

FORGE





PURDUE
BASEBALL

DATE: _____ OPPONENT: _____

[illegible]

HEAD COACH: MARK WASIKOWSKI











CULTURE CLUB

WASIKOWSKI HAS ENGINEERED BASEBALL TURNAROUND

By Tim Newton

Mark Wasikowski wanted to know what he was inheriting, so he started his first Purdue baseball practice with an infield/outfield drill. He sent a fungo to left field, and the outfielder's relay missed second base by 20 feet. Immediately, teammates began hollering at the errant thrower.

Next man up, same result, same reaction. After five minutes, Wasikowski halted practice and brought everyone to the pitcher's mound.

"We're not going to do this," he told his team. "No more yelling and screaming. We need to get on each other's side. The only way we're going to win here is by pulling for our teammates."

The resulting change was dramatic. A Boilermaker team that went 10-44 in 2016 improved to 29-27 a year later, the greatest turnaround in program history. And the trend continued in 2018, as the squad went 38-21 and qualified for the NCAA Tournament for just the third time ever.



BUILT TOUGH

Mark Wasikowski is a high-energy, fiery competitor. That was never more evident than the championship game of the 1992 College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska, a game that his Pepperdine team won 3-2 over Cal State Fullerton.

In the first inning, Wasikowski tried to score from second on an infield hit to short. He arrived at home plate at the same time as the ball, and as the rules at the time allowed, he attempted to bowl over the catcher. He flipped over the catcher, knocking the ball away, and was tagged out by the pitcher, although photographic evidence showed that he touched the plate first and should have been called safe.

A picture of the play serves as the avatar on Wasikowski's Twitter feed. It helped spur a new NCAA rule that forces runners to avoid those types of collisions, but it also had another byproduct.

"Years later, the catcher from Cal State Fullerton called me out of the blue and said that Ford had used a picture of the play in its 'Built Tough' marketing campaign," Wasikowski says. "Apparently, they hadn't received permission to do so.

"As a result, I got a free truck out of the deal."



CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

John Madia is director of baseball operations. He has plenty of history with the program, playing for coaches Joe Sexson and Dave Alexander. His son, Drew, was coached by Doug Schreiber. He has seen the turnaround firsthand, and says there's no secret to the success.

"Culture. Mark has created a winning culture through every drill and piece of instruction, and it has led to a belief that we will win here," Madia says.

"Regardless of who we're playing, we're going to play Purdue baseball. We're going to put pressure on the defense. We consider playing defense as offense with a glove. It's a new style of baseball in the conference, and people are taking notice of what is happening here."

SURF'S UP

Wasikowski (pronounced WOZ-uh-COW-ski, but commonly shortened to "Waz") grew up in Seal Beach, California, where there were two daily pursuits — baseball and surfing. He played for the Los Alamitos Bronco baseball team that captured a World Series title in 1983, and went on to play in high school on a team that included former major leaguers J.T. Snow, Robb Nen and Greg Pirk. (Must have been

a tough league ... the team finished fourth in the conference.)

He continued his baseball career at Hawaii, but left after one season. After a year at Santa Ana College, he spent his final two collegiate seasons at Pepperdine. The Waves won the 1992 College World Series, and Wasikowski was a two-time All-West Coast Conference selection at third base. The Milwaukee Brewers drafted him in the 35th round in 1993, but he decided it was time to hang up the cleats.

"I always felt like I was late, and it seemed like I was chasing ghosts trying to get to the major leagues," Wasikowski says. "I wanted to get my degree and go work on Wall Street. My dad had invested so much into my career that (leaving baseball) dissolved our relationship for a while, but it's better now than ever."

Wasikowski never made it to New York. His coach at Pepperdine, Andy Lopez, suggested he pursue a secondary education certificate. Even though Wasikowski had no intention at the time of coaching, he went along with the idea, serving as an assistant as his high school alma mater during the day and bartending at night.

His coach at Santa Ana, Don Sneddon (the all-time winningest coach in California community college history), then called and asked if his former player would be interested in a job at Southeast Missouri under coach Mark Hogan. Wasikowski said yes, and he drove the next two days to the start of his new career.

BUILDING A RESUME

Wasikowski spent two seasons at SEMO, where he earned an MBA and met his wife, Lori. Lopez then hired him on his staff at Florida, and he followed his former coach to Arizona for a 10-year run. He left there for a five-season stint under George Horton at Oregon.

In his 20 years as an assistant coach, Wasikowski's teams qualified for 14 NCAA Tournament appearances. He helped coach 130 players that were selected in the Major League Baseball Draft, with 33 of them making the big leagues. In 2012 and 2013, the scouting service Perfect Game named him among its national lists of 10 assistants "ready to lead."

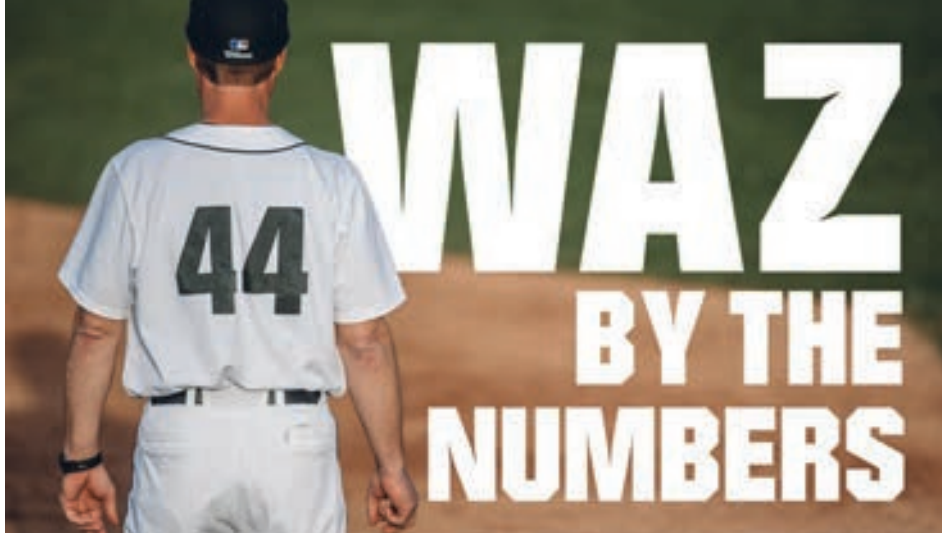
That opportunity came in 2016. When Schreiber stepped down at the end of the season, Wasikowski felt the time was right to make a move.

