and role models to wrestlers throughout Western Pennsylvania and across the country. 📍







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# Gary Bowser: A Pitt Man Through and Through



Written by Craig Meyer

Bowser family members and friends demonstrating their Pitt pride while on vacation

**F**or as long as he can remember, Gary Bowser has felt a special connection to the University of Pittsburgh. It's a part of who he is.

The school he grew up cheering for and later graduated from is now one that Bowser, who today owns a number of Pittsburgh-area car dealerships, donates to and partners with, solidifying and strengthening what was already an indelible bond.

"I feel like I have a responsibility to support the university that provided me with some of the best years of my life," Bowser says. "I try to teach that to my own kids. The most important things I got out of Pitt were the relationships that I've made throughout Western Pennsylvania."

Bowser's affinity for the Panthers began at an early age. He was born in Kittanning and raised in Murrysville, Pennsylvania. His father (who also is named Gary and also was a dealership owner) donated to the University's athletics department and relished offering his son an up-close look at the sports he loved. Growing up, Bowser

“

You can't go anywhere without people talking about Pitt right now. I think that's a great thing for Heather Lyke and everything she's been able to achieve. The athletics at Pitt, pretty much all of them are pointed in the right direction."

– Gary Bowser

would get to go down on the field at the old Pitt Stadium, where he fondly recalls watching coach Jackie Sherrill's football teams during one of the most accomplished runs in program history, which included getting the chance to see an Oakland-bred quarterback by the name of Dan Marino.

Over time, his interest expanded beyond football. Beginning in the late 1980s, Bowser began making the trek to New York City every year for the Big East men's basketball tournament to watch Pitt compete in—and eventually win—the storied event.

"That was always one you circled

on the calendar," Bowser says. "You couldn't wait to get up there."

Bowser's passion for Pitt was brewing as he began to immerse himself in the family business. He has worked at his father's dealership in some capacity since he was a kid, moving from the car detailing shop all the way to the general manager position and, eventually, ownership.

Today, 40 years after the group of dealerships got started, Bowser Automotive Inc. has three locations and sells the full lines of Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, Hyundai, Genesis, Subaru and Nissan. The brand is one of the most



recognizable in the region.

Bowser runs the dealerships with his brother, Kurt, and is still guided by the early lessons and values passed along to him by his father.

“My dad has always been a people person,” he says. “He’s always about making sure you have the best people on your staff that you can have.”

Since graduating from Pitt in 1995, Bowser has remained active with his alma mater, donating to its athletic teams and providing support where he can.

Over the past several years, with changes to the rules in college athletics that govern the name, image and likeness rights of athletes, he has been able to forge relationships with those in the athletics department in new, exciting ways.

He has signed deals with a number of Pitt football players—most notably, Kenny Pickett and Calijah Kancey—providing them with Bowser cars through his Wheels of Support program, which also has outfitted Chris Bickell ’97 Head Football Coach Pat Narduzzi and other staff members. Through a strong and trusting relationship, Bowser defers to Narduzzi when it comes to selecting players for such an agreement. In return for the car, a player only has to make posts on social media.

What has become a familiar exchange over the years—handing car keys over to the vehicle’s jubilant new owner—has taken on a different meaning, melding two of Bowser’s loves.

“Even today for me, you still get that excitement when you get a new car,” he says. “For them to come in, it’s great to see the expression and the happiness they show. I still have a deal going with Kenny [Pickett], even now that he’s with the Steelers. He’s been nothing but a treat to work with—very, very respectful, super nice, makes himself available. We don’t ask him to do too much anymore because of his role and everything else.”

Recently, that excitement has taken on a different form. Much like when he first became a fan of the school, the Pitt athletic teams are thriving—and on a



Kenny Pickett



Calijah Kancey



Gary Bowser's Pitt van

widespread scale.

Pitt’s football team has won 20 games over the past two seasons, the most over a two-year stretch since the end of Sherrill’s tenure in the early 1980s. Under coach Jeff Capel, the men’s basketball program won 24 games; made its first NCAA tournament in seven years; and, once there, won a pair of games. The women’s volleyball program has gone 61-8 over the past two seasons and has advanced to back-to-back Final Fours. The men’s soccer team has made the College Cup in two of the past three seasons, completing one of the more remarkable turnarounds in any sport nationally at the Division I level. This past season, the women’s soccer team made its first-ever NCAA tournament, where it won two games and advanced to the round of 16. In March, Nino Bonaccorsi became the Panthers’ 17th NCAA wrestling champion and the first in 15 years after earning the crown at the 197-pound level.


“It’s great to see the energy back, not just in the football and basketball programs, now that they’re both back and heading in the right direction, but all the other programs like wrestling,” Bowser says. “You can’t go anywhere without people talking about Pitt right now. I think that’s a great thing for

Heather Lyke and everything she’s been able to achieve. The athletics at Pitt, pretty much all of them are pointed in the right direction.”

That success has made the experience of being a fan and donor that much more rewarding for Bowser and his family—his wife, Lisa, and his five children, Riley, Brett, Kaitlyn, Matthew and Ashley.

Pitt athletics remain a source of intense joy for him, and his enthusiasm can be seen in a refashioned bus that’s plastered with pictures of some of Pitt’s all-time great football players—Marino, Aaron Donald, Hugh Green, Mike Ditka, Larry Fitzgerald and others—that he brings to tailgates.

If the bus isn’t enough of an indication, Bowser is truly a Pitt man.

“The education, of course, was extremely important, but surrounding yourself with good quality people who have maintained a special place in my life going forward, everything always seems to circle back to my days at Pitt,” he says. 

# New Coaches Bring Experience, Confidence and Commitment to Excellence

**T**he University of Pittsburgh Department of Athletics strives to provide the best and most comprehensive student-athlete experience in the nation. Fundamental to that experience is the acquisition of extraordinary coaching talent. Most recently, the department recruited and welcomed new coaches for the women's basketball and gymnastics programs.

## Tory Verdi Gets to Work



Tory Verdi was introduced as the 10th head coach in Pitt women's basketball history by Director of Athletics Heather Lyke on April 7, 2023.



“

We're not saying that we need all this time to rebuild and get the right people in. We're winning. I'm not going to sit here and tell you a number, but I can tell you that this team will be different."

– Coach Tory Verdi



Verdi was joined by his wife, Heather, and two of his three children, Avery and Bradyn.

When Tory Verdi sat down for his introductory press conference, he made one thing very clear: He has never shied away from a challenge and has no plans to start now.

Verdi, a proven builder of programs in the Mid-American and Atlantic 10 conferences, was hired on April 7, 2023, as the 10th women's basketball coach in University of Pittsburgh history.

"We had great expectations of what we needed in our next leader, and we did not settle for anything less," says Pitt Director of Athletics Heather Lyke. "We found that leader in Tory Verdi."

The New Britain, Connecticut, native spent the last seven years at UMass, where he led a total revival of the women's basketball program by guiding the team to 53 wins and a pair of championships over the last two seasons.

He has inherited a Pitt program looking to break through in the ACC.

"Today is the day that we start winning," says Verdi. "And we will win big here. I felt it from the moment I stepped on campus."

At UMass, he took over a program that had gone 45-134 in the six years prior. Verdi left having gone 89-33 over the last four seasons, winning an Atlantic 10 regular season title and the conference tournament in 2021-22, clinching a spot in the NCAA tournament.

Before his time at UMass, Verdi spent four years as the head coach at Eastern Michigan University, including

two working under Lyke. Following a challenging first season, he took the Eagles to 64 wins over the following three seasons, making the Women's National Invitation Tournament twice.

"For two years, I watched Coach Verdi's work ethic," Lyke says. "I saw how he built relationships with his players [and] the interactions with our donors and our community. I saw his concept of family come to life."

Verdi has had coaching stops as an assistant at Columbia University, the

University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Kansas and also has worked in the WNBA, spending three seasons with the Connecticut Sun.

Now he is tasked with building the Panthers' program in one of the nation's elite women's basketball conferences.

"We're not waiting for three years," Verdi says. "We're not saying that we need all this time to rebuild and get the right people in. We're winning. I'm not going to sit here and tell you



Verdi met with returning players following his introductory press conference inside the Petersen Events Center.

a number, but I can tell you that this team will be different.”

When Verdi stepped off the plane in Pittsburgh, he was accompanied by his wife, Heather, and his children, Avery, Bradyn and Tyler. Family is something Verdi takes seriously and plans to turn into a bedrock of how he builds his program at Pitt.

With that and the help of the transfer portal, Verdi is confident that

Pitt can become a winner sooner than some might think possible.

“I think everyone wants instant gratification,” he says. “But I will tell you this: There is nobody out here who is more competitive than [I am]. There’s nobody who wants to win more than [I do]. So I don’t have patience.”

Ultimately, he understands that Pitt has become a place to compete, a place to win and a place to bring titles

to. Both of Pitt’s soccer teams, plus its volleyball, football and now men’s basketball programs, are among those that have enjoyed strong seasons of late after tougher stretches in seasons prior.

Verdi wants women’s basketball to be the next in line.

“This is the City of Champions,” he says. “It’s time we do our part. It’s time to get to work. It’s time to play for and win championships.”

## Casey Jo MacPherson Has Great Expectations



Casey Jo MacPherson at her introductory press conference with Heather Lyke

**C**asey Jo MacPherson, named the new University of Pittsburgh head gymnastics coach in April 2023, becomes the fourth head coach in Pitt gymnastics history. She comes to Pitt from the University of Missouri, where she served as associate head coach for three years and assistant coach for six seasons before that. In that time, she earned a strong positive reputation across the NCAA.

“From my first conversation with Heather Lyke, it’s been clear how

committed she and her staff are to every sport and student-athlete at the University of Pittsburgh,” says MacPherson. “The passion and dedication throughout the athletic department create an energy that gets you excited about the future.”

In her 10 seasons with the Tigers, MacPherson helped to bring Missouri gymnastics to national prominence. Missouri’s top eight all-time beam scores, and nine of the top 12, all came under her direction. She also coached three Tigers to Women’s Collegiate Gymnastics Association regular

season All-America honors on the apparatus.

“When we searched the country for a new leader of our women’s gymnastics program, we found the perfect fit in Casey Jo MacPherson,” says Lyke. “Her extraordinary competitive background, phenomenal coaching experience, dynamic and genuine personality and desire to build Pitt gymnastics into a nationally competitive program make her the ideal person to lead our team.”

During its run in the 2023 season, MacPherson’s beam team dominated,



“

I am so excited to connect with this talented team and begin building our championship program.”

– Coach Casey Jo MacPherson



MacPherson with her parents, Charlie and Geni; her husband, Scott; and her daughter, Charlie Marie

setting a new beam program high score of 49.550. Over the season, Mizzou earned at least a 49.200 on the apparatus seven times, with three scores of 49.500 or better. At the NCAA regional second round, the Tigers posted a 49.475 on the balance beam, pushing the team to a new regional program high. Alisa Sheremeta confirmed a spot as an individual competitor on the beam based on her 9.950 performance in the NCAA regional final and went on to claim All-America honors on beam at the 2023 NCAA Championship.

