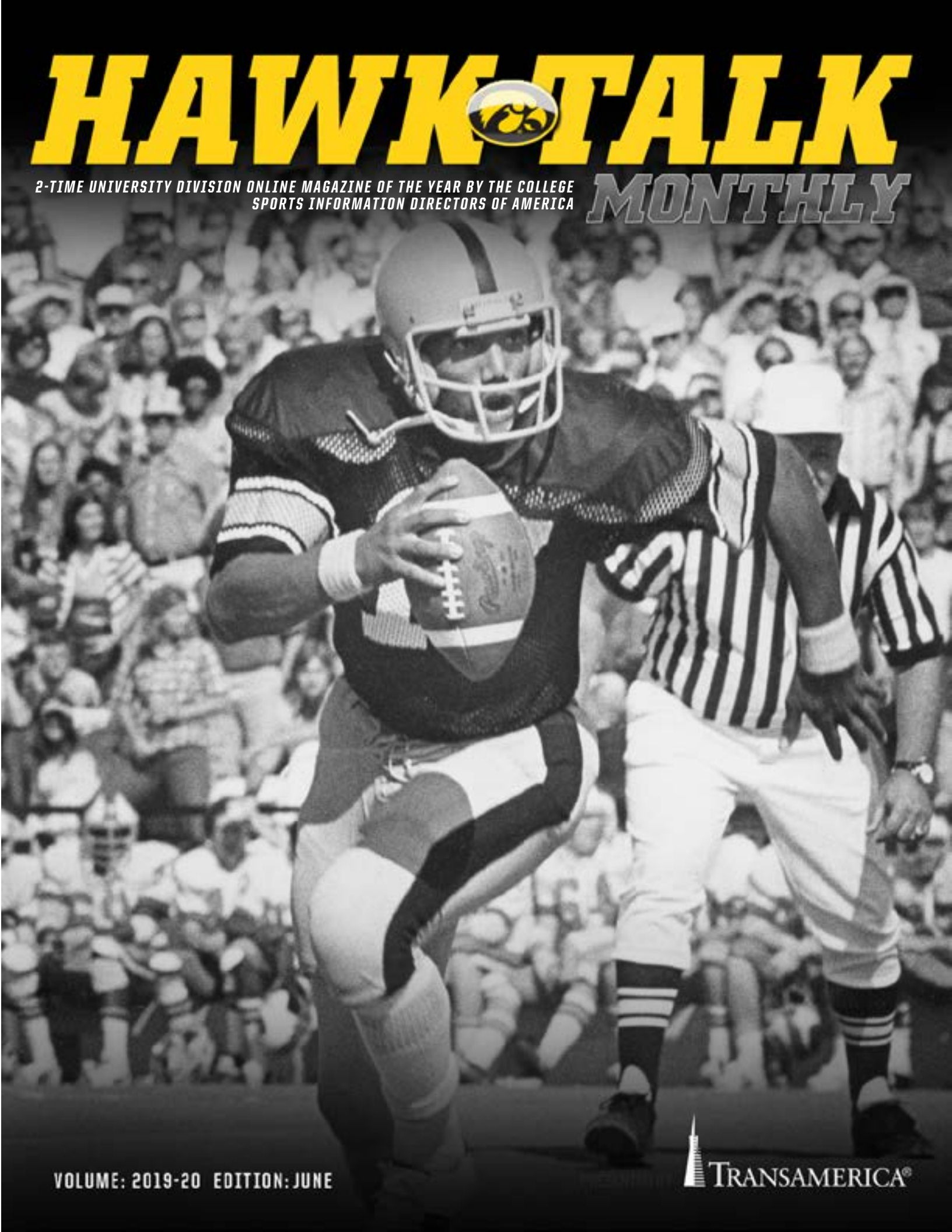
HAWK TALK MONTHLY

2-TIME UNIVERSITY DIVISION ONLINE MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR BY THE COLLEGE SPORTS INFORMATION DIRECTORS OF AMERICA



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On the Cover
James "Butch" Caldwell scrambles from the pocket during his playing days for University of Iowa football in the mid-1970s. On May 16, Caldwell received a bachelor's degree in communication studies with a minor in television and film production.

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BY THE NUMBERS



12,568

Average number of fans who watched the University of Iowa wrestlers compete in seven dates this season in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The NCAA record bettered the previous average dual attendance record of 12,166 set by Iowa in 2015-16

284

University of Iowa senior guard Jordan Bohannon was granted a medical hardship waiver by the Big Ten Conference, giving him a fifth year of eligibility. Bohannon holds the Iowa career record with 284 3-point field goals.





5

Big Ten Conference Athletes of the Year from the University of Iowa during the 2019-20 season. They are Spencer Lee (wrestling), Luka Garza (men's basketball), Kathleen Doyle (women's basketball), Wayne Lawrence (men's track and field), and Laulauga Tausaga (women's track and field).



69

Number of University of Iowa student-athletes named to the 2019-20 Big Ten Winter Academic All-Conference team. The list includes student-athletes from men's basketball (four), women's basketball (eight), men's gymnastics (six), women's gymnastics (10), men's swimming and diving (11), women's swimming and diving (13), and wrestling (17).



11

Eleven University of Iowa athletics teams posted perfect single-year NCAA Academic Progress Rate scores for the 2018-19 academic year. The sports are men's cross country, men's gymnastics, men's tennis, women's basketball, women's cross country, rowing, field hockey, women's golf, women's gymnastics, women's soccer, and women's tennis.



43

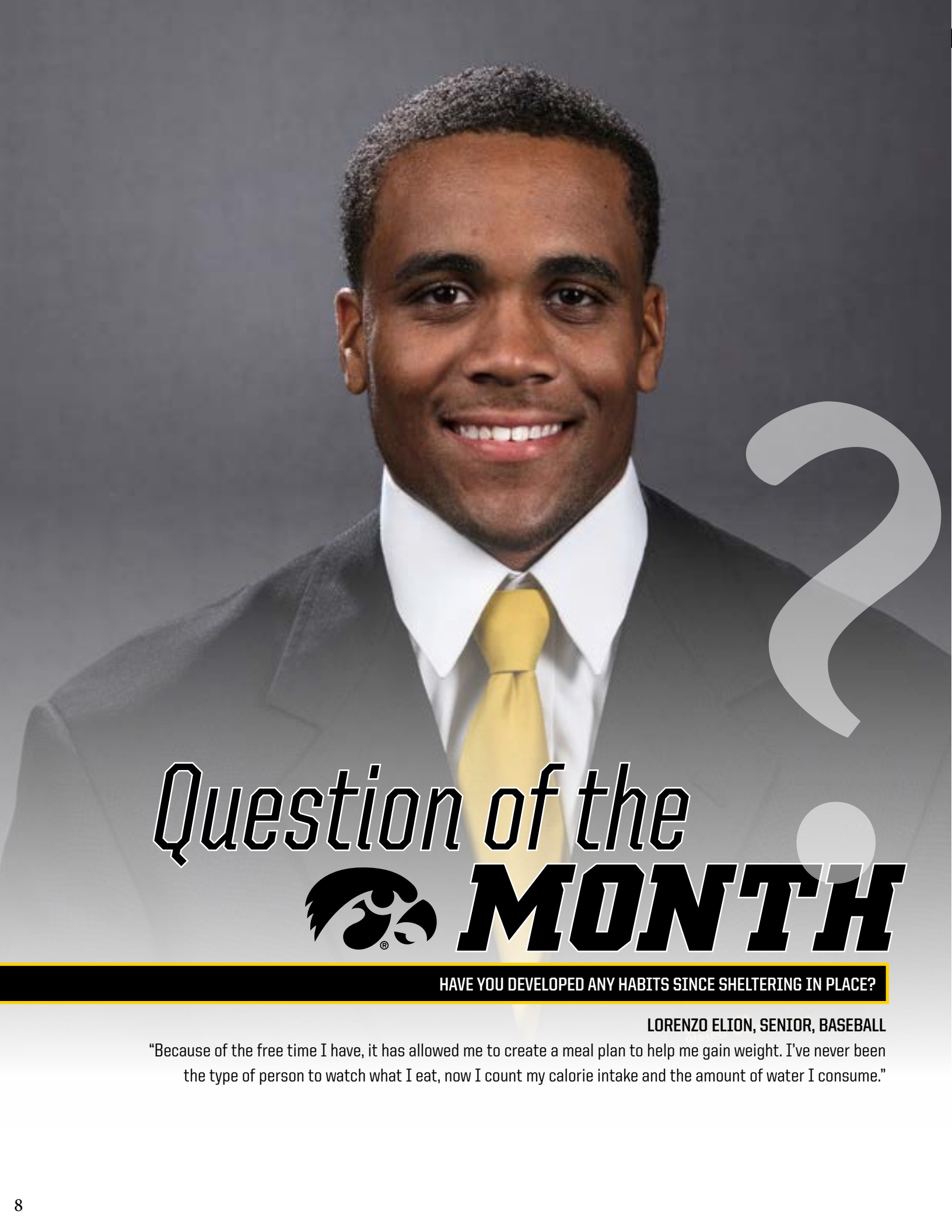
Forty-three years later, former University of Iowa quarterback Butch Caldwell returned to earn his degree in communication studies with a minor in television and film production.



