THE MUSTANG POST

Play by Play

SPORTS & LEISURE THAT FUELS LIVES



ISSUES ARRIVING THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL YEAR

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STAFF

Quinn Nordick



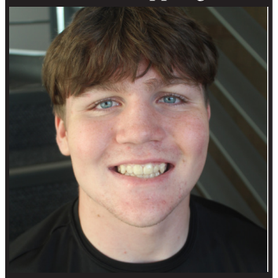
Editor & Journalist

Gerardo Delgado



Journalist

Michael Ripplinger



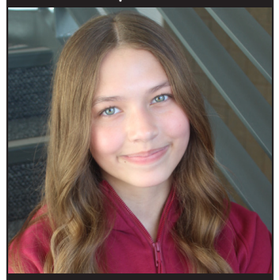
Journalist

Mack Hagberg



Journalist

Aubrey Lauckner



Journalist

letter from the editor

Universal. That's the word that came to mind while glancing at the articles in this first issue of Play By Play. Why universal? Each of these articles focuses on a different sport: F1, gynmastics, ice skating, football, cheerleading, and wrestling.

Though these sports may differ in their demands, movements, and traditions, they share something deeper: the human desire to challenge ourselves. Perhaps this is what makes sports universal. They remind us that unity does not require everyone to be the same, but rather our differences are often what bring meaning to the things we share.

As I look at this first issue, I can't help but feel incredibly proud of the hard work and effort my team has put in. Each person brought their own unique perspective, and together, we have created something that reflects the diversity of the sporting world itself. This issue is more than a collection of articles; it is a reminder that different passions can exist side by side, connected by a common love for the game.

Welcome to Play By Play, where every sport has a story.

Sincerely,

Quinn Nordick

The Mental & Physical Effects of Gymnastics

By Quinn Nordick

Gymnastics is a decently well-known sport, but have you ever wondered about what's behind an athlete's mind who seems like they can do all those skills so effortlessly? Today we are here to dive into the mental and physical effects of gymnastics.

Gymnastics, specifically artistic gymnastics involves 4 events for women and 6 for men. For women, these events include floor, beam, bars, and vault. For men, these events include rings, floor, high bar, pommel, vault, and p-bars. Women's gymnastics focuses on flexibility, grace, and acrobatics. While men's gymnastics focuses on strength.

This sport can be extremely physically grueling on the body. When I was in gymnastics, my practice was right after school from 4:15 to 8:15pm, and this would be almost every weekday. So around 20 hours per week. But in the summer, it was 5 hours almost every day minus Sunday having no practice and Saturday being a short practice. Saturdays we mainly did a long run and little actual practice, that day was mainly conditioning.

Jordan Caroll

Image courtesy of gymcan.org

During those 5- or 4-hour practice sessions, we only had a 15-minute break to eat. Then we go straight back to practice. Not only do the long hours take a huge toll on your body, but say you have homework for school, you won't have any time to get that work done outside of school because you're at practice all the time.