In 2021, MacPherson’s beam team finished the regular season ranked 10th nationally with a national qualifying score of 49.369. Over the course of the season, the Tigers scored at least 49.250 on the event six times, including three scores of 49.400 or better. At the NCAA second round, MacPherson’s team totaled 49.450 on beam, which shattered the postseason team beam record and marked the team’s second-highest beam score in program history.

Prior to her tenure at Missouri, MacPherson

helped to lead the Western Michigan University Broncos to the 2013 Mid-American Conference championship as their assistant coach. Her responsibilities included beam and floor workouts, choreography and routine construction.

“We have great expectations for this program as we head into the first year of gymnastics in the ACC and the upcoming completion of new training and competition spaces in

the new Victory Heights arena and performance center,” says Lyke. “We could not be more excited to have Casey Jo as our new leader.”

“I am so excited to connect with this talented team and begin building our championship program,” MacPherson says. “I’m very grateful to Heather and the Pitt family for this opportunity and look forward to competing for the first ACC gymnastics championship. Hail to Pitt!” 🐾



MacPherson with members of the Pitt gymnastics team







# ABBY EDWARDS



Written by Josh Rowntree



Abby Edwards is set to be one of “the few, the proud.”

That motto, associated with the U.S. Marine Corps, perfectly encapsulates Edwards, a fifth-year softball pitcher at the University of Pittsburgh.

Last summer, Edwards graduated, but not from Pitt. The Dwight, Illinois, native completed the Marine Corps’ Officer Candidates School in Quantico, Virginia.

The program—a rigorous 10-week commitment—is designed to screen and evaluate potential Marine Corps officers and commissions its graduates as second lieutenants.

“My whole life, I’ve thought about the Marine Corps,” says Edwards, whose father, Dan, was a Marine. “But I never really thought about the officer route.”

Edwards got that idea thanks, in part, due to softball.

Former Pitt softball head coach Jodi Hermanek’s brother-in-law, who is a Marine, saw Edwards pitch last season and learned about her desire to join the military. He mentioned to the coaching staff that it would be a great opportunity for Edwards and that she should look into the Officer Candidates School.

“It definitely opened my eyes a little bit more,” Edwards says, “and I decided, okay, this is something I want to do.”

The 10-week school, like most Marine Corps activities, was grueling.

“It was kind of a crazy process, because I didn’t do much [to prepare] before going there,” she says. “I just kind of stepped right into it. So that was a little nerve-racking.”

“You have academics, physical fitness and leadership—those are the three things you’re graded on there. And they very much focus on that leadership aspect of it.”

Edwards not only completed the program, she thrived. She earned a special achievement award for her

remarkable level of fitness. That recognition made her the highest-scoring candidate in her battalion.

“It was very physically demanding,” she says. “But it was definitely a mentally demanding thing, too. If you know about a Marine Corps boot camp, that’s basically what it was like.”

Edwards returned to Pitt shortly after completing the program and began preparing for her final season on the diamond.

Along the way, she was able to show off that athleticism in a unique way.

After four years on the team, used only for her arm, she got her first career at bat on Feb. 25 against Sam Houston State University—and hit a home run.

“Being able to do that, for the team, was really good,” she says, “a really good feeling.”


This spring, after completing her final season on the field, Edwards graduated in a more traditional sense. She received degrees in biological sciences and administration of justice from Pitt and walked across the stage at the Petersen Events Center in a cap and gown that will soon be traded in for fatigues.

Her path is one that is unusual in collegiate sports, particularly at a level like the ACC. But it’s also one that affirms that perseverance knows no bounds.

“I’ve never even thought about inspiring others with it,” she admits. “But if other people do see that I’m a softball player, and I play in the ACC, and they’ve thought about going into the Marine Corps, maybe they’ll be motivated to do the same.”

Edwards’ family, she says, is incredibly supportive of her plans, no matter what they may entail. She has a four-year commitment to the Marines ahead and will go to the Marine Corps’ Basic School in Quantico, a seven-week school for officers.

At this point, she’s unsure of what she wants to specialize in during her career in the military. But she does know what she wants to get out of the time she spends serving her country.

“Whatever it is I do, that’s not exactly up to me, because they decide that for you based on what you’re good at,” she says. “But I just want to be the best Marine I can be.” 





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**Coach Kreidler  
Leads Pitt Swimming  
and Diving to a**

# **RECORD- BREAKING SEASON**

Written by Elisabeth Schmidt

The 2022-23 season was one of the most successful campaigns in the last two decades for the University of Pittsburgh swimming and diving programs. Under the direction of first-year head coach Chase Kreidler, the Panthers saw 29 program records broken, 15 student-athletes qualify for the 2023 NCAA championships and two divers qualify for the 2024 U.S. Olympic trials.



# CHAMPIONSHIPS

Marcin Goraj and Head Coach Chase Kreitler at the 2023 NCAA Men's Championships in Minneapolis, Minnesota




Dylan Reed at the 2023 ACC Championships in Greensboro, North Carolina



Goraj at the 2023 ACC Championships in Greensboro

Pitt women's swimmer in the last six years. Vega finished 25th overall in the women's platform, while Jansen became the first freshman swimmer to represent Pitt at the NCAA championships since 2006.

The men's team continued its success in the postseason by having 12 members qualify for the NCAA championships, the most in recent memory of the program. The men's 400-yard medley relay team, composed of Krzysztof Radziszewski, Cooper Van der Laan, Marcin Goraj and Dominic Toledo, finished 16th overall and broke its own school record with a time of 3:05.72, earning Honorable Mention All-America accolades.

Van der Laan and Reed both secured individual Honorable Mention All-America honors at the championships, as Van der Laan placed 16th overall in the 100-yard breaststroke and Reed finished 16th overall in the 1-meter finals. Reed, a three-time NCAA qualifier, recorded the highest finish under diving head coach Katie Kasprzak and the highest finish since Dominic Giordano won the national title in 2016. 

Senior Dylan Reed set the tone for the season as he was named to the 2022-23 USA Diving High Performance Squad in early November. The 2023 Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) championships bronze medalist is the first member of the Pitt diving program to garner this invitation to team USA. Strong postseason performances from Reed and sophomore Cameron Cash earned both divers an opportunity to compete at the U.S. Olympic trials.

Breaking records seemed to become second nature to the Panthers during the 2023 ACC championships, as Pitt swimmers and divers combined to break 21 school records over the course of the weeklong event. The men's team also made its mark in the record book by posting the highest team finish in program history (seventh) with 660.5 total points.

Junior Sophie Yendell left the ACC championships with her name on six school records and was one of three women from the Panthers to qualify for the NCAA championships. Yendell, first-year swimmer Claire Jansen and sophomore diver Jess Vega all represented Pitt in Knoxville, Tennessee. Yendell finished 18th overall in the 50-yard freestyle, marking the highest NCAA finish by a



Sophie Yendell at the 2023 NCAA Women's Swimming and Diving Championships in Knoxville, Tennessee





Krzysztof Radziszewski at the 2023 NCAA Men's Swimming and Diving Championships in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



Claire Jansen at the 2023 NCAA Women's Swimming and Diving Championships in Knoxville

## RECORDS BROKEN IN 2023

### WOMEN'S

EVENT	NAME(S)	TIME	MEET	DATE
50 Free	Sophie Yendell	22.34	Minnesota Invite	Dec. 1, 2022
	Sophie Yendell	22.00	ACC Championships (Prelims)	Feb. 15, 2023
	Sophie Yendell	21.89	ACC Championships (Finals)	Feb. 15, 2023
100 Fly	Sophie Yendell	53.43	Minnesota Invite	Dec. 2, 2022
	Sophie Yendell	53.35	ACC Championships (Prelims)	Feb. 16, 2023
	Sophie Yendell	52.62	ACC Championships (Finals)	Feb. 16, 2023
100 Free	Sophie Yendell	49.07	ACC Championships	Feb. 18, 2023
200 Medley Relay	Claire Jansen, Tatum Detwiler, Sophie Yendell, Kate Fuhrmann	1:36.68	ACC Championships	Feb. 14, 2023
200 Free Relay	Claire Jansen, Tatum Detwiler, Sophie Yendell, Kate Fuhrmann	1:29.18	ACC Championships	Feb. 15, 2023
50 Back	Claire Jansen	24.73*	Minnesota Invite	Nov. 30, 2022
	Claire Jansen	24.42*	ACC Championships	Feb. 14, 2023
100 Back	Claire Jansen	52.35	ACC Championships	Feb. 17, 2023
	Claire Jansen	52.33	UGA Last Chance Meet	Feb. 26, 2023
400 Medley Relay	Claire Jansen, Tatum Detwiler, Sophie Yendell, Kate Fuhrmann	3:36.54	ACC Championships	Feb. 17, 2023

\* relay split time

### MEN'S

EVENT	NAME(S)	TIME	MEET	DATE
200 Medley Relay	Krzysztof Radziszewski, Marcin Goraj, Cooper Van der Laan, Flynn Crisci	1:23.98	ACC Championships	Feb. 14, 2023
	Krzysztof Radziszewski, Marcin Goraj, Cooper Van der Laan, Flynn Crisci	1:23.89	NCAA Championships	March 22, 2023
50 Back	Krzysztof Radziszewski	20.70*	ACC Championships	Feb. 14, 2023
800 Free Relay	Marcin Goraj, Dominic Toledo, Guy Frimis, Wojciech Dutkowiak	6:19.45	ACC Championships	Feb. 14, 2023
200 Free	Marcin Goraj	1:34.65*	ACC Championships	Feb. 14, 2023
	Marcin Goraj	1:33.91*	NCAA Championships	March 22, 2023
200 Fly	Adam Mahler	1:43.24	ACC Championships	Feb. 17, 2023
	Adam Mahler	1:42.54	UGA Last Chance Meet	Feb. 25, 2023
100 Back	Krzysztof Radziszewski	46.29	ACC Championships (Prelims)	Feb. 17, 2023
	Krzysztof Radziszewski	45.49	ACC Championships (Finals)	Feb. 17, 2023
100 Breast	Cooper Van der Laan	51.26	American Short Course Championships	Feb. 3, 2023
400 Medley Relay	Krzysztof Radziszewski, Flynn Crisci, Marcin Goraj, Dominic Toledo	3:06.70	ACC Championships	Feb. 17, 2023
	Krzysztof Radziszewski, Cooper Van der Laan, Marcin Goraj, Dominic Toledo	3:05.72	NCAA Championships	March 24, 2023
200 Back	Marcin Goraj	1:42.27	ACC Championships (Prelims)	Feb. 18, 2023
	Marcin Goraj	1:41.35	ACC Championships (Finals)	Feb. 18, 2023
	Marcin Goraj	1:40.34	UGA Last Chance Meet	Feb. 26, 2023
400 Free Relay	Stepan Goncharov, Dominic Toledo, Marcin Goraj, Flynn Crisci	2:51.81	ACC Championships	Feb. 18, 2023

\* relay split time

## In Memoriam

### DICK GROAT

Legendary Western Pennsylvania sports figure Dick Groat died on April 27, 2023. He was 92.