FIGHT FOR IOWA



Iowa Stadium in 1931, two years after it was built. Iowa Stadium would be renamed Kinnick Stadium in 1972.



Question of the MONTH

HAVE YOU DEVELOPED ANY HABITS SINCE SHELTERING IN PLACE?

LORENZO ELION, SENIOR, BASEBALL

"Because of the free time I have, it has allowed me to create a meal plan to help me gain weight. I've never been the type of person to watch what I eat, now I count my calorie intake and the amount of water I consume."



KATE CLAYPOOL, SOPHOMORE, SOFTBALL

"Creating my own workouts and branching out to do different activities and exercises in order to stay active and continue progressing in the growth I made this semester. It has required creativity in working with the resources I have at home."



DEJUAN FRYE, SENIOR, MEN'S TRACK AND FIELD

"I have been coloring a lot. It is easy to pass the time."



ELISE VAN HEUVELEN TREADWELL, SENIOR, WOMEN'S TENNIS

"I have being working out and practicing when possible, but some new things I've been doing include yoga, listening to podcasts and finding interesting books to read. Definitely a good time for some self-reflection, too."



OLIVER OKONKWO, SOPHOMORE, MEN'S TENNIS

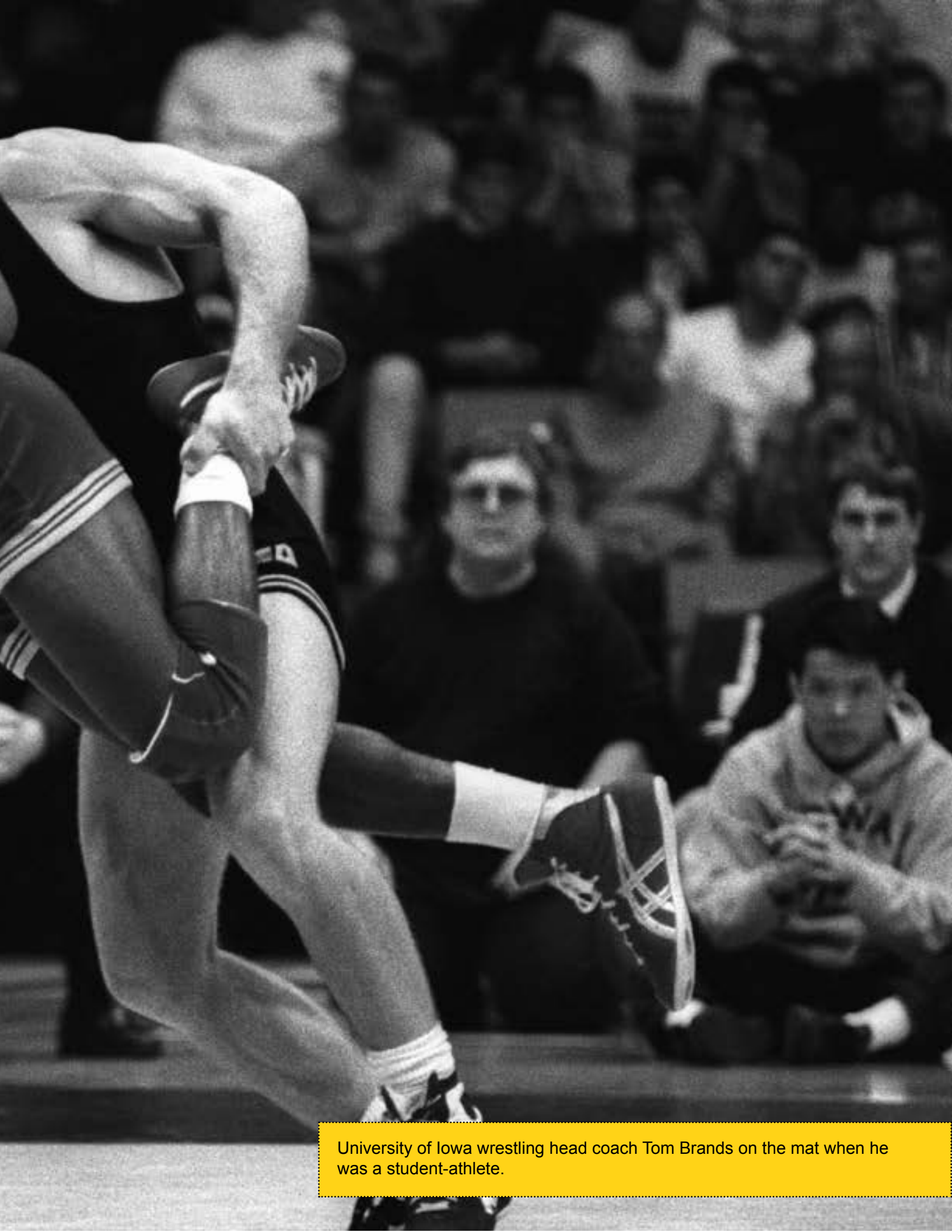
"I've been cooking a lot more, which has been fun. I also started to read books, which I've never really been known to do, but I am enjoying it."



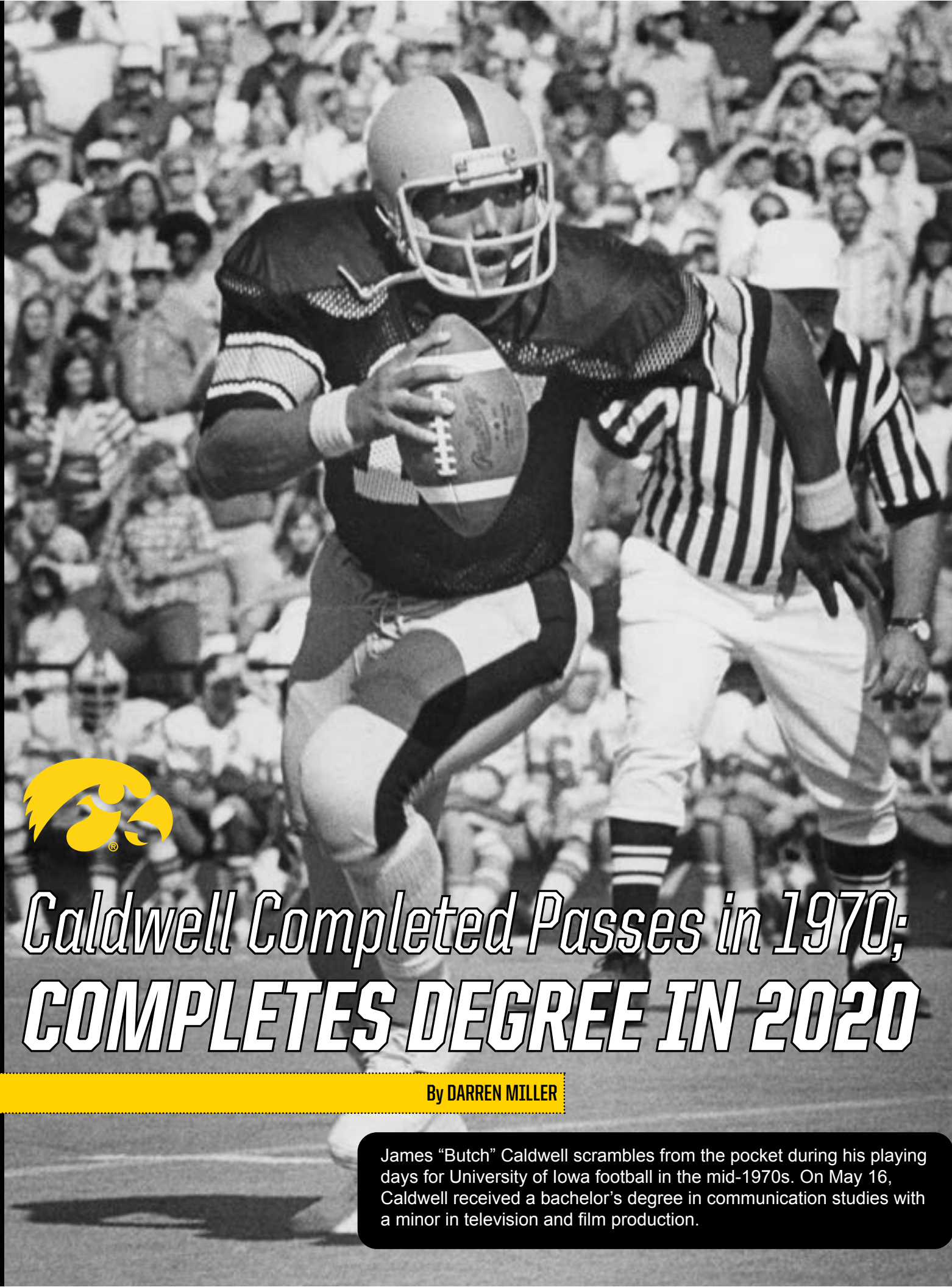
LILLY GENTZKOW, FRESHMAN, WOMEN'S GOLF

"I go on multiple walks a day and my sister and I go for a bike ride every afternoon."


FIGHT FOR IOWA



University of Iowa wrestling head coach Tom Brands on the mat when he was a student-athlete.