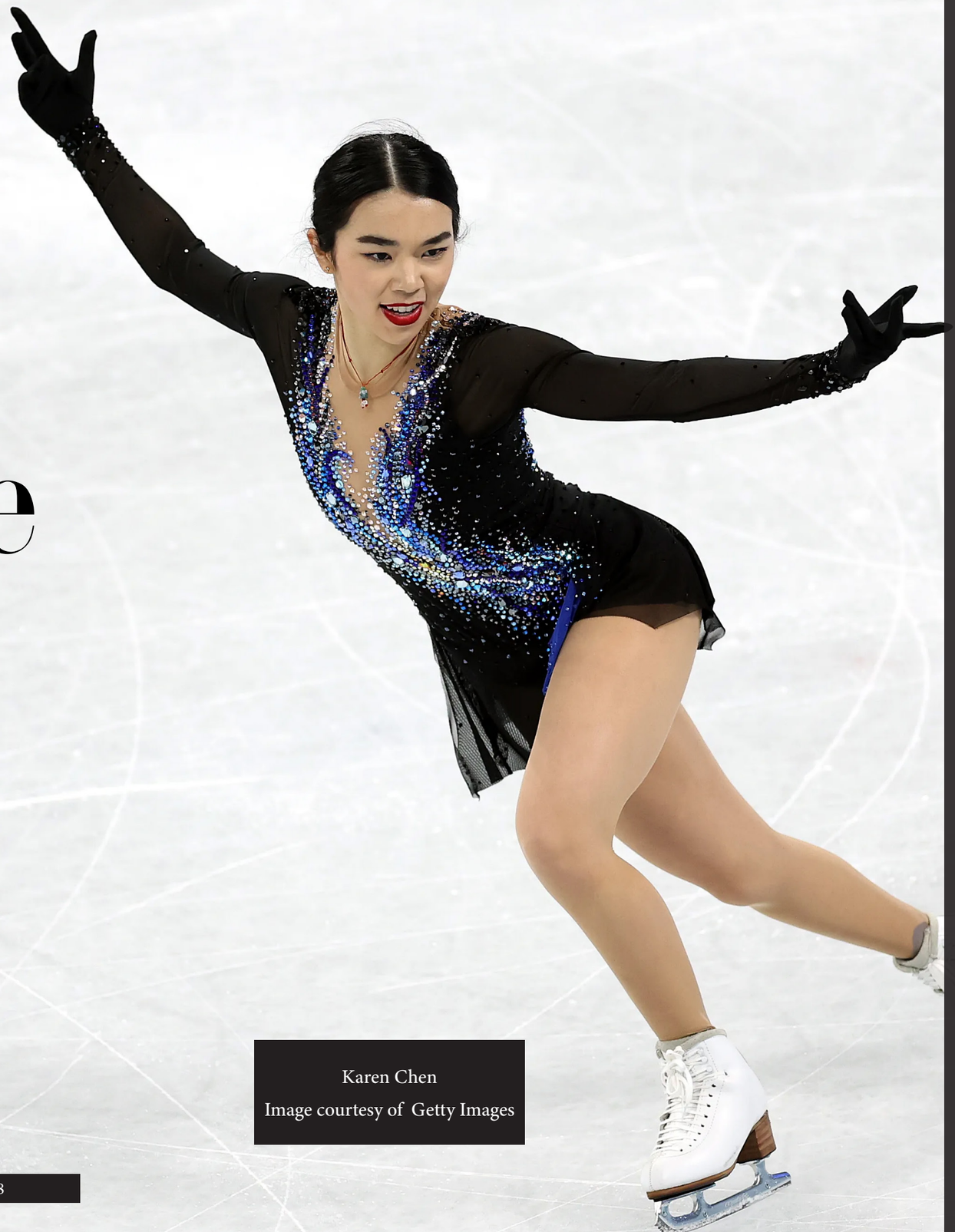
In my last few years of gymnastics leading up to me quitting, my mental health had taken a huge blow. My confidence was at an all-time low, I was extremely stressed, and all I could think about during school was the fact that I had gymnastics after. This led to me quitting later on.

Reasons many gymnasts get super stressed is because say you fall hard on a skill you had been working on; you wouldn't want to do it again right? Yeah, I know I wouldn't, but in gymnasts that doesn't matter. You are expected to get back up even if you're terrified to do it again. You cannot just stop doing a skill because you're scared of it. This leads to stress among gymnasts, causing them to have something many people experience, a mental block.

Mental blocks for gymnasts are as scary as they are dangerous. They are described as not necessarily being scared, but your body just won't move, and you freeze up. Having a mental block could possibly lead to injury.

Overall, gymnastics is often overlooked when it comes to the physical and mental aspects of the athlete.

Grace on Ice



Karen Chen
Image courtesy of Getty Images

By Quinn Nordick

Gliding across a frozen surface, a pair of steel blades cutting through the ice, is an experience that perfectly balances athletic intensity with artistic grace. This sport is called ice skating. Ice skating is a competitive sport and an activity enjoyed by millions worldwide.

