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This Blair Review edition features students and teachers exploring their initial attraction to and engagement in America’s—and the world’s—rite of passage: athletics. Many of us have spent a lifetime consumed by sport, whether as participants, coaches or enthusiastic fans—often, the trifecta prevails. This immersion in athletics has shaped our lives and shaped our society, warts and all. Who has not been consumed by the stunning array of sports that punctuate our childhood? In these essays, Blair community members consider how this fascination with and endless involvement in athletics all began.

Crew, basketball, baseball, football, golf, running, soccer, softball, swimming, volleyball and more are part of this rich mix; the authors fell in love with one or more of these sports and have often maintained a link to them—forever. And, yes, gender counts. Title IX anti-discrimination legislation apparently opened the door for women who would have been sidelined in a previous era. Families are also part of the story. Consider the complicated, supportive roles played by moms and dads, documented by their generally grateful children. Lastly, a note about baseball: The national pastime’s popularity may be diminished with the ascendancy of youth football, basketball, soccer, lacrosse and other sports, but it’s still an incubator for aspiring athletes of all stripes. Today’s field of dreams comes in various dimensions, though for many, it started out as a baseball diamond.

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“I always turn to the sports section first. The sports page records people’s accomplishments; the front page has nothing but man’s failures.”

- Earl Warren
My mother once told me that there was a plastic football placed in my crib in the nursery at Warren Hospital in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. As Phillipsburg, a blue-collar town not far from Blair Academy, is steeped in football tradition, I had every reason to believe her. Some of my earliest memories are of being on the sidelines with my father, who served as head coach of the midget football team in my hometown of Milford, New Jersey, a small mill community some 10 miles due south of Phillipsburg on the Delaware River. A former star football player at Phillipsburg High School in the early 1940s, my father was quite an athletic presence in my town, where he coached and officiated youth sports in exchange for a future cut short. Like many of his generation, my father’s World War II commitment effectively derailed his prospects for earning a college degree as well as his chances for playing football at Syracuse University, where he had started college after the war. He settled for a factory job at the Riegel Paper Corporation, which owned and operated a series of mills on the banks of the Delaware and Musconetcong Rivers that wind their way through rural western New Jersey. Passionate about football as well as most any sport that happened to be “in season,” my father, along with many other hard-working and talented men of his generation, took great care to mentor the youth in my town. His former players would often come to our house during holidays and vacations from high school and college to chat about football or school or just about life. I didn’t understand or appreciate it at the time, but it seems that my father had quite an impact on many of the boys he coached. Even today, when I run into his former players, they are quick to comment on how he had been instrumental in shaping their young lives.

A bit about my hometown… while my mailing address was simply Elmhurst Road, Milford, New Jersey, I actually lived a few miles outside of town in Holland Township—specifically, the Riegel Ridge section of the township—just a few streets from where the Riegel Ridge Community Center was located. The Ridge, as it was affectionately called, had been built by Riegel Paper Corporation back in the mid 1930s for its employees and their families. On the hilltop campus was a spectacular mansion-like clubhouse that housed a basketball court, which on one end had a stage for plays and concerts. There were bowling lanes, a large kitchen/dining area that served food and an oaken lounge/library, replete with a magazine collection and a color
television (a rarity among households in my neighborhood at the time). There were ball fields, tennis courts, hiking trails, a beautiful 50-yard outdoor swimming pool and a golf club (memberships fees were additional).

As my father worked in the maintenance department of the Milford mill and kept a part-time job at the Ridge, I had the run of the place. I took full advantage of everything the Ridge had to offer... sports, clubs, activities, arts...and, to the best of my knowledge, everything was free. The Ridge was open just about every day of the year, so it truly was a second home for me and many of my friends. Unless I had a doctor’s appointment or had to visit relatives or do something around the house (my older sisters would declare that a rarity!) I was at the Ridge pretty much every day after school. I would come home, eat a quick dinner and typically return in the evenings to watch games or play chess or read in the library. On Saturday mornings, it was bowling, basketball games and tennis in the afternoons and loitering in the evenings. Sundays we had church and then a family meal at my grandmother’s house, so the best I could typically manage was a brief afternoon visit. And during the summers, my friends and I were there more than we were at home.

Lew (mascot) and his father (far left back row), coach of Riegel Ridge football team.
My love of sport developed, at least in part, in reaction to being the “sick kid” in the neighborhood. Not so much physically sick, but by the time I was eight years old, I had endured five pretty serious surgeries that kept me from doing anything physical for large chunks of time. I took to sports—swimming, baseball, basketball, football, tennis—with an energy and enthusiasm that I now wish I could re-capture. Perhaps it was to prove to friends and family that I wasn’t to be coddled or perhaps it was because some of my friends and neighbors were fabulously talented and I wanted to keep up—I’m not really sure. Whatever the reason, it was very important to me to be the best I could be at whatever sport I was playing, and The Ridge was the crucible where I learned to polish my skills and compete. In addition to having the facilities, fields and courts on which to practice, there were a ton of factory kids who spent pretty much all their time there as well. The Ridge was where my father coached the midget football team in the fall and where he worked on the weekends throughout the year managing the bowling alley (I could bowl for free on any of the open lanes!). It was where I was “asked” by the older guys to keep the clock in the gym for the high school basketball leagues. It was where we would play baseball or tennis or swim or hang out with friends virtually every day in the summer. The Ridge was where I watched and learned from the older guys in my neighborhood who were talented and bright and—when they weren’t picking on us or throwing us in the bushes—actually kept a close eye on our progress. By the fourth grade, I was hooked on sport…I read about it extensively, watched everything available on the five or so television stations we got, and relished in associating with the older guys who were planning to play their sport in college. We were far from wealthy, but I think I lived quite a privileged life, due in large measure to the “country club” a mere stone’s throw from Elmhurst Road.

By the time high school came, things were looking bright. I had a chance to be a successful athlete, particularly in baseball. In the fall of my sophomore year, while playing football, I tore my ACL and needed reconstructive surgery. Back in 1972, most athletes who faced that surgery also faced the prospect of a premature end of their playing days. I was no different. After my surgery, the first person I recall seeing was my orthopedic surgeon, who told me that while the surgery was a success, he wasn’t sure how I would recover. “You’ve got a pretty good head on your shoulders…it’s time you started to use it!” was his rather direct message to me.

After being in a cast for 10 weeks, I embarked on the long road
to recovery. My father had bought a leg bench for our home so that I could rebuild the muscles in my atrophied left thigh. I lifted faithfully three times a day, every day, in the hopes of returning to the diamond the spring of that year. That goal turned out to be unachievable, as I simply wasn’t physically ready. A full year later and with a completely healed knee, I was able to play baseball and finished out a solid high school career as a pitcher, good enough to attract attention from a number of college coaches. Fortunately, I was able to play baseball in college for a time, but tendinitis in my shoulder brought my collegiate career to an ignominious end. By the spring of my sophomore year at Lafayette, I don’t think I could have broken a pane of glass from 50 feet with my best fastball, as I had lost so much velocity due to the tendinitis.

Looking back, I realize now that I was very fortunate to have been given a second chance to play the sport I loved at the college level. Even more, the knee injury I suffered and the subsequent surgery sobered me to the reality that I needed to focus on other things—namely my schoolwork—as what relatively little talent I possessed had been seriously compromised. The tradeoff was clearly a price worth paying. I became a very good student during my final years of high school and in college.

In my professional life, playing sport has been supplanted by coaching swimming and tennis, which has been richly rewarding. What’s more, I’ve had the chance to watch my children enjoy their sports; both my wife, Lois, and I have lasting memories of watching them compete. And, in an interesting twist of fortune, living and working at Blair Academy for nearly 30 years has allowed Lois and me to provide our own children with their very own version of The Ridge. Blair has provided everything (save bowling!) that I had at my fingertips in my own childhood. The legacy continues…

Only now can I comprehend how sport and the circumstances surrounding my youth have impacted me. Just as I had no idea of my good fortune in having access to a veritable athletic paradise as a kid, I also couldn’t understand what my interest in sport had done for me intellectually. In the library at The Ridge, I would regularly devour the *Sports Illustrated* and *Sport* magazines when they arrived on Fridays, and each evening I would read the sports pages of the *Easton (PA) Express*, following local athletes as well as those of note from other high schools and local colleges. Not much in print got by me. I followed Ed Laubach, sports editor of the *Easton Express*, who had played football for my father, as well as other, more “big-time” writers and commentators. From the brilliant *Sports Illus-
trated stories of such gifted writers as Frank Deford and Dan Jenkins to the rousing NFL pre-game television commentary of CBS analyst Jack Whitaker to the high-energy “calls” of Marty Glickman covering professional, college and even high school sports in New York City; I gained a deep appreciation for artful language and the power of persuasive speech. Like most of my friends, I labored through Dickens and Twain and Hemingway in school, but I loved reading about sports and got quite an education doing so. Be it the flamboyant Howard Cosell waxing poetic during those iconic Muhammad Ali/Joe Frazier fights or Al Meltzer’s witty yet exciting coverage of Philadelphia’s Big 5 basketball games from the Palestra—home to the Penn Quakers and college basketball pantheon—these men exposed me to the art of oratory and to the beauty and power of a well-turned phrase. When Glickman barked out the play-by-play of the Knicks games on the radio, I could envision Bill Bradley receiving the bounce pass in the corner from Walt Frazier and hitting that jumper from 20 feet, with Glickman ringing out his signature swish! Reading Jenkins’ account of Jets’ quarterback Joe Namath’s pre-game ritual—starting
with the pain injections, followed by his strapping on knee braces the size of infant car seats—I could easily picture Broadway Joe lumbering in the backfield, his rickety knees barely keeping him upright. I could feel his postgame pain as Namath soaked in an ice bath, cheerfully managing a smile while talking to reporters.

These and other chroniclers of sport were far more inspirational than I could have imagined. By the time I had graduated from high school, the literature and language that excited me had impacted my interests, so much so that becoming an English major at Lafayette was an easy choice. Teaching English and coaching tennis and swimming for so many years have served as a healthy outlet for my passions, and recently taking on a book project on athletic recruiting has become my chance to bring logic and order (hopefully!) to the many intricacies of the subject. I have found that watching, reading, listening and now writing about sport remain evocative, exciting and wholly enjoyable endeavors.

Questions persist. Why is it that I still read the newspaper the same way former Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, whom I quote at the start of this essay, did—by opening to the sports section first? Surely, Chief Justice Warren had far more important matters to tend to. Why is it that when I turn on the TV, it’s either set to Sports Center or the Tennis Channel or a ball game I had watched the night before? And why is it that when
I run into old friends, our conversations quickly turn to recollections of games and former coaches and players? After all these years, I should think that sport would occupy a less prominent place in my life. I have more things to connect with away from sport—a loving wife and family, as well as a rewarding and interesting professional life being two such examples. Fortunately, there has been some degree of separation. I don’t go into a funk any longer when one of my favorite teams loses, and I’m more inclined to find other things to do, like gardening or visiting my children, instead of watching or attending games. Still, I am drawn to Chief Justice Warren’s quote about the sports page as the great recorder of human accomplishment. He’s right—sport is accomplishment. Beyond the victories and the great plays and the artistry, sport is also hard work and discipline and teamwork and commitment and fun. What is accomplished through sport is a good thing—a very good thing. Perhaps that is why I remain inexorably drawn to it.

These days, I don’t have a subscription to *Sports Illustrated* and I don’t pore over the box scores in the newspapers as I used to. While I still try to keep active and fit most every day by swimming or walking or playing golf, it’s not so easy to do as the years pass. My body needs more time to recover and other commitments really do get in the way. Even so, every now and again, I can’t help but grab a *Sports Illustrated* magazine off the shelf in the grocery store and instantly reconnect with my past.

*Dressed for success—Mr. Little League.*
Nathan Molteni is Blair’s dean of academics, as well as a math teacher and academic monitor. Since joining Blair’s faculty in 2008, he has taught algebra 2, advanced placement calculus and statistics, coached JV boys’ baseball and thirds soccer, and directed the Quiz Bowl and History Bowl programs. Nathan completed his undergraduate work at Villanova University in Pennsylvania in 2008. He and his wife, Andrea Magat-Molteni, have recently welcomed son Jeremy into their busy Blair lives.
If you’ve ever taken the time to drive around a small suburban city like the one in which I grew up, you may find yourself constantly stumbling onto a variety of fields, designated for different sports and experiences. My hometown of Saratoga Springs was littered with chain backstops and dirt infields, reflecting the deep love of baseball which permeated the city. A sport which, despite waning enthusiasm in many parts of the country, still inspires plenty of passion and excitement in upstate New York to this day. Baseball, while seen as a passive and uneventful sport by many, was always a fervent quest for glory during my childhood, inspiring a personal desire to capture the perfection I saw play out in front of me on TV and at the ballpark, specifically for those few who stood tall on the mound in the midst of it all.

This was a journey which first came to me as a spectator, seeking to emulate the excellence of the pitchers I watched with admiration. In 1993, I was introduced to the New York Yankees by a family friend, and my first sporting love was born. With the dynasty of the late 1990s yet to come, those early 1990s teams were more about individual players and accomplishments in my mind. It was in 1993 that Jim Abbott, born without a right hand, threw a no-hitter for the New York Yankees. I distinctly remember being mesmerized by each pitch; each batter went back to the dugout empty-handed as perfection grew closer and closer. I knew that I wanted to capture some aspect of the glory of his performance on a personal level, standing tall on the mound while opposing batters feebly fell to my assortment of pitches. I began playing Little League baseball that same spring, but one does not simply ascend to glory from the first day. I wanted to be a pitcher, but my skillset was best suited for right field in my coach’s eyes. Immediate gratification was not to be found based on natural talent alone.

Through it all, I had an ally in this burgeoning love of the game. My travels from field to field in Saratoga Springs were always accompanied by the man who willingly took on the role of bullpen catcher in the afternoons or on the weekends. Dad dutifully picked up his old mitt, set up shop behind home plate and let his son dream about what could be. Some days, it was pitches in the backyard with numerous dents on the shed reflecting the amount of work I needed to do to pepper the strike zone. Other times, it was a trip to one of many solitary backstops or fields scattered throughout our hometown, throwing pitch after pitch until it got dark or time for dinner arrived.

When I think about my dad, I always fondly recall those moments
and his enthusiasm for my own passions. He was always reading a new book about pitching, trying to fix my constantly inconsistent pitching mechanics, showing me a grip for a curveball which wouldn’t blow out my elbow long-term, just in case. He was my first pitching coach, and despite numerous visits to the mound when things weren’t going well during our practice, it was never to call the bullpen and have me replaced as his favorite pitcher. I was in search of pitching glory, and he just wanted me to be happy.