Caldwell Completed Passes in 1970; COMPLETES DEGREE IN 2020

By DARREN MILLER

James “Butch” Caldwell scrambles from the pocket during his playing days for University of Iowa football in the mid-1970s. On May 16, Caldwell received a bachelor’s degree in communication studies with a minor in television and film production.

Butch Caldwell seemingly had it all.

The dual-threat quarterback from Dayton, Ohio, possessed a strong throwing arm, legs that could zig-zag around defenders, and a durability to thrive in the 1970s when the sport was, well, hard-hitting, hammering football.

Yes, Caldwell seemingly had it all. He had the fame that comes with being most valuable player on the 1976 University of Iowa football team, a recognition derived from 616 passing yards, three passing touchdowns, 389 rushing yards, and four more scores on the ground.

But Caldwell lacked one thing. It was absent in the spring of 1977 when he should have walked across the stage at commencement, and it remained missing until May 16, 2020. That is the day Caldwell will receive a diploma in communication studies with a minor in television and film production — 43 years after his original expected graduation date.

"This is very rewarding," Caldwell said. "I had tears in my eyes. This makes me appreciate what I didn't appreciate before. It is gratifying, and I was looking forward to going across that stage."

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, Caldwell will not get to clutch his diploma, shake hands with an academic dignitary, or pose for photos on stage in cap and gown. Always the optimist, he looks at it as another brush with history.

"I was one of the first African-American quarterbacks to start at a major university," he said. "And I'm in the first class to graduate that didn't get to march because of the coronavirus. I will make history again."

In Caldwell's first tour as a University of Iowa student-athlete from 1972-77, he pursued a degree in general studies, which did not require a foreign language. Iowa no longer offers that degree, so in order to major in communication studies, Caldwell needed to complete an additional 35 semester hours — including four Spanish courses. He will take two Spanish classes this summer before he officially has a degree.

Things have evolved in academia since Caldwell enrolled at Iowa in 1972.

"I feel like Fred Flintstone visiting George Jetson," he said.

From Bedrock to Orbit City, this is how Caldwell made it from his home in Dayton, Ohio, to Iowa City, Iowa, in 1972. He was among the most coveted high school recruits in the nation and narrowed his choices to Michigan, Ohio State, Southern California, Tennessee, and Iowa. The Hawkeyes were coming off a 1-10 season in 1971, the first under head coach Frank Lauterbur. Caldwell knew freshmen were eligible to play varsity football for the first time beginning in 1972, but Bo Schembechler at Michigan, Woody Hayes at Ohio State, and John McKay at Southern California, weren't interested in throwing a rookie into the fire of major college football.

Iowa assistant coach Jack Harbaugh recruited Caldwell.

"Jack Harbaugh promised he would do the best he could to get me on the field right away," Caldwell said. "That's all I needed. He said, 'If you're good enough to start, you will be starting.'"

In Iowa's fourth game of the 1972 season, Caldwell saw action at quarterback against Purdue. When his career ended in 1976 (he missed the 1974 season when he had his appendix removed), Caldwell had thrown for 1,651 yards and seven touchdowns and run for 1,061 yards and 12 touchdowns.

A highlight of his senior season came at No. 11 Penn State. He carried the ball on three of the first four plays — and 17 times in the game — as Iowa won, 7-6.

"Everyone told us we were going to get stomped," Caldwell said. "We went up there and they carried me off the field: It was either bootlegs, option or I had to scramble. I was so tired, drained, and couldn't move. It was a big win."

In his final game, Iowa crushed Michigan State, 30-17. It was the Hawkeyes' first win at Spartan Stadium since 1960.

After the season, Caldwell signed a free agent contract with the Baltimore Colts, but tore a hamstring on a kickoff return. He tried playing in Canada but returned to the United States and signed as an undrafted free agent with the San Francisco 49ers. Another torn hamstring ended his professional career.

Caldwell spent more than 30 years coaching high school football and girls' track and field. He also worked several football camps where he preached faith, family, education, and sports -- in that order. After years delivering that sermon, Caldwell looked in a mirror and wasn't satisfied with the reflection.

"I was a hypocrite," he said. "Here I am telling these kids about their education when I needed to do something about mine."

For more than 25 years Caldwell thought of returning to Iowa to finish his degree. Then one October at a Hawkeye football game, he broached the subject with Andy Piro, executive director of the Varsity Club. Piro put Caldwell in touch with Liz Tovar, who as associate athletics director, Student-Athlete Academic Services, oversees Iowa's Degree Completion Program. After filling out a few forms, Caldwell was ready to again become a student.

Caldwell was living on a fixed income through social security and looking for housing in Iowa City. Nothing came open for two weeks, so he bounced from hotel room to hotel room and even bunked in the back seat of his car. Iowa head football coach Kirk Ferentz and Ben Hansen, assistant director of football operations, called another former Hawkeye, Mitch King, who hooked Caldwell up with a place to live.

"That shows you that once a Hawk, always a Hawk," Caldwell said. "I have always said that Iowa has the best fans and the most generous people I have met in my life and I have been all over the world. I love it here and I love the people."

Tovar calls Caldwell's situation a unique, special story. She said it proves it is never too late to earn your college diploma and that Iowa's Degree Completion Program is open to any former Hawkeye who wants to return.

"We are committed to student-athlete success regardless of how long you have been removed from the University of Iowa," Tovar said. "Butch comes into our building, has a backpack on and he is ready to go to a tutorial session. My goal is that more former student-athletes will reach out to our office in the event we can help them complete their degree."

Life won't change much for Caldwell after receiving the diploma and he isn't sure about accepting a fulltime job. After all, there are grandchildren and great grandchildren to spoil. But first, there will be a family party for the 66-year-old graduate.

"They're more excited about it than I am," Caldwell said.

It is frosting on the cake for a guy who has it all.

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Mueller Humbled By HANCHER-FINKBINE MEDALLION

By DARREN MILLER

University of Iowa junior Marissa Mueller is thought to be the first Hawkeye female student-athlete to receive the Hancher-Finkbine Medallion, which was established in 1964. (Photo by Darren Miller)

Marissa Mueller is driven by the notion that she knows very little.

Those are her words. Socrates beat her to that line more than 2,000 years ago when he said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing."

Mueller concurs. The University of Iowa junior's grade-point average, which is above 4.0 on a 4.0 scale, suggests otherwise. But the idea of being a speck of dust in a galaxy of knowledge sharpens Mueller's mental pencil. Her educational mission is to be a knowledge-sponge.

"The biggest thing I have learned at Iowa is how little I know," said Mueller, who is pursuing a degree in biomedical engineering/pre-medicine. "There is so much out there and every day I get a new sense of respect for all those people with so much expertise in their fields. It is the same in athletics and academics."

Mueller, a native of Petrolia, Ontario, Canada, is also a member of the Hawkeye track and field program where she throws javelin. On April 22, she became one of two University of Iowa undergraduate students to receive a Hancher-Finkbine Medallion and is thought to be the first female student-athlete to receive the award in school history.

The Hancher-Finkbine Medallion, established in 1964, acknowledges four students, one professor, one staff member, and one alumnus each year. It is the pinnacle campus-wide award recognizing learning, leadership, and loyalty.

"I'm very honored and humbled," Mueller said. "Thanks goes to my coaches, the Honors Program, Iowa Center for Research by Undergraduates, Department of Biomedical Engineering, and my research mentor, Dr. Laura Frey-Law."

Keeping it simple

Mueller had an idea she was nominated for a Hancher-Finkbine Medallion after speaking at a Faculty Senate meeting in the Old Capitol Building in December. Mueller and University of Iowa men's tennis player Jason Kerst briefed the group on student-athlete graduation rates and explained how thankful they are for a job well done by Student-Athlete Academic Services.

Once Mueller and Kerst opened for questions from the floor, she recognized several engineering professors.

One of her favorites, Dr. David Wilder, spoke.

"He looked right at me and said, 'The hallmark of a good engineer is to be able to explain highly technical concepts in simplified terms," Mueller recalls Wilder saying. "As an aspiring engineer, I want you to explain the bio-mechanics behind the javelin throw.'"

In hindsight, Mueller wished she would have used a really simplified term, Grip and Rip. Instead, after gathering herself, she quoted a Princeton study and followed that by physically demonstrating how to throw a javelin, complete with mock run-up.

Mueller's response was well-received, and she accepted many kudos from faculty. A week passed and she was summoned to Wilder's office.

"He said they wanted to nominate me for the Hancher-Finkbine Medallion," Mueller said. "He was very deliberate when he asked that question (in the Old Capitol Building). There was a message behind it, and I was completely shocked."

You ought to give Iowa a try

The roots to why and how Mueller ended up at the University of Iowa were planted when she was 9 or 10 years old. She just didn't realize it at the time.

The local high school was performing The Music Man, written by Meredith Willson, who was born in Mason City, Iowa. The cast for the musical required an elementary student to play Windthrop, and Mueller got the part. Her only line was:

You really ought to give Iowa, Hawkeye Iowa, ought to give Iowa a try.

"I thought nothing of it at the time," Mueller said.

Until she came to Iowa City on a recruiting visit.