One of the most well-known forms of ice skating is figure skating. In this sport, athletes perform jumps, spins, footwork, and other movements on the ice. Figure skaters are scored based off of their execution, technical difficulty, and artistic presentation. Some compete individually, while others perform in pairs or ice dance teams. Figure skating requires many years of practice, flexibility, coordination, excellent balance, and strength.

Another type of skating is speed skating. Unlike figure skating, its main goal is to travel around an ice track as fast as possible. Athletes race against one another or they race against the clock, using powerful strides and lower crouching body positions to gain speed. There are different forms of speed skating, including long-track and short-track speed skating. Their success depends on acceleration, endurance, technique, and the ability to maintain control while taking sharp turns.

Ice hockey is a fast-paced team sport played on an ice rink. Players wear skates and use sticks to move a puck across the ice and score goals. Hockey requires skating ability, quick reactions, teamwork, passing accuracy, and strategic thinking. Players must constantly change direction, accelerate, stop, and maneuver around opponents. Because the game is so fast, skating skills are essential for both offense and defense.

Ice skating takes a lot of practice, patience, and hard work. Skaters train regularly to improve their balance, strength, and skating techniques. Figure skaters practice jumps and spins, speed skaters work on going faster, and hockey players practice skating, passing, and shooting pucks into the goal. It can take a long time to learn new skills, but with enough practice, skaters can improve and become more confident on the ice.

There are several skills needed to be a good ice skater. Balance is one of the most important because skaters need to stay steady while moving, turning, and stopping. Strength and coordination also help skaters control their movements and perform different techniques. Agility is especially important in sports like ice hockey, where players need to change direction quickly. Skaters also need focus and determination to keep learning and improving.

Safety is another important part of ice skating. Wearing skates that fit properly can make skating more comfortable and help prevent accidents. Beginners should start with the basics and learn how to stop and fall safely before trying harder moves. Wearing a helmet is also important, especially for beginners and hockey players. Warming up before skating and following the rules of the rink can help keep everyone safe.

Overall, ice skating is a fun and challenging sport that takes time and effort to learn. With regular practice and the right safety measures, skaters can improve their skills, stay active, and enjoy everything the sport has to offer.

Speed Skaters

Image courtesy of Getty Images

DALLAS COWBOY CHEERLEADERS POPULARITY IMPACT

By Aubrey Lauckner





After just one season of Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders (DCC) on Netflix, the internet blew up after finding out about the reality of the profession: mental health, body standards, low pay, and massive individual following.

Because of the internet and individual cheerleaders who have a voice, such as Victoria Kalina, Kat Puryear, and Erica Wilkins, things started to change as a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader.

Four-year veteran Victoria Kalina shared that she had been battling with depression, anxiety, and bulimia while trying to maintain appearance standards as a cheerleader.

Victoria's words impacted the other cheerleaders whre they no longer felt the need to hide their pain. Even director, Kelli Finglass and the DCC began to consider their standards, leading to free therapy, psychological evaluations, to support the team.

After three seasons of being on the team, Erica Wilkins faced a severe neck and shoulder injury that unfortunately ended her DCC and dancing career.

After her severe injury, Wilkins believed that the association was exploiting their physical appearance and images with no financial fair compensation.

Due to the low pay, Wilkins wanted to speak up so a new era of cheerleaders would not face the same financial issues.

Wilkins then filed a lawsuit regarding the unpaid mandatory hours, violation of fair labor standards, pay rate falling below the federal minimum wage, and having to use their personal money to pay for necessities to keep up with the DCC look.

When this lawsuit ended, the organization made an exception to increase 50% for hourly practices from $8 to $12 per hour and game days are increased at a rate of 100% making $200 - $400 per game.