Glory was never far away for a fan of the New York Yankees in the late 1990s. Starting in 1996, a parade of excellent pitchers came through New York, blowing fastballs past the rest of the league and spinning curveballs which buckled the knees of the best hitters of the day. I watched in awe as Dwight Gooden threw a no-hitter in 1996, briefly recapturing some of the early magnificence of his career and was spoiled by David Wells and David Cone throwing perfect games in back to back years. There have been no Yankee no-hitters since this time, yet in a five-year stretch, there were four demonstrations of perfection, further inspiring the search for glory off that small strip of white rubber. I never made it closer to the mound than second base in my first year of Little League, and, in subsequent years, I discovered a passion and talent for catching that placed me on the receiving end of the job I truly coveted. While I don’t know the reasons he took the job, Dad decided to become a coach in the league, and now my own personal pitching coach was going to be my real manager. Opportunity was quickly knocking.

Pitching glory is relative when you are 10. In Dad’s first year as coach, we were terrible, losing every game. I was in the pitching rotation that year not just because I was the coach’s son, but because someone had to throw pitches on a team of kids who weren’t necessarily up to the task. So, I was finally standing tall, facing down a hitter, thinking about pumping fastballs or throwing the off-speed pitch which has too much bite to be hittable. In actuality, I spent more time just trying to throw enough strikes not to walk in runs and avoid hitting opposing players out of wildness. Pitching to batters in a game was not quite like the serene and successful throwing sessions my dad and I had away from the ballpark. I probably should have known that a career in pitching was not just around the corner, but my admiration for the game always started with fingers on the seams and a toe on the rubber.

One particular game stands out from the collection of errors and walks. I had been sick the day before but, I was scheduled to pitch, and I begged my father to let me pitch the next night. He relented, and as
we took the field against the Lions in their green and yellow uniforms, I began the best pitching performance of my career. Many hits, many walks, and seven Lions runs later, the game ended in our favor 9-7, the only win our team would have that year. I remember the joy of being mobbed by my teammates after throwing the last pitch, feeling like a superstar, despite the lack of quality of my performance. I had merely been less atrocious than the opposing pitching, but, on this night, that made me the ace. A little taste of this success fueled my passion for pitching, despite being a far more impactful player as a catcher.

When the next spring came and our team roster improved dramatically, I was now no longer a lock to pitch in games, clearly a secondary option after some more-talented kids. My dad kept giving me opportunities, believing—or at least supporting—my dream of being great.
despite his overall responsibility to
the full team.

It was a Saratoga tradition that, on Memorial Day, all the Little
League teams marched in the parade down Broadway to the playing
fields before starting the games for the day. Waving to parents, friends,
and strangers, it felt like our own version of a ticker-tape parade down
the Canyon of Heroes in New York City, a sight I often watched on TV
in those days after World Series victories. I stepped on the mound that
afternoon in the warm sun with thoughts of grandeur dancing in my
head. We scored a lot of runs early in the game, and I shut down the op-
posing team with crafty, or perhaps lucky, pitching. The wheels came
off soon, though, with a plethora of walks, hard-hit balls and errors in
the field. What started as a blowout in our favor quickly turned the op-
posite way. I, perhaps increasingly despondent due to the deflation of
my hopes for that day, was not particularly kind to my father when
he dutifully came to the mound to calm me down. Eventually, he came
to replace me, and instead of sending me behind the plate to catch,
which normally happened when I was done pitching, I got a trip to the
bench. He had called to the bullpen on me for real this time.

There was a fight in our house that night, as my conflicting emo-
tions of failure and frustration led to a lot of yelling. I don’t remember
exactly what was said, but each of us seemed to know that there was a
clear difference between pitching to Dad and pitching for Dad. One was
a bond we shared, and the other was a failed experiment. I might have
pitched a bit more that year, and I continued to play for him in the fol-
lowing years, but the quest for glory had lost its luster. In a wonderfully
cliché moment during the playoff against teams from the other side
of town at the end of the year, we played against another father-and-
son team, but, in this case, the son was the ace pitcher and star hitter.
Holding a 1-0 lead late in the game, I threw out this other boy trying to
steal second, cementing my greater importance as a catcher than as a
pitcher for my dad. We went on to win, but, surprisingly, Hollywood
never called to get the rights to the script. Local glory ultimately stays
on the field and in our memories.

I moved on to other sports, while my dad kept coaching base-
ball. He had a lot of wisdom to offer other players after all the research
he had done for me. I really cherish the time we spent together, trying to
figure out things like arm slot and follow through that were far beyond
a 10-year-old’s understanding.

As I enter fatherhood myself now, I know that, someday, I will
put on the cap, take up the clipboard, and lovingly suffer through
supporting my son’s dreams to pitch when maybe he is not the best op-
tion to take the ball that day. Growing up a baseball player was equal parts love of the game and love of time spent with my father. The wins, losses, and limited glory are not what stay with me to this day. Instead, I remember to whom I pitched for so many hours and the man who always wanted me to capture a piece of my dreams, no matter how unrealistic. I look forward to settling in behind home plate in the years ahead to let this cycle of dreaming begin anew.

Nathan and Jeremy—the future awaits!
Penn Graves Lunger played soccer, basketball, and lacrosse during her high school career at St. Andrew’s School in Delaware. She played four years of soccer at Davidson College and served as co-captain of the team in 2001. She joined the Blair Academy faculty as an English teacher, soccer and lacrosse coach in 2002. Now a veteran English teacher, Penn returned to the classroom for her 13th year in 2015-2016 to teach sophomore English after spending a year at home with her young sons, Philip and Graves. Penn holds a bachelor’s degree in English from Davidson College (2002) and a master’s in English from Middlebury College Bread Loaf School of English (2010). Wife of classics department chair Eric Lunger and stepmother of Emily Lunger ’17, Penn lives with her family in Wayside House.
Playing Like a Girl

Before ever playing “team sports” with matching T-shirts, dad-coaches, team-moms, and sliced oranges, the kids in my neighborhood played games of all sorts. Sometimes our neighbor, Mr. Ben, pitched while chewing on a cigar, but usually we older kids ran the show. Horse and knockout at Dr. Dave’s drooping basketball hoop, kick the can in Kendall’s yard, four-square on the street, and roll-the-bat in the “horse-lot” (an empty lot across Main Street where horses may or may not have ever roamed). I was the tallest and second-oldest kid on Short Drive, and my girl-friends’ younger brothers were often my best competition. Perhaps because I had won a few games of H-O-R-S-E against these younger boys, or maybe because I’d learned to shoot guns with my dad, I thought nothing of playing organized sports with boys. I was practically one myself.

My first years of sport were wonderfully simple. In matching orange T-shirts, my soccer teammates and I dashed around on a sand-spur studded field behind the local elementary school. By my second season, I’d proven to be one of a few scrappy girls, eager to keep pace and out-hustle the strongest boys on the team. Other kids’ parents, most of them new to soccer, dubbed me “iron foot” and told me to “boot Penn goes for the ball against the boys.
it!” Back on Short Drive, I honed my shot by driving our soccer ball into the fence posts at our house. Despite my father’s pleas, I knocked out the white posts one by one.

Simple soccer became more complicated during my middle-school years. My head-splitting collision with middle-school wrestler Russ caused my parents, or at least my mother, serious concern. She worried that my playing with overzealous and increasingly muscular boys could lead to even greater injury. I loved the 11 stitches above my left eye, and I did not mind the attention that the scar brought me. Moreover, I could not imagine playing sports with just girls.

When a girls’ basketball league formed at the rec center, mom signed my sister and me up. Though I genuinely believed I would learn to dunk, and I really would have preferred to play with boys for another season, I relished the chance to post up against the other “tall” girls in town. I threw elbows on one end of the floor and drew fouls at the other. We girls were allowed to shoot from a slightly closer free-throw stripe, but after shooting at the far stripe in the boys’ league, I refused to step up to the girls’ line. I might be playing with girls, but I wanted to play like a boy. After all, my heroes—George Lynch and Eric Montross—played on the Carolina men’s team.

Despite her occasional misgivings and protective instincts, my mother saw in my playing sports incalculable value. She, after all, had been a southern girl of the 1960s and 1970s. In her rural, eastern North Carolina town, girls had no chance to compete like my sisters and I did. I’d been confused and embarrassed by her crying after so many of my games, yet those tears eventually impressed upon me how lucky I was. She pushed me in ways I could not fathom during my critical, early years of play. Furthermore, she was the one to show me just how far I might go. UNC Chapel Hill, her alma mater, happened to be the heart of American women’s soccer. Our trips to see the team play in Chapel Hill were critical in building my self-worth and my identity, not just as an athlete, but as a female athlete. “Carolina
soccer girls” like Mia Hamm and Christine Lilly soon superseded Montross and Lynch as my role models. I aimed to play soccer with the same fierceness and skill. I could play like a girl.

Title IX champions like Billie Jean King deserve our respect to be sure, but I imagine that many women of my generation owe thanks to our athletically inexperienced but opportunistic mothers.

Thanks, Mom.

The hard work of defense.
Bob Brandwood was appointed to Blair in 1985 and serves as chair of the English department and teaches junior- and senior-level English. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Wales in the United Kingdom, earned a postgraduate certificate in education from Leicester University, and earned an MA in English from Middlebury College. Prior to coming to Blair, Bob taught English in a government school in northern England and also worked for two years teaching English in a small village school on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. During his tenure at Blair, Bob has taught at every grade level and had a hand in shaping the English department current course of study. He also coaches boys’ soccer and swimming and serves in Freeman Hall, where he’s done dorm duty for more than 20 years.

Bob with heroes:
(top–bottom) Law, Best, and Charlton.
Why I am Not a City Fan

I can’t actually remember when I committed my allegiance to Manchester United (it may well have been in utero), but I do know that they were “my” team, “our” team, from my earliest memories.

Let me explain: growing up in Manchester, United Kingdom, one had a binary choice—United or City. I suppose I could have chosen to support neither club, but then I would have been a social pariah and an outcast from my family. The city was split between the two clubs. You were either a “blue” (City) or a “red” (United). The former was blue-collar, English, Protestant; the latter, red (can’t bring myself to keep using that abhorred adjective) collar, Anglo-Irish/Scottish, Catholic. My father was probably responsible for my being a United supporter, and he was blue-collar, Anglo-Welsh, atheistic, so he was a United supporter for non-ideological reasons.

Both teams had long, storied histories, dating back to the late 19th century in what was the heart of the cotton industry in Lancashire at the time, and both were products of working men’s athletic clubs. The rivalry was intense and a loss to the cross-town opponent would lead to endless teasing and ribaldry at work or school. (As an illustration, one of my friend’s older brothers actually called in sick the Monday after United lost to City because he couldn’t face the storm of abuse he knew he’d receive on his return to work after the weekend). Little seemed to be more important than football; for example, my older brother, father and I attended a European Cup semi-final at Old Trafford on April 20, 1966, United vs Partisan Belgrade. It was a second-leg tie and United won 1–0, on a goal from Nobby Stiles, but lost 2–0 on aggregate. We received the news of my sister’s birth at the end of the game.

I think what made United the more desirable team for those of us in my peer group who supported them was the story, now legend, of the Munich Air Disaster. On February 6, 1958, returning from an away game against Red Star Belgrade in the prestigious European Cup (now the Champions League), the United team was involved in a tragic plane crash that resulted in the deaths of eight members of the first team, three members of the staff, as well as numerous injuries to other players, staff, and coaches. The team, the town, was devastated and a period of public mourning followed. As news percolated down to the fans regarding the extent of the injuries and subsequent deaths of a number of promising, young players, the grief deepened.

By popular consent, one of the
victims, Duncan Edwards, was the best young English soccer prospect of his generation. He survived the crash but in critical condition. Shortly before he died, emerging from unconsciousness and unaware of the extent of his injuries, he called over the assistant coach, Jimmy Murphy. “What time is the kick-off on Saturday, Jimmy? I can’t miss the Wolves match,” he is reported to have said before lapsing back into unconsciousness and, ultimately, death.

The following Saturday, the team program, which provided a schematic of the team’s proposed formation, was blank. The staff substituted reserve and youth-team players for the starting 11 and won 3–0.

The manager/coach, Matt Busby, was also injured in the crash. He was in intensive care for several months and, when he did recover, was so depressed by the events he had barely survived that he almost quit football. Only the intervention of his wife, who suggested that he owed something to the memory of the dead players, brought him back to the touchline. Once there, he vowed to rebuild the team and go on to win the European Cup—a goal he accomplished within 10 years of that fateful day. Some of the players who had survived the crash—Bobby Charlton, Bill Foulkes, Harry Gregg—were an integral part of the team who secured this eventual success and ensured that the event would not be forgotten.

This is the stuff of which dreams are made, and, as a matter of fact, United’s stadium, Old Trafford, is called the Theatre of Dreams, in no
small measure because of the legacy of that “lost” generation of players.

The story of the German bombs that landed in the stadium during the war, destroying the playing surface and much of the ground and resulting in United having to play at City’s ground for several seasons both during and following the war, only served to deepen our appreciation of just what the team had been through and make them even more special in our eyes. Subsequent tales of skill and toughness against seemingly unassailable opponents sealed the deal.

The team Busby rebuilt was the team I grew up supporting, and the names of the players who went on to win the European Cup in 1968 and establish United as one of the top clubs in England, in Europe, are etched into my memory. The final was played at Wembley Stadium, London, and many supporters, including my father and older brother, traveled down by bus to watch the game. United played Benfica, a top team which included the Portuguese superstar Eusebio, and we all knew the Reds, who were without top striker Dennis Law, sidelined with an injury, would have to be at their best to pull off a victory. It was with some anxiety and trepidation that I watched the opening minutes of the game on our black-and-white TV. My mother was doing the ironing in front of the fire, so I had to keep bobbing up and down and shifting from side to side to catch the game between freshly starched shirts, pajamas, and bed sheets.

United scored first, early in the second half, with a header from Charlton—unusual because he was noted for his long-range power shots—but Benfica equalized soon after. Eusebio went one-on-one with Alex Stepney, the United goal-keeper, late in the game, and the crowd held its collective breath. Stepney made the save. The game was tied 1-1 after regulation play, and if anxiety levels in and around Manchester and Wembley stadium were high at the start of the game, they were in the stratosphere as we started extra-time (two 15-minute periods, no golden goal). The second goal came from Georgie Best, who dribbled around the keeper in his inimitable fashion to score; the third from 19-year-old Brian Kidd, Dennis Law’s replacement for the night, playing on his birthday; the final goal came from Charlton sealing the victory, 4-1. Grown men cried with joy that night.