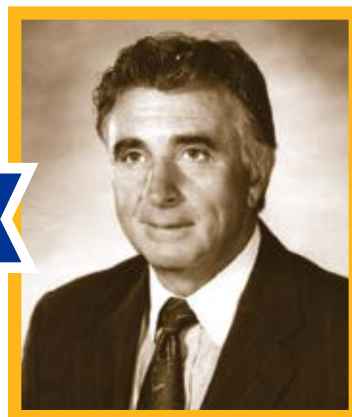
Groat spent 40 years as radio analyst on Pitt Basketball broadcasts following a 14-year career in the major leagues with the Pittsburgh Pirates (1952-62), St. Louis Cardinals (1963-65), Philadelphia Phillies (1966-67), and San Francisco Giants (1967).

At Duke, Groat was a two-time All-American in both basketball and baseball. On the hardwood, he was named the National Player of the Year after his senior season (1951-1952) and was the first player at Duke to have his uniform number (10) retired. On the diamond, Groat played shortstop and helped to lead the Blue Devils to a 31-7 record and their first College World Series appearance as a senior in 1952. He was a two-time winner of the McKelvin Award, given to the athlete of the year in the Southern Conference.

Groat agreed to sign with the Pirates prior to his senior season at Duke and balanced playing both baseball and basketball for one season after being selected by the NBA's Fort Wayne Pistons with the third overall pick in the 1952 draft.

In his 14 seasons of Major League Baseball (spread across 16 years due to two years of military service), Groat hit .286 and made the All-Star team five times. He won the MVP award in 1960 after winning the batting title (.325 average) and helping the Pirates to the World Series Championship.

Groat went on to earn induction in the Duke Hall of Fame (1975), College Basketball Hall of Fame (2007) and National College Baseball Hall of Fame (2011). He was recently informed that he would be inducted in the Pirates Hall of Fame Class of 2023.



### CORKY COST

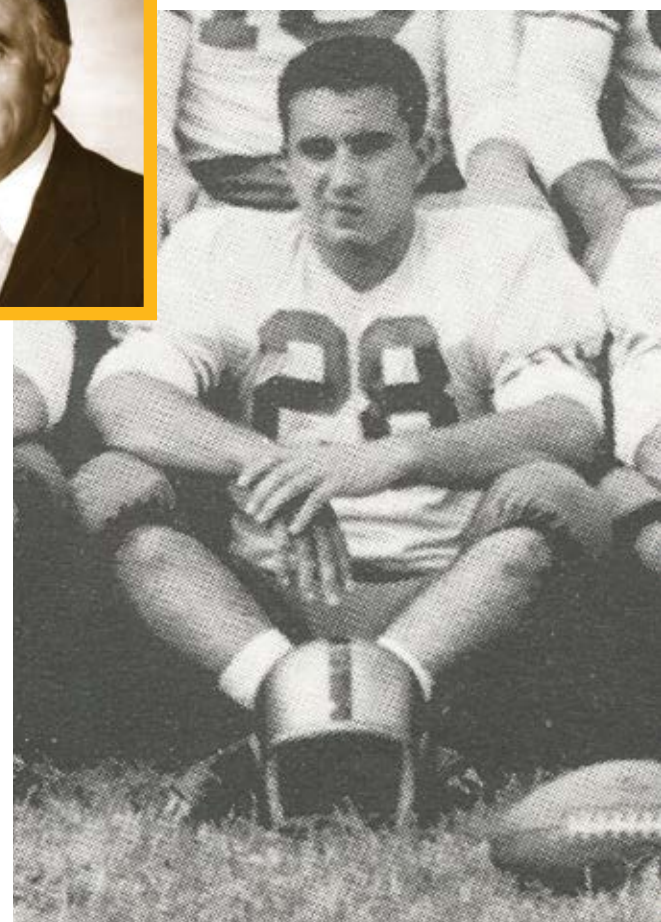
Construction company owner and Pitt alumnus Charles "Corky" Cost died on April 28, 2023. He was 87.

Cost earned nine letters in three years playing baseball, basketball, and football at Pitt. He was a star running back during the 1954, 1955 and 1956 football seasons and represented the University wearing number 28 in both the Gator Bowl and the Sugar Bowl. While an engineering student at Pitt, Cost met his wife, Frances. After graduating from Pitt, Cost served in the U.S. Army, then went on to a 60-year career leading Cost Company.

Over the years, Cost donated his time and resources to the university, and his charitable endeavors were many and varied, leading to honors like the naming of The Charles L. Cost Field, home of the Pitt Panthers baseball team, and the Cost Sports Center at Pitt.

In 2007, his company restored and cleaned the Cathedral of Learning, for which he was honored with a Historic Preservation Award from the City of Pittsburgh.

In 1983, Cost was honored by the Pitt Varsity Letter Club with its Award of Distinction.







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# Olympic Athlete and Activist John Carlos Visits Pitt

**I**n February, former U.S. track and field athlete John Carlos visited the University of Pittsburgh as part of the inaugural Changemakers in Conversation event. While on the Pittsburgh campus, he made an additional stop at the Department of Athletics

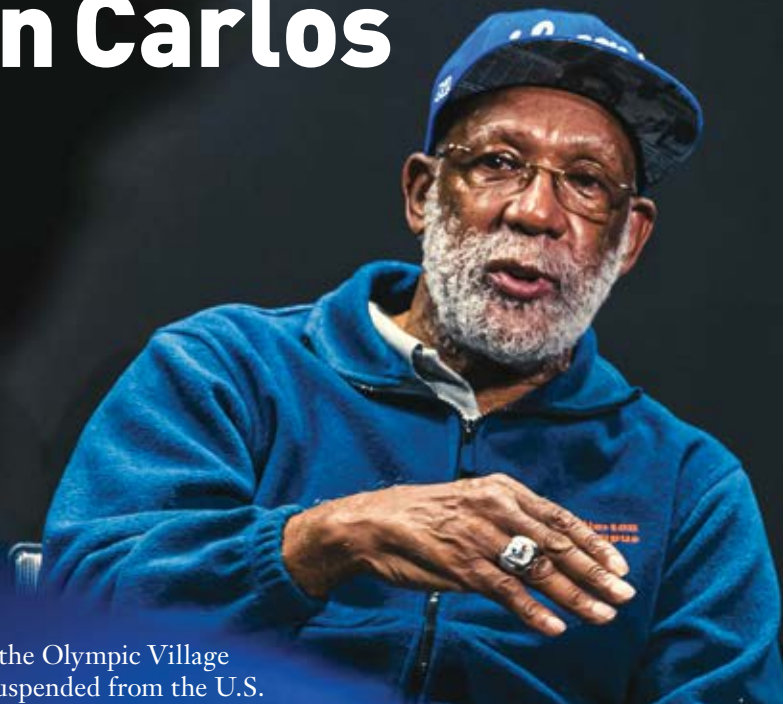
to deliver a presentation to student-athletes and others there.

In addition to his athletic achievements, Carlos is known for his protest at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, where he and Tommie Smith (who finished third and first, respectively, in the 200-meter race) displayed the Black power salute while on the podium.

As a result of the silent protest, which was captured in an iconic image by LIFE magazine, Carlos was banned

from the Olympic Village and suspended from the U.S. Olympic team and became a significant symbol of the civil rights struggle.

“We were so blessed and fortunate to have John Carlos visit with our student-athletes, coaches, staff and alumni,” says Penny Semaia, senior associate athletic director for student life. “He shared great wisdom and insight with all of us.” **P**



Carlos meets with the Panthers United team and Track and Field Head Coach Alonzo Webb



Carlos (right) on the medal podium at the 1968 Summer Olympics



# FELIX WOLTER

## Takes Third ACC Heptathlon Crown

On Feb. 24, 2023, in Louisville, Kentucky, Pitt track and field star Felix Wolter won his third heptathlon in a row with a score of 6,059 points. His score was a meet record, a school record and a facility record.

Wolter is the first individual to win three successive Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) championships in program history.

### 60 METER

6.93 sec\* 1st place

### LONG JUMP

7.51 M – 23' 7.75" 1st place

### SHOT PUT

13.03 M – 42' 9" 5th place

### HIGH JUMP

2.03 M – 6' 8"\* 1st place

### 60 M HURDLES

8.03 seconds 1st place

### POLE VAULT

4.95 – 16' 2.75" 3rd place

### 1000 METER

2.42.50 2nd place

\*personal record







# What a Run

## Panthers Return to the NCAA Tournament

Written by Craig Meyer

**L**ast summer, buzz and optimism began to grow around the University of Pittsburgh men's basketball program.

The new Panthers squad, assembled by Jeff Capel and featuring a variety of new faces, took that buzz and ran with it, finding a way to get hotter and hotter as the weather got colder.

With five players entering their final season of eligibility, the Panthers played with veteran savvy. They increased their win total by 13 games from the year prior, including eight more wins in Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) play, and Pitt's 24 wins were its most since the 2013-14 season.

"We're definitely leaving [the program] better than we found it," says Jamarius Burton. "That was our goal as seniors, as guys in our last year. The future is bright. We put Pitt on a national stage."

To get to that point, however, the Panthers continually had to fall back on a blossoming culture of resiliency.

Picked to finish 14th in the ACC Preseason Poll, Pitt battled early obstacles, injuries and a slow start to the season that included a three-game losing streak in mid-November.





## Then a switch flipped.

Rallying around Burton and impact transfers in Nelly Cummings, Blake Hinson, Greg Elliott and Federiko Federiko, the Panthers won 10 of their next 11 games. A 29-point road win at Northwestern grew the team's confidence and helped to solidify its identity on the court and in the locker room.

"They were unbelievably together," Capel recalls. "They faced different types of adversity but never wavered in their commitment to each other and their belief in each other."

Included in that winning stretch were dramatic ACC road victories at NC State and Syracuse as well as consecutive wins over nationally ranked powers North Carolina and Virginia—games that ignited the Oakland Zoo and Petersen Events Center.

Three weeks later, with the Petersen packed to the rafters, Pitt went on an

11-0 run over the final two minutes of play to drop 20th-ranked Miami, 71-68, in one of the most raucous environments of the season.

"We felt them; they gave us energy," Capel said after the win. "They were with us, even when we didn't play well. And our team felt it."

Burton, a First Team All-ACC selection, led the way for Pitt, averaging more than 16 points per game in league play. Hinson, one of two players in the NCAA to average better than 15 points and six rebounds per game while making 90 or more three-pointers, garnered Second Team All-ACC status and also was named the CollegeInsider.com Top Impact Transfer.

Cummings, a Western Pennsylvania native, scored more than 11 points per game, including 21 in a gritty road win at North Carolina as Pitt became just the third program to record three or more consecutive wins at the Dean E. Smith Center. He also paced the team with 4.8 assists per game while making 61 three-point field goals on the season.



Greg Elliott

"The coaching staff and everybody in this program, they have a belief in themselves that can translate to guys who come in," says Cummings.

Elliott also averaged double figures, dropping in a career-best 10.4 points per game with 77 of Pitt's school-record 325 three-pointers. Nike Sibande, after missing the 2021-22 season with a knee injury, returned in grand fashion, earning ACC Sixth Man of the Year accolades after averaging 8.4 points and 4.1 rebounds per game.

Pitt also saw rapid development of a trio of underclassmen. Federiko took over the starting center role and ran with it, posting a memorable 19-point, eight-rebound performance against Georgia Tech in Pitt's ACC tournament win. He was a perfect 7-of-7 from the field against the Yellow Jackets and finished the year shooting 66.7% from the field, the second-best mark in program history.