Later, when the first season premiered of the Netflix documentary 4-year veteran, Kat Puryear, compared the income of a full-time Chick-fil-A worker and a substitute teacher to a Dallas cowboy cheerleader: A DCC only provided part-time wages.

Puryear then broke the internet and public anger of low pay revealing that the franchise is a multi-billion-dollar brand.

The organization then increased the hourly rate from $15 - $20 per hour to $75 per hour, game day appearances from $500 per game to $2,500 per game. In the end, the DCC organization increased 400% pay raise.

From season 1 to season 4, individual cheerleaders of DCC who were the focal points of attention throughout the series gained a higher following on social media and became fan favorites.

For example, newcomers from season 1, Reece Weaver, became a fan favorite for her sparkling personality, her faith throughout her journey, and her love for dance.

Another example would be veteran Kelcey Wetterberg, known for being group leader, her flawless execution while being a DCC and a full-time pediatric nurse.

Before season three even began in the makings, more people around the world wanted to try out to be a Dallas cowboy cheerleader because members have turned into celebrities, influencers, and have more future career opportunities such as modeling and the entertainment industry.

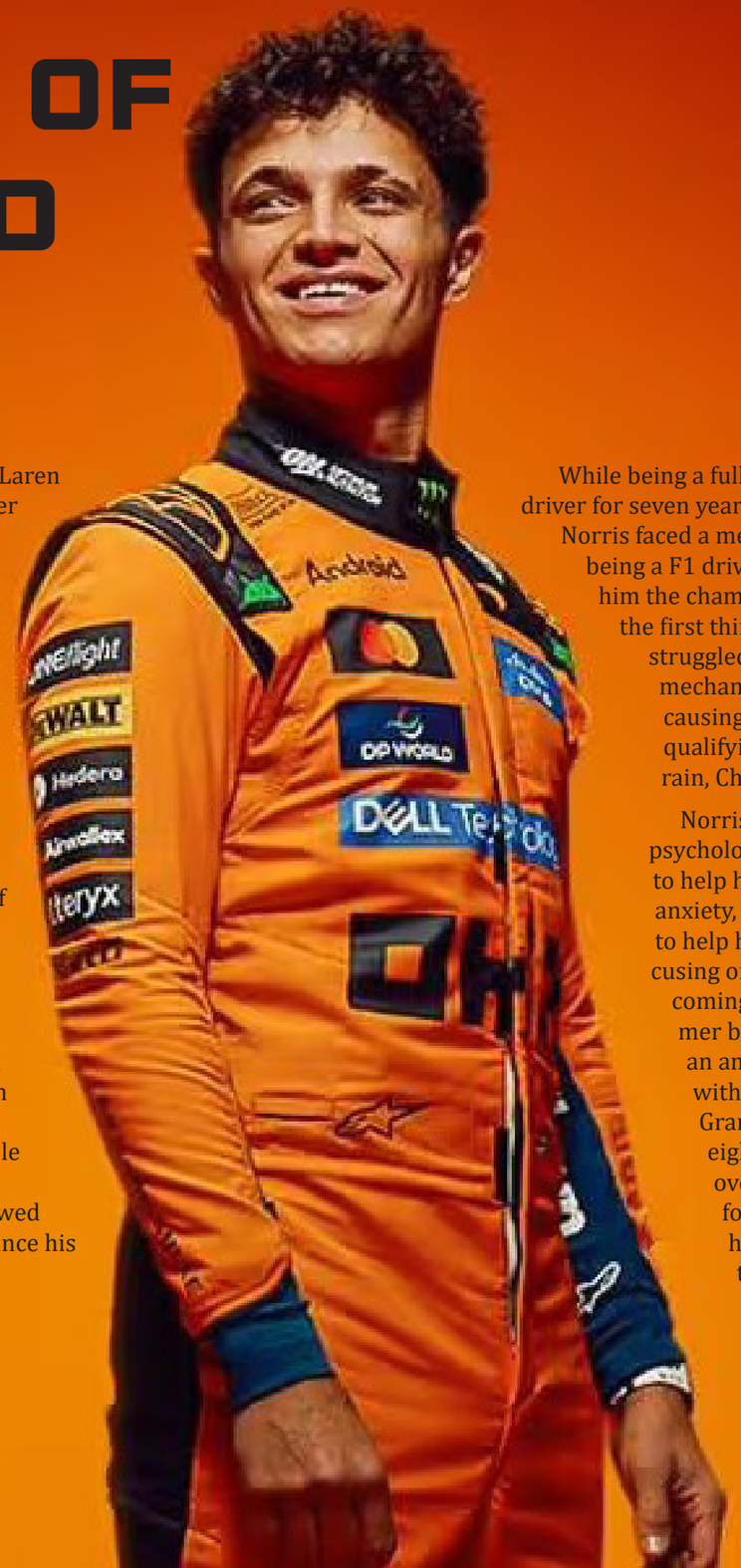
Due to the increasing amount of people wanting to try out, director, Kelli Finglass made the decision to make tryouts worldwide including Australia, Japan, Ukraine, Canada, and the UK.