In my mind’s eye, I can still see my favourite players: Bobby Charlton striking the ball from 30 yards out into the top left corner of the net or Dennis Law straining his neck muscles to make contact with a wickedly fast crossed ball to score on a rain-soaked Saturday afternoon or Georgie Best dribbling his way through four separate tackles to slot the ball inside the far post,
beating the keeper and mesmerizing the crowd in the process. Magical stuff. One of my favourite “fan” stories involves a friend and fellow “red,” Irish John. John had moved to Manchester from Dublin and was a life-long supporter of United. He was married and had a couple of children, but he never missed a home game. A staunch Catholic, he had a crucifix attached to the wall above the fireplace, but as an indicator of his “second faith,” he had pictures of Bobby Charlton, Dennis Law and Georgie Best at the points of the cross. I guess you could say United was his religion when he wasn’t attending mass.

A Saturday at Old Trafford was an experience. The stadium was invariably filled to capacity (in the 1960s and 1970s about 65,000) and the majority of the crowd stood up. (It was only after the Hillsborough Tragedy, a 1989 FA Cup semi-final played at the neutral Hillsborough ground between Liverpool and Nottingham Forrest, where overcrowding in the Liverpool section resulted in 96 fans being crushed to death, that all-seater stadiums were made mandatory). I distinctly remember, as a boy, being carried up and down the terraces in the crush of fans after a goal was scored. It was exhilarating and a little bit frightening. Perhaps more frightening, in retrospect, was the tribal nature of the various teams’ fans during the 1970s. Hooliganism proliferated during this period, and United and City fans were every bit as bad as each other when it came to violence and abuse. There was a period when one had
to hide team favours—scarves, hats, buttons, shirts—until one was safely inside the ground and trips to opposing teams’ grounds were fraught with anxiety and danger. I remember having to wait inside the ground at Maine Road (City’s ground) until the home fans had dispersed before being escorted by police to the buses and trains that took us back in to central Manchester. Because of the wide variety of regional accents in the U.K., it was never wise to speak when approaching a rival stadium. Liverpool’s ground, Anfield, is about 35 miles from central Manchester, but the accents are so distinctive that it’s easy to recognize the difference between a scouse and a manc on the basis of a short phrase.

We never let the potential danger outside the ground distract us from the entertainment inside. Each player had his own “song” that the crowd sang at intervals throughout the game—a tradition that has been maintained into the Premiership-era. Of course, we were elated when we scored, and especially so if we won a game, and despondent if we conceded a goal or lost, especially at home. Leaving the stadium was an event in and of itself. Old Trafford is bounded by the Manchester Ship Canal on one side and a railway line on the other, so the only way to get away from the stadium is over a bridge. The bodies were packed in so tightly that I could lift up my feet and be carried up the steps and over the railway line by the press of the crowd—a warm, funny experience if we’d won, a cold, bad-tempered squash if we hadn’t.

City never had a chance of capturing my attention or affection, even though some of my best friends were City fans. “After all, it isn’t a matter of reason; it’s a matter of love.”

Old Trafford today.
Martin Miller joined Blair’s history department in 1980. In addition to teaching AP European history, world history, political economy and economic theory classes, he directs the Society of Skeptics program, serves as head cross country coach and assistant track coach, edits the Blair Review and runs the Model United Nations program. He completed his undergraduate work at Syracuse University in 1966 and earned his PhD in comparative politics from the City University of New York (CUNY) in 1982. Before coming to Blair, he taught at Stockton State College in New Jersey and CUNY. Marty lives on campus in Steckel House with his wife, Micheline, with whom he has two children: **David ’88** and **Colin ’00.**
A Day in the Life of a Runner

Day One of High School
September 1959

The old man, a bricklayer by trade, growled “It’s time,” as he headed for the door well before dawn, tools and work hat in hand. He rushed by my anointed spot on the living room couch without so much as a sideways glance, as if to say we had serious tasks to carry out in this world and be thankful there’s a roof over your head, thankful that education was the current lot of youth rather than a factory floor or the hard streets of 11- and 12-year-old hawkers and vendors. My father had a point. Steeled to this rather unique wake-up call, I was already fully conscious, responding with a defiant, monosyllabic, “Up.” There was no “good morning” or “have nice day” in this Bronx household; “It’s time” would have to do.

The Great Depression and “The War” shaped my parents’ and neighbors’ blue-collar lives and imparted deep-seated insecurities: jobs were thought to be precarious, sick days non-existent, vacations an unaffordable luxury, and rent money often problematic. Paycheck-to-paycheck living was the order of the day. If a particular construction project ended or was delayed by inclement weather, my father holed up in the bedroom like a wounded animal, fearful of being seen on the street. After all, unemployment was sinful and threatened the social fabric. (“Why aren’t you at work?” were his final deathbed words to me in 1980.)

Families were deeply scarred by the economic hardship of the 1930s, the anxiety-ridden appeasement of fascism—what W.H. Auden called “a low dishonest decade”—and the existential threat of conflicts in Europe and Asia. Cold War realities suggested yet another cataclysm to come. Fathers and brothers were missing or maimed in body and spirit, lives had been thwarted, and frustration often led to irrational aggression—the terms child and spousal abuse are currently employed for such errant behavior.

The notion of a “Greatest Generation” meant little to me. In any case, that was THEIR life; my perspective was decidedly one of youthful exuberance, optimism and limitless opportunity. Good times had, in fact, come to America, and kids like me had a chance, a real chance. An excellent high school, college (?), and who knows what else was within reach. More importantly, my all-consuming passion for athletics could be pursued at a secondary school level, and perhaps I would make the grade—I must make the grade! All this emotional Sturm und Drang transpired just shy of my
14th birthday.

Why did I choose cross country tryouts on that particular fall day more than a half century ago? So many factors and experiences came into play, all leading in one direction: distance running.

--Stickball, “hardball” (baseball), handball, basketball, street football (broken collarbone, ankle, fingers—dangerous terrain), and every conceivable sport and game were what I lived for. It was as simple as that. The streets, avenues and walls were fields and courts, the arenas where one could strut his stuff on a daily basis. I use the word “his” advisedly, since girls were relegated to the sidelines in that antediluvian era. A narrow escape from a passing car or truck in the neighborhood’s four-cornered intersection was a small price to pay for executing a daring catch. And who cared about missing lunch and dinner if I could hold down a handball court against all comers? In retrospect, I recognize the physiological and psychological upside to this frenetic, crazed activity, not that anyone was thinking in terms of “working out” or “improving one’s core.” Clad in well-worn Keds, the endless hours spent running and jumping on concrete and macadam created a reservoir of stamina and a mind-set inured to fatigue. It was a matter of pride to be among the last boys standing. God knows the opportunity cost involved!

--Roger Bannister’s poster loomed large in the Junior High
School 135’s seventh-grade gym class. His name was on everyone’s lips. This brilliant medical student and British Olympian had been the first track athlete to break the previously impenetrable four-minute mile barrier—a 1954 hero for the ages. With a long, graceful stride straining for the finish line, a face contorted with pain and presumably joy, Bannister stirred the imagination. Lost in thought, I stared at his lithe form three times a week. Today, LeBron, Brady or this or that high-priced star get all the ink and attention, but competitive mile races were on the front page of various sports sections of the 1950s and 1960s and even made page one of *The New York Times* on a regular basis. Wes Santee of Kansas, John Landy of Australia and Lazlo Tabori of Hungary were also in the hunt for running immortality. Who would be first to breast the tape under 4:00? Well, the glory went to the most amateurish fellow, the supremely talented Bannister. And, yes, a 12-year-old could dream, inchoate as those dreams might be.

--Some role models were closer to home. Tom Courtney of Fordham University captured the 800-meter gold at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, and Manhattan College’s Lindy Remigino had sprinted to victory in the 100-meter race in the 1952 Helsinki Games. Both campuses were just a jog away. Villanova’s Irish import, Ron Delany, was the 1500-meter victor in 1956; he could be found racing in the Bronx’s Van Cortlandt Park. Fordham, St. John’s, Manhattan, and NYU (world indoor 4x400m relay with Kenny Hendler, Steve Damashek, Jimmy Wedderburn and Cliff Bertrand) seemed to rule the running world. Yes, track was a big deal, and I resided close to the center of this exalted universe; the names and accomplishments of these athletes resonated throughout my life. And I thought it would last forever. It didn’t. Local talent drifted to colleges in Arizona, Arkansas, California and Oregon, and the Australians, New Zealanders, Kenyans and other Africans arrived on the international scene. But that’s another story.

--Orchard Beach, not to be confused with the “tar beach tanning salon” on my apartment building’s rooftop, was situated on a polluted section of Long Island Sound, a 15-cent bus ride from my neighborhood. Built in the 1930s, “The Bronx Riviera” was 115 acres and 1.1 miles of beachfront, a project emerging from the depths of the Great Depression that created jobs and a ray of hope for a beaten-down citizenry. It served as an all-purpose vacation spot for city kids, and, if the stars were aligned just right, I could get there on a few of the hottest days of summer. I usually gravitated toward the hard edge of the water at low tide (high-level smell!)
and ran and ran. Why not loll about and get a tan? Who knows? Floating along effortlessly, creating shallow imprints in the wet sand felt, well, just right. And so it has been.

The morning of my first commute to high school is etched in memory: 15 minutes to the train station and one hour on the subway (wicker seats, slow-turning overhead fans, riders packed like sardines, no student hijinks permitted among working-class folks). Subway-goers looked gaunt and tired (no obesity epidemic back then) and the ride to 14th Street and Union Square showcased characters of all types. The crowd was a tableau of faces, a blurred backdrop that allowed one to drift off a bit. I really had one thing on my mind, though, and it wasn’t education and classes. Cross country practice began at 3:30 sharp!

I made the team that day in September 1959—so did every kid who trekked to the East 10th Street track, but why quibble about the joyful moments of youth? The prize was a much-darned sweatshirt with an imprinted winged foot proclaiming to the world, or at least to the straphangers on the rush hour IRT northbound express, that I had arrived at a wondrous juncture. (The winged foot image stirs my soul to this day!) The successes and failures of schoolboy and collegiate racing were in the future, and more than five decades of seeking renewal on daily runs was unimaginable. But at that precise moment, my narrow world was widening. I knew it full
well and rejoiced in quiet fashion. Yes, it was a good day, an excellent day. Inevitably, “It’s time” would be barked early the next morning, and I’d surely beat my father to the punch.

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The years have passed eventfully and ever so quickly, and I am now a man of a certain age beginning a seventh decade with optimism and a healthy dose of foreboding. After all, it’s the final lap, so to speak. Competitive running is a distant, fading memory, though the daily, solitary jaunts in the grass are a “re-membrance of things past,” a link to youthful passion, a mini-celebration of those former physical aspirations amid a life currently defined by roles as a husband, father, teacher and coach. The legs have slowed, the intensity abated and my musing is no longer about personal records or a particular challenger (What was his name?). The rhythm, the movement, the body’s eventual equilibrium, the rush of air, the surrounding dappled green and brown impressionist effect—all remain gloriously intact from my teens.

Thankfully, the gods of running have granted me an endless succession of cross country seasons: crisp fall days, the smell of wet fallen leaves and musty, damp warm-ups, spikes biting into the earth and grass, and, of course, a yearly sup-

ply of eager young men—far more well-rounded and better adjusted than young Martin—seeking transcendence in some form. They call it a good race or a fine season. Parents gush and applaud, coaches look on with approval and succor the back-of-the-pack runners, peers are ever so supportive, faculty advisors follow students’ incremental improvement and, in general, the Blair community revels in such accomplishments. Rightly so. But part of me is that Bronx kid who lived a far different life and bridles at all this hoopla, an alien universe. My initial distance career was a more solitary, driven, limited experience mostly hidden from parents and friends. How things have changed! (And I’ve changed a fair amount, along with the times.)

During the first days of Blair’s early season practice, I distribute training jerseys to a corps of aspiring distance runners, youngsters with varied hopes and dreams. They surely notice the small winged-foot emblazoned on one corner of the T-shirt and perhaps even find inspiration in the elegant, lightning fast sandals of Hermes, an Olympian god. For some newcomers, it’s a symbol of their entrance into high school, a new and challenging fraternity of endless opportunities. It was certainly mine.
Carolyn Conforti Browse ’79 has taught English at Blair for more than 25 years. She is director of leadership programs and head girls’ softball coach. In addition to teaching sophomore and senior English classes, Carolyn is a faculty advisor to the Blue and White Key and does dorm duty in Freeman and Mason Halls. She completed her undergraduate work at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, in 1983 and earned an MA in 1995 from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. In addition to her responsibilities at Blair, Carolyn is director of academic curriculum for the Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academy in New Jersey, Illinois and California, and co-director of the Rookie Teacher Seminar, which trains new boarding school teachers at Blair each August. Over the years, she has also taught at the Antwerp International School in Belgium and St. Mark’s School in Southborough, Massachusetts. In 2001, she received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to study the work of Herman Melville. Carolyn lives in Blair House with her husband and math department chair R. Latta Browse, with whom she has two children: Tyler ’08 and Annelies ’13.
On the Bus

The coach! She even drives the bus! When I was playing sports in high school, I thought it was a big deal. The coach does it all, I remember thinking. Being a team player taught me a lot; being a coach, even more. And, driving the bus is, in fact, a big deal.

Sports for girls sure have changed in my lifetime! Through my work with the Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academies, I have met many famous athletes—from 1999 Olympic soccer captain Julie Foudy to Billie Jean King, Jessica Mendoza, Sue Enquist, and the iconic Mia Hamm; and they all speak about how sport transformed their lives. We all do owe a debt to those early female athlete pioneers and to Title IX legislation.

In 1972, only one out of 27 girls played organized sports; currently one out of 2.5 do. That incredible change is a result of Title IX. I came to Blair in the fall of 1976, and playing sports opened up a new world for me, as it did for millions of other girls across the United States. My ninth-grade friends and I loved our uniforms; we wore them every chance we could, even though my first hockey uniform was a dress. Its likeness hangs in the case in Hardwick Hall! We had to supply our own Peter Pan-collar blouse to wear under it, and we could only buy one type of cleat—Adidas. My first real coach was Jan Hutchinson, who went on to set NCAA coaching win records, and I can remember thinking, as a ninth-grader during pre-season field hockey practice, how amazing it would be to be a coach. Yes, despite the fact that everyone—my teammates, the captains, my parents—had an opinion about her (because she was worthy of an opinion), she was unquestionably a significant female authority figure.