"I was not interested in anything other than a job at a Power 5 conference, because I wanted the chance to win a national championship," Wasikowski says. "I was looking for a school that was committed to winning, and not just somewhere that was participating. Purdue checked all the boxes."

With the blessing of his wife and daughters, Joelle and Kelsey, Wasikowski moved his family and took over the reins in West Lafayette, beginning the process of rebuilding a program that had won the Big Ten Conference championship in 2012. While he is still learning the history of the university and its athletic programs, he wants to walk a line between being respectful of the past and not being burdened by perceived restraints.

"Coming from the outside, I see things a little differently," he says. "I look at our academics and our facilities, and I envision tremendous opportunity. It's a place that can explode, and the only thing that can hold it back is people who aren't on board."

"We're not going to make progress unless we believe we can play for conference and national championships here. I think the culture has improved, and I'm looking forward to see what we can achieve in year three." ✕



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PURDUE WINS UNDER WASIKOWSKI



BENEATH THE SURFACE

STATE-OF-THE-ART ACADEMIC EXPANSION OPENS THIS SPRING

By Jared Thompson

A transformation is occurring in West Lafayette. It's certainly evident to anyone with a television tuned to a sports channel. People walk taller. The air breathes with renewed freshness.

While what has been visible to a national audience deserves attention, it's what has happened underground – literally – that has become the latest point of pride within Purdue Athletics.

The roots of success at Purdue are built in the academic foundations of its student-athletes. That culture not only remains with renewed on-the-field success but is emboldened with renovations to the former football footprint. The Brees Academic Performance Center has expanded, nearly seven-fold, and improved its technological resources.

"We're talking 10,500 square feet," says Ed Howat, senior associate athletics director for student services. "Right now, our academic space is 1,600 square feet."

What was the former football locker room, lounge and equipment room has been transformed into a state-of-the-art learning space for Purdue's 500-plus student-athletes. Previously, the academic learning spaces

consisted of a few study rooms (converted from old offices following the Mackey Complex project in 2011) and a computer lab.

"We knew where we were deficient, which was group study rooms and basic tutoring space," Howat says. "So that was the start of it. Then we added where we could."

Athletics administrators and project planners researched rival campuses, but ultimately found inspiration just steps away at active learning centers on Purdue's campus.

Large study and collaboration areas were inspired by the active learning center at Shreve Hall, which converted a former cafeteria into study spaces. Modern use of space is evident in Purdue's main library.

"We went through Wilmeth Hall, the new active learning center – and that place is amazing," Howat says. "It seemed like every time you took a corner, there was some type of different study environment."

More amazing was the usage, per a conversation Howat had with Frank Dooley, Purdue's senior vice provost for teaching and learning.

"He said they averaged 300 students in there at 2 a.m.," Howat says.

Howat gleams with an ear-to-ear smile as he walks through the new space, which is more lounge than cave, more boardroom than classroom.

"We wanted to make it functional," he says. "We tried to get as many seats as possible. But it had to be a place our student-athletes want to spend their time. We needed a place that is welcoming and functional."

You can count law and society junior Tario Fuller from the football team as an advocate for improved study space.

"When I first got here, it was one big room, packed around big tables," Fuller says. "Twelve guys in a room for one resource. Focus was a struggle."

Fuller, who aspires to become a police officer and, eventually, a detective, is one of the most fervent users of Purdue's career advancement and placement programming.

"I think a lot of us actually realize how much they do for us and build our opportunities," he says. "The people who help me, in particular Sam Planz, my learning specialist,

do a lot of work to help me manage time and keep track of classes, assignments and tutors.”

Don’t call it coddling. Academic support staff assess each student-athlete’s time requirements and curriculum, and build a plan of attack for success, somehow, when day after day is consumed with sport and academic responsibilities from before dawn to bedtime.

“It’s not easy,” Fuller says.

Prior to the Mackey expansion, the second floor of Brees housed former athletics director Morgan Burke’s office, the business operations staff and the academic services staff.

“There were tutoring sessions in the hallways,” Howat says. “It was sorely lacking. It was cramped. If you had a tutor and the rooms were full, you may have had to default into the computer lab. And with 60 computers in there, it could get loud quickly.”

But Howat believes that the academic and career programming, systems like the John Wooden Leadership Institute, made up for the shortcomings in space.

The new academic environment will cater to all types – and even promote unity among the human resources doing the leg work.

“Our tutors, right now, don’t have a space to call their own,” Howat says. “(In the new setup) they will have a kitchenette, locker room. We want them to feel like a part of our staff, but right now they don’t have a place to hang their coats.”

The Center for Academic Vision and Enrichment (C.A.V.E.) program, which serves students with learning disabilities, will have its own space in a contained environment.

For the first time, Purdue will be able to serve all student-athletes with daytime and evening study hours, open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

“If they have a two- or three-hour break on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, there will be a space for them to come in and knock out some of their objectives,” Howat says.

And it all has a welcoming, but professional feel. For student-athletes who aspire to be executives, the boardroom is coming to them sooner than expected.

Space planners worked with the design firm Populous to convert a dark basement into a space that is bright and large with numerous glass divisions and an open, yet adjustable floor plan. Students even had input on the furniture selections.

The original footprint, Brees’ second floor, will continue to maximize its spaces, freeing up the usual evening congestion. It also will have some of the new furniture and technologies that are being implemented downstairs. Many of the furniture upgrades will influence the look and feel of the remainder of the building.

“I don’t want someone to go downstairs and it be full and think that it’s not as cool upstairs,” Howat says. “We will continue to evaluate and position the entire facility to be the best possible learning environment for our student-athletes.”

Space no longer is at a premium, and the congestion that used to exist will be eradicated.

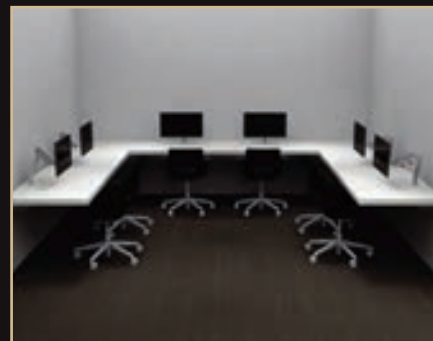
“What’s planned is going to provide better structure and be more convenient for us,” Fuller says. “To have a five-minute walk to get from the football complex to everything I need academically, that’s invaluable.”

Construction wrapped up in February, and Howat looked towards a complete move-in soon after.