The tryouts being worldwide were so successful that Kelli Finglass made it permanent for the following years.

Ultimately, the Dallas cowboy cheerleaders have made such a big popularity success from their Netflix documentary Americas Sweethearts that they made impacts throughout the series, creating the DCC to be a better overall organization and experience.

THE JOURNEY OF F1 STAR LANDO NORRIS

By Aubrey Lauckner



As Lando Norris grew up, he found love for minibikes and motocross. When he was seven years old, his father, Adam Norris, took him to a nearby track, where he started karting. By the age of eight, he started competing in Comer Cadet Karts. Norris won several championships, such as the CIK-FIA European KF-Junior Championship. He also won the WSK Euro Series in 2013 and the CIK-FIA World Championship in 2014. These awards made him become known as a talented young driver.

After his era of karting, Norris moved on to car racing. He won the MSA Formula Championship, which was important for the start of his racing career. In 2016, he won the Auto sport BRDC Award for his success in racing. With that he competed in the Toyota Racing Series, the Formula Renault Eurocup, and the Formula Renault Northern European Cup. In 2017, he won the FIA Formula 3 European Championship, which helped him get closer to his dreams of being an official F1 driver.

Because of his success, McLaren put Norris in their young driver program. In 2018, he became a test and reserve driver for McLaren, this helped Norris to have a chance to have experience with Formula 1 cars. During the same year, he raced in Formula 2 with the Carlin team now known as Rodin Motorsport and finished in second place in the championship. This showed that he was ready for the next steps of his career.

In 2019, McLaren made Norris a full-time F1 driver with Carlos Sainz Jr. His first race was the Australian Grand Prix, where he qualified eighth and finished in twelfth place. In 2020, he earned his first pole position at the Russian Grand Prix. These achievements showed how much he had improved since his karting era.

While being a full-time McLaren driver for seven years now, Lando Norris faced a mental strain of being a F1 driver, almost losing him the championship. During the first third of the year, he struggled on McLarens mechanical updates, causing him to have qualifying errors in Bahrain, China, and Canada.

Norris than found psychological coaching to help his mentality, anxiety, and several ways to help his nerves into focusing on the track. When coming back to summer break, Norris had an amazing comeback with a total of seven Grand Prix victories, eighteen podiums over the twenty fourth race season, he than reclaimed the top spot in Mexico.

Later, McLaren faced two disqualifications at the Las Vegas Grand Prix due to high floor plank wear, this made Verstappen pull off a comeback stealing McLarens title.

Norris than became the 2025 Formula 1 World Drivers Champion, he crossed the line in third place having fifteen points, making Verstappen have exactly two points behind the final standings, Norris having 423 and Verstappen having 421. Making Lando Norris the 35th World Champion in Formula 1 history.