Hutch was a “tough” coach. One day, after a particularly brutal front hill workout where two girls threw up, two girls cried, and two mumbled curses about her through the runs, I had to return to the field because I forgot my mouth guard. I found her shaking her head and she said, “I guess I overdid it,” but with a twinkle in her eye which suggested we would do it again anyway. Her assistant coach, the coolest ever, pregnant mom-to-be Diane Brennan, responded, “We’ll see who comes back tomorrow.” I loved Hutch’s insistence on testing physical and mental limits and the culture of girls’ sports that she preached; she didn’t speak much, but what she said about teamwork was memorable. I loved the fact that Coach Brennan raised eyebrows by jogging with us, even as she was eight months pregnant. They both taught us, against many of the messages of the culture, that girls could be and should be physically strong.

I recall the explicit warnings of
older relatives and even Blair teachers. “Why are you wasting your time playing sports?” my grandmother wondered. One well-intentioned teacher told a few of us who snuck into the “boys-only” weight room space: “Girls! You should never lift weights; it will hurt your capacity to have children.” Since, at the time, a few of us thought having children would be simply an awful thing, we lifted even harder! These confusing messages were balanced by our coaches’ examples and by the fact that huge crowds often came to field hockey games, including the football team! We were good, and field hockey was more fun to watch in the more dangerous era before the official’s whistle took the game over. Edythe Washburn ’79 and I made it to the northeast regional selection camp for field hockey, which gave me a peek at how sports were changing for women.

When I arrived at Colgate and made the varsity, 70 girls tried out for the team; doors were opening everywhere for women interested in sports. But back then, I never dreamed that it would be possible that I would spend hours watching collegiate women’s softball play on television. Or, that more people would watch the Women’s World Cup than the NBA finals or the Stanley Cup.

Two events marked me as a coach my first fall of coaching. That fall, as JV field hockey coach, in full Ahab mode, I made them vow to beat the varsity team by the end of
the season. I developed a reputation for insanity, but I also loved introducing rookies to the sport. Our first game was against Kent Place, then returning state champs, with a JV that had been practicing for weeks and could have beaten most varsity squads. After mentally cursing the athletic director for scheduling them first, I set out a lineup and gave the pre-game pep talk about what a privilege it was to wear the Blair uniform, blah blah blah.

At half time, the score was 8-0 for the bad guys, and a dejected group slumped off the field. One of the few times in my life when I felt genius strike quickly, I called them to the half-time huddle and outlined our “strategy for the second half.” I started by asking sternly which of them felt we could or would win the game; the two or three I’d-bet-ter answer-yes-types meekly raised their hands; the sensible kids rolled their eyes. I then announced that there was no way for us to outplay the other team, but since we had to play the second half, could we agree to set some goals, play a game we could win, and change the game for ourselves? I asked them if they could at least get the ball to the 50-yard line (it had been in our defensive end for the entire first half!). They grudgingly nodded. Then, they agreed, unanimously, that every time we pushed or hit the ball across the 50 we would stop playing, cheer, and count it as our goal scored. I could see the march of emotions across their faces; from exhaustion, to deliberation, to determination, to laughter! Re-energized, they took the field and, while the other team thought we were certifiable, we “executed our plan” and “scored” 10 times. The second half ended with our cheering and high-fiving—by our count, we had “won the second half” though, technically, the official score was 12-0. That taught me to question the nature of winning.

The second event: the game ended five minutes in when my aggressive center forward, Kasha Kaczmar ’86, was hit in the forehead by a lofted shot. When she rolled over, she looked like Frankenstein; I thought she was disfigured for life or critically concussed. As she came to, in the days before trainers existed, I didn’t recognize my own calm voice; I couldn’t recall how I moved so quickly to her side. She was taken to the hospital by ambulance. I didn’t sleep the entire night worrying, and when Lois Underwood called to say that she was, in fact, leaving the hospital with two black eyes and no major injury, I still felt nauseated. Driving the van back to Blair was interminable. This coaching business wasn’t just clever fun, team bonding and physical fitness. It was downright scary.

And not just because it involves driving a bus full of children. Because it is all about the bus rides in the end. At this point, I can often
tell if we are likely to win by the mood of the bus ride. A team who laughs and sings is always a great thing.

Stacey (Gorski) Spring ’95 and others might take issue with this statement, but I was taking the driving of the bus very seriously. Once, during my senior year, the 15-passenger van we were in blew a tire just as we were coming up the hill before the Blairstown exit. I watched as coach Kara Caufield held the wheel with all her might, keeping the van from flipping; the muscles in her forearms and the sweat on her forehead evident as she wrestled the van to a safe spot on the side of Route 80. Most of my teammates had been fast asleep; I knew she had saved our lives. The next day, her arms were black and blue. I think about that event often as I approach the exit 12 sign on our return from an away game.

In my career, I have met several female Olympic athletes. Julie Foudy, Jessica Mendoza, and Mia Hamm told me, over dinner and coffee, that the bus rides and the people are what it is all about. Even the Olympians know that it is the bus rides and our teammates that we remember—not the records. It is always who is with us on the bus.

When I first interviewed to teach at Blair, I got into an argument with Jon Frere, the outgoing athletic
director, and insisted on being the head coach of field hockey. He refused me in pretty blunt terms, and I recall with some horror at my own hubris that I stated that I absolutely did not want the Blair teaching job unless I was also going to be a head coach. We compromised on softball and ended the interview, and I found out later that he wrote in his report to Dan Hazen, the incoming director: “Watch out for her—could be a complete disaster.”

Dan Hazen shared that with me after I was one of the only coaches, besides wrestling, of course, to win a championship that year. While we won regularly, I certainly was a disaster. I only communicated effectively with the pitcher and a few underclass athletes. The “happy” outfield spent most of their time with my very able assistant. We ran sprints for every small offense—cursing, leaving trash around the bench, not keeping track of the count. I think I owe that team an apology, but they certainly tested me. A few of the seniors hated me for “ruining” their senior spring. I suspended four for rule violations, the punishment being a Cedarville Road run every morning at 6 a.m. It wasn’t until years later that I realized they were getting caught in succession: guess who had to run with them every morning! Thank goodness Hillary Vance ’85 actually
held the team together and Heather Eakins ’85 pitched out of her shoes all season. Thank goodness I had the wisdom of Sara Burdsall, then assistant athletic director, to remind me that coaching was about “putting people in the right position to succeed” and Kara Caufield, who returned to watch the semi-finals and assured me that if they hated me, a little or a lot, I was doing it right. I learned more from those early teams than they ever learned from me.

For many years, I forgot that it was about the people and the bus rides, laughing over our victory socks and crying over Courtney Fields ’04’s stories. I agonized over specific losses and forgot the great practices and victories. Perhaps I was spoiled by the incredible undefeated team of 1989 and the first ever Blair Mid-Atlantic Prep League (MAPL) winners of 2004. Figuring out how to respond to loss makes a person a champion. I probably have to thank Carolyn Davis ’04 for that lesson, or her teammate Cortney Romyns ’04, who, on paper, pitched us to a state championship only to have a right fielder drop a ball, ensuring the Hun victory. In the ensuing huddle, she turned to the upset teammate and said, “Don’t you dare be upset—we are still champions!” She was right.

As a coach, I sometimes lose sight of the incredible opportunity to change players’ lives in small ways. “Luck may be the residue of design” but, even if it is otherwise, I have been lucky—perhaps most fortunate in meeting two tenacious soccer players from Afghanistan, Roya and Shamila Kobestani ’08. Shamila won the ESPY for courage in 2006 and Roya, despite poverty and illiteracy, continued to build sports opportunities for girls in Kabul. Those girls played the sport they loved despite near-constant ridicule and very real death threats. Shamila now works for a nonprofit in Washington dedicated to helping women around the world improve their lives through sports.

As a coach, I am lucky to always be learning from so many different female athletes. And, I remember more often that the biggest moments are the times the person off the bench is heroic, or when the extra hours of batting practice finally pay off for the batter in the bottom of the order. I remember the bus ride singers. I remember the parents, the generous patience of my assistant coaches, the front hill runs. I remember the leaping catches and the diving plays, the slappers and the big bombers. I remember the laughter.

During Alumni Weekend, people often ask me if I really remember so many people. On the softball field I do, and sometimes when I look at the field, and always before the first practice, there’s a crowd in right field or on third. I recall every girl who played there—all of the bigger-than-life shortstop personal-
ities, all of the tenacious and unselfish catchers, all of the large-hearted bench players. Years ago, a father of a graduate used to occasionally stop in the parking lot and watch a game or practice on his way home from work. I wanted to say to him and to all the parents, “I remember your daughter here, too. I miss her, too.” Lucky me, to have been her coach.
James M. Moore teaches English and economics at Blair, directs the School’s squash programs, is head coach of girls’ varsity squash, advises the School’s literary magazine and is a junior class monitor. Since joining the faculty in 1990, he has also served as dean of college counseling, housemaster of Insley Hall, director of capital giving, and assistant coach of the boys’ varsity baseball team. He completed his undergraduate work in English at Cornell University in 1985 and has since studied literature at Georgetown University and Drew University and business at the University of Rochester. Prior to working at Blair, Jim taught at The Hill School in Pennsylvania and the Savannah Country Day School in Georgia. He left Blair in 1997 to work at the William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Rochester and as a management consultant. Mr. Moore returned to campus in 2006; he lives in Ringe House with his wife, Dr. Wendy Bedenko Moore, and his two children: Emma ’12, currently a student at the University of Rochester, and Harrison ’17.
My mother used to tell the story of my father taking me to the squash court in the library of the Cornell Law School—yes, it’s still there—when I was just able to walk, so it must have been late 1963 or early 1964. My assignment that day was to entertain myself, while my father worked off the tension of his third-year classes by hitting a few drives. Of course, he hit me in the head within the first 10 minutes and was forced to carry a screaming one-year-old back to my mother, who had just wanted a break for half an hour or so.

Was that my introduction to sports? I like to think not. I don’t remember it, because I was no more than 14 months old and, after all, I had been hit on the head. Rather, my first memories of formal games are of watching the last innings of the New York Mets’ improbable World Series victory over the Baltimore Orioles on a 12-inch black-and-white television in October 1969. The Orioles, about whom I knew almost nothing, immediately became my favorite team—I felt so badly for them—and, sometime soon thereafter, my father explained the major league structure to me and how those Orioles were related to our hometown Rochester Red Wings, their Triple-A farm club. He told me this in the front yard of our house, lobbing a rubber baseball with molded seams to me, fearful all along, I imagine, that he would hit me in the head and have to explain again to my mother. But I also suspect he could barely contain his excitement, because, regardless of what was going on in the world beyond our yard—remember this was 1969—playing catch was what fathers were supposed to do with their sons, perhaps, even, what his father had done with him as life struggled to get back to normal after World War II. Indeed, I suspect this because 35 years later, I performed the same exercise with my own son, teaching him to glide under a deep fly so that he arrived, his glove up and open, just when the ball did, as if this had been the plan of the universe all along.

What is it about a green polygon imposed by man on a landscape, lined in meaningful ways, that calls us back to something elemental? I flew to Edinburgh to see my daughter earlier this year and, as the pilot began his approach, I looked out the window. It was March in Scotland and everything was grey: the sky, the screen of leafless trees, the asphalt roads, the Castle rising in the distance and the sea beyond. All grey except a rectangle of bright green, not the unnatural, uniform green of artificial turf, but the thick green of a cultivated pitch, with white lines and marks at once unfamiliar and immediately recognizable. This was surely a
place where people launched balls on graceful trajectories and chased them down.

Like Proust’s madeline, this verdant rectangle, glimpsed from an unusual perspective, like I was looking at an artist’s rendering of it before it was built, was a portal to not only the events of my early life but the things that still catch my eye and hint that, as I grow older and the world changes, some things just cannot be improved upon. The white on a baseball before the first pitch. The remarkable intersection between the line of a forward pass and that of a man moving obliquely away from it. The sole home run I hit in Little League, knowing it was gone as soon as I made contact and having to remind myself to run as I approached first base and watched the ball disappear over the left field fence, one of those rare moments when reality not only imitates but copies exactly what has happened over and over in the imagination. I haven’t tried to hit a baseball thrown at speed in a quarter century. As a friend who had been a champion college diver explained a few years back, declining to demonstrate a back two-and-a-half at his country club pool, “there are 20 pounds of me that have never been on a diving board before.” But I can still tell whether it’s a curve or a fastball by watching how the pitcher releases the ball, and my friend knows that when he finally sees the water below him, it’s time to come out of his tuck.

Somehow, I knew how to calculate averages in my head by the fall of 1970, when the Orioles sought redemption against the Big Red Machine of Cincinnati. I was only eight, but had devised a scorecard on which I kept track of every one of the five games and used the information I had gathered to publish an elaborate set of statistics for my family each evening. At one point, I derived a formula to calculate earned run average and was deeply gratified when I compared my results with those in the newspaper and discovered that they were dead on. At the same time, I watched in awe as Brooks Robinson of the Orioles conducted a real-time clinic on how to play third base, daring the fearsome right-handers in the Reds lineup—Bench, May, Perez—to try to drive the ball by him and stopping everything as if he had a magnet in his glove. There was something compelling about being able to measure everything and that those numbers often predicted what would happen next—and something equally so they didn’t, as when Orioles pitcher Dave McNally, a lifetime .133 hitter, jacked a grand slam in game 3 of that series, beating the Reds not only with his fastball but with his bat as well.

Indeed, baseball may take place within an ordered space, like any other competitive sport, but every
once in a while, the ball itself, the very object of play, absents itself in a hurry, leaving the confines of the field, inspiring us to leap to our feet to watch it go. A basketball rolling out of bounds or a squash ball struck out of court simply stops play and becomes the possession of the side that didn’t touch it last. A home run, arcing—there’s the geometry again—high above a deep-green wall, though, well, that offers an amalgam of triumph, beauty and escape unique to baseball. I have never asked, because I try to be a sensitive man, but such is the instinct to celebrate any home run that I suspect my friends who are Yankee fans struggle to remain seated when even the lowliest of the Red Sox goes yard on a New York pitcher.

I know, I know. This piece strays dangerously close to suggesting that baseball is a Metaphor for Life, another in a long tradition of attempts to build some framework around our attachment to the sport. After all, the French-born American historian Jacques Barzun, an heir to de Tocqueville, advised in 1954* that “Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.” And, in 1975**, the sports impresario Bill Veeck observed that “Baseball is the only game left for people. To play basketball, you have to be 7 feet, 6 inches. To play football, you have to be the same width.” Furthermore, I could go on to suggest that other—oh, I’ll say it—lesser sports, games played within a standard rectangle and governed by a clock, have become arguably more popular because they are easier to play, produce and consume, a sort of athletic sound bite that demands less of us while providing a simple answer when the whistle blows at the end. Baseball, like democracy or the working of the markets, is a messy, often self-contradictory process that takes its own sweet time to resolve into something that some of us like and some of us don’t.