Twin brothers Guillermo and Jorge Diaz Graham became key contributors off the bench as freshmen, with Guillermo coming through with one of the biggest defensive plays of the season, a block of Mississippi State big man Tolu Smith in the closing seconds of the game to preserve the Panthers' 60-59 victory in the NCAA Tournament First Four.

Statistically, the Panthers finished in the ACC top five in both scoring offense and scoring defense. On the defensive end of the floor, the team saved its best for its NCAA Tournament matchup with Iowa State, a smothering display in which the Cyclones managed just 41 points, tied for the lowest point total allowed in the NCAA



Nelly Cummings





Nike Sibande

“

We're definitely leaving the program better than we found it. That was our goal as seniors, as guys in our last year. The future is bright. We put Pitt on a national stage.”

– Jamarius Burton



Federiko Federiko

Tournament in the past five seasons.

“What an unbelievable defensive performance,” Capel said after knocking off the number six seed in the Midwest Region.

In his fifth season leading the team, Capel was rewarded for the fantastic year. He earned ACC, U.S. Basketball Writers Association District II and National Association of Basketball Coaches District 2 Coach of the Year awards and was a candidate for several national coach of the year awards.

“I'm so proud of my team,” Capel says of Pitt's monumental bounce-back season. “Everyone in our program, especially our players, has done such an amazing job this year.”

“I'm so grateful for the journey that they have taken us on and allowed us to be a part of. These are a group of guys who will always hold a special place in my heart.”

Throughout the year, Pitt was able to captivate its fan base and the city in a way that it had not been able to for years prior. Now, with a new standard set, a fresh sense of optimism abounds in Oakland and beyond. And while time will tell how impactful this season was for the program, Pitt's outgoing players feel that the magic created this season will be lasting.

“A lot of people should come here and believe in Coach Capel,” Sibande says. “He did an amazing job with this group.”

“If you want to come make noise,” Elliot adds, “why wouldn't you want to come to Pitt?”



Blake Hinson

# Oldest Living U.S. Olympic Medalist, **Herb Douglas**, a University of Pittsburgh Alumnus, Has Died at 101

Written by Ervin Dyer



**Herbert P. Douglas Jr., the oldest living U.S. Olympic medalist—and a University of Pittsburgh alumnus who served on its Board of Trustees and was later named an emeritus trustee—died Saturday, April 22, 2023. He was 101.**

“In every role that he filled, as an aspiring athlete from Hazelwood, as a student-athlete and University trustee, and as an esteemed businessman, Olympian and community leader, Herb Douglas excelled,” Chancellor Patrick Gallagher said. “He was both a champion himself and a champion of others, never hesitating to open doors of opportunity and help people pursue their own success. Unsurprisingly, Herb

left an indelible mark on this world, while leaving an incomprehensible hole in the hearts of so many. I am proud to have called him my friend, and Karen and I will be keeping his family and circle of loved ones close in thought as we begin to honor his remarkable life and legacy.”

In 1948, Douglas graduated from the University with a bachelor’s degree in physical education and placed second in the Olympic trials in the long jump.

A few months later, he won a bronze medal in London’s 1948 Summer Olympics.

“Herb Douglas led a remarkable life that inspired people the world over. Whether it was as an Olympic medalist, accomplished business executive or personal mentor, Herb impacted and was loved by so many. That is certainly the case at the University of Pittsburgh, where his life and legacy are truly enduring,” said Heather Lyke, director of athletics at Pitt. “On a personal note, one of the greatest blessings for me here has been getting to know Herb and listening to the stories he shared and lessons he taught me. His incredible intellect and determination were only surpassed by his personal kindness. Pitt Athletics is forever

indebted to his passion and support. It is so fitting that our future indoor track will be named in Herb’s honor, ensuring his name and legacy live on to inspire future Pitt student-athletes.”

Douglas received a standing ovation when he was inducted into the inaugural Pitt Athletics Hall of Fame class in 2018. Four years later, at a celebration for Douglas’ 100th birthday, Gallagher announced an even greater recognition: The 300-meter indoor track planned for Pitt’s future Victory Heights facility would be named for one of the Panthers’ all-time greatest athletes: Herbert P. Douglas Jr.

“Herb Douglas meant so much to so many. He was a friend and mentor to me for more than two decades,” said Alonzo Webb, head coach of Pitt’s men’s and women’s track and field and cross-country teams. “Herb had an unwavering commitment to our University and athletics department. Through the Herbert P. Douglas Scholarship, he helped many track and field student-athletes attain a Pitt degree, and he always encouraged them to pursue graduate studies. Herb was a true Pitt ambassador who kept company with presidents and world leaders. I’ll always treasure our conversations and his wisdom.”





## Formative Years

Born March 9, 1922, Douglas grew up in Pittsburgh's Hazelwood neighborhood, where he showed off his remarkable athletic ability, running and playing basketball and competing in other sports at Taylor Allderdice High School.

At just 14, Douglas met Jesse Owens, the legendary Black Olympian who won four gold medals at the 1936 games in Berlin. Owens placed his arms around the young man and asked Douglas about himself.

"I run the 100-meter dash and do the long jump," Douglas said.

"That's more than what I did at your age," Owens responded, encouraging the teenage Douglas to go to college.

If not for the early discovery of his athleticism, Douglas likely would have followed his father into entrepreneurship rather than going to college. Herbert Paul Douglas Sr. ran a Shadyside parking garage and presided over a close-knit family. As the younger Douglas told Pitt Magazine in summer 2008, his father taught him service, integrity and commitment.

Those values aided a young Douglas as he won city championships in tumbling, sprinting and basketball and state titles in track and field. In 1940, he set a broad jump record at Allderdice that stood for decades.

But breaking sports records and racial barriers wasn't always easy. Douglas, the first Black basketball player at his high school, quit the squad in 1940 after teammates refused to pass him the ball. Segregation and Jim Crow were the order of the day, yet he continued to excel, winning an athletic scholarship to Xavier University of Louisiana, the country's only Catholic historically Black college or university.

Ralph Metcalfe, the Xavier coach who recruited Douglas, won four track medals in the 1932 and 1936 Olympics. Under his tutelage in 1942, Douglas' 440-relay team made Xavier the first Black college to win a national title.

During Douglas' sophomore year, he returned to Pittsburgh to help manage the family business started by his father, who had lost his sight to a stroke when Douglas was in the first grade. Working with and observing his disciplined father helped Douglas learn to "analyze, organize, initiate and follow through," he told Pitt Magazine in 2008. "Anyone who follows those four steps can succeed."

## 'The ultimate trailblazer'

Douglas transferred to Pitt in 1945 and starred on the University's football and track teams from 1945 to 1948. He won four intercollegiate championships in the long jump and one in the 100-

yard dash. He additionally captured three national Amateur Athletic Union championships in the long jump.

During his time at Pitt, he became close friends with Jimmy Joe Robinson, another pioneering Black student-athlete. Along with Allen Carter, they became the first Black football players at Pitt.

Then in 1948, he won a bronze medal in London's Summer Olympics, with a 24-foot, 8.75-inch long jump.

In 1950, Douglas earned a master's degree in education from Pitt. "More than anything, I wanted to be a coach," he told Ebony magazine in 2017. "But Pittsburgh was not employing in the public school system African Americans to be coaches."

Instead, he turned to sales and marketing, starting at Pabst Brewing Co. By 1963 he moved to Philadelphia when he joined Schieffelin and Co., a premium wine and spirits firm that is now Moët Hennessy US. At Schieffelin and Co., Douglas worked his way to a vice presidency, becoming one of the first Black corporate executives in America to attain such a high position. He spent 30 years there, the last six as a consultant, and retired more than 25 years ago.



Dozens of close friends, former colleagues, legendary athletic teammates and loved ones gather to celebrate Herb Douglas for his 100th birthday celebration at the Senator John Heinz History Center in March 2022.



While at Pitt between 1945 and 1948, Herb Douglas won four intercollegiate championships in the long jump.





Herb Douglas won a bronze medal in London's 1948 Summer Olympics with a 24-foot, 8.75-inch long jump.

As he climbed the corporate ladder, Douglas used his influence to get African Americans hired and then mentored them through promotions. In the course of his work, he befriended civil rights stalwarts such as Medgar Evers, Andrew Young and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He would later go on to meet presidents, including Barack Obama, and other world leaders.

"Trailblazers are those who have the courage and commitment to open doors for others and provide the shoulders that many of us have stood on to achieve success in our lives," Pitt Board of Trustees Chair Doug Browning said.

"From my first day as a member of the University of Pittsburgh's Board of Trustees, Herb—the ultimate trailblazer—was there to welcome and guide me," Browning added. "A proud African American alumnus who understood the transformative power of a Pitt education, Herb was a true champion of and for Pitt. On behalf of the board, his colleagues and friends, my wife, Sheila, and I extend our deepest condolences to Herb's family members and loved ones during this difficult time."

## Lasting Legacy

After retiring, Douglas focused on a philanthropy that raised support for student-athletes and showcased important aspects of the history of African Americans in sport.

Douglas remained friends with fellow Olympian Owens for decades and founded the International Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) in 1980 to honor Owens' achievements. The association recognizes the finest amateur athletes in the world, and recipients have included diver Greg Louganis, runner Mary Decker and track and field athletes Edwin Moses and Roger Kingdom, whom Douglas considered to be "surrogate sons."

Douglas also created the Jesse Owens Global Award for Peace, using the appeal of sports to address social problems. It has honored the likes of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, President George H.W. Bush and South African President Nelson Mandela.

Pitt Chancellor Emeritus Mark Nordenberg, a close friend to Douglas for many years, said Douglas was especially proud of two documentaries he co-produced with his friend Bob Lott.

The first was produced in connection with a University celebration of the first 100 years of African American athletes competing at Pitt. It was shown

at the Petersen Events Center in a program that included sports journalist Bob Costas as emcee and featured CNN's Fredricka Whitfield.

The second documentary was "The Renaissance of the African American Athlete in Sport." Though it debuted at Lincoln Center in New York City, Douglas soon showed it at Pitt, where Olympians came to support it. The film focused on the African American track athletes who medaled at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. These were the games that Hitler hoped would establish the supremacy of the Aryan race. Of course, these athletes shattered that myth. The most famous was Jesse Owens, but a Pitt freshman named John Woodruff won the gold medal in the 800 meters. Jackie Robinson's older brother was also one of the medalists.

In the fall of 2013, Nordenberg presented Douglas with the Chancellor's Medal at the Varsity Letterwinners Dinner. The Chancellor's Medal is one of the most prestigious honors awarded by the University, and recipients are persons who have left a mark on the proud traditions, values and character inherent in the University of Pittsburgh.

Nordenberg presented medals to both Douglas and businessman and philanthropist John M. Petersen that



Chancellor Emeritus Mark Nordenberg and Herb Douglas together at the screening of the documentary "Thaddeus Moseley: Sculptor," part of the University's Black History Month celebration in 2012.



Herb Douglas' image was memorialized by artist Heather White on a mural located on Second Avenue in Douglas' hometown neighborhood of Hazelwood.

night and said: "I have been in this office for more than 18 years but never have awarded a Chancellor's Medal. In fact, only eight such medals have been awarded since Chancellor Litchfield presented the first nearly 50 years ago in 1964, and none has been presented since Chancellor Posvar awarded his last in 1982, more than 30 years ago."