“The services we have provided have offset some of previous space problems,” Howat says, “but this puts us in line with the best in the Big Ten.” ✖

BREES CENTER EXPANSION HIGHLIGHTS

- Various styles and sizes of desks and tables for different learning preferences and objectives
- Digital solutions in every space
- Flexible room with adjustable walls that can accommodate individual learning and seminars for up to 60 people
- Optimized for installation of future technology innovations



FOREVER OUR CAPTAIN

By Tom Dienhart



My iPhone buzzed at 8:29 a.m. on February 13, 2018. After a quick glance, I didn't recognize the number on the text message. I opened it.

"Tom, this is Tyler Trent and I am currently working on a story for the Exponent on where the Purdue basketball team goes after their two losses. Looking to cover how they maintain the 1 seed in the bracket, how the Big Ten will end up, and how they adapt to the weaknesses exposed. Would you be able to answer a few questions in a quick phone interview before Wednesday?"

Tyler called and we talked about the end of Purdue's 19-game winning streak, the back-to-back losses to Ohio State and Michigan State. And just like that, we struck up a relationship over the next 10 or so months before his passing on New Year's Day 2019.

At the time, I was working for the Big Ten Network and wasn't aware of Tyler's backstory, but I soon learned of his heroic battle with cancer that became public in the fall of 2017. Tyler texted again February 28, 2018, at 2:35 p.m., wanting to meet at the Big Ten Tournament.

"I'm flying into New York early tomorrow. Not sure what your schedule is, but would love to grab a meal or meet-up sometime over the weekend!"

As I was settling into my seat along press row last March at Madison Square Garden, I heard someone call my name. I looked up and saw this frail young man moving toward me with a crutch under one arm. He looked like a boy, with wisps of hair that barely covered his scalp and wire-rimmed glasses that framed his soft face.

IT WAS TYLER TRENT

The conversation came easy. Why wouldn't it? We both loved sports. We both loved to write. And we both followed Purdue. Here we were, in the "world's most famous arena" watching the Boilermakers. Pretty cool.

Tyler discussed and analyzed the 2017-18 Boilermakers led by the senior foursome of Vince Edwards, Isaac Haas, Dakota Mathias and P.J. Thompson. The kid knew his stuff for what was one of the best Purdue teams in history.

I also soon discovered his passion for baseball. He told me he would love to work for a team as a statistical analyst, a trending position that had grown out of the "Moneyball" era popularized by Oakland A's wiz general manager Billy Beane.

Tyler and I stayed in touch off and on in ensuing months. He texted again March 18, 2018, at 2:22 p.m.

"Are you going to be out in Boston?"

He was wondering if I would be at the site of Purdue's NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 game. I wasn't going. Tyler was hopeful.

"Trying to make my way out there!"

I thought of Tyler from time to time over the next few months. We would Tweet at each other. I had him mail me one of the yellow wristbands he had produced that on one side said "TYLER STRONG." On the other side it read: "1 THESS. 5:16-18," the Biblical message Tyler wanted to share with the world. The meaning: Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

The wristband arrived in an envelope addressed by him, and it included a short note of thanks with mention of how to donate to help fight cancer. I quickly slipped on the wristband. It was a way for me to remember Tyler and his struggles. It also was a way for me to remember to be grateful for all I had because a grateful heart is a humble heart. And a humble heart is a helpful heart.

And most importantly: The yellow rubber wristband was a way for me to remember never to give up. No matter what.

Ever.

Tyler Trent never did. How could I? How could you?

We all watched in awe as Tyler's story unfolded the last year. He was first introduced to Boilermaker fans prior to the home football game against Michigan in 2017, when Mike Carmin of Lafayette *Journal & Courier* wrote a story about Tyler camping out the day before to get a good seat for the big game.

And so it began. From there, Tyler became a Purdue treasure, serving as honorary captain of the football team at the Hammer Down Cancer game against Nebraska in October of 2017. *The Alumnus* featured Tyler on the cover of the Spring 2018 issue with a detailed story by Kat Braz.

Tyler's story began to grow, hitting a zenith during a magical October Saturday last fall when his story was featured on ESPN's College GameDay. Try watching it and not crying. That night, Tyler was bundled in a wheelchair wearing a Purdue stocking cap and watched his Boilermakers pull an epic 49-20 upset of No. 2 Ohio State in one of the most magical nights in Ross-Ade Stadium annals.



Tyler Trent campus memorial January 9

Along his inspiring journey, a trail of honors piled up for Tyler:

- Sagamore of the Wabash
- Tyler Trent Courage and Resilience Award, a scholarship for students
- Disney Spirit Award

And Tyler had a cavalcade of celebrity well-wishers that included vice president Mike Pence, Clemson coach Dabo Swinney and ESPN anchor Scott Van Pelt, among others.

The goal in all of this for Tyler Trent: To raise awareness about cancer – his was eating his bones – and also to raise money to fight the disease. It was always about others ... never about him.

I was supposed to visit Tyler's home in Carmel for this story. I texted Tyler on December 19 at 10:51 a.m. to confirm my visit the next day. Tyler texted back.

"What time were you thinking again?"

He followed with:

"How does 11 am work?"

It was all set. I got in my car the next morning and began to trek to his home on Brook Mill Court in Carmel, Indiana. That's when I checked my phone. And I saw this text.

"Hi Tom! It's Kelly Trent ...Tyler's mom! He's not feeling so great today. Any chance you could try for a visit tomorrow or perhaps via phone later today if he's up for it? I'm so sorry!"

I didn't want to bother Tyler on this day. It could wait, I figured. I really wanted to see him ... not just talk on the phone. But I didn't want to impose if he wasn't feeling well.

Kelly Trent texted again.

"I'm so sorry about the timing! You are welcome to visit the week of the (January) 7th....yes! If you were wanting any sort of interview and wanted to try a phone call we can do that too. Again...I'm sorry...its been an unusually tough week and the days he has felt ok extremely busy. Appreciate your understanding. Merry Christmas!"

Of course, as we know, I never was able to make that January trip to see Tyler. Less than a week after attending the Music City Bowl, he passed away.

Tyler Trent is gone. But, his impact will resonate. Purdue celebrated his life at a candlelight memorial January 9 on campus.

Thanks for the inspiration, Tyler. And thanks for the life lessons. Yours was a life well-lived. ✨

IMPACTING US ALL

He was with us for just 20 years, but Tyler Trent's impact on the world was profound. He bravely battled bone cancer first diagnosed in 2014. All the while, Tyler offered a message of hope and inspired millions with his selfless attitude in the face of a grave prognosis. The core of that message: Help and serve other people — no matter your circumstance.

Long-time sportswriter Mike Carmin of the *Lafayette Journal & Courier* first introduced the world to Trent. And it was a story that would get retold and amplified to the point where Tyler became a national treasure and beacon of service to others.