And, yet, things evolve. Now, the nation gathers in greater numbers on fall and winter weekends to watch football; in all my years of watching and playing sports, I have never once been invited to eat wings and Cheetos and drink beer at a World Series party. This past summer, I saw more news about the frankly exciting U.S. women’s soccer team as they marched through the World Cup draw than about whoever’s in first place in the American League East. My son, who for five years roamed the outfield and took his licks on the ballfield out by the Blairstown airport, now spends his winters chasing a black rubber ball for Blair around a white box and, while he still keeps up with what’s

* The year Willie Mays made “The Catch” to shut down the Cleveland Indians in the World Series
** Red Sox Carlton Fisk; walk-off in Game 6.
going on in baseball, has found a home in the spring strutting and fretting upon the stage.

My connection to baseball has changed as well. For 30 years, I have coached and played squash to the exclusion of my involvement in any other sport, save for those that enable me to stay fit enough to play squash. I get to perhaps one professional baseball game a year, usually in Rochester with my father, and have no sense, other than what I can glean from the program, whom I should be watching. I like this fellow Mike Trout of the Angels, whose early career suggests what Mickey Mantle might have become had he taken care of himself, but I couldn’t tell you what he’s hitting right now. Rather than a focus, as it was for those important years when I was growing up, baseball has become more of a backdrop for my life, against which all else settles in relief.

I coach squash in the summers, have the opportunity to work with some of the best players in the world and take my players to great tournaments here in the U.S. and abroad. During the school year, I spend at least two hours every day of the fall and winter helping my kids develop not only the skills to become better squash players, but also an approach to personal development and competition to help them become better people. It is such a great game that every day, even as I become dangerously close to my mid-50s, I am convinced that if I spend a little extra time doing drills to clean up my footwork, I will finally be able to take the ball earlier and be better than I was 20 years ago, and 10 and five and yesterday. This is the sort of exercise in denial that not only gets

Jim teaching the art of the backhand.
us through the day, but enables us to imagine something beyond what all of our instincts and the rest of the world tell us is not possible.

After I’ve brought my girls back from the MAPL tournament at the end of the season in February, we all disperse for spring break, and I take some time off from playing and coaching squash. As my economics students know, the Law of Diminishing Returns applies to even those activities about which we’re passionate, and, besides, I’m just tired. In April and May, then, I lift weights in the gym or ride my bike on the Paulinskill Trail. But when I know that Jim Stone’s nine is on Wakefield Field, or that the waters on Kroner have receded enough for Carolyn Conforti’s girls to play two on a Saturday, I run campus loops, a course that allows me to take in a few innings. I don’t need a program, because I’ve taught or coached or worked in the dorms with most of the players. And if the score is 2-1, and there are two on with one out and some kid who was in my English 1 class is on the mound, I might just settle in. My run can come later, because there’s a ball game on.
Andrew Sykes joined Blair’s history department in 2000. He teaches global issues and western civilization and is head of the Rules and Discipline Committee. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Richmond in 1999 and earned a master’s degree in history from Rutgers University in 2008. Andrew lives in Rea House with his wife, Kate, with whom he has a daughter, Lyla, and son, Ollie. In addition to coaching freshman basketball and varsity boys’ golf, he does dorm duty in Locke Hall.
A Numbers Game

Ah, 24-4, 268, 1.53. Ask anyone who was a Met fan in the 1980s what these numbers represent and they will know. I was 8 years old when Dwight (Doc) Gooden put together one of the best pitching seasons of all time. Those numbers from 1985 occupy a permanent place in my head. I might forget them one day, but I can’t imagine when: 24-4 won-loss record, 268 Ks, 1.53 ERA. I became a Met fan in 1985, in large part because of Doc. In the early fall of 1985, when the Mets were chasing the St. Louis Cardinals, I’d watch the first three innings of their games on TV, then go to bed and listen on my clock radio until I fell asleep, a practice I continued for the next several years. As the first in the apartment to get up in the mornings, I’d open our door to find The New York Times waiting for me. Before anyone else was up, I’d fish out the sports pages and check the box score for the result. No need to read the article, the numbers in the line and box scores told me all I needed to know. After the Met box score, I’d turn to the dozen or so others with equal interest. If Gooden made me a Met fan, box scores made me a baseball (and a numbers) fan.

I don’t know if it was the numbers that drew me to sports or sports that drew me to numbers, but I do know that from my first days as a sports fan(atic), the two were linked. I learned my fractions and percentages from those box scores and standings crammed onto the pages of The New York Times sports section, or at least the section of the business section that served as the sports section on most days. Sundays and Mondays were great, as on those days, sports got a section to themselves, and with more pages came more space, and with more space, more stats—league leaders, Mets team stats and, eventually, the extended standings that have become standard now. Like the pages of stock quotes that my father would peruse every morning, the box score page held numbers in the highest regard. There, words were secondary with even short ones like ‘hits’ and ‘runs’ abbreviated so as to fit more numbers onto the page. This was my page.

Older box scores were simpler, and that was a good thing for me back then. They didn’t include batting average or ERA; that was left to the reader to figure out, and that is what I did while I ate my breakfast just about every morning in fourth and fifth grade. That is where I learned that if Gooden had 2.12 ERA and threw a complete game, but gave up three runs, his ERA would go up. Or that that the Mets’ record of 108-54 in 1986 produced a neat .667 winning percentage. A 4-for-16 weekend translated
to a .250 batting average, and would thus raise Rafael Santana’s average a bit. And that .250 batting average was the same as the 1962 Mets’ .250 winning percentage. Another clean fraction, though this was a sad one for fans. Those were the easy ones.

The more fun questions were whether Keith Hernandez would catch Willie McGee or even Tony Gwynn. If Hernandez was hitting .312 the last time they published the league leaders (usually on Sundays), and he had gone 4-for-9 since then, what was he hitting now? Had he passed McGee, who was at .316 on Sunday, but suffering through a 1-for-11 week so far? What does he need to do to pass Gwynn for the league lead? Would Coleman get to 100 stolen bases? What was his pace? Fifty-eight at the halfway point were easy. But he’s slowed down a bit. How about 65 through 100 games? Still on pace, but barely. I think there is algebra in there somewhere, but it seemed more fun sitting at our kitchen table in front of a dirty inked newspaper than at a desk staring at a textbook.

It wasn’t just baseball, though baseball is where most of the numbers were. The Giants’ 12-4 record in 1989 was just the inverse of what those pitiful 1962 Mets had managed over 160 games. Thankfully, they improved on that record the following year en route to their second Super Bowl in my short lifetime. Mets and Giants in 1986, followed by the Giants again in 1990—winning championships seemed easy for my teams.

And the Giants’ 1990 Super Bowl coincided with the brief but glorious run of the National Sports Daily, a daily tabloid devoted entirely to sports. This I could pick up on my way home from school, and fold under my arm as businessmen did their Wall Street Journal in the morning. No need to even say anything; just put two quarters on the counter and hold up the paper until the cashier acknowledged the purchase. Again, just like the guys in suits would do on their way to the subway in the morning. I was so sure that this was the future of sports journalism that I bought five copies of the first issue, with a color cover featuring Patrick Ewing standing tall above the New York skyline, and saved them, confident that they would one day represent a down payment on my Mets or Giants season tickets.

If the year and a half of the National Sports Daily represented the high point of my pre-Internet sports access, the four years that followed, also known as my high school years, represented the worst of times. Confined to a boarding school in Middletown, Delaware, I had to get my sports news in our school library from the Wilmington News Journal, a paper so lacking in passion for sports that it didn’t deign to publish full box scores for baseball
games unless the Phillies or Orioles were playing. The Mets received a line score only, the same treatment as our high school baseball games received. No real stats, nothing to think about or to analyze. I could only guess how many men Bonilla had left on base, or how many times Elster had struck out. And, to make matters worse, I had to deal with the awkward wooden stick that the librarians attached the paper to every day. Newspapers were to be folded for convenience, not hung as if they had committed some crime. I was homesick. I missed my mom’s cooking and I missed my bed, but I also missed my box scores and my *National Sports Daily*, and what seemed then to be unlimited access to sports and to statistics.

Then came college and the Internet, and what now seems to be truly unlimited access to sports and to statistics. Box scores, league leaders, “advanced metrics” or “analytics,” (both of which seem to be just fancy words for new stats) and standings that can be sorted by division, conference, wild card standing, run differential, etc. It is all there, but unfortunately, I don’t have the time to do it all justice anymore. After all, I have to go set my fantasy football lineup.
Timothy Devaney is chair of the language department. A Blair faculty member since 2010, he teaches various levels of Spanish and coaches cross country and kayaking. He completed his undergraduate work at Bowdoin College in 1988 and earned his master’s degree in bilingual education at Hofstra University in 1993. Prior to coming to Blair, Timothy was principal of the Peaks and Cliff Island School in Casco Bay, Maine. He has also taught at De La Salle Academy and Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, New York, where he served as dean for Spanish and Vietnamese-speaking students. In 1998, he earned a master’s degree in educational administration from Columbia University Teachers College. Tim and his wife, Ying, are housemasters of South Cottage, where they live with their two young children.
High School Cross Country

My love of sports began oddly. I grew up in the suburban town of Guilford, Connecticut, in a neighborhood filled with kids obsessed with sports and split between Yankee lovers and Red Sox lovers, though it tilted to the Sox. My family, being from Worcester, Massachusetts, were Sox fans, mostly vicariously through my grandfather, who waited 79 years for a Red Sox world championship that wouldn’t come until 17 years after his death.

All the kids in my neighborhood seemed gifted far beyond me in terms of natural sports ability, and I struggled to remain competitive in the sport du jour (and even to be picked for a team); we switched often from baseball to basketball to street hockey to basketball, according to the season or our whims.

When it came time for organized sports at the town level, I was relegated to the “minors” in baseball, a league in which we sported T-shirt uniforms and jeans, unlike the “majors” which wore the pro-like uniforms from head to foot, which I greatly coveted. In soccer, travel teams seemed to travel fine without me. It wasn’t until seventh grade, that my natural height, decent speed, and a sudden flurry of frustration over years of status quo caused me to work harder than I ever had in basketball tryouts. I made the team and played for my school for two years. My friend Phil remarked to me that I had made the team because I gave 110 percent.

When I got to high school, I decided to run cross country, mainly to get in good shape for basketball season. I recall meeting for a week of preseason with three other runners and an alum, Mike Regan, who had run a sub-15-minute 5K and was a local legend. At the end of the week, we raced 5K, and I came in second. The rest of the season was somewhat typical for a freshman—learning how enervating running hard can be, but also how exhilarating. I was not a standout during my first year, nor during my second. During our early high school years, I vividly recall my friends cutting workouts short or taking their time completing them, and making a conscious decision to put my all into the workouts that our coach, Jim Ford, gave us. My friends still did well, being more naturally gifted runners, I believe. But I knew if I worked hard, I could do as well or better.

By my third year, I gave up basketball to run year round—I had been plagued by sprained ankles and a lack of aggressiveness under the boards. More than that, though, I had found my true love, a way to channel my physical talents in a way that was fruitful and rewarding. I
got a little better each year.

My junior summer, I followed everything the coach recommended (why I didn’t do that the two previous summers, I can’t explain, except by my youth), putting in more miles than any of my teammates. I rose to run first and second man during my senior year. Running in high school was the first time I found I could excel at a physical pursuit, and, though it might be painful, it also gave me great joy—to be part of a team striving for something together, to test limits, to engage in something so atavistically elemental as to run swiftly.

In college, running was still important to me, but I ran to be in good shape and turned to rugby to satisfy my need for a team challenge. It was a completely different kind of challenge, but an invigorating one. My college team was competitive in northern New England circles, and as the eight-man, it fell to me to punt for the team and to take the ball out of scrums, to name the few tasks I remember.

Continuing on in life, I have revisited some sports of my youth, such as hockey and soccer, and taken up others, such as road biking and hiking. But I recall with great fondness the period of my high school years, when I gave my all to the pursuit of running, and in the process, came to know myself at a deeper level, and fell in love with sports.

Tim (opposite page and second from left, above) as high school runner.
Hans Doerr joined Blair’s faculty in spring 2010. In addition to teaching western civilization and regular and advanced placement U.S. history, he was head coach of the boys’ crew team and an academic monitor for the junior class. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Virginia before spending several years teaching in Detroit public schools as a member of Teach for America. While there, he also oversaw the Detroit Boat Club rowing team. Hans and his wife, Tiffany, left Blair in 2015 for Georgia where they continue to shape the lives of their students.
Messing About in Boats

My first memory is of being under green, sunlit water. There is a small porthole, a stone wall, and a treasure chest. It might only be a memory of a memory, since I was two years old when I rode on the 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea ride at Disney World, but it stands alone in my mind, nothing earlier and nothing later of my own for some time. There are my parents’ stories from back then, some of which I’ve borrowed and made into my own memories over the years. Floating down rapids from my mother to my father again and again when I was two or three on a canoe trip; constantly asking how deep the river, lake, ocean was when we were floating or swimming. And there are my own: paddling six miles across Cranberry Lake on my own and getting lost and trapped by a furious headwind when I was 10, finding my old summer camp file at 20 and reading that my counselor would have needed to chain me up to keep me away from Camp Becket’s waterfront, swim team when I was nine, sailing at 10, windsurfing at 11, water polo at 13, crew at 18, coaching crew at 22, and stand-up paddleboarding at 35.

I started swimming because my father thought I should; I agreed. I could keep my head down, go straight enough, and whirl my arms in freestyle, all of which came together at Wildcliffe Lodge in Cranberry Lake as I swam back to my father and the beach, and he told me to think about swimming. I was already heading over the mountain every day for school, and swimming at the YMCA had the incredible benefit of five fewer 90-minute bus rides when I was in season. My mother would pick me up and do step aerobics while I finished practice. Some days, I’d swim twice, once with the eight-and-unders at their early practice, and again with the older kids. Other days, I’d take roller skating lessons at Magic River Skateland to fill the two hours before practice.

Central Pennsylvania YMCA swimming wasn’t the fastest, but our summer river swims were incredible. We’d shuttle ourselves nine miles up the Susquehanna River from Lock Haven and spend three or four hours swimming those nine miles back down the river. No parents, no support boats, just 10 kids and a coach. Sometimes, the water would be too shallow, and we’d walk; other times we’d stop and sit on the rocks and rest. River swims seem incomprehensibly laden with risk management in hindsight, but, God, they were great.