Even with all the international outreach and networks he built, Douglas remained a champion for his hometown neighborhood of Hazelwood, where a colorful mural still heralds his 1948 Olympic win. When Pitt launched Community Engagement Centers in Pittsburgh's Homewood and Hill District neighborhoods, he encouraged the University to continue its long-standing work in Hazelwood, a close-knit steel town neighborhood along the banks of the Monongahela River.

Lina Dostilio, vice chancellor of engagement and community affairs, remembers a conversation in 2017 when Douglas was excited about how Pitt was already engaging in terms of work development, child development and other health and education outreach to his home community as it recovered from the decline of the steel industry and "wanted to see Pitt's support and investment in the people of Hazelwood go on."

The Rev. Tim Smith moved to Hazelwood as a teenager in 1979,

and he became deeply involved in the community. He eventually founded and now leads the nonprofit community organization Center of Life. He befriended Douglas a few decades ago. Douglas, Smith said, "has always been a big supporter of Hazelwood." He recalled Douglas' efforts to pull together scholarships for kids to participate in a Jesse Owens track competition, the time he took to connect the Center of Life and the whole community with Pitt to bring education and other resources to Hazelwood.

"He brought attention to bear to Hazelwood. He has a lot of history with Hazelwood, and we're trying to build on that," said Smith.

Roger Kingdom (CGS '02), who won Olympic gold in the 110-meter high hurdles in 1984 and 1988, was a Pitt sophomore when he met Douglas more than three decades ago.

Kingdom described Douglas as a father-like mentor who gave him advice for the Olympics and continually pushed him to earn his bachelor's degree—which took Kingdom more than 20 years to complete.

"We developed such a bond that I started to call him 'Daddy Herb,'" Kingdom said. "He inspired me in so many ways but gave me two very important directives. First, finish my degree as I promised my mother.

Second, he shared his secret for success: 'Always analyze, organize, initiate and follow through.' That wisdom made a major difference for me and so many others. I hope I can touch even a fraction of the lives he did. Daddy Herb, we love you and thank you for giving so much to make this world a better place."

Douglas' longtime friend Linda Wharton Boyd (A&S '72, '75G, '79G), past president of Pitt's African American Alumni Council and member of the Douglas-founded IAAA, also spoke to his enduring legacy of inspiring others: "My friend and fellow alumnus, Herb Douglas, was a man for all seasons. Winter, spring, summer or fall, Herb lived life to the fullest. He led a principled life that was an inspiration to all who were blessed to know him and who had crossed his path. His love for his people, especially the young and the many athletes he mentored, permeated his entire being."

Douglas was predeceased by his parents, Herbert P. Douglas Sr. and Ilessa Douglas; his sister, Barbara Joy Stevens; and his son, Herbert P. Douglas III.

He is survived by his wife Minerva Douglas, daughter Barbara Joy Ralston of Copenhagen, Denmark; daughter-in-law Susan Douglas of Richmond, Virginia; and four grandchildren, Tracy Douglas of Richmond, Christopher Douglas of Aldie, Virginia, Mikel Christianson of Copenhagen, Denmark, and Anja Besnik of Vienna, Austria; as well as by great-grandchildren, grandnieces and grandnephews.

Memorial gifts can be made to the Herbert P. Douglas Jr. Scholarship or the Herbert P. Douglas Jr. Indoor Track project, part of the greater Pitt Athletics Victory Heights campaign. 📄



*Reprinted from Pittwire, April 24, 2023*





EVERY DAY IS GAME DAY.



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OF PITT ATHLETICS

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



# 2023 PANTHERS' CHOICE AWARDS

**T**he University of Pittsburgh Department of Athletics hosted the sixth annual Panthers' Choice Awards on April 17, 2023, celebrating student-athlete achievements in academics, athletics and citizenship during the 2022-23 academic year. The awards honor Pitt's top athletic performances and community service participation as well as the top teams in terms of both athletic and academic accomplishment.

The Blue-Gold Award is presented to the male and female senior student-athlete who best represents the student-athlete "ideal" based on academic scholarship, athletic achievement, leadership qualities and citizenship.

The Panther Award is presented to the male and female senior student-athlete who has promoted Pitt Athletics through his or her outstanding athletic achievement. These recipients will be forever recognized on the Varsity Walk.



Volleyball student-athlete Serena Gray was recognized with the Blue-Gold Award after leading the Panthers to back-to-back national semifinals while maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA in her graduate program, applied developmental psychology. She is the first Panther to earn Academic All-America, ACC Scholar Athlete of the Year and First-team All-America honors in the same season.



This year's Blue-Gold Award recipients are **Deslin Alexandre**, **Serena Gray** and **Jackson Walti** and the Panther Award recipients are **Nino Bonaccorsi**, **Courtney Buzzerio** and **Calijah Kancey**. These individuals' names will be forever recognized on Pitt's Varsity Walk between the Cathedral of Learning and Heinz Memorial Chapel, a tradition that dates to 1950.

Below is the full list of awards presented.

## Top Overall Academic Teams of the Year

Reserved for the male and female team with the highest cumulative GPA for the spring and fall terms

Winners: **Men's Soccer** and **Volleyball**

## Bridge Builder Award

Presented to the team whose student-athletes demonstrate the strongest commitment to making an impact in the community

Winner: **Men's and Women's Track and Field**

## Heart of a Panther Award

Presented to the student-athletes who best embody the spirit of service through the Pitt Promise and who are involved in the community above and beyond what is required

Winners: **Deslin Alexandre (Football)** and **Ellie Coffield (Women's Soccer)**

## Gold Standard Teammates of the Year

Presented to the student-athlete who most effectively inspires his or her team through exemplary commitment, composure and integrity

Baseball: **Nash Bryan**

Cheer: **Hayden Bash**

Dance: **Anna DiPasquale**

Football: **Jake Kradel**

Gymnastics: **Ciara Ward**

Lacrosse: **Abby Thorne**

Men's Basketball: **Aidan Fisch**

Men's Track and Field/Cross Country:

**Luke Henseler**

Men's Soccer: **Jackson Gilman**

Men's Swimming and Diving:

**Jackson Salisbury**

Softball: **Sarah Seamans**

Volleyball: **Valeria Vazquez Gomez**



Left to right, Eben McIntyre, Jackson Gilman and Mateo Stoka accept the award on behalf of men's soccer for top men's academic team.

Women's Basketball: **Dayshanette Harris**

Women's Track and Field/Cross

Country: **Lydia Bottelier**

Women's Soccer: **Chloe Minas**

Women's Swimming and Diving:

**Jess Vega**

Wrestling: **Nino Bonaccorsi**

## Gold Standard Administrators of the Year

Presented to noncoaching staff members in the athletics department who have gone above and beyond to ensure success and development of student-athletes

Baseball: **Austin Thompson**,  
Director of Operations

Cheer and Dance: **Katie Stumpp**,  
Associate Athletic Director,  
Administration

Football: **Chris LaSala**,  
Associate Athletic Director, Football  
Administration

Gymnastics: **Shawn Mueller**,  
Athletic Trainer

Lacrosse: **Joe Lassi**,  
Director of Social Media

Men's Basketball: **Robert Blose**,  
Graduate Manager

Men's Track and Field/Cross-Country:

**Darryl Weston**,  
Director of Operations

Men's Soccer: **Tilly Sheets**,  
Associate Director, Academic  
Support Services

Men's Swimming and Diving:  
**Dylan Baxendell**,  
Athletic Trainer

Softball: **Hope Moreno**,

Director of Operations

Volleyball: **Tilly Sheets**,

Associate Director, Academic  
Support Services

Women's Basketball: **Danny Bonaventura**,

Director of Mentorship

Women's Track and Field/Cross

Country: **Molly Trott**,  
Athletic Trainer

Women's Soccer: **Ann Marie Porada**,  
Athletic Trainer

Women's Swimming and Diving:

**Wendy Meyers**,  
Executive Associate Athletic  
Director, Human Resources

Wrestling: **Chris Byland**,  
Assistant Director, Academic  
Support Services

## James Conner Comeback of the Year

Presented to a student-athlete who, having recovered from an injury, illness or hardship, returns to make a noteworthy contribution to their team's athletic success

Winner: **Nike Sibande (Men's Basketball)**

## David Sandberg Champion Award

In memory of the former Pitt wrestler and assistant coach, presented to the senior who best exemplifies the qualities that Sandberg embraced: dedication to academic and athletic excellence, with an unyielding



Claire Jansen of swimming and diving was named Newcomer of the Year, as voted on by her fellow student-athletes. She broke multiple school records and is the first Pitt freshman female swimmer to qualify for the NCAA Championships in 17 years.



Penny Semaia receives the inaugural Herb Douglas Mentorship Award from his mentor, Donna Sanft.

spirit and passionate commitment to the improvement of the University of Pittsburgh and its surrounding communities

Winner: **Micky Phillippi (Wrestling)**

### Male and Female Performance of the Year

Presented to a male and female student-athlete for the most remarkable or significant performance achieved in 2022-23

Winners: **Israel Abanikanda (Football)**, who broke the school record with 320 rushing yards and six touchdowns in a 45-29 win over Virginia Tech; **Nino Bonaccorsi (Wrestling)**, who claimed Pitt's 17th national championship as he downed South Dakota State University's Tanner Sloan in the 197-pound final at the NCAA wrestling championships; and **Ilse Steigenga (Women's Track and Field)**, who earned First Team All-America honors in the long jump after posting an eighth-place finish at the 2023 NCAA indoor track and field championships

### Newcomer of the Year

Presented to the student-athlete who has made an immediate impact at Pitt in their first year of intercollegiate competition (nominees may include first-year students and redshirts)

Winner: **Claire Jansen (Women's Swimming and Diving)**

### Team Moment of the Year

Presented in recognition of a striking performance by an individual or group in a specific competition that led to a shift in momentum

Winner: **Volleyball**, for advancing to the program's second NCAA Final Four

### Male and Female Athlete of the Year

Presented to a male and female standout student-athlete who has demonstrated outstanding athletic performance during competition and has been instrumental to their team's success

Winners: **Nino Bonaccorsi (Wrestling)** and **Courtney Buzzerio (Volleyball)**

### Script Writer Award

Recognizes a student-athlete who best embraces Pitt Athletics' seven bridges, achieving comprehensive excellence within the classroom, on the field/court of play, within the University community and within the city of Pittsburgh

Winner: **Felix Wolter (Men's Track and Field)**

### Blue-Gold Award

Presented to a male and female senior student-athlete who best represents the student-athlete ideal based on academic scholarship, athletic achievement, leadership qualities and citizenship. The recipients' names are engraved on the Varsity Walk.

Winners: **Deslin Alexandre (Football)**, **Serena Gray (Volleyball)** and **Jackson Walti (Men's Soccer)**

### Panther Award

This award is presented to male and female senior student-athletes who have promoted Pitt athletics through his or her outstanding athletic achievement. The recipients' names are engraved on the Varsity Walk.