A fluke, but the best kind of fluke

Mueller received a recruiting pitch from Andrew Dubs, Iowa's throws coach at the time. She looked for Iowa on a map, studied up on the NCAA and Big Ten Conference, and set a date to visit.

"I had never heard of the NCAA. I had never heard of the Big Ten," Mueller said. "I did well in my high school season for track and field and started getting calls from coaches. I did not know you could get support to study and compete in sports."

A surgeon friend of Mueller's father, Peter, had a connection to a surgeon in Iowa. She was blown away by Iowa's engineering program and was amazed by the collaborations between the university and the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

And did she notice Hawkeye pride. On her official visit, Mueller attended a football game and heard a Go Hawks! cheer. It was what she called a "light bulb-went-on-moment."

"Oh my gosh, this is Hawkeye Iowa they were talking about in The Music Man," Mueller said. "It was really a fluke (how I got to Iowa), but the best type of fluke that could happen."

'I was supposed to be at Iowa'

Like her quest for knowledge in the classroom, Mueller's understanding of Hawkeye pride is ongoing.

"I still feel I don't fully understand what that means, because it is something so special that you can't describe unless you are here and experience it in person," she said.

Mueller knows it sounds cliché, but after she toured campus, saw the athletic facilities, met director of track and field Joey Woody (who she says is "absolutely fantastic"), visited the Gerdin Learning Center…

"I knew I was supposed to be at Iowa," she said.

Mueller the javelin thrower

The javelin is contested during the outdoor portion of the track and field season and the 2019 season for Mueller was cut short because of injury. She competed at the Big Ten Championships on May 10 in Iowa City and set a personal record by placing seventh with a throw of 47.02 meters (154-feet, 3-inches).

Mueller was healthy and feeling well this March as she completed a routine weight workout. Then there was a notification on a teammate's watch: the outdoor season had been canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The whole weight room went quiet. It was like a giant rock had been thrown at all of us and I felt a lump sink into my chest," Mueller said.



"We finished the workout, but it was the weirdest workout I have ever experienced.

"It lights a fire under you to get ready for senior season (in 2021) more than ever."

Mueller eyes MD-PhD program after Iowa

As the Hancher-Finkbine Medallion indicates, Mueller is much more than a javelin thrower. She has scaled back her academic workload for the next two semesters because she was supposed to be competing in track and field this spring and when time permits, studying for the Medical College Admission Test.

Mueller wants to enroll in an MD-PhD program where she could eventually earn both a PhD and a medical degree. She finished application letters April 27.

"It is a lot of time, but I love the research and I love the medicine side of things," said Mueller, who would like to be a physician scientist. "I can't see myself doing one without the other. Once I get into medical school, I will be exposed to areas I have never heard of. Right now, I like cardiology, neuroscience, orthopedics, and sports medicine."

Mueller is not in a rush to pin down a medical specialty, she won't know for certain until she has completed a couple years of medical school. Until then, Mueller will continue in the role of a knowledge-sponge that has served her well as a student-athlete at the University of Iowa.

A student-athlete who is driven by the fact she knows very little.



5 More Hawkeyes DRAFTED INTO THE NFL

By DARREN MILLER

University of Iowa defensive back Geno Stone prepares to face Southern California in the Holiday Bowl on Dec. 27, 2019. (Photo by Brian Ray)

The family tree of Phil Parker-coached defensive backs in the NFL grew during the most recent draft April 23-25.

Already entrenched in the league are Micah Hyde (Bills), Desmond King (Chargers), Josh Jackson (Packers), and Amani Hooker (Titans). In the 2020 NFL Draft, Michael Ojemudia was selected by the Broncos in the third round and Geno Stone followed to the Ravens in the seventh round.

"It was a long three days waiting for that call, but when it comes, I let all my emotions out," Stone said. "It was a dream come true."

Five Hawkeyes were selected in the 2020 NFL Draft. Iowa has had at least one player drafted in every NFL Draft since 1978, including 10 first round selections. Entering 2020, Iowa has 17 consecutive draft choices remaining in the NFL, second only to Michigan's 19.

"Coach Parker produces guys every year, it doesn't matter how high of a rating they are coming out of high school," Stone said. "We all appreciate it. Coach Parker's impact will help me going to the NFL. I'm going to use everything he taught me in the NFL and prepare the way I did at Iowa."

No. 16 Iowa won its final four games to finish 10-3 in 2019. Stone was third on the team with 70 tackles. He also had four pass breakups and three forced fumbles. The Hawkeyes were fourth among FBS schools in scoring defense (14 points per game) and 12th in total defense (308.2 yards per game).

A season highlight for Stone was knocking off Southern California, 49-24, on Dec. 27, 2019, in the Holiday Bowl. He made five tackles with a breakup and forced fumble.

"It was my last game in a Hawkeye uniform, and we played well as a unit," Stone said. "We played great on special teams, defense, and offense. It was one of the games where we hit on every cylinder and couldn't be stopped."

Iowa's 2020 NFL Draft total is the most since six Hawkeyes were taken in back-to-back-to-back seasons from 2010-12.

"To have five guys drafted is a special moment," Iowa football head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "It's a neat summation of their college careers and the opening of a new chapter."



University of Iowa defensive back Geno Stone breaks up a pass in the Holiday Bowl on Dec. 27, 2019, in San Diego Community Credit Union Stadium. (Photo by Max Allen)

HERE IS A RUNDOWN OF THIS YEAR'S DRAFT PICKS FROM IOWA:

NAME	ROUND	PICK	POS	TEAM
TRISTAN WIRFS	1	13	OL	TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

Iowa has had eight offensive linemen selected in the NFL Draft in the last decade and 18 during the Ferentz era. Wirfs will rejoin Hawkeye teammate Anthony Nelson, who is in his second season with Tampa Bay. Wirfs and Nelson played together in Raymond James Stadium on Jan. 1, 2019, when Iowa defeated Mississippi State, 27-22, in the Outback Bowl.

A.J. EPENESA	2	54	DE	BUFFALO BILLS

Iowa has had 13 defensive linemen selected in the NFL Draft during the Ferentz era. Four, including Epenesa, Adrian Clayborn, Kenny Iwebema, and Matt Roth, were defensive ends. Epenesa joins three other Hawkeyes who are on Buffalo's active roster: guard Ike Boettger, wide receiver Nick Easley, and strong safety Micah Hyde.

MICHAEL OJEMUDIA	3	77	DB	DENVER BRONCOS

Iowa has had a defensive back selected in four consecutive drafts: Desmond King (San Diego, 2017), Josh Jackson (Green Bay, 2018), and Amani Hooker (Tennessee, 2019). Ojemudia is the 15th defensive back selected in the Ferentz era.

The 2020 NFL Draft marks the third straight year Denver has drafted a Hawkeye. Linebacker Josey Jewell was a fourth round selection in 2017 and tight end Noah Fant was the 20th selection in the first round a year ago.

GENO STONE	7	219	DB	BALTIMORE RAVENS

Baltimore selected Hawkeyes in the 2015 (Carl Davis, third round) and 2007 (Marshal Yanda, third round) NFL Drafts. It is the first time two Iowa defensive backs have been drafted since 2012 when Shaun Prater went to Cincinnati in the fifth round and Jordan Bernstein went to Washington in the seventh round.

NATE STANLEY	7	244	QB	MINNESOTA VIKINGS

Stanley is the third quarterback selected in the Ferentz era, joining Ricky Stanzi (2011) and C.J. Beathard (2017). The last time the Vikings chose a Hawkeye in the NFL Draft was 2017 when they picked Jaleel Johnson in the fourth round. Stanley joins former Hawkeyes Riley Reiff and Johnson on the Vikings' roster.

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A Great START

By JAMES ALLAN

University of Iowa freshman Peyton Williams led all Big Ten Conference freshmen with 16 RBIs during the shortened 2020 season. (Photo by Stephen Mally)

A 15-game sample was the extent of Peyton Williams' freshman season with the University of Iowa baseball team. It was enough for the first baseman to showcase his potential.

Williams started all 15 games for a Hawkeye team that went 10-5 during the 2020 season. Batting in the middle of the lineup, Williams hit .298 with 16 RBIs and 13 runs. His seven extra base hits included two home runs, four doubles, and one triple. He tied for fifth in the Big Ten in RBIs and was the top freshman run producer in the conference.

"Peyton was off to a great start," said Iowa head coach Rick Heller. "He was giving us better at-bats every game, and that's what we liked from Peyton from day one. He is a hitter that makes adjustments pitch-to-pitch and at-bat to at-bat, which is one of the keys to being a great hitter.

"What was evident to anyone who watched us play the first 15 games is how well he was adjusting to how teams were trying to attack him."

Williams' path to the starting lineup was what Heller envisioned when he received a verbal commitment from Williams as a sophomore at Johnston (Iowa) High School.

"We felt Peyton was the type of player that could come in and make an immediate impact in the middle of the lineup as a freshman and do a good job at first base," said Heller. "He didn't disappoint."

Baseball has long been Williams' favorite sport. He started when he was 5 or 6 years old when he played with older kids because his age group didn't have organized baseball. His love for sports grew, thanks to his father, David.

"No matter what it was, he was there with me outside shooting hoops or going to toss to me in a run-down batting cage where he got hit too many times," said Williams. "He was always trying to help."