Water polo started when I went to The Hill School. I’d played a year of seventh-grade football the previous fall and thought I’d continue, but the summer before my eighth-grade year, I’d spent every afternoon and
free period at Camp Becket's waterfront and football faded. I marched up to Mark Nelson, The Hill's polo coach, at an opening cookout on the Quad and formally informed him that I was going to play water polo, not football, as I'd said when I'd interviewed the previous fall. I also called him Mr. Deconnick, who was the swim coach. I played for five years and was good in the specific way that prep school kids are when they don’t train in the off season and learn a sport from scratch, which is to say that I wasn’t very good in the grand scheme of things, but that’s because the grand scheme of things wasn’t on my radar as an athlete.

Swimming followed water polo season. The goals came out, the lanes went in, and the water dropped so the gutters would be more effective. It always coincided with daylight savings, and seemed as if everything that could go dreary, did. Practice was 3:30 in the pool to 6:00 every day with three-hour swims on Wednesdays and Saturdays without meets. I swam distance, always on the edge of doing well, but with two or three guys in front of me every day. We were a mileage team, often average 12,000 yards a practice and up to 15,000 on our three-hour days.

Senior year, I wrote down “rec basketball” on my sports sign up at dinner, and Mr. Deconnick, my table head, was livid. He challenged me, and I said, “No offense to the sport you love, but I despise it.” He walked away, and I played basketball with my friends that winter. It was a mistake. Certainly not a huge one, but I’ve thought about it often over the years. I was a late bloomer in the pool that fall, often leading practices and sprints and Coach Deconnick mentioned I might be a sprinter in swim season, but I’d convinced myself I hated it.

What I really hated was the competition. My nerves were shot every time I stepped on the blocks in a way that they weren’t in any other aspect of my life. Now I tell my athletes that there is an important distinction between the questions “How did you race?” and “How did you play?” but as an athlete in high school, the thought of racing was terrifying in the days, hours, minutes beforehand.

The summer before my first year at UVA, I got a letter from the Virginia Rowing Association, the men’s club team that represented Virginia all over the country. It asked for tall men to consider joining the team and had a photo of the boat that won their race at the San Diego Crew Classic that spring. I mentioned it my father, who, probably thinking about my season of rec hoops that winter, doubted my discipline. Armed with a healthy, “I’ll-show-him” attitude, I signed up for crew and ultimate Frisbee at UVA’s activity fair, went to one ultimate practice, and then began
tryouts for rowing. We learned to erg, sort of. We learned to race on the erg, sort of. And I learned the way in which a good hard piece on the erg can ruin your day. Dan Najjum and I fell asleep on the bus back from Onesty Hall and rode the Grounds loop at least twice before we remembered to eat dinner. Four years of rowing later, we walked the lawn wearing our unisuits under our gowns, carrying an oar the underclassmen snuck past security. We'd won some and lost others, but the feeling of a racing shell that's moving well is something that will stay with me the rest of my life.

Now that I'm coaching, I often say that life is like rowing. The factors that are in your control are seemingly infinite. I can change the gearing on every seat, shuffle lineups, change training plans, buy new boats, ergs, oars, switch lakes, but the unknowns are every bit as legion. Headwinds, tailwinds, crosswinds, quartering heads and tails, water temperature, ice, sun, rain, hail, snow, not the least of those is your competition, who sits in another lane and may or may not react at all to your race plan—and the best crews do not.

But the most important interaction of all occurs at the end of your oar and it is with the water. The hook and press at the catch, the send at the finish, the mass that is so much greater and moves so much faster through the water than any other human-powered boat or swimmer. The laws of physics and hydrodynamics make impossible demands of a crew shell and each of those is tied inextricably to the boat and the water. The speed of a racing shell is cyclical. Boats slow down at the catch, the point where the blade enters the water, and they speed up just after the blade is released, which means the work you put in, the lung-burning drive of the legs and suspension on the handle pays its dividends after you’re finished with the blade completely out of the water and, from that point on, everything you do will, unavoidably, slow the boat down. You have to work with your shell to let it run out, to let it travel in between strokes, because you are in a relationship with the water and shell that requires you to give up control. The more relaxation you develop between strokes, the better your relationship with the water and boat will be, but you will never stop the boat from slowing down.
Lara Curtis joined the faculty in 2010. She came to Blair after graduating from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, with a BA in European studies. In addition to serving as head coach of the girls’ varsity volleyball team and assistant varsity coach of boys’ and girls’ swimming, Lara is the School’s assistant athletic director. She also teaches geometry. Prior to joining the faculty at Blair, she taught math at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia. She lives on the Flight Deck in Insley Hall, where she also does dorm duty.
My immersion into the world of sports began 26 years ago when my mother enrolled me in a water babies’ class at a local rec center. I was 15 months old. Perhaps it was the feel of the water, or the determination to reach the side, or maybe just the ruffled yellow polka-dotted swim suit, but whatever it was, that was the beginning of my obsession with chlorine, counting laps, early morning practices, goggle rings, and green hair.

The following summer, still according to my mother, I was a “stubborn cuss” as I “repeatedly jumped straight into the deep end when entering the pool.” In desperation, and in hopes that I might develop a healthier fear of the water, she enrolled me in a beginner swim class, never dreaming that two weeks later I would attempt to pass the swim test. I only swam halfway and so I “flunked.” But, at age three, I didn’t really have the concept of pass or fail; I only knew that not swimming all the way meant that I couldn’t go off the diving board. Apparently, I demanded to take the test again. Immediately. This time, I didn’t stop until I had reached the far side, promptly wiggling out and standing in line for my turn to do a cannonball. By age four, I had talked my way onto the summer swim team, the Dolphins, and the following summer, at age five, I won my first swimming trophy—“Most improved eight-and-under girl.” To this day, I can’t walk by a pool and not get excited smelling the chlorine.

I swam every summer from ages four to 18, missing camps and beach vacations because I couldn’t bear to
miss a meet. I swam endless winters and, in college, year round. Beginning at 15, I coached every summer for a decade. To say I simply enjoy swimming is an understatement; it is a hobby, a passion. It has defined me as a person. It has been my constant from childhood to high school to college and, finally, to Blair. In a roundabout way, it is what convinced me to coach; it is what convinced me to teach. The two go hand-in-hand.

Swimming involves competitiveness not only for the team, but also for the individual. One strives to constantly improve. To shave a half second off a stroke’s time can bring enormous satisfaction. But competition isn’t everything. Athletics go beyond all of that. The lessons I have learned in sports, lessons about determination and teamwork, lessons about setting goals and following through, lessons about handling both success and defeat, are lessons which will carry me through life. Who would have thought, 26 years ago, that a simple water babies’ class would have led me to a sport, a job, and a career, all of which I love?

Thanks, Mom.
Sink or Swim

2006 Dolphins

Swimmer Coach

THANK YOU!

OF A CHAMPIONSHIP YEAR
Rookies on Deck

**Fiona Walsh ’17**
current Blair junior
(center back row)

**Batouly Camara ’15**
University of Kentucky
(front center with ball)

**Jon Nowell ’15**
Randolph-Macon College
(third from right, #21)

**Matt Kolodzic ’15**
Princeton University
(second row, third from left)

**Phoebe Dopulos ’15**
Bryn Mawr College
(back, third from right)
Growing up in a small town like Hackettstown, New Jersey, meant sports were always a core part of community life. Every weekend, families lined the fields and gyms. Sports were a way of bringing the community together. So, like any other parent, my mom introduced me to the world of recreational sports at a very young age as a way of getting me off the couch and away from the TV; however, over the years it became so much more.

As many of us can relate, my first and perhaps still my greatest fans as an athlete were my parents. Despite their very different backgrounds, both my mother and father understood the importance of athletics. My mother, never really having the opportunity to play a sport as a child herself, was extremely encouraging of my young athletic career and went to every length to provide me an opportunity to improve. My father, on the other hand, grew up on the streets of Ireland using his passion for boxing to escape a life of poverty. His fortitude as an athlete led him to a career as an amateur boxer who would eventually represent his country in the ring. With their support, at the age of six, I attended my first soccer practice. I immediately found the idea of chasing after a ball in the hot sun three times a week both pointless and boring. My foot skills were poor, even for a six-year-old, so I had no problem volunteering to play goalkeeper whenever there was an opportunity. No one likes getting scored on, but there was something about the feeling of making the save that I found exhilarating. This pressure motivated...
me to improve, and, over the years, showing up to practices became less of a chore and more of something I looked forward to.

My drive to improve carried over into my basketball season. Coaches quickly noticed my focus and determination. During my years of elementary sports, I met some of my closest friends and greatest role models. I learned to appreciate the small victories before the big ones. I learned to seize every opportunity I could to advance myself and listen to those who discerned my potential. Most importantly, I learned to thrive on adversity and the strength overcoming it brings.

In sixth grade, I attended my first Blair Academy basketball game with some of my friends and was immediately captivated by the competitive ambiance that filled the gym. The players’ camaraderie and support of one another were what inspired me the most. Each individual was representing so much more than just a team; they were representing a prestigious school and a legacy of accomplished student-athletes. I looked up to them.

Now a three-year Blair Academy student myself, I have been able to accept the challenge of learning both rowing and softball, in addition to being Blair’s varsity goalkeeper and member of the varsity basketball squad. I am blessed to be playing on the same court as some of my greatest childhood role models, continuing their legacy. Every day, I make it a priority that the work ethic I have in the gym matches my drive to improve in the classroom and in everything else I pursue. Every time I step on the field, I want to impact those in the stands the same way the athletes I watched growing up impacted me.
It was New York City, 2003, and like any other day, my siblings and I would wait for one another to get out of school and then head over to my mother’s job on 124 Street and 7th Avenue. She owned a 99-cent store, and directly to the left was a Jamaican restaurant followed by a morgue. We spent a lot of time sitting outside watching the people go in and out of these three places and simply passing by on the sidewalk. That summer happened to be one of the hottest, but that never stopped us from playing freeze tag or jumping double Dutch.

I enjoyed going to my mother’s job because when we commuted back home, we were not allowed to play with the kids in our building. As my mother liked to say, “They are a bad influence, and we don’t surround ourselves with people like that.” We listened closely and never associated with anyone in the immediate area.

On the weekends, however, we would venture off to Arabic school, which was my favorite place in the entire world. At Arabic school, it didn’t matter who was the oldest or youngest, unlike in my house, where respect for elders was an essential part of life. All that mattered was who knew more about the Quran and who could easily recite the surahs (passages). I felt like my best self when I was there and I memorized nearly twice as many surahs as my classmates and, for that reason, I would be given the opportunity to teach and discipline my classmates at the end of the day. I loved everything about Islam and, growing up, it was the foundation of our household. We were constantly reminded that our entire existence is solely to please Allah.

As I grew older and my sister and brother began high school, I often found myself taking on a lot more responsibility. At this time, I was in fifth grade going on to sixth. Over that summer, I grew about four inches and, as a result, I began towering over my classmates. It was hard for me to go shopping and try
to fit in with the other girls in my class so I started hanging out with the boys in my grade. I wore baggy clothes and was now considered a “tomboy.” Although I did not like this label, it did not bother me.

One day, as I was walking home, I saw this tall girl who I could have sworn was about seven feet tall. I later found out she was 6’3” but, at that time, she was the tallest girl I had ever seen. She was shooting around with an older woman who was nearly the same majestic height as her. I was intrigued and fascinated by these tall women. Even though I was supposed to go directly home, I decided to walk into the park. I sat and watched them dribble and make shots with their left and right hands from short and long distances. This was my first real encounter with the game of basketball. I sat there for about 30 minutes before I decided to go home. On my way home, I wondered if they had noticed me, and if they knew places where I could find pants for tall girls. I was also determined to ask if I could join in playing if I saw them again in the future.

That day came sooner than I expected when I next walked into the park and saw the girl and the older woman again. They looked over at me and signaled for me to come over. I began throwing the ball at the basket, which caused the girl, whose name I learned is Marjorie, to try her best to teach me some technique. That day was followed by little drills and games the girl made up and a thousand questions posed by me. That continued for the entire summer until I was going to begin middle school.

At school, there was an announcement about try outs for the
boys’ team, and I decided I needed to tell Marjorie about it. We worked out all that week, and I attended the tryouts. I made the boys’ middle school team, and my visits with Marjorie became shorter and less frequent. I went on to finish that season with the boys and was offered an opportunity to play with a girls’ team: the Riverside Hawks.

Venturing out to play girls’ sports was very difficult for me as a daughter of a Guinea, West African parent. I had been carefully raised at every step of life to prepare for marriage in accordance with our culture. There was a constant reminder in our household that basketball was hard for certain family members to accept, because I was a girl and I should not be given that much freedom. At a young age, I traveled to various states and had many experiences through basketball that my siblings did not; as a result, my journeys became theirs. I progressed and continued to get better over time.

Three years later, entering my freshman year of high school, I lost someone very close to me, and I used this as a driving force to motivate myself to excel. I finished my freshman year, but I knew in order to get where I wanted to go, I had to stretch myself even more and enroll in a new school—I applied to Blair Academy. Blair has been a life-changing experience for me and has allowed me to interact with some incredible people. Throughout my entire journey, I shared experiences with other girls who have parents from different cultures, and we have discussed how hard it is for us to break cultural norms. I am happy to say that I will be attending the University of Kentucky as a college freshman and that is something that I could not have thought possible when I was skipping ropes on the streets of New York City all those years ago.
Basketball has been a huge part of my life since the age of eight. It has always been part of my schedule, my daily thoughts and my future. I have been surrounded by Hoop Dreams and the passion for the game since I was a child, but it didn’t just become my favorite sport immediately. Initially, I was a soccer player and my first athletic experience came in the form of playing soccer in a neighborhood league with local kids when I was six years old. I wasn’t very good and I think my parents put me in that league just to occupy my afternoons. I didn’t really understand the sport and found myself awkwardly taller than the other kids.

My introduction to my real passion, basketball, came when I attended a game one afternoon which my dad refereed. He was a part-time referee and often spent his afternoons making close calls at local high school games. One night, I attended a game and everything changed for me. I can’t remember the schools, the gym or who won. What I can remember is that I was fascinated by what I saw. The game was fast paced, involved high-flying actions and had a swag that soccer just didn’t have for me. There were dunks, deep three pointers, nice crossovers and more to behold. The players were roared at and rooted for by the fans with an energy I had not seen before. Upon seeing this, I realized that I no longer wanted to play soccer—I wanted the attention and love that those basketball players got. In addition, I wanted to dunk and hit shots just like them. From that day on, I asked my parents to get me started with basketball.