Winners: **Courtney Buzzerio (Volleyball)**, **Calijah Kancey (Football)** and **Nino Bonaccorsi (Wrestling)**

### Carson Graduate Fellowship Full Award


Steward to the candidate who is of high moral character, who has shown outstanding undergraduate academic achievement at the University of Pittsburgh and who demonstrates the potential for outstanding graduate study in continuing their graduate or professional education at the University of Pittsburgh

Winner: **Chinaza Ndee (Volleyball)**

### Herb Douglas Mentorship Award

Steward to the candidate who best embodies Douglas' dedication to leading, inspiring and mentoring the world's future achievers

Winner: **Penny Semaia**, Senior Athletic Director, Student Life

Congratulations to this year's Panthers' Choice Award recipients. 



# 2023 Awardees of Distinction



Director of Athletics Heather Lyke and Varsity Letter Club Director Sam Clancy gather with the 2023 awardees of distinction. Pictured from left to right are Clancy, Brock Generalovich, Janine Scotti Schuliger, Curtis Aiken, Theresa Nuzzo, Paul Helsel, Melissa Young Szalay, Roman Matusz, Jennifer Hansberry and Lyke. [Not pictured: Gary Burley]

Since 1961, the Pitt Varsity Letter Club has honored letter winners who have distinguished themselves in their profession or community and who, by their accomplishments, have enhanced the value of the intercollegiate athletics programs at the University of Pittsburgh.

The 61st Pitt Varsity Letter Club Awards dinner took place on Feb. 24, 2023, at The Westin Pittsburgh and featured the largest crowd in the program's history.



## Congratulations to 2023 Awardees of Distinction:

Curtis Aiken, Men's Basketball

Gary Burley, Football

Brock Generalovich, Men's Basketball

Jennifer Hansberry, Women's Basketball

Paul Helsel, Baseball

Roman Matusz, Football

Theresa Nuzzo, Cheer and Dance

Janine Scotti Schuliger, Swimming and Diving

Melissa Young Szalay, Gymnastics

## H2P Magazine Wins Award for Creative Excellence

The University of Pittsburgh Department of Athletics magazine, H2P, has received a gold award in the Athletic Communications category from CUPRAP. The award was announced at the organization's 2023 professional development conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in March. Judges for CUPRAP's annual CUPPIE Awards are experts in the field of communications and include designers, writers, educators, corporate executives and media professionals.



## Clay Greene: Courtside and Loving It



Clay Greene (back row, second from left) and his family gathered with Pitt men's basketball legends Terry Knight (far left), Billy Knight (back row, center) and Sam Clancy (far right) at a game this year.

**D**evoted basketball fans have been known to show their passion for and commitment to the game by saying that basketball is life, but not many exemplify this expression better than the Greene family.

Clay Greene is the founder, president and chief executive officer of TechBlue, a management and information technology services consulting firm based in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. His wife, Nichol, is TechBlue's human resources director and serves as vice president of Pittsburgh's Jack and Jill of America chapter. They have 15-year-old twin sons.

Clay and Nichol Greene both attended the University of Pittsburgh. Nichol Greene has an MBA from Pitt's Joseph M. Katz School of Business. Clay Greene received undergraduate and graduate degrees and continues to stay connected to Pitt by teaching three courses through the College of Business Administration. Last year, he made the decision to become more involved with the University by getting men's basketball season tickets for his family.



The Greenes have always been a basketball family. Claye Greene grew up playing, and his brother played professionally. His sons both play on their school team and on the same AAU team. He spent some time as his sons' coach

when they were young but now watches them from the stands. As they have gotten older, both kids have expressed an interest in playing basketball in college, so it made sense to give them the opportunity to experience high-level college basketball.

They ended up choosing four Courtside Club seats for the 2022-23 season. Greene wanted them to be close to the court and truly feel like part of the game. As a coach, he stressed the importance of communication to his players. His sons didn't really understand what that meant until they came to a preseason Pitt game.

"You get to hear what happens on the court, and it was a great experience for them from a basketball IQ perspective," he explains. "It's not a quiet game. You don't get an appreciation for that on TV."

It wasn't the only lesson his kids learned throughout the year. As first-year season ticket holders, the family was able to watch the team evolve throughout the season. After the West Virginia game, Greene told his sons, "Just wait. It was their first game against a major opponent and their team chemistry is coming together."

Most importantly, going to Pitt basketball games gave them a time and a place to come together as a family. As the year went on, the whole family became engaged and invested in the program. The elder Greenes even found that two days before a home

“

You get to see [the team's] evolution and grow with them in a way."

– Claye Greene

game, the kids would be caught up on homework for the week.

By the time Pitt was set to play North Carolina, the family knew the whole roster. The boys had discovered that Jorge and Guillermo Diaz Graham went to IMG Academy, where they participate in basketball camp. That connection helped them to feel more linked to the team.

Greene describes the atmosphere inside the Petersen Events Center as something you can't experience on television. The ability to watch the coaches and how they react, in addition to watching the players in real time, up close, seeing their focus, allowed the entire family to appreciate the game of basketball on a deeper level.


The kids also learned a lot about the student experience at Pitt by watching the Oakland Zoo. They had never seen, in person, the impact of a student section before. They saw how the Zoo responded when the team shot a three or as the opposing team shot a free throw. Greene describes his children as naturally quiet, but by the end of the season, they were on their feet cheering for a big play. Not only did they increase their knowledge of the game, they also gained a better understanding of how to be a fan in the arena.

When asked whether he would recommend that others take the same leap and invest in the team by becoming season ticket holders, Greene

says that if you have the ability, you absolutely should. From his perspective, the experience his family got from attending a full season rather than buying a single game ticket was worth it. He would encourage others to commit to being part of the experience.

"You get to see [the team's] evolution and grow with them in a way," he explains. "I always equate it to this: It's like going to work. You don't go to work two days a week and expect to get the full experience. You can't get to know your managers or other employees that way."

Even the employees at the Petersen came to know them. The ticket-taker recognizing and greeting them at every game and knowing the name of the bartender and usher made them feel like members of the community rather than spectators.

What's Greene's favorite moment of the season? Prior to this season, his kids had followed North Carolina and Duke men's basketball their whole lives. After coming to several games, they added Pitt to their list of favorite college basketball teams. By the time North Carolina came to the Petersen Events Center to take on Pitt in December, his kids were actively rooting for Pitt to win. Greene recalls, "They looked at me and said, 'Dad, I hope Pitt beats the socks off of them.'" 



# Sue Stewart: Paying It Forward

Written by Maggie Rollicheck

**S**ome people don't know the meaning of the word quit. Sue Stewart is one of those people.

Stewart's life took an unexpected turn when her father suddenly and tragically passed away when she was only 5 years old. Her mother had to go to work to support Stewart and her younger brother, Bill.

Stewart's journey of turning tragedy into meaningful opportunity started when she registered for classes at Pittsburgh's South Hills High School. She wanted to pursue the academic track to study what she enjoyed: history. Her mother tried to steer her toward the general track instead, sitting her down and explaining that they only had the means to send Bill to college. He would likely need a college education to provide for his family later in life, and as was common practice in the late 1950s, Stewart would probably get married after high school and start a family.

Stewart switched to the general curriculum, but when the school principal learned of her choice, she was called into his office. He encouraged her to stick with an academic path despite their family's financial situation. After he called her mother and offered his

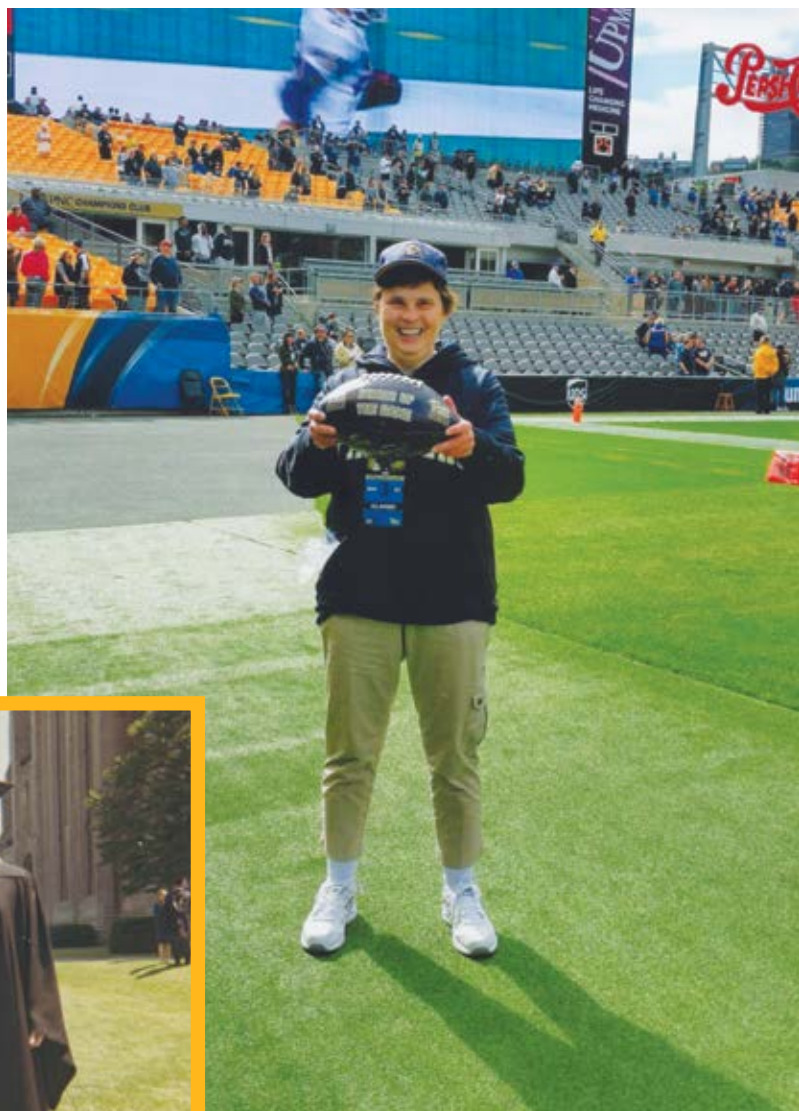


Stewart at her Pitt graduation in June 1967

recommendation, Stewart's mother consented to the switch.

Stewart did well in high school, and despite her hesitations, her mother agreed to let her apply to colleges, but they were denied financial aid. Between paying off their house and not owning a car, it seemed as if they didn't need financial support.

Fortunately, Stewart heard about a state senatorial scholarship opportunity that required taking a test on American history. After some encouragement from her mother, she decided to take the exam. She finished first in her senatorial district and chose to attend the University of Pittsburgh



Stewart "dotted the i" as the donor of the game on Sept. 30, 2017 (Pitt vs. Rice)

with her scholarship.

Stewart elected to take a badminton class for her physical education requirement in her first year at Pitt. Despite being unfamiliar with the sport, she thoroughly enjoyed the class. An exhibition for the class at Pitt Stadium piqued her interest in declaring a physical education major.

Stewart enrolled in her first major courses sophomore year, taking basketball and field hockey. She joined the field hockey team, and by the spring term, she also had joined the women's basketball team. The team practiced in the basement of the Cathedral of Learning and played road



“

I decided to do the first two scholarships to keep the memories of my mom, dad, Bill and Aunt Bernie alive and to help kids get a college education at Pitt because I believe it can transform a person's life.”