It all began the Friday before Purdue was slated to play host to Michigan in September of 2017. Carmin was covering a high school football game between West Lafayette and Benton Central. On his way home, he thought he would swing by Ross-Ade Stadium to see if any students were camping out in anticipation of the big game. Carmin pulled over his truck near the stadium and approached a tent pitched near the student entrance.

"I knocked to see who was in there," Carmin says. "And Tyler steps out with his buddy. I asked them what they were doing. They said they were excited about Purdue football, which was coming off a big win at Missouri. They wanted a seat down low, so they figured they would camp out."

"I then asked Tyler why he was on crutches. He proceeded to tell me his story. He had just had chemotherapy not long before down in Indianapolis, and he was back on campus and camping out. I wrote a short piece on the encounter for the paper the next day."

The rest, as they say, is history. Carmin would catch up with another story on Tyler later that fall when he and his father went to the Purdue game at Iowa. Tyler wanted to experience the spectacle of The Wave, an Iowa tradition where at the end of the first quarter fans wave to sick children in the hospital adjacent to Kinnick Stadium.

"He is a special person who impacted a lot of people," Carmin says.

Here is a look at how Trent's personal journal impacted those in the Purdue family ... a coach, an administrator, a student and a student-athlete.

DAVE SHONDELL VOLLEYBALL COACH

You could hear the emotion in Dave Shondell's voice as he tried to answer the question: How were you impacted by Tyler Trent?

"What an example he set," Shondell says. "He was inspiration to me, a hero with how he operated. We ask our athletes to give everything they have. I don't think I've seen anybody give as much of themselves as he did to others."

Shondell forged a special bond with Tyler during the last year. They texted each other. And Shondell even had Tyler visit with his team and sit on the bench as a de facto coach early in the 2018 season.

"You look at how he finished his last month, and it was all about what he could do for other people," Shondell says. "In volleyball, we always talk about not leaving any plays on the floor. He was a guy who didn't leave anything out there. He did all he could to help others in hopes of making a difference in the lives of others afflicted like him."

Shondell marvels at how Tyler conducted himself in such a difficult situation.

"When most people get in that situation, all they want to do is hide," Shondell says. "They want to feel sorry for themselves. He was just the opposite. Mature, so humble ... it's like nothing I ever have seen."

And Shondell never will forget the last time he saw Tyler.

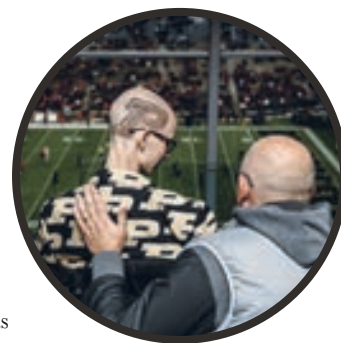
"It was at the Ohio State game," he says. "I didn't want to get in the way, but he wanted to see me. I told him: 'Here's what you need to understand, none of us knows when our last day will be. Every day you live has made a difference for everyone else.'"

"He never felt good, but he did these things for people because of the courage he had, trying to raise funds and awareness. He didn't say no to anybody. He just loved Purdue. To call him a super fan isn't an appropriate description. He was God's fan. He was sent from God. I never saw anyone who represented what God wanted more than him. There was more to this than sports, than cancer, than a guy being courageous."

DAVID BLOUGH QUARTERBACK

Who can forget the image of senior David Blough pushing Tyler Trent in a wheelchair during the college football awards show last December in Atlanta when Trent received the Disney Spirit Award? Blough and Tyler forged a strong bond in a short period of time, both bound by a deep and unshakeable faith.

"We knew this was inevitable but that doesn't make it any easier," Blough says. "Since the first time we learned his story when he was camping out for the Michigan game, he was a young man going through so much and what he was battling. And the commitment he had to our program. He wanted to be there to support us no matter what."



Blough and his fellow captains visited Tyler in his Carmel, Indiana, home, offering support for a young man who became the spirit of the program this past season.

“He loved Purdue sports,” says Blough, who spoke at Trent’s celebration of life in early January. “And that’s how it all started. Sports brought him and our team together. When we learned of what he was going through, there was a special connection between him and our coach, there was a special connection between him and our guys. When you see someone who is dealing with something so much worse than what you can even fathom, pain-wise and their mental battle and emotionally. It is incredibly inspiring, and to do it so gracefully, and being humble and selfless like he did.

“He just wanted to help others who may someday go through the same thing. That is what made his story so attractive, one people could get behind and support. People who heard his story were impacted by it. That’s why people want to support him and his cause. It wasn’t just about him fighting cancer but it was about others who may be in the same situation at some point. That is why his story resonates with us all.”

MIKE BERGHOFF BOARD OF TRUSTEES CHAIR

Mike Berghoff always will remember when his wife, Kristen, went to meet Tyler Trent during the epic home game against Ohio State last season.



“We were in a suite next to his,” Berghoff says. “As she approached Tyler, she was speechless. She couldn’t say a word. She was finally meeting this person she had heard so much about and admired so much.

“Tyler put her at ease and spoke. He could sense the situation and put her at comfort. My wife never has forgotten that. And neither have I.”

Berghoff is the father of a current Purdue student, so the battle that Tyler endured and the way he conducted himself throughout hit home even harder. Berghoff knows Tyler was unable to enjoy a typical college career like his son, nor like he did as a Purdue student in the 1980s.

“It gives me gratitude for what I have,” Berghoff says. “We always have to appreciate our circumstances.

“My sister-in-law is a high school teacher in Terre Haute. And she has her students watch that ESPN GameDay segment that ran on Tyler. It’s just a way for students to take a look at their situation and then see how Tyler dealt with his.”

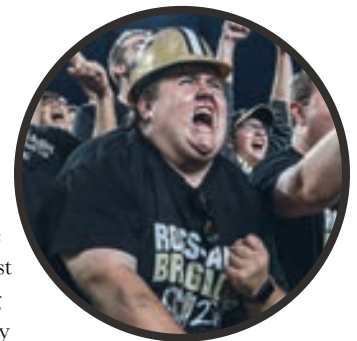
Berghoff won’t soon forget Trent.

“I was so impressed how he made his physical suffering secondary to achieving his primary goals, whether they be supporting the team, finding ways to help finance cancer research all while he was suffering,” he says. “He managed to compartmentalize that and still achieve his goals.