As I grew older and continued to play the sport, I found that I was pretty good and had a body type that is favored by basketball—I was tall and skinny with long arms. In addition, I had pretty good speed. I began to develop a passion for the game as I continued to watch high school, the NBA and practice in my own backyard. My games on the weekends were the best parts of my week, and I loved practice. When I turned 10, I knew that I wanted a future in basketball and I made a commitment to myself to deeply invest my time in it; I haven’t stopped since.
Very few people call me by my real name. Actually, there’s only one: my mother, and then only on special occasions. Growing up, hearing my real first name was a surefire way of knowing how much trouble I was in. “Paul. Matthew. Kolodzik.” was the sound awaiting my ears anytime I did something I wasn’t supposed to. Those words never ceased to scare me in their threatening, monosyllabic nature with a volume always inversely proportional to the amount of crap coming my way.

Both my parents and grandparents have the same names: JoAnn or Joan for short, and Paul. This made for some rather tense moments whenever my mom used “the voice” with my father. No doubt she learned it from her mother though, who, to this day, uses the very same tone when angered by my grandfather.

Unlike their similarities in names though, the two sides of my family could not be more different in personality. My mother, like her family, is on the whole quiet, a bit nerdy, intellectually curious, and caring to the nth degree. My father, like his family, is focused, determined, intense, and always active. My name is Paul, but my family calls me Matthew. It’s fitting: Paul Jr. just doesn’t sit right and, besides, as any one of my friends can attest, I am quite a bit like my family...all of my family. So what, then, would I call myself?

Truthfully, I wouldn’t know how to answer that question. I’m still finding out more about myself and, 20 years down the line, I probably still will be. To answer that question at this very point in time, though, I needed some help. The top three keywords that came up on Google under my name were Matthew Kolodzik wrestling, Matthew Kolodzik Blair wrestling and Matthew Kolodzik Princeton wrestling...funny no one knows who Paul is. Apparently, I'm a wrestler, but Google was never good for much other than writing papers. Now, perhaps it’s simply the teen angst speaking, but I really don’t think of myself as just a wrestler. My friends call me Matt or Kolo (which my mom hates); however, my friends and family and all the characteristics they possess do little to explain the first 14 pages of Google under my name devoted solely to wrestling articles. Yet, someone who could answer that question is Paul.

In this instance, Paul is my dad: hard working, practical, and focused as ever, he started me and all of my siblings in sports at the earliest age possible. He did this with a single intent: gain an advantage in getting into college. In a sense, we
were cheating the system, which is sneaky, but, after all, it turned out to be pretty successful. My brother graduated from Princeton in 2012, thanks in large part to wrestling. Much like him, I will be doing the same, and my sister is currently golfing at UVA.

I was four when I started wrestling. As it turned out, not knowing the context of my being thrust into the arena of athletics became beneficial. The first time I wrestled, I was so young I didn’t know any better than to revert to the most primal of human instincts: fight like life depended on it, and I did. Growing up, I won matches based on sheer will that those around me interpreted as raw talent. The reason was simply because I was afraid to fail.

Failure constantly scared me, so much so that I spent hours lying in bed, on the mat, or at a desk at school obsessing over how I would make certain failure did not enter the circle I stepped into every Saturday. As a result, I was a superstar on the mat, but frustratingly below average in the classroom.

When I wasn’t at wrestling camps, driving to practices, or cutting weight, I was reading and doing test prep: the most practical, although least fun, use of my time. My hard work off the mat didn’t seem to add up though, and it angered me. I felt like I was doing all the right things: working hard, devoting time, and showing up every day at school, yet the good results that showed up every weekend at tournaments did not happen on my report card. Yet, for all my success on the mat, I really had little perception of why I did what I did. I just kept working. That’s what Paul Kolodzik needed to do; both of them. Success for me plainly became the elimination of failure.

Throughout grade school and high school, I lurched from tournament to tournament, test to test, and crisis to crisis through the cycle of daily school, skipped meals and spent countless late nights in the car while my dad drove me to practices. Looking back, I see how incredible all the things my dad sacrificed for me really were, and even more importantly, why he did them. Dad understood that the world was a harsh place, and in order to be successful, one needed to make sacrifices. Practical sacrifices. That’s how he lived his life, and that’s how he raised me. Still, all the while, even during those short times we weren’t in the car driving to practice, Paul Kolodzik was in the driver’s seat while Matthew sat shotgun. Practicality and competitiveness yielded results, but they had a dark side: pessimism and the ever-present feeling that I was failing myself despite near physical exhaustion. The disadvantages to this mentality were apparent in how I handled myself at school and on the mat whenever I lost. Happiness in those years simply wasn’t practi-
cal. In this mindset, enjoyment became a rarity, even when I wasn’t wrestling. Through this lens, everything I did became an obstacle and every person I met became a competitor. My job was to juggle these threats with as much competence as possible, or suffer the consequences of inadequacy. In essence: survival. It made sense, given how I handled myself on the mat, but, as I soon found out, this was no way to live.

As junior high ended and high school approached on the horizon, I came to realize that discipline wasn’t part of my life; it was my life. Incentive and enjoyment, on the other hand, were nonexistent. Just like my brother, I was the Ohio Miami Valley School’s one-man wrestling team. I didn’t have any teammates to commiserate with, much less friends who could stand to be around the angry little kid I was then. I received little sympathy from most of my teachers as well, who couldn’t see the fairness in a kid like me perhaps getting into a school like Princeton given how little I tried. Truthfully, it wasn’t fair. I’m not smart. However, what my peers and teachers didn’t see was everything that happened outside of the classroom. The two-hour drive to practice and back, the second practice at home, going out for a 10 p.m. run to shed a few more pounds, homework until 2 a.m., bed, rinse, and repeat. Wrestling was a constant process of putting myself through the ringer and the daily grind was wearing me down. I hated school and, by the end of my freshman year, I was as despondent as I was disliked. The only thing that kept me going was my unhealthy fear of failure. My mom, ever caring and always concerned by my lack of enjoyment with what I was doing, sensed my discontent. Moreover, the hours upon hours of daily drives to my practices were wearing my parents out. They did so much for me and my frustration made things hard on everyone; something had to change. So, over spring break during my freshman year, my parents approached me with a question. The answer to that question was Blair Academy, a prep school in Blairstown, New Jersey, with a wrestling team and coach unlike any other in the country or even the world.

I pulled up on campus a week before school started with my phone still up to my ear after a conversation with a fellow wrestler and longtime friend, Jordan Kutler. What he said affects me to this day; the best high school coach in the country, Jeff Buxton, was leaving the best wrestling school in the country a week before I started classes. “Brilliant,” I thought. “Another obstacle to hurdle alone.” Maybe I just had this giant adversity magnet inside me or maybe I just thought everyone was out to get me. Either way, the unfortunate timing didn’t do much to make me feel secure or accepted in this strange new life called board-
ing school. Coaches Paul Clavel and Charles Danhof did the best anyone could possibly do under the circumstances and, at the end of the year, we were crowned national champions, proof for many that the team was still on course. Though I had been pessimistic coming into my sophomore year, the team turned out to be successful.

Afraid and confused as I was then, I wouldn't change it. Inside the wrestling room that year, I began learning for the first time that there was more than one way to succeed. My way was neither the most efficient nor enjoyable. Banging my head against the wall like I had been for so many years only got me so far. Despite the coaching changes, I learned more technique than I ever had. More importantly, I was enjoying myself. Wrestling became fun when I took the time to study the intricacies of the sport.

It was common to hear Coaches Clavel and Danhof use the Buxton line: “Go play.” The implications were clear: Discover the sport, see if you like what you just learned, and use it. This approach was unlike anything I had ever known. I was more productive, I was enjoying myself and the benefits of this new process were undeniable.

Even now, there are these undeniable parallels between wrestling and science that have the tendency to bring out the most elegant and exciting solutions to complex problems, which only elevates one's curiosity and joy of learning. Outside of the wrestling room, it showed. For the first time, I was also enjoy-
ing school, especially Doc Sayers’ sophomore chemistry class. Doc inspired me to want to learn and, often, when the going got tough, he was always there with some cookies and a terribly dry pun to make me laugh and help me through. By the end of sophomore year, Doc was both my good friend and my advisor. His inspiration led me to become fascinated with science and read almost every book he gave me about the United States space program. In essence, I was becoming the biggest nerd my friends ever had the displeasure of knowing. Their loss, not mine.

When I came home over break, my mom made a point of asking me who I was and what I had done with her son. She was right; I was still Matt, just a different one, a nerdier and happier one. For the first time, learning how to learn had opened up a world of possibilities to me, possibilities that weren’t there before. Possibilities that helped me come to terms with my fear of failure. I began to realize that I didn’t need to cut insane amounts of weight to win matches; I just had to learn from those who were teaching me and not be afraid to try new things, even if sometimes I failed with them. As I relaxed and distanced myself from the wound-up and angry kid I was freshman year, I learned and enjoyed more than I ever had. I discovered that people were actually awesome and not out to get you if you just sat down every once in a while to talk to them. I made friends and had conversations with people who are still some of my closest friends today.

Something had to rain on my parade though, and that something for me, like many, was “Junior Year” at Blair. Ask any junior and they’ll tell you. It’s just tough. School was tough, wrestling was tough, and the negatives of social life at Blair started becoming more apparent. This was a time when I found out just how stressful things could get academically. Physics with Mr. Ryerson that year was both the most challenging and most enjoyable class I took. I wasn’t extremely good at it, but I got the job done. At the end of the year, I was happy I did it, but I still couldn’t shake this feeling that I could have done more to raise that 4.5 on my final year grade. Yet, I had come a long way from where I had been just a few years earlier. I was disappointed in myself, but not angry or frustrated like I always had been. Despite my doubts with the wrestling program having another coaching change on the horizon and more than a few more run-ins with School administrators, things were still far better than they had ever been for me. If anything, junior year taught me that adversity is unavoidable, but learning a thing or two from adverse situations is not. Like wrestling, the work was always hard, but after a good chunk of ded-
icated time, it started to become less like work and more like play. Little by little, I became able to face the problems that high school threw my way with a more level head by telling myself to “go play” anytime a solution to my problems wasn’t obvious. I came to view all the obstacles in my life as challenges, not threats. That outlook was worth more than any win on the mat or 6.0 on a test. For the first time, I started to become wholly invested in myself.

Yet a downside to this newfound sense of purpose was inevitable. Over my time at Blair, I began to figure out just how upsetting failure can truly be, especially when you care so much more about what you are doing. During my sophomore year, I got pinned for the very first time in the Ironman finals in front of the entire country. A week later, I lost by a point to the same competitor. Junior year, I lost again, twice to a different opponent. Similarly, physics, the class I cared so much about, was getting tougher by the day, and I was struggling under all these pressures and from two additional coaching changes since I got to Blair. I had grown into a more knowledgeable, nerdy, and invested Matt throughout my time at Blair, but when adversity came back in full force, I felt powerless, overwhelmed, and angry again.

What nobody told me is that those things never change throughout life. What can change, however, is perspective. Reading yet another space-nerd book Doc Sayers had loaned me, I remember flipping to the cover which read “Failure is Not an Option” and having that strange existential moment almost every junior at Blair has. I thought about what failure was to me and what a failure I was. I pushed myself back into the hole I had worked so hard to escape. But as I read on over the months and went about my life on the mat and in school, I came to realize that those words weren’t what they appeared to be. Failure isn’t measured in units of success, nor is success measured in units of accomplishment. Success depends holistically on how much you learn and how well you make the best of a tough situation. It took me a while to realize that life isn’t something you succeed at; it’s something you live and attempt to make success with. Living up to my potential was something I struggled with constantly, but in certain moments, success showed up even when I wasn’t exclusively searching for it, provided I applied the tools my family, my friends, and my experiences had taught me.

The “go play” mentality was easy in principle but hard in practice. My passions led me to want to pursue getting a pilot’s license, math courses over the summer to make up for lost ground and, most ambitiously, aerospace engineering at Princeton. There was just one catch: I was a
recruited athlete, not an honor roll student. Be that as it may, I also learned during my time at Blair that intellect isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. I have come to accept that working with problems and facing the possibility of failure is a continual struggle for everyone.

My coming to Blair was supposed to solve all the problems I faced in Ohio, but during my time here, I did anything but avoid problems—I learned how to face them. Those skills are what I will carry with me through Princeton and in the face of all the challenges in life. Thirty years from now, how many matches I’ve won or tests I’ve aced will be inconsequential. What will matter is how willing I was to jump at opportunity, how much I learned from failure and success, and how much I changed in the process.

Change is scary, but ironically, it’s only through failure that we learn the changes necessary to succeed. All these platitudes sure sound nice in a paper, but truthfully, I’m still just as scared for my future as I was the first time I stepped on the mat.

I spent a lot of my earlier years so worried about what I should be doing, I neglected what I wanted to be doing. Engineering and science make me tick, but I’m also an athlete. If you don’t believe me, just ask Google. The fact that I’ve found my passion means anything but smooth sailing from here on out. I do believe, however, that my passion, my friends, and the lessons I’ve learned will supply me with a lot of support for the tough times ahead.

Whenever those tough times come, I, like a true space nerd, remember the words of John F. Kennedy when he spoke to a stadium full of engineers at Rice University as mankind embarked on one of the most difficult challenges of all time: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” Whenever things get particularly hard, I try to remember that, despite how it seems, failing Mr. Wilson’s physics test or losing a match is not the end of the world. Adversity is not here to kill me; it’s here to challenge me.

Looking back, I’ve come a long way from where I started three years ago. I know who I was then, so who am I now? My name is Paul Matthew Kolodzik. Google says I’m a wrestler, my friends say I’m a nerd, my family doesn’t know what to make of me, and I am still making something of myself. I’m so grateful to my family for what they have done for me. Looking back on that day four years ago when my parents asked me how I felt about going to Blair, I can’t help but laugh at my initial reaction: “No way!” I said, much to the relief of my mom. As much as she wants the best for my future, my mom will always be the one who wants her kids where they belong: at home where she can care.
for them.