Williams grew into a three-sport star at Johnston. He was a three-year starter in football, earning two second-team all-conference honors at tight end, and he was a two-time all-conference and a third-team all-state basketball player as a senior.

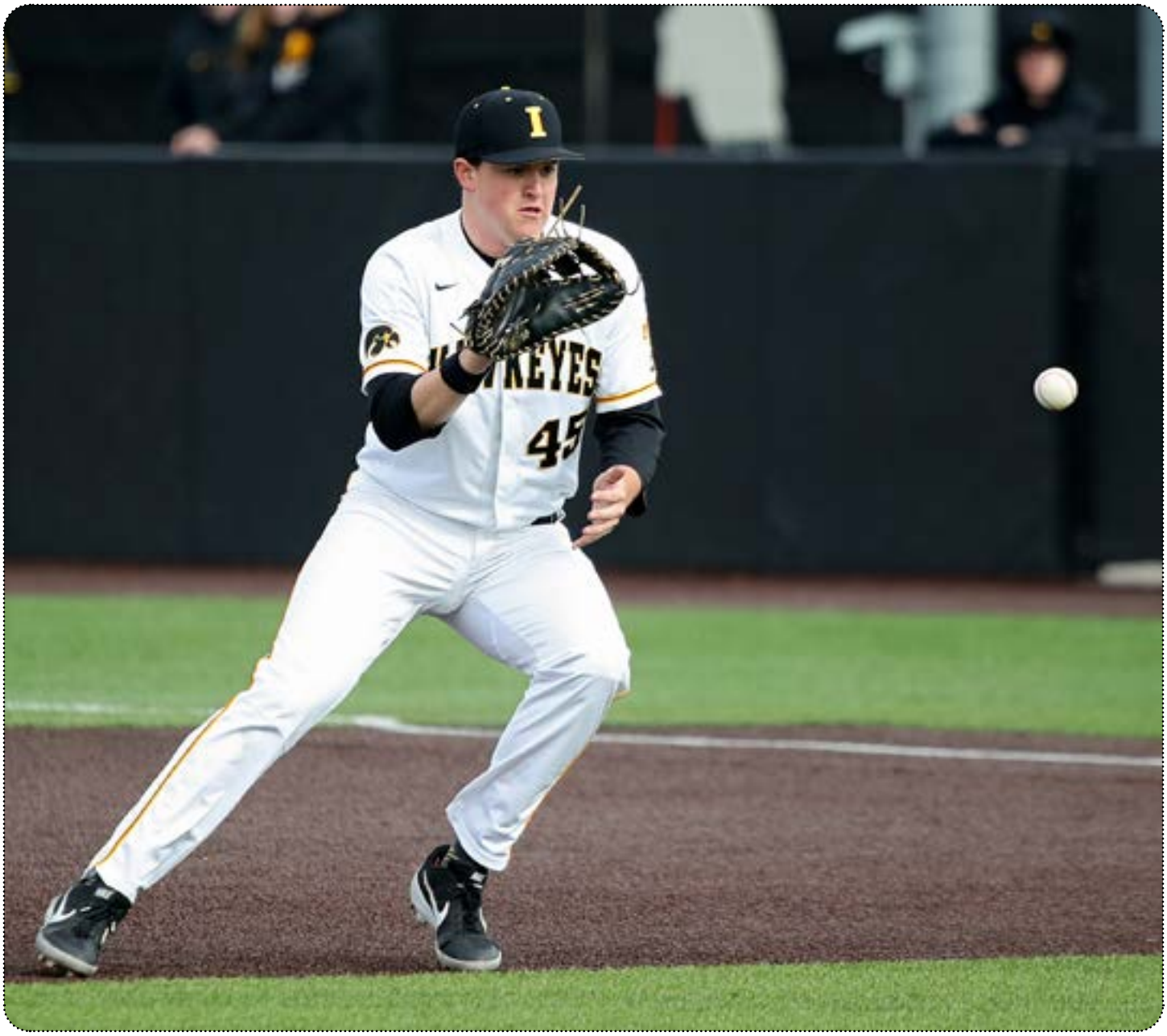
It was on the baseball diamond where Williams really made his mark. As a senior, he was the Iowa High School Baseball Coaches Association and Iowa Prep Baseball Report Player of the Year after hitting .473 with 17 doubles, 57 RBIs, and a state-best 16 home runs.

Williams finished his career as a two-time IHSBCA Super Team, three-time first-team all-state and all-district, and a four-time all-conference selection. He became the sixth player in 4A history to surpass 200 career hits and he finished his prep career as Johnston's career leader in runs, hits, doubles, home runs, and RBIs.

"To commit a first baseman as a sophomore, you don't see that a lot, but we felt he was special," said Heller. "The fact he played three sports, we felt he would grow athletically. He is one of those kids like (former Hawkeye) Jake Adams, where he was hitting home runs at 9-10 years old."

Williams used the football and basketball seasons to refine skills for baseball.

"They helped develop specific skills that sometimes baseball doesn't focus on," said Williams. "In basketball, you focus on quickness and defensively, you don't focus on being quick in baseball, but developing that quickness in basketball helps when you're playing defense.



"Football is a game where it takes mental toughness to power through small injuries and it takes a lot of strength. That translates over to baseball."

Baseball came naturally to Williams, and he has a drive to be the best.

"(Baseball) is something I wanted to get better at," said Williams. "It's a sport that when you grow up in Iowa, you don't get that much exposure because we play high school ball in the summer.

"I always wanted to make my name known and get out there. I wanted to get better so people had to notice me."

It's that drive that has Heller excited about Williams' future.

"When you have that type of attitude to improve daily when you come to practice, the sky is the limit," said Heller. "I wouldn't put a cap on what Peyton can do in his career."

Williams was riding an 11-game hitting streak when the Hawkeyes' season was canceled on March 12 by the global coronavirus pandemic.

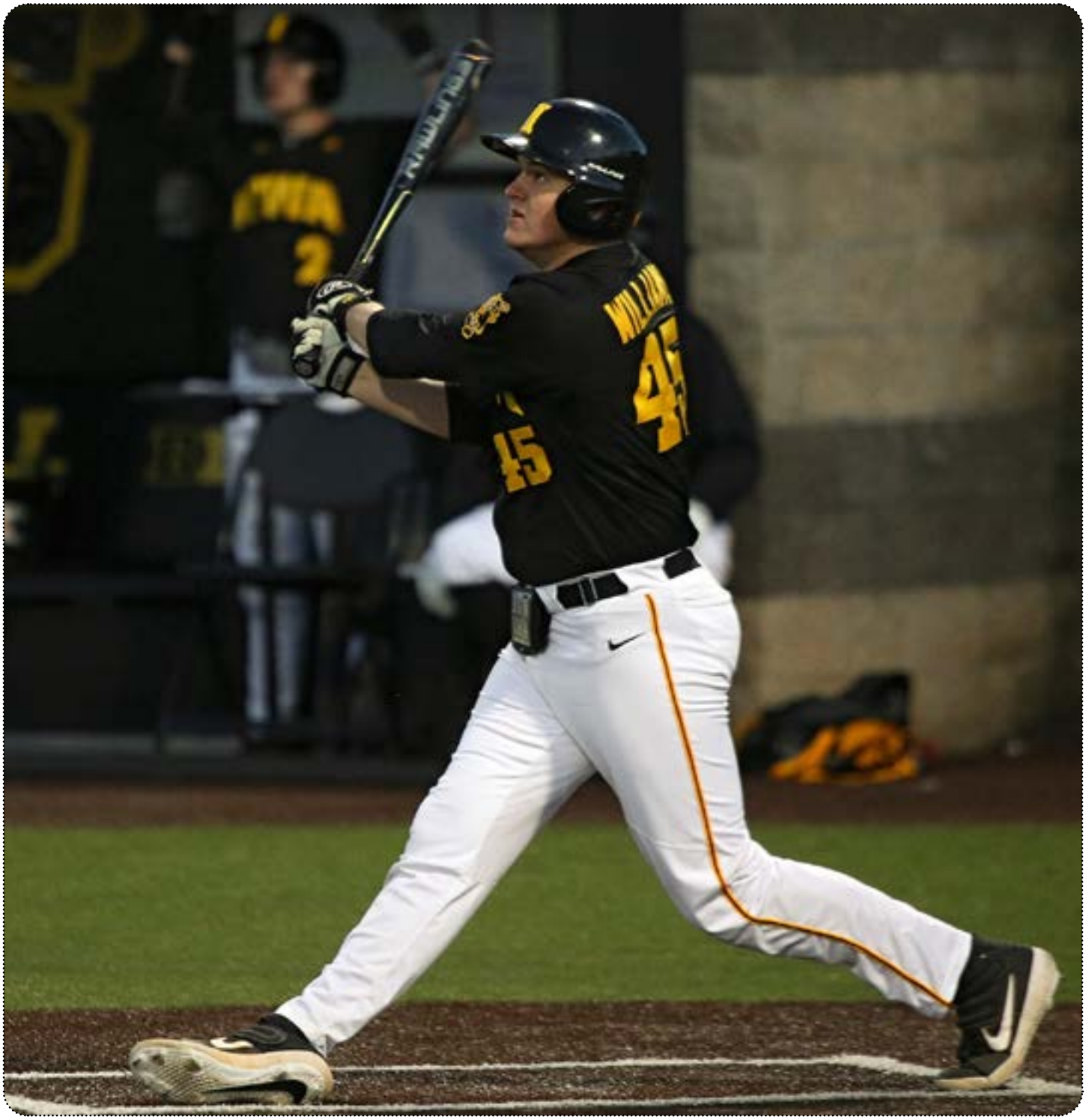
"It's disappointing he didn't get a chance to finish 56 games this year and go into the summer with a wooden bat and go through that experience," said

Heller. "That was the road map, it has changed, but I know he is going to put the work in.