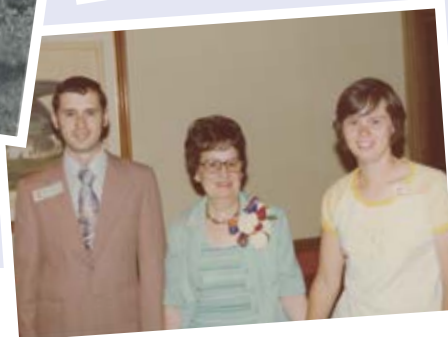
– Sue Stewart



Stewart and her brother, Bill, in the early 1950s



Stewart's parents on their wedding day in April 1940



Stewart and Bill with their mother (center) at her retirement party in May 1977

games around Pittsburgh. During her junior year, Trees Hall opened, allowing the women's basketball team to play home games.

Stewart recalls, “We thought we were in the Ritz. It was amazing, like a palace. We even had a real scoreboard.”

After graduating from Pitt in 1967, Stewart received a graduate assistantship at the University of Maryland. Upon completing her master's degree, she began teaching physical education and coaching at Penn State Beaver. While there, she hurt her back, making coaching

and teaching nearly impossible. She returned to Pittsburgh and ultimately ended up in mortgage banking, working with securitized mortgage loans and state licensing.

In 2003, Stewart's mother passed away after suffering a stroke, and then, in 2008, Bill unexpectedly passed away following a cardiac arrest. She spent the six months after his passing trying to gain back a sense of normalcy. Stewart inherited her brother's 401(k), and at the end of 2009, she started thinking about what she wanted to do with the money he had left her.

In 2011, Stewart created an endowed scholarship for softball because her brother loved the sport, and it was Pitt's newest team at the time. “In a strange way I never expected, it started to give me some peace,” Stewart says of creating the scholarship, “like maybe something good would happen, because to me, Bill[s] dying was tragic.”

In 2014, Stewart created three additional scholarships: one named for her dad; one named for her mother's sister, Bernie, and one in her own name that she would rename in 2022 to honor her basketball coach, Audrey Cale

“I decided to do the first two additional scholarships to keep the memories of my mom, dad, Bill and Aunt Bernie alive and to help kids get a college education at Pitt because I believe it can transform a person's life,” Stewart explains. “I think it's about the greatest gift you can give someone.”

After all, if anyone would know about the power of getting a college education in the face of adversity, it's Stewart. 📌



Team photo taken in Trees Hall in March 1967; Audrey Cale is on far left, wearing the dress.

**K**

atelyn Fleishman Allison is an associate professor in the Department of Sports Medicine and Nutrition within the

University of Pittsburgh School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and serves as interim director of the MS program in sports science. She previously served as the principal investigator for Pitt's research effort within the U.S. Marine Corps Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force and as a co-investigator on the U.S. Department of Defense injury prevention and performance enhancement research activities within the Neuromuscular Research Laboratory. As a Pitt undergraduate, Allison participated on the cross country and track and field teams from 2003-2007.



Allison delivering the alumni address at the 2015 School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences graduation ceremony

**What degrees did you earn at the University of Pittsburgh, and when did you graduate?**

I earned a Bachelor of Science in exercise science in 2007, a Master of Science in exercise physiology in 2008 and a PhD in rehabilitation sciences with a concentration in sports medicine in 2012.

**Why did you choose Pitt?**

I chose Pitt for many reasons, including amazing academic and athletic opportunities, but also because Pitt is in my blood. Most of my family went to Pitt, including my dad, both grandfathers and many of my relatives. During my years at Pitt, I had several cousins on campus at the same time, some of whom were also student-athletes or on the cheer and dance teams.

**How did your time as a student-athlete set you up for success as you worked toward your PhD?**

I am so grateful for all the support from my coaches and [Department of] Athletics staff as well as resources from the life skills department within athletics in helping us to find success not only as athletes but also in the classroom and beyond. Additionally, I was fortunate to earn the George I. Carson Graduate Fellowship while completing my master's degree, which



was a tremendous experience. Overall, I would say that my time as a student-athlete taught me lessons that translate to professionalism, including teamwork, time management and being goal oriented and resilient. Also, being part of the cross-country and track teams taught me that as a student-athlete, you not only represent yourself, you also represent the University of Pittsburgh, and being part of something larger than yourself instills a sense of pride and determination to always put your best foot forward.

During my time as a student-athlete, I suffered from stress fractures and was often unable to compete while recovering from injuries. I loved my undergraduate field of study—exercise science—and was fascinated with how the body adapts to exercise. In deciding my career path, I knew I wanted to work in an academic environment because I loved research and teaching, and I had a strong desire to study injury prevention, especially in female athletes. Once I completed my undergraduate and master's degrees, I pursued an opportunity at the Neuromuscular Research Laboratory to study injury prevention and performance optimization in the military as a PhD student in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. This research specifically looked at risk factors for injury in tactical populations, including women in the military who suffer stress fractures at an increased rate. This line of research was particularly meaningful, as helping this population prevent injuries is so important not only for tactical readiness but also for quality of life during and after service.

#### **Tell us about your path from student-athlete to educator.**

Since becoming a faculty member in the Department of Sports Medicine and Nutrition in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences in 2012, my roles have included leading research investigating the integration of women into combat occupations within the U.S. Marine Corps and assisting with injury prevention/performance optimization research within the special operations forces as well as working closely with our graduate programs in sports medicine and sports science. In the years since my time as a student-athlete, it has been amazing to witness the growth of wearable/portable technology (and the ability to collect data similar to what we would collect in our research laboratory) being used in athletics. Instead of in a controlled research lab, data is collected in real time, during practices and competitions, to help inform team coaches, sports medicine personnel and dietitians. I feel as if my path has truly come full circle, as many of our MS in sports science students work as interns with Pitt Athletics to help collect this data and communicate findings with each team's high-performance unit. I love working with our students to help them achieve their goals, and it is wonderful to collaborate so closely with Pitt Athletics in this role and help make an impact on the health and performance of current student-athletes.

#### **Describe your experience as a Pitt student-athlete.**

Being a student-athlete at Pitt is like being part of a large, welcoming family, and that relationship lasts for a lifetime. During my years as a student-athlete at Pitt, our athletic teams saw lots of success, including the women's track team's earning several Big East [Conference] championship titles, which made my time very exciting even though I was injured and unable to compete. The resources and guidance



Allison running in the 2006 Big East Cross Country Championships in Boston, Massachusetts



Allison and son Brett tailgating at the Pitt Varsity Letter Club tent before a September 2022 Pitt football game

provided by the entire athletics department truly made me feel supported at such a large university, and I am forever grateful for all the relationships and friendships I formed as a student-athlete.

**Can you tell us about one of your most memorable moments at Pitt?**

There were so many wonderful memories made with friends over those years, but one of my favorite moments was when our track team received our Big East champion rings on the field during a football game. I also loved cheering on all of our sports teams and traveling to the Big East basketball tournament championship game at Madison Square Garden in 2004 and to the Fiesta Bowl in 2005.

**What tools or knowledge did you gain during your time as a student-athlete at Pitt that helped to prepare you for life after sports?**

Being part of the cross-country and track teams taught me many lessons that have been translatable to life after sport. When I was injured as a student-athlete, the experience was frustrating at the time, but it taught me patience, perseverance and resiliency. It also taught me about prioritizing health, because you can't perform your best when your health is suboptimal. As a former athlete, it is sometimes difficult to compare your current state of fitness to what you were once able to accomplish as an athlete, but shifting the priority of fitness to achieving health and longevity is really helpful in overcoming those thoughts.

**What does being a Forever Panther mean to you?**

To me, being a Forever Panther means that you are a part of and represent the Pitt Athletics family for life. I am so grateful for all the amazing opportunities that Pitt offered me as a student-athlete, and I love that I am able to remain connected to the Pitt Athletics family in both a personal and professional way almost 20 years later.

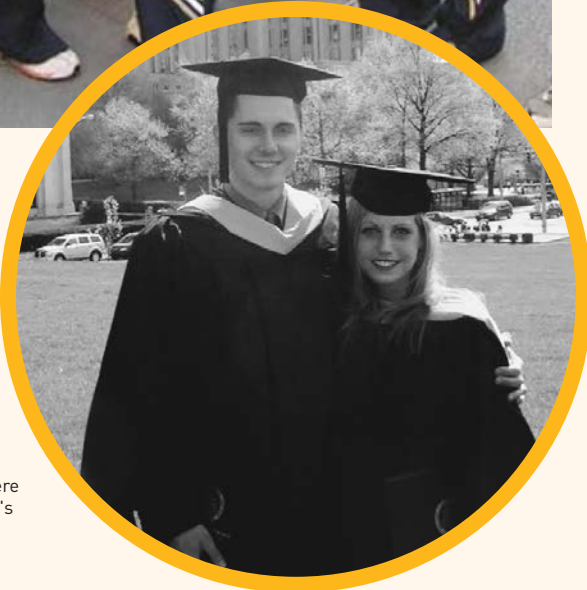
**What professional accomplishment has made you proud?**

My greatest sense of pride is the success of our students. It is truly amazing to watch their careers unfold and the impact they make as Pitt graduates, and I feel lucky to have played a role in their journeys.

Additionally, our research with the U.S. Marine Corps helped to inform U.S. Department of Defense policy on the integration of women in combat arms. I am honored to have had the opportunity to contribute to our lab's Department of Defense research studies aiming to better the experiences of the men and women who serve our country.




Allison (far left) and teammates after receiving Big East championship rings in 2005



Allison met and began dating her husband, Brandon, when both were working toward master's degrees in exercise physiology at Pitt.

**What is one piece of advice that you would give a current student-athlete based on what you wish you had known when you were in their shoes?**

Take advantage of all the opportunities that the University of Pittsburgh has to offer. Pitt offers such a unique environment to be a student-athlete because it has Power Five athletics and incredible academics, is a top research-funded university and is located within the City of Champions. The experiences you have access to at Pitt provide tremendous opportunities for your future. From the resources within the Department of Athletics to other campus clubs and organizations, I urge you to become involved in whatever strikes your interest, both personally and professionally. The connections you make at Pitt are truly extraordinary, and you never know how these connections may cross your path in the future to help you achieve your goals and dreams. 





# Bruce's #12 RETIRED



On Feb. 19, 2023, Jennifer Bruce's number 12 jersey was raised to the rafters of the Petersen Events Center. The ceremony cemented Bruce as one of the greatest basketball players in University of Pittsburgh history and marked just the second women's jersey ever to be retired.

Starring for the Panthers from 1981 to 1985, Bruce remains one of the most productive and decorated players in Pitt basketball history. Nearly four decades after the conclusion of her collegiate career, she remains the second all-time leading scorer in Pitt basketball history—men's or women's—with 2,295 points. She averaged 20.5 points and 8.9 rebounds over her four seasons. Bruce's scoring average is tied for the highest in program history (with the late Lorri Johnson). An exceptional all-around player, she still ranks in the top 10 of nearly every major statistical category for Pitt women's basketball, including blocks (third, with 203), rebounds (fifth, with 998) and steals (seventh, with 203). A three-time first-team All-Big East honoree, Bruce was named the 1984 Big East Conference Women's Basketball Co-Player of the Year after she averaged 23.8 points and 10.3 rebounds per game. In 2004, she was named to the Big East Silver Anniversary Women's Basketball Team, recognizing the league's greatest players over its first 25 years. [P](#)





# FIRST ROUND PICK

CALIJAH KANCEY  
SELECTED BY  
TAMPA BAY

Written by E.J. Borghetti

**P**itt's pipeline to the National Football League continued in a big way during the 2023 NFL Draft, held April 27-29.

The Panthers finished with six total selections, including defensive tackle Calijah Kancey, who went to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the first round with the 19th overall pick.