My experience as a Blair wrestler over the past three years has been less than ideal. My teammates and I have faced challenges and adversity because of the loss of one of the best minds in wrestling. Yet, despite the difficulty, I’ve learned more than I could have ever imagined. Very few people call me by my real first name, but perhaps Paul Jr. wouldn’t be so unfitting. I’m a little bit like both the Pauls and Joans of my family in a whole lot of ways. My mom provided me with the compassion, intellectual curiosity and love for what I’m doing in advocating for my coming to Blair. My dad provided me with the determination and work ethic to push through all the obstacles that will face me in life. Wrestling for Blair distanced me from my family, but I still carry what they taught me with the lessons I learned during my time here. Three years ago, I would not have imagined how indebted I feel to my parents and Blair for giving me the opportunity to fail and learn. Whatever the future holds, I owe it to myself and to Mom, Dad, Doc, Coach Clavel, Coach Danhof, Coach Buxton, Coach Antonelli, and all my family at Blair for giving Paul Matthew Kolodzik the means to learn, work, and “go play” on the mat, in the classroom, and in life.
Dopulos

**Phoebe Dopulos '15**

I have won championships. I have broken personal records. I have won Peddie Day. I have enjoyed the feeling of victory down to my very core. However, my greatest moments in sport did not come from the sports I was good at. In fact, they came in the sport that hated me most, that rejected me and isolated me. I am an insightful golfer and a mediocre goalie. But I was an awful softball player who loved it more than anything.

Being unathletic but powerful, softball seemed like a good fit. I could sort of sprint, but my throws and batting were above average for third graders. After playing a few successful rounds at school, I asked my dad to sign me up for rec league softball in my hometown.

I could hit. My parents encouraged me, and I even had my own bat, crushing underhand pitches to doubles and triples. I played catcher religiously, even though my knees couldn’t handle the weight, and I finally thought I had found something I could take with me for the rest of my athletic career. Softball showed me that I was strong, that I was powerful, but it highlighted the fact that I was not fast.

In my second season, I was bumped up to a team with better pitchers and faster runners. I could
still bat, but brute strength wasn’t nearly as effective with windmill pitches as it was with the soft lobs I had gotten used to. I didn’t stand out anymore. We won games, but I had very little to do with it.

One day, our big hitter crushed a home run while I was on first. I sprinted around the bases, listening to the howls and cheers. It was a moment of ecstasy.

“You can’t pass her.”

The command cut like a knife through the happiness that surrounded me. I realized that the girl who had hit the homer was only a foot or so behind me, practically jogging to keep up with my sprint.

I knew I was slow, but at that age I didn’t think of it as “not fast enough.” I thought I could keep up. But after that game and the ones surrounding it, I knew that playing seriously wasn’t realistic if I didn’t want to put in the effort to get faster. So I quit.

A few years and golf tournaments later, I saw my old bat while cleaning my garage. I got goosebumps just by looking at it, practically hearing the screams and cheers and tasting sunflower seeds in my mouth. My father noticed, and asked if I wanted to go outside to hit with it.

We went into my backyard, home of my first catch, home of my first passion, to go hit. He lobbed me the ball, nearly in slow motion. As it crossed the sweet spot, I closed my eyes and swung.

I still don’t know if it was because I had built up golf muscles, but I sent the ball across the lawn, over the garage, and into the hydrangeas.

While my dad was off fetching the ball, tears welled up in my eyes. I remembered getting that first out, the smell of the catcher’s pads, and the shadow patterns made by the backstop. I had exchanged batting for putting, sprinting for walking. I enjoy golf, but I loved softball.
Roy Wilson joined Blair’s faculty in 2009 as a physics teacher and now serves as chair of the science department. He completed his undergraduate work at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, in 2007, and then spent two years teaching math and coaching girls’ cross country at Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. He lives in the Gateway house near the School’s entrance and serves as the head coach of boys’ and girls’ track and field.
I was three years old when I started going to school. My mother was convinced that because of how I was developing, starting my formal education early was the only way for her to keep me engaged and entertained. I was sent to Bethel Baptist Church for basic school, which at the time was held in a small room at the rear of the church. At the basic school, I learned to read from the King James Bible, how to write in cursive, and derive basic arithmetic. My life at Bethel also included going to Sunday school and the church services with my grandmother every Sunday morning. We sang and recited passages in front of the congregation to practice our public speaking skills, and, at Christmas, we partook in the performance of the nativity scene. I was always one of the three wise men, the one with the frankincense.

After Bethel, I went to Richmond Park Prep for primary school (the equivalent of elementary school in the United States). My grandmother paid my school fees. She was a very demanding woman, but one whom I loved, respected, and wanted to please. I spent four years going through the grade levels at Richmond Park with high scores, establishing an exceptional academic record. All of this work was in anticipation of the national exams. Jamaica’s education system requires that, at the end of primary school, students take a national examination to determine which secondary school they can attend. I was a very confident student at Richmond Park and believed that I would do well enough to attend any school of my choice. My eyes were focused on one goal: the school I wanted to attend the most—Calabar High School. Calabar, an all-boys high school, is renowned as one of the best secondary education institutions in Jamaica, so it was a natural choice for an academically focused child. However, at the time, my motivation was not tied to the academic reputation of the school. I chose Calabar for one compelling reason only: I wanted to win at Champs running for Calabar.

The Jamaican High School
Track and Field Championships (Champs) has been taking place for over a century and is recognized as one of the most competitive youth events in track-and-field. Year after year, nearly 40,000 people gather in the historic National Stadium to spectate and cheer on their respective alma mater. When I was making my high school selection, the history of Champs meant more to me than any other facet of a particular school’s reputation. Calabar was one of the most decorated track programs in the country and home to track-and-field giants like Dennis Johnson, Herb McKenley, and Authur Wint. I knew that Olympians came from Calabar, and I wanted to be just like the greats. Looking back, it felt like my running ambition was all I had at that time. I was this young boy with a goal to be the fastest he could be, and who wanted to earn the right to represent his high school and his country.

I left Jamaica in March 1995 when I was nine years old, to live with my father and stepmother in New York City, all before my national examinations. I did not have my chance to attend Calabar, and consequently, the opportunity to run and compete in Jamaica. When the time came to move, I was strapped to my seat, leaving my dream to wear green-and-black at Champs behind.

My first few years in the United States did not involve competitive sprinting, but instead involved football, handball, and basketball in the city parks. When I finally entered high school, I joined the football team because I grew to love the game. After four years at John F. Kennedy High School, my football career consisted of two playoff appearances, one that culminated in a New York City public school championship. The football program was the beacon of athletics at J.F.K., and I attribute much of my success as an athlete and coach to my years on the Kennedy football team.

Kennedy’s track-and-field program had a rich history, particularly during the 1980s. However, when I was there as a student, the teams were small, and garnered less support for the sport than provided for the football program. Nonetheless, I was on the J.F.K. track team for my four years and was captain of the team my senior year. One of my teammates was also on a club team, the Bronx International Express Track Club. He convinced me to attend one of their practices, and I was thrilled when I found out that all the club coaches were Jamaican. I still remember how exhausted I was after that first practice session. I brought home the membership paperwork, and my parents agreed to let me join.

It was the summer of my freshman year at J.F.K. when I became a member of the Express. Our practices were held in Van Courtland
Park in the northwest sections of the Bronx. Over the next three years, training and competing with the Express consumed my summers. If we had a good season, football would end in the latter half of November, around Thanksgiving. The winter and spring meant the indoor and outdoor track seasons were in session, and the summer meant the return to club track. That was my routine for my high school career. As a track athlete, I peaked during my senior year, clocking 10.84 seconds in the 100-meter dash at a club meet in Van Courtland Park.

I did not have as much success on the track when I was at Colby College. I ran all four years there as an undergraduate, and was captain of the team my senior year. However, these were the years that I started to learn the sport in ways I had not done before. I focused intently on the concepts and ideology purported by my coaches, and I made a conscious effort to understand the principles that were guiding my training. It also helped that I was studying physics at Colby. That is, the technical model of sprinting is a direct result of the fact that all movement must adhere to a set of physical laws. These laws are nonnegotiable, and therefore, dictate what we must anatomically articulate at any track and field event.

In a way, being a track coach is like being a physics teacher and being a physics teacher is like being a track coach. All of my experiences have led me to this moment in my life where I get to do both. I am grateful for the opportunities that have paved a way to a life at Blair, and I am working to create here a track and field experience that reminds me of my most thrilling moments, and also resembles the exhilaration at Champs.
Caroline Wilson joined the admission office in 2013 after receiving her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. At Williams, Caroline was a member of the varsity swim team, where in addition to being named the NCAA Division III swimmer of the year in 2013, she was a 13-time Division III national champion and a seven-time Division III NCAA national record holder. In addition to working in the admission office and teaching advanced placement psychology at Blair, Caroline coaches the varsity swim team in the winter and the girls’ JV lacrosse team in the spring. She lives in Insley Hall, where she also does dorm duty.
For the Love of Swimming

The relationship that my brother and I had growing up could be likened to that of a dog and his owner. My brother Harrison, three years my senior, was, and still is, my idol. Every memory I have from growing up involves me sticking to his side, demanding participation in his activities, and desperately following in his footsteps—whether he liked it or not. I wanted to do everything he did; play the same games, have the same friends, and wear the same clothes. I never questioned my identity as a female, but I was the tomboy of my class from day one, and it is all his fault.

So, when I saw my super-cool older brother swimming on our country club swim team when I was four, I begged my parents to join the team. However, their lawyer sensibilities were always keen to point out that, in order to join the team, I had to swim a whole lap by myself. A whole lap! No holding the side! No pulling the lane lines! I’d have to practice. So, I spent my final year of preschool taking swim lessons with my best friend, Reed. We worked hard, even accomplishing a jump off the low board with minimal help from a floatation device. The weekend after I turned five, my parents gave me a chance to try out.

I crushed that tryout.

That summer, the summer of 1996, I joined the elite Hartford Golf Club swim team, and I fell in love. I loved the water, I loved the team, and I loved eating candy bars in between events. I was hooked. The following summer, I didn’t hesitate to sign up again, and that summer, I realized I had found my thing. I was pretty good at swimming. Though six-and-unders in our league only got purple participation ribbons, a family friend used to write me special first-place ribbons when I won my heat. On top of all this fame and celebrity, I had a chance to spend even more time with my older brother. I felt like the coolest kid in the world. So when a friend signed up to swim in the winter, my mom signed up my brother and me as well.

That first winter season was my dream come true. I didn’t have to wait until the warm summer months to do something I loved. However, Harrison didn’t feel the same way. After losing a few too many races, he hung up the Speedo and goggles and bought a full set of hockey goalie pads instead. I settled for allowing him to dress me in said pads and shoot hockey pucks at my face in the driveway. It would have to do. Though I was sad he didn’t continue swimming, he led me to my passion and, for that, I am forever grateful.

That winter marked the first of my 13 years of competitive year-round swim seasons. I have been a part of 10 club and school swim...
teams in my life (yes, I am counting the Hartford Golf Club) and each one marks a huge portion in my life. It is an understatement to say that swimming has helped define the person I am today. Swimming was, and remains, my safe haven from the world when I need a giant step back from what is going on.

When I was little, this meant an escape from fulfilling the simple tomboy persona I took on at school. It proved to me that talk and show is nothing if you can’t back it up with hard work and a “ready-to-race” attitude. As an older teen and young adult, it became a two-hour block in the day where I couldn’t do homework, check my phone, or be on Facebook. It was a forced mental break from the stress of school and from the pressures that social media have slowly created for my generation.

Like every other swimmer, or really any lifelong competitive athlete, I couldn’t keep swimming for fun as I grew older. I started to become competitive. I swam to get best times, make special meets, and eventually, to get recruited by a college. I think a competitive attitude is an important trait to have, because it is what forces self-improvement. However, I slowly fell into the trap of swimming because I had to, not because I wanted to. It became that thing I was good at and had to continue for many different reasons. While that isn’t totally negative, the love of the sport definitely got lost in the shuffle time and again.

As I got older, the individual victories and importances became less significant, while the team aspects started to take over. In high school, I experienced winning the New England Championship with my boarding school team and winning a relay title as well. I no longer enjoyed the club teams I had once loved, because fun turned into vicious and unfriendly competition among “friends” to beat one another and get noticed by the top colleges. I craved the winter, when I could swim for the love of my team, represent my school, and accomplish large goals that were unobtainable individually. Hard work on my high school team paid off when I had the chance to go to Williams College, primarily as a swim recruit. Though many of my club friends judged me and teased me for my decision to go to a Division III school while they chose schools like Florida State and Maryland, I know I had the greatest experience in the world.

Swimming in college was the peak and culmination of my swimming career. I loved it more than words could ever describe. Many of my best friends were on the Williams swim team, and we spent endless amounts of time with each other. Those girls and boys got me through many hardships, celebrated the beauty of life with me and never allowed me to even consider the
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idea that I was alone in anything. The group I spent those four years with is the greatest bunch of people I have ever met. Everything I did was for them, and I truly realized the power of being on a team. My mom would argue that I felt this on my first tee ball team at age four, but this was different. Throughout my time, we placed second at NCAAs, broke two NCAA relay records, shattered innumerable school records and had fun along the way. These were my people and, with our coach there to help us, we were able to accomplish great things.

So, to recap, at this point I have gone from swimming as a means of following in my brother’s footsteps, pursuing it to obtain bigger and better goals, and then continuing because I loved being on a team.

After my last swim in college as the anchor leg of the 400-free relay at NCAAs, I stood on the bleachers and cried. No one swims after college; this was it for me. The sport was over. Swimming for the sake of swimming was irrelevant; it was only about how much I loved my team, and now my eligibility had dried up. My brother no longer swam; I couldn’t use the sport to get to a cooler meet or get into grad school, and I was teamless.

When I started working at Blair, I found out there was a club team that used our facilities to train. Young and hungry in the search for more money, I approached the coach of the Jersey Gators one afternoon and asked if I could help coach. He looked me square in the face and said, “I saw you flopping around in the pool the other day. You should swim for me.” My immediate response was, “No way.” I was OLD! Twenty-two to be exact. My friends were done, I was no longer on a team, and I was on my longest break ever taken from the sport (eight months). I couldn’t go back to the pool. It was my past life, and I didn’t love it anymore. I needed to move on—start taking Zumba classes and drinking green smoothies. But Ed continued to ask. He told me he needed me to help the Jersey Gators swim their relay at sectionals. I was fast enough to get them there; otherwise, they had no chance.
One month later, I approached Coach Ed, and told him I would swim from January until March, for three months, and that would be it. One last fling with the sport I had loved, one last chance to help a team, and one last chance to get on the blocks. I was doing it for the other three girls on the relay; I was doing it to help because I am a nice person. I was not doing it for myself.

Then I realized something. I loved swimming. I loved it when I was little, I loved it throughout my middle school and high school years, in college, and I still love it now. There is something about the way I feel in the water, the way I am forced to spend two hours with no one but myself and my thoughts. Something about the way I can always push myself, reach the next step, try to make myself better. And, of course, something about the people. The wonderful people who swam by my side, supported me, made me a better person. Swimming taught me that I should always pursue what I love, because with hard work and determination, there are always loved ones around me who will help me pursue my passions and help me do what I love.

I feel like I have more to write on this subject, but I have to go—it’s time for swim practice.