"Peyton worked hard in the weight room on his body (this past year), was becoming more flexible, and he's a big guy that can run. He will attack all those things equally, and when you get a guy like that, the sky is the limit."

The Hawkeyes experienced success in Williams' first 15 games, posting three wins against ranked opponents. He wants the team to use the 2020 successes and the disappointment of the lost season as a launching point toward 2021.

"I want our success to motivate us that it is possible to be that good," said Williams.





Elation Then DEVASTATION

By JAMES ALLAN

University of Iowa junior Kelsey Drake broke a school record in the 200-yard butterfly at the Big Ten Championships with a time that qualified for the NCAA Championships. Drake never got the chance to swim at the NCAA meet. (Photo by Stephen Mally)

That describes how Kelsey Drake capped her junior season with the University of Iowa swimming and diving team.

First came the elation when Drake achieved a life-long goal at the Big Ten Championships on Feb. 19 at the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center. Drake swam a career best in the 200-yard butterfly to set a school record and post a strong time toward qualifying for the NCAA Championships.

She started the night swimming the butterfly on the 200-medley relay. Then she watched and fed off the energy from the 800-free relay that placed fourth.

"I had the fastest split I have ever had in the 50 fly," said Drake. "I knew that was a good sign for the rest of the meet and I was excited to get up and race later that night. I tried not to think about the race too much because I freak myself out. Getting on the block, I tried to relax and enjoy the moment."

What followed was Drake's time trial where she posted a career-best and Iowa school-record 1:55.89, shattering her previous school record of 1:57.87. It was a time the coaches felt confident would get Drake into the NCAA Championships for the first time.

"I was surprised and happy," said Drake. "I put in all that work for so long and that was my goal in swimming since I was an age-group swimmer. I knew that's what I wanted to achieve and getting to that point was amazing. I was on cloud nine."

Fast forward a month when devastation ensued.

Drake was preparing to travel to Athens, Georgia, to compete in her first NCAA Championships. The week before she departed, things at the national level started going haywire.

College basketball tournaments were canceled. Then came news from the NCAA — all championships and spring events were canceled.

"I was on the phone with my mom," said Drake. "We were talking about (how the tournaments got canceled) and she had the news on when a reporter announced it on television. I was on my way to get dinner and I broke down."

Drake's season was over because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I had no idea how big it was going to get and how fast everything was going to shut down," said Drake. "I was devastated, and the next couple of days I was trying to get over the news and come to terms with it.

"Even though I knew it was for the better and it was what needed to happen, it is hard to know that I worked so hard for this and it was taken away."

Drake was heartbroken for her Hawkeye teammates, especially senior Hannah Burvill, who was set to close her career at the NCAA Championships.

"We talked and hung out that night," said Drake. "(Hannah) didn't know Big Tens would be her last meet as a Hawkeye. It was sad not being able to end the season the way we wanted."

Barring something unforeseen, Drake is motivated that she will have another chance to qualify next year. Five of Iowa's six NCAA qualifiers — Drake, Sam Tamborski, Anze Fers Erzen, Daniel Swanepoel, and Mohamed Neuman — will have a chance to earn NCAA berths during the 2020-21 season.

"I am ready to get back into the pool to start training and get ready for that," said Drake. "I know we have a hopeful future in this program, and I am excited to be back in the pool with my teammates to build on the progress we have made."



Leaping to the NEXT LEVEL

By **DARREN MILLER**

University of Iowa senior Will Daniels competes in the heptathlon hurdles at the Big Ten Indoor Track and Field Championships on Feb. 29 at the SPIRE Institute in Geneva, Ohio. (Photo by Darren Miller)

Will Daniels is a jumper.

High, long, triple; he put an emphasis on field as a member of Geneseo (Illinois) High School track and field teams from 2013-16.

After placing second in the long jump, third in the high jump, and 10th in the triple jump at the Illinois High School Class 2A State Championships as a senior, Daniels leaped to the next level at Division III Central College in Pella, Iowa. There, he ventured onto the track, added a few more field events to his repertoire and became the best multi-event performer in the nation.

Three times he was national champion — twice in the indoor heptathlon (2018, 2019) and once in the decathlon (2019). Daniels also excelled in the classroom, graduating in three years with a 3.98 grade-point average and a degree in biology. He received the American Rivers Conference Duane Schroeder Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year for 2018-19.

"From an athletic standpoint, I felt I exceeded any expectations I had coming into Central," Daniels said. "That speaks highly of the coaches there who took me from where I was out of high school — which was pretty under-developed, especially as a multi-event athlete — and transformed who I was as an athlete."

Another year at Central wouldn't have done much for Daniels in the classroom, either. He could pursue a minor or more clinical experience, but in the end, he decided on graduate school.

"Going to a new place and getting brand new experiences was what I wanted to do instead of diversifying at Central," Daniels said.

Daniels received plenty of encouragement at home to attend the University of Iowa. His father graduated from the University of Iowa School of Dentistry. Other University of Iowa alumni in the family included an aunt, uncle, cousins, and brother. Iowa also had a small, specialized master's program that interested him: clinical exercise physiology in the health and human physiology department.

An added bonus — the Hawkeye men's track and field team was also coming off a 2019 Big Ten outdoor championship, but it did not score points in the decathlon.

During his junior season at Central, Daniels reached out to Joey Woody, Iowa director of track and field. That was before Daniels won his second consecutive Division III NCAA heptathlon championship with 5,418 points. When athletes moved outdoors, he added a national decathlon championship by scoring 7,427 points.

"Will brought great athleticism that we are always looking for," Woody said. "He has a great demeanor; he's dialed in and focused. He is locked in with what he is trying to do and is a very down-to-earth-type of kid."

In his first heptathlon as a Hawkeye — the Frank Sevigne Husker Invitational on Feb. 7-8 in Lincoln, Nebraska — Daniels won the event with a school-record 5,689 points. Over the course of the seven events, Daniels won the 60-meter dash, long jump, and high jump.

"I was super-excited — a huge overall PR, broke the school record and that score ended up qualifying for nationals," Daniels said. "That was probably the best individual performance I have ever had."

Daniels returned to a familiar venue three weeks after his record-setting meet for the Big Ten Indoor Championships at SPIRE Institute in Geneva, Ohio. He competed on the outdoor facilities there for the 2017 and 2019 NCAA Division III National Championships.

Daniels opened by winning the 60-meter dash in 6.87 seconds. He was third in the shot put and pole vault and with 5,639 points, finished runner-up to Zach Lorbek of Wisconsin.

"Getting second was not a performance I was super-excited about, but it was still a solid overall performance for me," Daniels said.

Ironically, he couldn't find his rhythm in the high jump and long jump, two of his best events.

"I kind of dropped the ball and missed out on a lot of points there and had to claw back in the hurdles and pole vault on day two," Daniels said.

It would be two weeks before Daniels returned to action at the NCAA Indoor National Championships at the Albuquerque Convention Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Daniels worked out at the track March 11 and was expected to begin competing at noon (CT) the next day. Before he could settle into the starting blocks for the 60 dash, the NCAA canceled all competition through the academic year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We all understood there was something bigger going on," Daniels said. "Disappointment was the main emotion. We gear our training specifically for this meet, so we were hitting our peak shape for the national meet and it got called off."

There is still an opportunity for Daniels to write a happy ending. He has eligibility to compete during the 2021 outdoor season, and since he would be completing course work at Iowa anyway, he will remain with the Hawkeye track and field team.

"Sometimes it's hard when you have a one (year)-and-done athlete," Woody said. "Now he can contribute to the culture of our program for another year, which is always significant when you are trying to build a championship team."

According to Woody, being first-team All-America in the decathlon is a reasonable goal for Daniels. He will have plenty of competition in practice; at the Big Ten Indoor Championships, four Hawkeyes placed in the top nine and three were on the award's stand. Joining Daniels were sophomore Peyton Haack (fourth), freshman Austin West (fifth), and junior Daniel Gaynes (ninth).

"Everyone brings their own energy, experience and knowledge in different events every day in practice," Daniels said.

It's one Hawkeye student-athlete sharpening another.

"Will elevated them just like they elevate him," Woody said. "It is a good culture and now we have one of the best multi-event programs in the country."

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Back Yard GEM

By **DARREN MILLER**

University of Iowa senior Tia Saunders competes in the 600-meter run at the Jimmy Grant Invitational on Dec. 14 at the Recreation Building in Iowa City, Iowa. (Photo by Stephen Mally)

Sometimes the shiniest gems are in your back yard, they just require polishing.