Overall, Norris worked hard to reach Formula 1. From racing karts to competing against some of the best drivers in the world. His success in different racing championships helped him reach his goal of becoming a full-time formula 1 driver for McLaren. His journey shows that hard work and dedication can help people achieve their dreams.

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL REALIGNMENT SINCE 2020

By Michael Ripplinger

Since the early 20th century, Univiersities have had athletics events for their students. It is obvious that you would want to schedule games aginst schools near you and have a system for playing those games. But, when your athletics make enough money, you dont want to play small schools that dont make any.

Big schools moving across states and regions to play sports, which is the modern college sports landscape. But the same pull for money that stoped Colleges from playing high schools would now pull schools from California to a conference named after the Atlantic Ocean.

On July 27th, 2021, the Universities of Texas and Oklahoma announced their move to the Southeastern Conference from the Big 12. This was a realization of the growing fear that the Power 5 conferences (Pac-12, ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, and SEC) were not as competitive as they once were.

The Big Ten and SEC had media deals worth 440 million and 300 million dollars a year compared to the Big 12 and ACC had deals only worth around 200 million dollars. Even worse for the Pac-12, they had stalled of getting a media rights deal. So, if a school in the Pac-12 was valuable to another conference, should they stay in their conference that had not even certified their paycheck?

On June 30th, 2022, the Big Ten added UCLA and USC from the Pac-12, the problem with that is the Big-10 is a Mid-Western conference, and both of those schools are in Los Angeles. Texas and Oklahoma moved into a conference that geographically fit them, but that factor would soon seem irrelevant.

Oregon and Washington moved to the Big Ten four days later, and the PAC 12 was down to 8. The universities left because the Pac-12 had yet to get a media rights deal to pay their universities, of course all these moves are because of money.

Predictably, the Big 12 was mourning the loss of Texas and Oklahoma and needed new schools to regain their prestige and market value. The Big 12 added the universities of Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona State. This came after they absolutely pillaged the American Conference adding UCF, Cincinnati, Houston, and added BYU

At this point, the other, now Power 4, conferences were getting at least 16 members, and the ACC especially did not want to get devoured. The ACC is not good besides the top couple of teams. In every conference Realignment there is a chance that schools get left behind and a lot of their schools will be swept away. Through this fear they added SMU, Stanford, and Cal.

While, reading this you might have thought “Hey, why are these schools in California not playing anywhere near California, shouldn’t they join conferences that are closer to them?” College sports are no longer about education; it is all about money.

The students do not learn much. Most top tier players are 5th year seniors who take one online class and get paid millions of dollars. Why would they care about school? There is also speculation that the Power 4 conferences will leave the NCAA and have salary caps like other professional sport leagues.

NDSU FOOTBALL'S EFFECT ON THE SCHOOL

By Michael Ripplinger



On February 9, 2026, North Dakota State University announced they would pay 17.5 million dollars to move to the Mountain West Conference for football. This sounds nice, but NDSU is a university, not a football team, so why did they pay 17.5 million dollars to play sports against a different group of teams instead of, you know, educating?

NDSU spent 8.4 million dollars on football last year and is expected to increase spending in the Mountain West. This is a staggering amount of money, especially for a public insitution run on tax dollars. The university does not pay all the budget for sports with boosters helping substantially.

On July 1st, 2026, NDSU hosted "701 Day" which was named after the area code for phones in North Dakota. "In 24 hours, NDSU raised $280,918 in cash gifts and $10.1 million in matching gift pledges. The 1,150 donors that gave on 701 Day helped push NDSU Athletics over the halfway mark of Climb the Mountain with over $28 million raised to date," NDSU Team Makers.

With all the money and effort brought by NDSU's Team Makers, NDSU won 10 national championships, in their previous division, and won almost three fourths of their games. In the FBS, NDSU is 6-1 with six of their games being on national television. NDSU, because of their recent football success, is in conversations about the College Football Playoff and in the minds of millions of people, many of which could be future students.