“Seeing how Tyler was able to penetrate so deeply so many different constituencies connected to Purdue was a lesson in how an attitude and perseverance can produce results. He connected with our fan base and student-athletes. To watch that play out was an incredible opportunity to see how you can touch folks in a way that matters.”

STEVIE MALLIA PRESIDENT OF THE ROSS-ADE BRIGADE

You can’t miss Stevie Mallia. The TV cameras almost always find the big fella, as he typically is front and center in the student section wearing a gold P hard hat. It’s all about supporting the team for Mallia, who did what he could to support fellow student Tyler Trent.



“Despite his situation, he was such a dedicated football fan,” Mallia says. “The first time I met Tyler, he was camping out for the Michigan game. I remember thinking, wow, this guy is really dedicated. And that was before I knew anything about his story. He must be a special fan if he is that dedicated. He kept coming to games.

“He became a beacon member of the student section. Everyone would talk about him when he would make it to games. He had such a positive impact on the players on the field. We all were rooting with him and for him. He had an amazing spirit to him. No matter what was going on around him, he still loved the game and came to the games.” ✖



Clockwise from upper left: Blake, Kelly, Tony, Tyler and Ethan Trent

FINDING HER MATCH

By Tom Dienhart

Silvia Ambrosio was home sick. She cried every day.

“I could not take being away from my parents,” says Ambrosio, a native of Frankfurt, Germany. “I was put on a plane and sent over to America.”

That was back when she played at Marquette. Now, more than three years later, Ambrosio has blossomed into a star at Purdue and arguably the best women’s tennis player in school history. Not bad for a once-scared teenager who – in all honestly – still is a bit home sick.

"What can I say," she says. "I love my family."

Ambrosio is primed to lead the Boilermakers this spring after earning unanimous first-team All-Big Ten honors as a junior, when she finished with a 14-7 record as the team's primary No. 1 singles player.

"I am very fast," Ambrosio says. "I get to a lot of balls. I play good defense. I have no problem staying back. A lot of girls want to play offense, attack and make points. Sometimes, they can't handle pressure."

"There isn't a shot I can't do. I have a good slice, volley. I have a lot of things I can use. I am working on my offensive game, which I think is getting better. A lot of girls slap a lot, hit it hard. That's not my type of game. I try to play spin, slice, change up the game."

Whatever she's doing, it's working. Last season, Ambrosio won eight of her last 10 matches and defeated three ranked foes. She climbed as high as No. 95 in the country.

"I hope to finish my career on a high note," says Ambrosio, who rose to a No. 9 national ranking in early February – the highest in school history. "I feel good and confident. I have enjoyed my time at Purdue."

Ambrosio began her career at Marquette, where it wasn't always so enjoyable.

"I loved Marquette, but it was the tennis (that caused me to leave)," she says. "I liked my team at first, but there was a lot of unnecessary drama."

The last straw was when she got into an on-court argument with a teammate in the fall of 2016.

"It was time to move on," Ambrosio says. "I felt suffocated at Marquette."

Ambrosio started to look around. She had heard of Northwestern, Illinois and Michigan within the Big Ten. And she explored the Pac-12 Conference. Then, a friend told her to reach out to Purdue.

"And I was like: 'Who is Purdue?'" Ambrosio says. "I didn't know anything about it. I saw them play once and liked how their coach worked. I was interested."

THE REST IS HISTORY

"I knew she was going to be good," Purdue head coach Laura Glitz says. "But until she got here and started working on things, I didn't know her ceiling was as high as it was going to be. Then after I saw her at nationals for us (as a junior), I knew she could play with anyone in the country. Now, she is just starting to believe that."

Ambrosio, whose family traces its roots to Italy, didn't realize how good she was while growing up in Germany. She played soccer, tennis and basketball. By the time she was 13, the angular girl with the long black hair had to pick a sport.

"I picked tennis because it was something I shared with my dad," Ambrosio says. "We played often, and he liked the sport. I would play three or four times a week but never at a high intensity."

Ambrosio loved the time with her father, Giovanni Ambrosio, who owns a restaurant called Pizza Pie where she and older sister Melissa, a student in London, would work from time to time. Like with her parents, Ambrosio is close with her sister.

"I talk and FaceTime with all of them," Ambrosio says. "My parents speak German and Italian. English, not so good."

While coming up through the ranks, Ambrosio loved looking up into the stands and seeing her father. It was comforting to have

his support during matches. But Ambrosio is closest to her mother, Carmela Cortazzo.

"I'm a momma's girl," Ambrosio says.

A momma's girl who just happened to be a tennis prodigy.

"When I was in high school, it became a trend for German kids to go to the U.S. to play college tennis," Ambrosio says. "I thought it sounded fun. I decided to do it, too. I reached out to a service to get recruited. I got about 20 schools interested."

"Marquette probably was the best option. I had no idea what type of response I would get. I knew a bit about Marquette because people at my father's restaurant knew of Dwyane Wade (a star basketball player for the Golden Eagles). And the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has an exchange program with the school in my city. It all kind of made sense."

But, it didn't work out. Marquette's loss is Purdue's gain.

"She doesn't have deficiencies," Glitz says. "She can play offense and attack the ball. And she can play defense because she is very fast. The combination of those things makes her a good player."

"She can volley and finish points and run down balls, which puts pressure on her opponent. If one part of her game isn't working, she has another part. She has an all-around game."

Now, Ambrosio, who plans to pursue a professional tennis career, is poised to leave school as an all-time great. ✂

After I saw her at nationals, I knew she could play with anyone in the country. Now, she is just starting to believe that.

- Laura Glitz
Head Coach



FORGE: As president and as a fan, you have to be excited about the momentum of the athletics department right now.

DANIELS: Nothing else brings us all together like athletics. There is no question that when things are going well, Purdue becomes a happier place. People are more cooperative with each other, there is maybe a little more energy, and you can just feel that. The second equally as obvious thing is the way our coaches and players conduct themselves reflects well on the university. It is something we all can be proud of, that our teams achieve excellence without cutting corners and coloring outside the lines.

FORGE: How important was it for Jeff Brohm to stay at Purdue?

DANIELS: You can quantify it because there is a direct causation between what he has accomplished here and increased attendance

and revenue. But that's not the full extent of it. The qualitative aspect of exciting and competitive week-in, week-out winning football has been completely different for us.

FORGE: With Brohm and Matt Painter, you have two high-profile head coaches who do everything the right way. Is it fair to say that helps you sleep better at night?

DANIELS: Absolutely. People ask me all the time how are things going, and I always say, "They are great, but that can change in 30 seconds." You never take anything for granted. You have 500 young people and people around them, and sometimes someone will do something they should not do. But top to bottom, starting with our coaches, our athletics department is attentive not only to the rules but the overall character and conduct of its teams.