Take Tia Saunders, for example. At Iowa City West High School, she flashed a varied skillset while participating in cross country for two years, basketball for two years, and track and field and soccer for four years.

"One of my biggest missions is to recruit the state of Iowa, to try to get the best kids and find diamonds in the rough," said Joey Woody, University of Iowa director of track and field. "Tia fits the bill."

Her high school results and marks were nothing flashy: 39th in the Class 4A state cross country meet as a junior and 16th as a senior. A 400 time of 60.56 seconds and a runner-up finish in the 800-meter run at the state meet as a senior (2:12.40).

"I knew she was a versatile athlete," said Jason Wakenight, assistant coach and recruiting coordinator at Iowa. "She was willing to do a variety of things and had great tools. I knew there were big things ahead for her."

Saunders' high school PRs were four years and four seconds ago. At the Bryan Clay Invitational in Azusa, California, last April, she ran 2:08.94 in the 800.

"Since that point, she has been on fire," Wakenight said. "She has been better and better."

An example would be the final 41 days of her most recent (and final) indoor season. Saunders ran a career-best 56.36 in the 400 on Jan. 18, a career-best 2:08.83 in the 800 on Feb. 15, and a career-best 1:29.83 in the 600 on Feb. 28.

"I credit the training we were doing; every year you get better," Saunders said. "You trust your base and improve speed. There were things in training I was doing that I had never done before. We worked more on speed, so running faster than I ever have in a 400 helped with my 600 and gave me confidence."

Saunders qualified for her first Big Ten final thanks to the PR in the 600 preliminary Feb. 28. The next day she went out strong and placed eighth (1:30.82), the first time she made it to the podium at a Big Ten Championship.

"That has been my goal for the past four years, so I was proud of myself and happy with Wake (coach Wakenight) for helping me get to where I am," Saunders said. "It felt like the work I put in the past four years has been worth it. It made me excited for what that meant for the rest of my outdoor career."

Saunders has one season of outdoor eligibility remaining and will use it in 2021. A human physiology major, she is enrolled in five classes through the University of Iowa as well as a physics course at a community college. Saunders has an interest in orthopedic surgery and will take the Medical College Admission Test and apply to medical schools.

Academics is a primary reason Saunders continued her education in Iowa City. She found exactly what she wanted at the University of Iowa.

"You never know what will happen," she said. "If you have a career-ending injury, you want to make sure you pick an institution where you can get the academic piece as well."

On multiple occasions, Saunders has been named to the Dean's List and Academic All-Big Ten.



There have been special times on the track for Saunders as well. Being a native Iowan made winning the Hy-Vee Cup team championship at the 2019 Drake Relays special. In high school, her state meets were held at Drake Stadium in Des Moines; last April she celebrated with teammates after the Hawkeyes scored 26 points in select events at the Drake Relays, causing Woody to call it an "unprecedented weekend for the women."

Saunders contributed to eight of those points when Iowa's 4x800 relay unit of Grace McCabe, Taylor Arco, Saunders, and Mallory King placed second in 8:31.84. That time broke a 32-year-old school record by 15 seconds. Saunders and King (Davenport Assumption) are native Iowans.

"To be able to do that with my closest teammates at one of the biggest track meets in Iowa was special," Saunders said.

The 2020 outdoor track and field season was wiped out March 12 when the NCAA canceled all competition through the academic year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Because of the momentum she had coming off the Big Ten Indoor Championships, Saunders expected a strong outdoor season in 2020. Now, with an extra year of training, she should be even stronger in 2021.

"The big thing for me is making another Big Ten final in the 800 and putting up points for my team," Saunders said. "Breaking 2:06 in the 800 would be pretty great. It would be cool to qualify in an individual event for regionals, but also fight for a spot on the 4x400 relay. I think we can do great things in that event as well."


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A Great FIT

By DARREN MILLER

University of Iowa sophomore Oliver Okonkwo celebrates a point against Louisville on March 6 at the Hawkeye Tennis and Recreation Complex in Iowa City, Iowa. (Photo by Stephen Mally)

It was June of 2017 when University of Iowa Mellecker Family men's tennis coach Ross Wilson traveled to Europe on a 30-day recruiting trip.

He could have left after the first day.

That's because the first player Wilson watched on day one of his journey at Reed's School in Cobham, England, was Oliver Okonkwo, who stood 6-foot, 3-inches and flashed a 130-mile per hour serve.

"I thought Oliver would be a great fit," Wilson said. "I watched him practice and thought this guy is a great athlete and hits the ball well. He will do well in our system."

Wilson was correct.

Okonkwo, now a University of Iowa sophomore, finished the spring season with a record of 9-8 at No. 2/3 singles and 12-7 at No. 1 doubles. Okonkwo and junior Will Davies were ranked No. 10 in the Oracle/ITA Division I men's doubles rankings released Feb. 5.

"It's the chemistry we have on court," Okonkwo said. "I know he is going to give his all and he should know that I am going to give my all as well. When we win together, it's great and everyone is happy, but when we are struggling, we're still pumping each other up with that constant energy we get from each other. Playing with Will is good fun; he is excitable on the court and it is great to be on court with him."

It didn't take Wilson long to identify Okonkwo's talent, and it didn't take Okonkwo long to make an impact with the Hawkeyes. As a freshman, he was 27-14 in singles and 24-10 in doubles. Okonkwo's 27 singles wins rank fourth in a single season in school history, and the most ever by an Iowa freshman.

Okonkwo said he was "free" during his first season at Iowa, motivated by a supportive group of coaches and teammates.

"The coaches believed in me and I believed in myself," Okonkwo said. "I love competing. I stepped on the court and I didn't see it like, 'Ah, I have to do this job.' It was an opportunity to have fun. I didn't even play that great, it is just the competitor coming out."

The Hawkeyes finished the 2018-19 season with a record of 18-10 overall, 6-5 in the Big Ten. That foreshadowed more success in the shortened 2019-20 season. After five straight wins — including a 4-3 decision over No. 16 Cornell University on March 8 — Iowa broke through into the top 20 of the ITA Division I National Rankings for the first time in program history.

Iowa (12-2 overall, 1-0 Big Ten) sat at No. 20 on March 10 and was the third-highest rated Big Ten team over the final month of the season.

In the win over Cornell, Okonkwo showed his value by knocking off No. 122 Eero Vasa at No. 2 singles, 2-6, 6-4, 6-3.

His success started years earlier and 4,000 miles away from the Hawkeye Tennis and Recreation Center (HTRC). Okonko graduated from Furze Platt Senior School in Maidenhead, England; he represented Berkshire County teams as a member of the Maidenhead Lawn Tennis Club.

"When I was younger, I was one of those kids who ran around and had way too much energy for my parents' good, so they stuck me into soccer," Okonkwo said. "Then they got me into tennis at the age of 3 or 4 and I loved it and kept playing."

He always had a competitive edge, but Okonkwo said he wasn't successful until he started developing around the age of 14. His attributes



are many: quick on the court, dominant serve, big forehand.

"When I started to grow more, my strengths became even bigger," Okonkwo said. "That is when my game took a couple stages up."

Soon after, Wilson made his recruiting visit. In Okonkwo, he saw an unpolished, yet successful player. Wilson was impressed by Okonkwo's winning ways and the fact he was a great student and teammate.

"Overall, he is a good person and great asset to this athletics department," Wilson said.

But Okonkwo had yet to visit to Iowa City. No worries.

"I loved the place," Okonkwo said.

More specifically, Okonkwo and the Hawkeyes love playing on the home courts at the HTRC. This season, Iowa won 10 of 11 home matches, including its final 10. The last 11 matches, as well as the Big Ten and NCAA Championships, were canceled because of the threat of spreading coronavirus.

Fortunately for the Hawkeyes, Okonkwo will return next season with the same drive and the same goals. He isn't content with merely qualifying for postseason play.

"For the team, our biggest goal is making NCAAs, but we should actually start considering making a dent in the NCAA Tournament," Okonkwo said. "We have never made the NCAA Tournament, so that would be a big step in our favor. We are battling against these (NCAA-qualifying) teams (during the regular season) and there is no reason we can't do damage."





Complete PACKAGE

By DARREN MILLER

University of Iowa sophomore Michelle Bacalla competes against Iowa State on Feb. 8 at the Hawkeye Tennis and Recreation Complex in Iowa City, Iowa. (Photo by Brian Ray)

Sasha Schmid knew the prototype she was searching for when the University of Iowa head women's tennis coach hit the recruiting trail for the first time as a Hawkeye.

Of course, Schmid was looking for someone with a passion for the sport. She wanted an athletic, fit, competitor with a sparkling personality. Schmid found the complete package in Michelle Bacalla, the first student-athlete she signed at Iowa.

"Michelle is a great representative of the type of person we want," Schmid said. "She is another example of a quality student-athlete who continues to develop over the course of their career at Iowa."

Bacalla, a 5-foot-4 sophomore from Skokie, Illinois, attended Niles North High School where she was a four-time state singles qualifier. She placed fourth as a junior and senior.

"It was cool to know I was her first recruit," Bacalla said. "I loved the atmosphere at Iowa, I loved the people, the academics. It felt like home when I visited, and I knew I would have everything I needed and everything I ever dreamed of at Iowa."