In Devin G. Pope's article "Understanding College Application Decisions: Why College Sports Success Matters," he calculated that schools in the top 20 of the AP Poll were sent on average 2% more SAT scores than the previous year, with the Top 10 getting 6% more and the national champion getting 12% more. Similarly with his other study on basketball, universities gain substantially more college applications than their counterparts when they are successful at athletics.

College sports are a big part of application decisions and student life. College is not only a stepping-stone to a career, but it is also a fundamental part of most American's lives. Students want to be happy when pursuing their education, and football brings joy to those applicants. NDSU's has more students from Minnesota than North Dakota in no small part because they are good at football. Football is a vital part of NDSU's culture, and is irreplaceable.



The 26'-27' NFL Season The Opening Week

By Gerardo Delgado Jr.

The first touchdown of the NFL season occurred in the second quarter; it was a 2-yard receiving touchdown scored by the Patriots; the pass was thrown by quarterback Drake Maye (#10) and caught by rookie tight end Eli Raridon (#82).

Seahawks first points of the season came via a 30-yard field goal made by kicker Jason Meyers (#5). In the Seahawks first touchdown of the season, quarterback Drew Lock (#2) threw a short pass to wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba (#11) who then broke away for a 45-yard touchdown

In the very entertaining 13-10 Seahawks win, many big things happened. Not even 5 minutes into the first quarter, on only the fifth play of the drive, Seahawks quarterback Sam Darnold (#14) injured his hip and was left unable to return after getting sacked by defensive end Dre'Mont Jones (#5).

This injury made the seahawks backup quarterback, NFL veteran Drew Lock, step up and deliver the win for his team.

With just under 13 and a half minutes remaining in the third quarter, Patriots wide receiver AJ Brown (#1) suffered a high-ankle sprain, needing at least 4 weeks of rest before being able to return.

With just above thirty seconds passed in the fourth quarter, Drake Maye threw an interception to cornerback Nehemiah Pritchett (#28), after the interception, the seahawks offense drove down the field for a touchdown; this was then followed by yet another Drake Maye interception, this time to safety Julian Love (#20), leading to a go-ahead field goal to put the seahawks up 13 – 10.

With the game on the line, rather than kicking a field goal and sending the game to overtime, Patriots head coach Mike Vrable decided to go for the game-winning touchdown; Drake Maye steps up to pass to wide receiver Mack Hollins (#13) in the endzone just for the ball to be intercepted by cornerback Josh Jobe (#29), icing the game, Seahawks won!



WRESTLING'S GLOBAL HISTORY

By Gerardo Delgado Jr.

Wrestling, one of the world's most popular sports, has a lot of history spanning over millions of years. From Greco-Roman to entertainment wrestling, wrestling has many different variations and a multitude of cultures claiming the sport as their own. It is clear that wrestling has the richest history of all sports.

Since the start of time, mammals such as bears, lions, and wolves have been known for grappling with each other over disputes such as territorial boundaries, to assert dominance, and reinforcing social hierarchies.

Over 4 thousand years ago, wrestling became an organized competition, with the earliest traces of the sport becoming a sport being in the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. Wrestling continued to flourish in early civilizations, so when the ancient Olympics were looking to add more competitions, wrestling was the first sport they went to, becoming the first non-footrace competition and the first combat sport on the program.

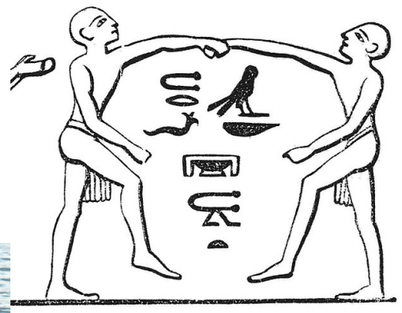
In the 1830s, Wrestling saw a second uptick in popularity, reviving the sport and bringing it back to its old glory. this is massively credited to the transatlantic spread of Irish "Collar-and-Elbow" wrestling, the birth of the French "Take-All-Comers" exhibition (when part of wrestling branched off into modern professional sports entertainment), and the standardizing of the sport, creating the Greco-Roman style.