FORGE: Have you ever seen someone – a student

no less – galvanize a university and a country as much as Tyler Trent did?

DANIELS: I have never personally been around any phenomenon quite like it. As I think I said at the memorial service, there wasn't anything intentional about it. He did not try to draw attention to himself. It just happened almost as if it was meant to happen, and I think that made it an even more powerful experience.

What he represented and personified so conforms directly to the self-image we have always had at Purdue – that is of men and women who are strong physically and strong in character and determination. That is why we have the only nickname of our kind in the country. To me, it was an absolutely stunning moment when they were interviewing David Blough, and they asked him how a man like this handles himself the way he does. David responded, "Well, he is a Boilermaker." That just said it all.



Q & A

with Mitch Daniels

By Alan Karpick and Tom Schott

Forge caught up with president Mitch Daniels in his office in Hovde Hall to get his views on the state of Purdue Athletics.

FORGE: Drew Brees continues to be a wonderful ambassador for the university.

DANIELS: Drew and Brittany have helped us in many different ways. When you think of his spectacular career here and at the next level, he is just a perfect embodiment of the way we want to think of our students, athletes or not. The whole country saw Drew, just as they saw Tyler, when he became professional football's all-time record-holder, talking to his kids about the right way to do things.

FORGE: The John Purdue Club – now more closely affiliated with the Purdue Research Foundation – has become more aggressive in its engagement and fundraising. How important is that?

DANIELS: Thank you John Purdue Club members, there are a lot more of you now. As worked up as I get about our

success athletically, I still think it is extraordinarily important that we have a self-sufficient program and the JPC membership is one of the biggest reasons we do. Seeing those numbers grow gives me a lot of confidence that the department will remain one of the models nationally as it has been now for quite a long time. We went from 6,000-plus to 8,000-plus and now hoping to get to 10,000.

FORGE: Do you have a vision for the future of Ross-Ade Stadium?

DANIELS: We want to get the best sense we can of where things are going in general for spectator sports. Whether you are talking college or professional, it is a very challenging business. We can all watch it live from anywhere on that thing in our pocket and on giant televisions where people are watching three or four events at the same time. We have a lot to compete with, so I think we just want to create the best experience we can, and enhancements that

do that will help continue to draw people.

FORGE: As a fan, how much does your blood pressure rise during an intense game at Mackey Arena?

DANIELS: There is nothing like it. I love bringing a guest to our venues. People who have not seen a game at Mackey say, "Oh, so that's what basketball is supposed to be like." I confess that I get a little irrational and have blurted out some un-presidential things from time to time.

Fortunately, especially recently, our teams of all kinds are keeping me on the happy side. Another thing I pay attention to is the Governor's Cup competition with Indiana. We have won it every year but one since I came here and that was close, so I have told Mike Bobinski, "This is not negotiable." I don't want to face my IU friends if we don't come away with that. ✖





Comfort In Cleveland

PLAWECKI LOOKING FORWARD TO MORE-SUITABLE SURROUNDINGS

By Tom Schott

On January 6, the Cleveland Indians acquired former Purdue standout catcher Kevin Plawecki from the New York Mets in a trade that returns him nearer to his roots and more in line with his nature.

"I'm excited. Cleveland will provide me with a fresh start, and I'm a Midwest guy," says Plawecki, who was born in Hinsdale, Illinois, and went to high school in Indianapolis. "Going to New York was a culture shock for me, and I'm really happy to be going to a city that's closer to home and to a franchise that has been really successful the last few years."

Cleveland has won three consecutive American League Central Division championships, reaching the World Series in 2016. Plawecki believes the change of scenery and getting away from the country's largest media market bodes well for his career. The 2012 Big Ten Player of the Year and second-team All-American will have the opportunity to become the Indians' starter behind home plate this season.

"I'm expecting to feel more comfortable on a consistent basis," Plawecki says. "New York is a city that one minute you love it and the next minute you hate it. There were times I felt at home there and times I did not. I believe the reason I had success at Purdue is because I always felt comfortable and always felt at home."

Plawecki hoped to carry the familiarity of his Purdue uniform No. 26 with him to the major leagues, wearing it "as much as I could in the minors," he says. But when he reached the big leagues with the Mets in 2015, that number was taken by first base coach Tom Goodwin. So Plawecki settled for No. 22.

"I talked with him about it, bribed him a little bit and we wound up switching," says Plawecki, who donned No. 26 for his final three seasons in New York. "I wanted it, to remind me of Purdue."



With the Indians, Plawecki will go with No. 27. “I bumped it up one. New beginning, new number,” he says.

When the deal was announced, Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said of Plawecki, “He’s earned a reputation as a really good teammate, a good receiver and leads a pitching staff really well.”

Plawecki acknowledged those positive traits are a direct reflection of his time in college, where he batted .359 with 20 doubles, four triples, seven home runs and 47 RBI as a junior in 2012 to lead the Boilermakers to their first conference championship since 1909.

“I take pride in those qualities – gaining the trust of my pitchers, being involved and getting along with everybody – because that’s my personality,” says the 28-year-old Plawecki, who was back on campus January 19 as the featured speaker for the baseball program’s inaugural First Pitch dinner. “I think it’s important to have fun with your teammates and embrace the moments, and that’s the same way I felt with the boys at Purdue. It’s the same comradery and the same game, just on a bigger stage.”

“My Purdue experience gave me the opportunity to become a professional athlete, and along the way I learned how to handle myself. Purdue provided a huge

stepping stone for me, and for that I will be forever grateful.”

Selected by the Mets in the first round of the 2012 MLB Draft, Plawecki quickly worked his way up through the minor leagues with stops in Brooklyn (New York), St. Lucie (Florida), Savannah (Georgia), Binghamton (New York) and Las Vegas before making it to the majors in 2015.

On his fifth day in the big leagues – April 25, 2015 – Plawecki made history by becoming the first player to hit his first career home run in a Subway Series game between the Mets and the New York Yankees, taking all-star CC Sabathia deep in the fourth inning with a two-run shot over the left-field wall at Yankee Stadium.

“I had so many thoughts going through my head, I was just trying to hit the ball hard,” Plawecki says. “CC hung a change up, and I barreled it up and sprinted out of the box because I didn’t know if I had gotten enough. It was a pretty cool moment because I got to share it with my parents (Jeff and Lynne) and my future wife (former Purdue soccer player Tayler Francel).”