Pitt's six draft picks led the ACC, tied with Clemson and ranked fifth nationally. Over the past three drafts (2021-23), the Panthers' 14 picks are the most of any ACC program (Clemson is second with 13).

Kancey's selection marked the second consecutive year that Pitt produced a first-round pick. In 2022, quarterback Kenny Pickett was selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers with the 20th overall selection.

Pitt last had first-round picks in consecutive years in 2007 (cornerback Darrelle Revis, New York Jets) and 2008 (offensive tackle Jeff Otah, Carolina Panthers).

Overall, Kancey became the 27th Pitt player to be drafted in the opening round.

"Our entire program is bursting with pride right now for Calijah," Chris Bickell '97 Head Football Coach Pat Narduzzi says. "This young man has absolutely earned all that comes with this night. Here's a Miami kid who didn't receive an in-state Power Five offer, comes up to Pitt and ends up being a unanimous All-American and first-round NFL Draft pick. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers are getting a great player and even better person."

Kancey's final collegiate season ranks as one of the most decorated in Pitt history.

He was named a unanimous All-American, earning first-team nods from each of the NCAA's recognized selectors: the Associated Press, American Football Coaches Association, Football Writers Association of America, Sporting News and Walter Camp Football Foundation.

In 133 seasons of intercollegiate football, Pitt players have earned unanimous All-America recognition only 15 times.



Kancey was Pitt's first since 2013, when defensive tackle Aaron Donald earned that lofty stature.

In addition to his All-America citations, he was named 2022 ACC Defensive Player of the Year and was a finalist for the prestigious Outland Trophy (for the nation's top interior lineman) and the Bronko Nagurski Trophy (for the national defensive player of the year). College Football Network named him the Interior National Defensive Lineman of the Year.

Kancey truly was one of college football's most dominant players in 2022 regardless of position. Despite facing an array of blocking schemes designed to slow him down, he compiled 31 tackles, 14.5 tackles for loss (leading the nation's interior defenders) and 7.5 sacks in 11 games played. (He missed the regular-season finale at Miami and the Tony the Tiger Sun Bowl against UCLA due to injury).

Pitt had five other players hear their names called during the NFL Draft.

Offensive tackle Carter Warren was selected by the New York Jets in the fourth round (120th overall). Warren played in 40 collegiate games, making 39 starts at Pitt.

"We are thrilled Carter gets to live out his NFL dream by returning home to play for the New York Jets," Narduzzi says. "Coach Robert Saleh is not only getting a great offensive lineman but also a leader. There's a reason Carter was a captain for us, and I know he will do the same, on and off the field, for the Jets."

Running back Israel Abanikanda also went to the Jets in the fifth round (143rd overall). Abanikanda was the ACC rushing champion (1,431 yards) and the NCAA statistical champion in scoring (11.6 points per game), total touchdowns (21) and rushing touchdowns (20).

"What an awesome moment for a Brooklyn kid to go and play for the hometown New York Jets," Narduzzi says. "Izzy is an absolute steal for them. He is going to give the Jets home run speed in the backfield and can help them in the return game, too."

Linebacker SirVocea Dennis was picked by Tampa Bay in the fifth round (153rd overall). As Pitt's middle linebacker this past year, he paced the team in tackles (94) and forced fumbles (two).

"SirVocea is going to be a tremendous addition in Tampa for Coach [Todd] Bowles, who certainly knows what it takes to build great defenses," Narduzzi says. "SirVocea might just be the most intelligent player I've ever coached—a green dot guy if there ever was one. We are thrilled SirVocea and Calijah will be continuing their football journey together."

Safety Erick Hallett II was drafted by the Jacksonville Jaguars in the sixth round (208th overall). Hallett finished his Pitt career by making 31 consecutive starts and was responsible for a team-high six turnovers (three interceptions and three fumble recoveries) this past year.

"Erick Hallett was so vital to our defense during his career," Narduzzi says. "He's such a smart, instinctive and athletic player. Erick is everything you want in a safety, and I know he will be a really big asset in Jacksonville."

Safety Brandon Hill was Pitt's final selection of the 2023 NFL Draft, going in the seventh round to the Houston Texans (248th overall). Hill was the Panthers' second-leading tackler this past season with 67 stops, adding two pass breakups and one fumble recovery (which was returned for a 30-yard touchdown).

"The Texans are getting both speed and an aggressive hitter in Brandon Hill," Narduzzi says. "He has the ability to not only compete at safety but also be a real difference-maker on special teams. Coach DeMeco Ryans and his staff got a real gem in a later round. I know Brandon will be ready to get to work upon arrival."

Pitt also had four players sign NFL free-agent contracts: defensive end Deshaun Alexander (New York Jets), Habakkuk Baldonado (New York Giants), offensive lineman Gabe Houy (Chicago Bears) and receiver Jared Wayne (Houston). 📌



Calijah Kancey, center, poses for a photo with Tampa Bay Buccaneers Head Coach Todd Bowles, left, and General Manager Jason Licht.

Photo credit: Chris O'Meara, AP

# Pitt's POWER FIVE



Pictured left to right are Stephanie Mock, Jeanne Doperak, Jennifer Brown, Liz Herrman and Auburn Weisensale.

Written by Josh Rowntree

**T**he individuals leading the University of Pittsburgh Department of Athletics' sports performance team have a lot in common. They are known by their peers for being hardworking, driven, goal-oriented and progressive and for possessing strong leadership traits.

There's also another bond they all share, one that makes them—as a collective—unique in collegiate athletics.

All five are women.

Pitt has the only Power Five athletic department in the country with five women leading its sports performance team, which incorporates nutrition, athletic training, sports science, physician support and strength and conditioning.

"We like to think that we're the best in the country at what this group does," says Pitt Executive Associate Athletic

Director for Administration Chris Hoppe, who oversaw much of the hiring and promoting of these five individuals.

"The fact that it's led by all women is an interesting anecdote. In each of these searches, there were a multitude of male candidates. But in the end, these women won out. They were better."

The five women are Jennifer Brown, Liz Herrman, Jeanne Doperak, Auburn Weisensale and Stephanie Mock. They lead a team heavily responsible for much of the behind-the-scenes growth of student-athletes at Pitt.

"All of the areas of performance touch our student-athletes daily and have the most interactions with our student-athletes, except for maybe the coaches," says Brown, Pitt's senior associate athletic director for sports medicine and performance. "But sometimes it's even more than the coaches, depending on the time of year."

"Performance" is a broad term that, essentially, is the label for the collective that handles the overall health of



student-athletes. For generations, it has been a field largely led by men. But throughout the country, that has begun to change in recent years, as more and more women have broken through in the industry.

“Sports medicine is definitely male predominant,” says Herrman, a primary care team physician, who did her fellowship at UPMC. “In my career, it’s never really been male versus female. It’s been very inclusive in general.

“But I think I’m lucky because I trained here and was exposed to the environment. It’s really cool to be a part of it.”

When Heather Lyke took over as Pitt’s athletic director six years ago, she did so with a mission to continuously invest in areas that would directly benefit Pitt’s student-athletes.

That goal has become a reality.

“When I started, there really was no performance team,” says Doperak, who trained under the late Freddie Fu and is now a team physician and director of Pitt’s Primary Care Sports Medicine Fellowship Program. “Back then, it was just a physician and an athletic trainer. Over the years, we’ve added so many different aspects, and the services we’ve added complement each other in a way that benefits the student-athletes tremendously.

“We’ve invested in people; we’ve invested in staff. And I think that’s our biggest investment. We have a staff with expertise that brings new knowledge and new resources as well as experience.”

Weisensale, Pitt’s assistant athletic director for performance nutrition and a former collegiate field hockey player, can see student-athletes profit daily in a way that she wasn’t able to in her playing days only a decade ago. Pitt has recently improved its nutrition infrastructure by adding and improving fueling stations—areas for student-athletes to get food and drinks around its athletic facilities. It also has invested in the way it educates athletes on what to put in their bodies, with the recognition that each sport, and even each individual, has different needs.

“We do cooking demos and grocery store tours so that when we’re not

alongside the athletes, they have these skills,” says Weisensale.

Mock, who is Pitt’s assistant athletic director for sports performance, oversees the school’s strength and conditioning and sports science departments. She is in a role that is unique for a female to hold.

“I’m in a really powerful position right now, because women coming up in the field have probably never seen women in these positions before,” she says. “I’m kind of laying the groundwork and framework.

“But I don’t want it to be something put up on a pedestal. It should become normalized, and the standard should be the same for men and women.”

Mock’s point is more than valid. And while women are making progress across the industry, Pitt has pushed them to the forefront. It hasn’t been done intentionally but rather organically. And it’s been earned.

“It’s awesome,” says Weisensale. “It’s awesome that they want the best people in place and that we just so happen to be female.”

Given the overall progression and recent success of the athletics department, with multiple ACC titles and runs through NCAA tournaments in multiple sports, it’s clear that Pitt’s method—with Lyke at the helm and five women overseeing the performance team—is not just working, it’s thriving.

“This shows the power of females supporting females,” says Brown.

“Anybody who knows Heather knows that we’re going to continue to grow. The only area that we’re not going to grow is the grass under our feet, because we’re constantly moving and constantly working and trying to improve.” 🍷



Jeanne Doperak



Auburn Weisensale



Liz Herrman



Stephanie Mock



Jennifer Brown

# Salute to Graduates



**H**ail to the more than 105 student-athletes and cheer and spirit squad members who earned a degree from the University of Pittsburgh during the 2022-23 academic year!



## HAIL TO HER: Donor Contributions Celebrate Women's Sports at Pitt



**T**hanks to the leadership of Panther Club members, the University of Pittsburgh Department of Athletics has established an endowed scholarship in recognition of the 50th anniversary of Title IX, which was signed into law on June 23, 1972. The endowment will provide support for tuition and education-related expenses for eligible student-athletes in women's varsity sports and was established by philanthropic gifts from Ed (A&S '70) and Diane Farkas, Andy (ENGR '73) and Bev (A&S '73) Jarabak, Dennis and Janet McKamish, and Neil and Judy (EDUC '71) Robinson.

If you're interested in learning more about this endowment or would like to make a gift, please contact Emily Nally at [esejna@athletics.pitt.edu](mailto:esejna@athletics.pitt.edu).





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# PITT MEMORIES



Najuma Fletcher becomes Pitt's first women's NCAA track and field champion when she captures the indoor triple jump with a leap of 44 feet, 2 and 3/4 inches in Indianapolis on March 11, 1995. A year later, she added the NCAA indoor high jump title and finished her career as a 14-time All-American.





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The graphic is a collage of blue and white cards featuring various Pitt logos and dates. The cards are arranged in a cluster, with the text "get your season tickets TODAY" prominently displayed in the center. The background is a large, crowded football stadium at night, with bright lights illuminating the field and stands.