On April 6, 1896, the first modern Olympic Games opened in Athens, Greece, after being revived by French educator Baron Pierre de Coubertin. This event featured 43 events across nine different sports, with wrestling as one of them. There was a single open-weight event with no weight classes, and it was held under Greco-Roman rules.

Years 1887 to 2000 are known as the era of Aleksandr Karelin. Aleksandr Karelin is often considered the best wrestler of all time. He went undefeated for 13 years from 1987 until the final match of his career at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. He did not lose a single international match and even went 6 years without letting up a single point.

Nowadays, wrestling is still as popular as it's always been, if not more. Countries all around the world have built part of their cultures off wrestling, and wrestling is available to all people of all backgrounds and upbringings around the world.









SHS VOLLEYBALL 4TH STATE TITLE IN 5 YEARS?

By Mack Hagberg

Since 2022, Sheyenne has been arguably the most dominant high school volleyball team in North Dakota. Over the past five years they have won three state championships over Bismarck Century, Fargo Shanley, and Fargo Davies. Will they be able to secure another?

A big piece in Sheyenne's recent success is "The Big 3" having the top three ranked players in the class of 2028: libero, Baylor Dinger; setter, Brynlie Richman; and outside, Olivia Bratton.

The team's success doesn't just rely on the players. Coach Leah Newton said, "We need to continue to work hard and put in effort to improve. Our goal is to play the best team volleyball at tournament time."

This improvement isn't just hard practice and discipline. Coach Newton adds, "It is important that we find a balance of fun and connection with our teammates & coaches." This bond between teammates coupled with fun creates a connection between the team members that shows itself on the court.

Tactically, Coach Newton says her team needs "to improve defensively-continue working towards consistency & discipline in blocking and positioning. We want to reduce unforced errors and at the same time, stay aggressive."

Team manager, Kinley Gross offers a broader perspective by setting expectations: "I think the team needs to continue to have the mindset of anyone can win a game, it's not just the higher seed."

This psychological perspective maintains realistic expectations where Gross states, "We've been very good about continuing to not let the standings get in our head and continue to want to win every game."

For Gross, it's a long run to the end; therefore, keeping focus on each individual game is key. "For the rest of the season, I think the team just needs to focus game by game and look into what each team will throw at us and how to defend that."

Can Sheyenne do it again? Sheyenne has already shown that they can compete with the best teams in North Dakota.

With talented players, strong coaching, and experience playing in big matches, the Mustangs have a chance to win their fourth state title in five years.

However, they will need to stay focused and play their best volleyball when it matters most. If they can do that, another state championship could be within reach.



Will ND Have 5 Different Football Champs in 5 Years?

By Mack Hagberg

In the last 4 years, there have been 4 different champions in North Dakota football.

In 2022, Fargo Shanley blew out Bismarck Century, 48-7.

In 2023, Minot High stopped Fargo Shanley from winning back-to-back championships, beating them 38-35.

In 2024, West Fargo Sheyenne conquered Fargo Davies, winning 24-14.

In 2025, after losing the previous year, Fargo Davies bounced back and beat Bismarck Century, 41-19.

The big question now is whether another team will win the championship in 2026. If it happens, North Dakota will have five different champions in five years. This would show how competitive high school football is in North Dakota. Every year, teams have a chance to prove themselves and make a run at a state championship.

There are several teams that could have a chance to win it all this year. Fargo Davies could try to win back-to-back championships, while other teams will try to stop them. Teams like Shanley, Bismarck, and Sheyenne could also be looking to get back to the top. With so many good teams, it is hard to predict who will come out on top.

No matter who wins, it should be an exciting championship. North Dakota football has shown that a team winning one year does not mean they will win the next. With four different champions in the last four years, fans have seen plenty of surprises. We will have to wait and see if 2026 brings us a fifth different champion in five years.





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