In 237 games with the Mets from 2015 to 2018, Plawecki batted .218 with 14 home runs and 75 RBI. He got to experience New York’s trip to the World Series as a rookie and regularly caught some of the game’s premier pitchers, including last season’s National League Cy Young Award winner, Jacob deGrom.

“I have a lot of fond memories,” Plawecki says. “Working with that pitching staff made my job a lot of fun. Calling a game and having a front-row seat for guys with so much talent was pretty neat. Any of the starters, one through five, had the ability to throw a no-hitter on any given day. Getting to know them on a personal level, they are great people, and at the end of the

day it’s about relationships, and I was fortunate.”

The 2012 Purdue team, which won a program-record 45 games and advanced to the NCAA Tournament for just the second time in school history, boasted eight future professional players, including three major leaguers: Plawecki, pitcher Nick Wittgren and third baseman Cameron Perkins. Plawecki, though, believes the Boilermakers’ recipe for success was the result of more than pure talent.

“We had fun, and we all got along,” Plawecki says. “We played baseball, and then afterwards we hung out together and enjoyed each other off the field. Upperclassmen and underclassmen – there were no sectors, and we included everyone in everything we did.”

For as long as he can remember, Plawecki aspired to follow in the footsteps of his parents and other family members who attended Purdue.

“I grew up a diehard Boilermaker fan, watching Drew Brees play football and Brian Cardinal play basketball,” Plawecki says. “Playing at Purdue was something I always dreamed of doing, and I am fortunate that everything worked out the way that it did. Purdue means the world to me.” ✂

2 FOR THE TRIBE

On February 4, the Indians acquired another former Purdue player – pitcher Nick Wittgren from the Miami Marlins. Wittgren and Kevin Plawecki, who were teammates at Purdue in 2011 and 2012, are in line to become the first pair of Boilermakers to be teammates in the major leagues since second baseman Bernie Allen and catcher Joe McCabe played for the Minnesota Twins in 1964.



Focus on Health and Wellness

DR. CARLY DAY // HEAD TEAM PHYSICIAN

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

INSIDE PURDUE ATHLETICS

By Tom Schott

Dr. Carly Day, a member of the Franciscan Physician Network, was appointed head team physician for the Boilermakers in December. She oversees all aspects of medical care for all 18 Purdue intercollegiate athletics programs and the spirit squad.

Last fall, Purdue Athletics partnered with the Franciscan Physician Network for the provision of comprehensive sports medicine services.

Day came to Purdue from Notre Dame College in South Euclid, Ohio, where she served as the head primary care physician. She has previous experience at NCAA Division I schools and with both amateur and professional events throughout the United States. Day earned her bachelor's degree in zoology from Miami University in Ohio and her medical degree from the University of Virginia.

We caught up with Day to talk about her critical role in student-athlete health and wellness, and more.

FORGE: What have your first few months at Purdue been like?

DAY: I have spent a lot of time getting to know coaches, athletes, athletic trainers and administrators. Everyone here shares the common goal of taking care of the student-athletes, allowing them to prosper both as students and as athletes. When everyone has a common goal, it makes work very easy.

FORGE: What are the responsibilities of a head team physician?

DAY: There are several

components to being a head team physician. One, of course, is the health care of the athletes. We also are part of a team with psychologists and dieticians to expand on how you can take care of them not just with their general health, but also from a wellness standpoint. There is more and more data available about how important nutrition and sleep are to performance. The final piece is looking at the policies and procedures as far as concussion protocol, emergency action plan, mental health plan and pre-participation evaluations.

FORGE: Mental health is as important as physical health, if not more so, right?

DAY: Certainly. It's not just fix up a knee and send them out there. Even when it comes to knees, there is a component of mental health. Studies on return from ACL injuries show that half of the people who don't return actually have some sort of fear of re-injury, and that is what is stopping them more than the actual function of the knee. It all works together, and you can't isolate and treat one part of the athlete without treating the entire athlete.

FORGE: How much did you know about Purdue Athletics before coming here?

DAY: I grew up in Cleveland, so you could say that I was raised in the Big Ten family. I didn't know anyone who had gone to Purdue specifically or have any ties. Once I took this job, it seemed like Purdue people came out of the woodwork. It has been fun to meet many new people. While I am new to Purdue,

I knew about the university and some of the great teams in the past. I hope to be part of some great teams in the future.

FORGE: How did you come to major in zoology?

DAY: Miami University does not let you choose biology as an undergraduate degree. You have to choose zoology, botany or microbiology. If you're not into plants or bugs, many of the pre-med students end up choosing zoology.

FORGE: Tell us about your family.

DAY: I have a wonderful husband, Matt, who is a stay-at home dad. He is a mechanical engineer, and he engineers our house now. I tell everybody that he by far has the harder job. We have a 6-year-old daughter, Valencia, and a 4-year-old son, L.J. They are enjoying their new schools and making new friends. They are very energetic kids who enjoy coming to sporting events and want to wear Purdue shirts every day. ✂









Memorializing Meyer



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

THE TEAM BEHIND THE TEAMS

By Cory Palm

Purdue meant the world to Ron Meyer.

And the Meyer family and Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay knew the best way to make that fact known. They wanted to pay tribute to the former Purdue football student-athlete and assistant coach, who passed away suddenly in December at the age of 76.

So they reached out to the John Purdue Club to set up an endowed scholarship in Meyer's name. With an assist from Irsay, the family established the Ron Meyer Football Scholarship Endowment to be given to a fellow former walkon football player. The inaugural recipient is running back Alexander Horvath.

"He loved Purdue, and it was important to give back to the school that gave him his start," son Ralph Meyer says. "He always had a soft spot for the walkon athletes since he was one himself, so that's why we set up the scholarship to go to a former walkon who earned it."

The family believes that the cornerstone for the way Meyer lived his life came from getting the most of his time as a Boilermaker.

"My dad believed in sports and the lessons it can teach beyond the field," daughter Elizabeth Meyer Petersen says. "He believed so strongly in education, so to continue that legacy was important. He appreciated his opportunity at Purdue. It shaped the course of his life."

For Irsay, it was an easy decision to be involved in the effort to honor his former-coach-turned-employee.

"Ron was an important part of Colts history and played a major role in reintroducing pro football to Indiana during our early days in Indianapolis," Irsay says. "The fact that Ron's coaching career brought him back to Indiana, where his football life started at Purdue was fortuitous. So I was proud to endow this scholarship at his great alma mater, so that his impact as a coach, a leader and a person will continue to live on."

Meyer's football legacy, which included seven decades of involvement with the sport, got its jump start on the West Lafayette campus. And Meyer's career was one of distinction, at the collegiate and professional level and even the broadcast booth of the sport he dearly loved.

Meyer accomplished just about everything possible over the course of his coaching career. On the collegiate level, he won a Rose Bowl as an assistant coach and took a fledgling program to a top-5 finish as a head coach. Professionally, he helped win a Super Bowl as a scout and took two franchises to the playoffs as the head man.

A native of Westerville, Ohio, Meyer came to Purdue as a walkon defensive back in the fall of 1959. He impressed head coach Jack Mollenkopf almost immediately and was put on scholarship shortly thereafter. Meyer lettered his final three seasons (freshmen were not eligible to play in the early 1960s) and earned Academic All-Big Ten honors. He was Purdue's recipient of the prestigious Big Ten Medal of Honor – for academic and athletic excellence – following his senior year.

Despite his contributions on the field, it was no mystery where Meyer would make his mark. After a year as the head football coach at Penn High School in Mishawaka, Indiana, Meyer joined Mollenkopf's staff as an assistant. In fact, the legendary head coach had made a mental note a few



years earlier that Meyer would one day be a good addition to his staff.

During his six seasons with the Boilermakers, Meyer worked with running backs, receivers and defensive backs, mentoring the likes of Leroy Keyes, Perry Williams and Jim Beirne in the process. Meyer was on the sideline in Pasadena when Williams crashed in for two touchdowns en route to a 14-13 win over USC in the 1967 Rose Bowl.

In the late 1960s, Meyer, while still in his 20s, became not only one of Mollenkopf's top assistants, but also one of his top recruiters. With a sense of fashion and style, the youthful Meyer was instrumental in securing the signing class of 1969, arguably the best in Purdue history. That group produced three eventual first-round NFL draft picks in Dave Butz, Otis Armstrong and Darryl Stingley. Meyer had swagger and pizzazz, and his personality resonated with kids, manifesting itself as a top coach and securer of big-time talent.

Meyer left Purdue following the 1970 season to take a job as a scout for the Dallas Cowboys, helping them to a win in Super Bowl VI. Two years later, he was back in coaching, this time as the head man at UNLV. He led the Rebels from mediocrity to a top-10 ranking in Division II before leaving for Southern Methodist in 1976. At SMU, Meyer recruited star running backs Eric Dickerson and Craig James and led the Mustangs to a top-5 finish in the 1981 Associated Press poll. Meyer left after the season to become head coach of the New England Patriots.

Meyer quickly turned around a franchise that went 2-14 the previous year. In his first season, Meyer led the Patriots to the playoffs for just the third time in franchise history. He finished his two-plus seasons in New England with a winning record and put together the bulk of the roster that would take the Patriots to Super Bowl XX in 1986.

In late 1986, after spending a year outside of coaching, Meyer appeared to be headed back to Purdue as head coach. His alma mater was in the

market for a new coach after the dismissal of Leon Burtnett. News reports at the time indicated Meyer and athletics director George King had a deal worked out and a press conference scheduled as Meyer was hours away from being announced as the new leader of the Boilermakers.

That's when Irsay, the Colts' 28-year-old general manager, intervened. Irsay had played for Meyer as a walkon linebacker at SMU in the early 1980s and had a feeling his old head coach would be a good fit in Indianapolis. Irsay literally intercepted Meyer and installed him immediately as the head man with the Colts.

Once again, Meyer helped a struggling franchise quickly reverse direction on the field, proving to be the right choice as the 0-13 Colts won their final three games and then won the AFC Eastern Division in 1987. He earned NFL Coach of the Year honors from United Press International for his efforts. In an interesting historical footnote, in 1987 Meyer hired the man who he would have followed at Purdue, Burtnett, to serve as the Colts' running backs coach.

After leaving the Colts in 1991, Meyer coached in the Canadian Football League and the XFL while also working as a football analyst for several network television shows. Some years later, in an interview with *Gold and Black Illustrated*, Meyer expressed some regret that he passed on the opportunity to return to Purdue. "As I look back on it, I might have been better off to take the Purdue job," Meyer said in 2005. "I met so many people that I still call friends, and I am grateful to have been able to be a part of the football tradition there."

Meyer often credited Purdue for giving him a lifetime career in football. "I still bleed Gold and Black," Meyer said in a 2016 interview with *GBI*.

With his family's and Irsay's gifts, Meyer will have his legacy forever attached to Purdue football. ✖



REMEMBERING 1999

WITH CAROLYN PECK

Convinced by seniors Ukari Figgs and Stephanie White that the 1998-99 women's basketball team could win the NCAA championship, second-year head coach Carolyn Peck postponed beginning her tenure as head coach and general manager of the expansion Orlando Miracle of the WNBA. Figgs and White proved prophetic, and the dynamic duo led the Boilermakers to the national title, defeating Duke 62-45 in the championship game. The fun-loving Peck, currently a broadcaster for ESPN, was equally passionate and emotional when looking back on that memorable season and team.

"Twenty years. I cannot believe it has been 20 years. It seems like it was the day before yesterday."

"The season was such a unique lineup of the stars. My assistants – Kerry Cremeans, Pam Stackhouse and Seth Kushkin – and me, we were young, green and naïve. Everyone talks about winning a national championship, but we did."

"All these years later, when I come back to Purdue, people still say, 'Thank you for the memories.' It really is a feeling of gratitude that Purdue gave me – gave us – an opportunity, and we were able to pay it back."

"We opened the season against (three-time defending national champion) Tennessee, and everyone bought in and believed in what we were doing. Late in the game, the crowd was going nuts, and Stephanie went around to each one of her teammates and said 'Don't celebrate. We're supposed to be here.' That win really convinced us that we are going to make some noise. Everybody had talked about Tennessee and Connecticut. We wanted people to start talking about Purdue."

"At the end of the championship game, I still remember looking at my team and having this awesome feeling that they had committed from start to finish. I'm a lame-duck coach, they know I'm not coming back, but they committed to each other."

"What stands out most about my three years at Purdue are the people. I made lifelong friends. It can get cold here in the winter, but West Lafayette is like a warm hug because of the awesome community. My connections with so many special people, those don't ever end."



The Archives

1999 Women's Basketball National Championship Trophy

While becoming the first – and only – Big Ten Conference women's basketball team to win an NCAA championship, Purdue achieved a 34-1 overall record, winning by an average of 16.5 points per game. The traditional wood national championship trophy resides in the Mackey Arena concourse. It is part of a new presentation for both men's and women's basketball Final Four and national championship hardware unveiled in January as part of continuing enhancements to the Mackey historical displays.





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