Bacalla comes from a tennis family. Her oldest brother, R.K. played at Western Michigan, and another brother, Dave, played at Valparaiso. The Bacalla siblings have their fraternal grandfather, Antonieto, to thank for their love of the sport.

Antonieto spent his entire life in the Philippines and passed his love of sports to his son (and Michelle's father), Cris. Instead of tennis, Cris opted to play basketball in college in the Philippines, where his eventual wife, Eppieh, competed in volleyball.

"(Grandpa Antonieto) was interested in and loved tennis, and tried to get my dad to play, but it never clicked with my dad," Bacalla said. "(After immigrating to the United States), my dad didn't want the three of us to play any other sport except tennis because he felt that was our best opportunity."

Growing up with brothers who were already involved with the sport, it was not unusual when Michelle started swinging a racquet when she was 5 years old. There were parks near their home, and like clockwork after school, the family would head to a court. Cris bought cans of balls, threw them in a makeshift basket and hit and hit and hit to his children.

"We would get our exercise and train with our dad," Bacalla said. "It was a good way to get out of the loop of school and get into the routine of adding tennis to our everyday life. It was a good way to bond with my brothers."

In her first season as a Hawkeye in 2018-19, Bacalla finished with a record of 12-12 in singles and 6-6 in doubles. Most of her singles matches (14) were at No. 5. A highlight occurred at home against Indiana on March 31, 2019. The match score was tied, 3-3, and all that remained was the result between Bacalla and Michelle McKamey. After dropping the first set, 6-0, Bacalla rallied to win the next two, 7-5 and 6-3, to give Iowa the victory.

She was even more successful as a sophomore because of improved mental strength and physical grit.

"Michelle had a good base as a freshman and has continued to have a good foundation from an athleticism standpoint," Schmid said. "As her sophomore year progressed, you saw maturity in terms of her strength and conditioning combining with maturity as a person. The more she competed, she continued to grow, and she was playing her best tennis near the end of the season."

Bacalla was 11-8 in singles (4-2 at No. 3) and 10-9 in doubles; the Hawkeyes won four of their last five to finish 6-6. In the final match against



Michigan State on March 8 in East Lansing, Michigan, Bacalla teamed with sophomore Samantha Mannix for a win at No. 2 doubles. She defeated Lauren Lemonds, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, at No. 3 singles and the Hawkeyes won, 4-3.

A highlight of Bacalla's sophomore season was when Iowa upset No. 50 Kansas State on Feb. 23 in Iowa City. Bacalla defeated Margot Decker, 5-7, 6-1, 6-3 at No. 3 and the Hawkeyes came from behind for a 4-3 victory.

"That was a monumental moment for us, it was our first win over a ranked opponent in a long time," Bacalla said. "Then we beat Michigan State in our Big Ten opener; I felt all the work we did from fall of this year to that point was amazing. All that work we put into our season was apparent with our winning."

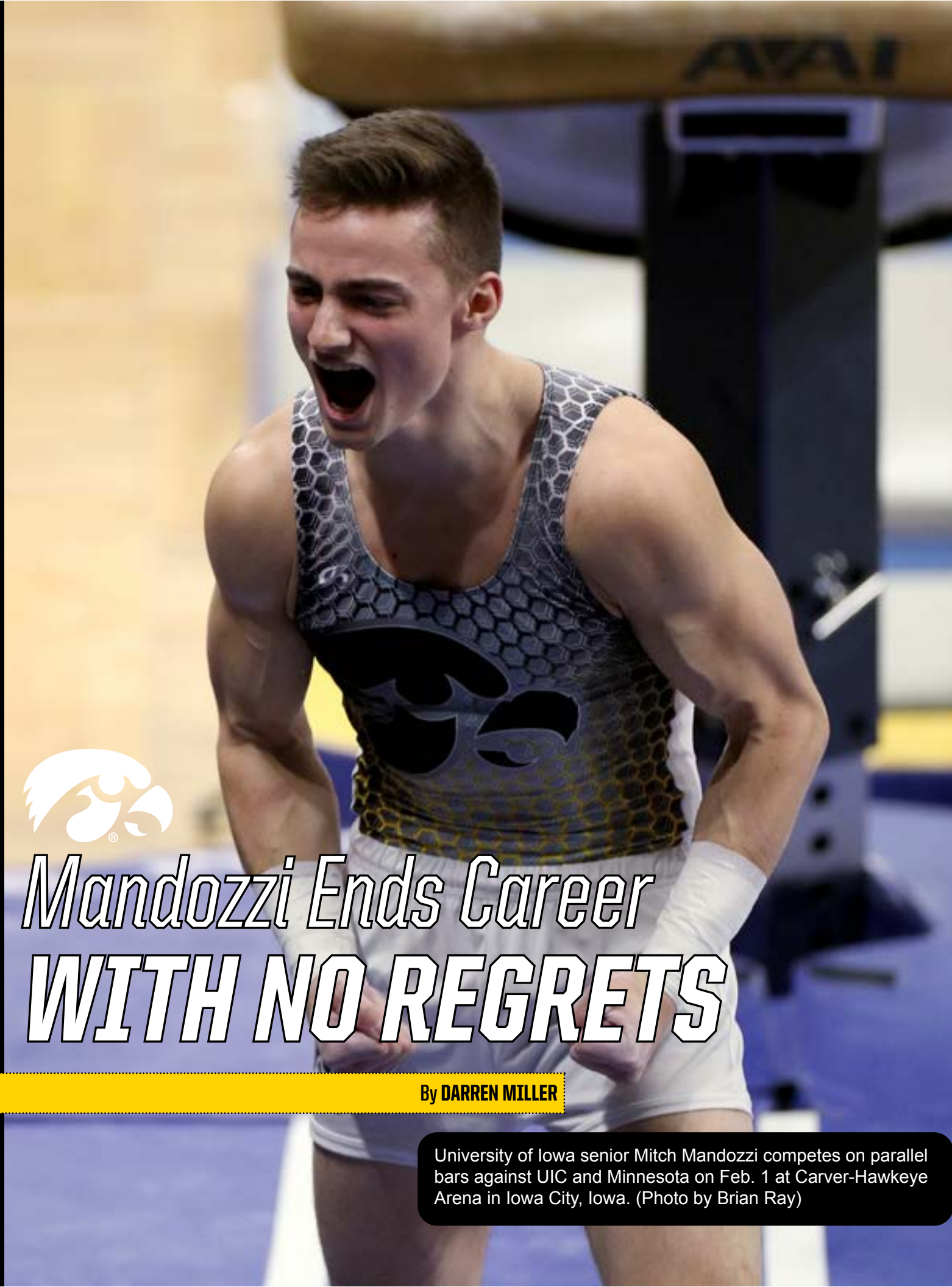
Bacalla is pursuing a degree in elementary education and wants to teach first grade. She returned home to Skokie after the Big Ten and NCAA canceled the spring seasons March 12 because of the coronavirus global pandemic. Bacalla has been making do with body weight workouts and she even dusted off a weight set she hadn't touched in years. A stationary bicycle is used for conditioning.

"Michelle is a complete tennis player and balanced off both sides," Schmidt said. "She has no weakness; she is fit and quick, so she is also good on defense."

She is also goal oriented.

"I want this team to win Big Tens and eventually win NCAAs," Bacalla said. "We talked a lot about goal-setting, and I want our team to be successful. No matter what, we will have each other's backs and keep ourselves accountable."





Mandozzi Ends Career WITH NO REGRETS

By **DARREN MILLER**

University of Iowa senior Mitch Mandozzi competes on parallel bars against UIC and Minnesota on Feb. 1 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City, Iowa. (Photo by Brian Ray)

The result of the Illinois-Iowa men's gymnastics meet rested on the shoulders of University of Iowa senior Mitch Mandozzi.

Mandozzi was the final competitor in the final event (high bar) with the Hawkeyes trailing Illinois on March 1 in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. In the previous three seasons, having Mandozzi as the meet's anchor wasn't such an encouraging thought. His gymnastics had been sporadic as a freshman and sophomore, then he began to find his footing near the end of his junior year.

By the time he closed the dual against the Fighting Illini, Mandozzi had evolved into a team captain and one of the best leaders on the roster.

He was also decent on the high bar.

"I ended up hitting a great routine to secure a tie with Illinois, which never happens in gymnastics," Mandozzi said.

His then career-best 13.750 on high bar (he topped that with 13.800 six days later at Ohio State) meant the Hawkeyes and Illini finished with a score of 403.50.

There are a couple reasons Mandozzi will remember that routine. For one, it meant the ninth-ranked Hawkeyes remained undefeated at home in 2020; what he didn't know at the time is that it would be his final performance in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. On March 12, the Big Ten Conference canceled all competition through the academic year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The news broke three days before what would have been Mandozzi's Senior Day competition against No. 3 Michigan. A normal meet week took a weird turn in a hurry.

"I started to get nervous for Michigan on Wednesday (March 11)," Mandozzi said. "I woke up, went to class, got back home and got the notification the season was canceled. I was shocked, but I wasn't sad at first. It was very fast-moving. None of us knew how to react; during the weekend the emotions started to come."

Carver-Hawkeye Arena was dark March 15. Mandozzi's mother, father, grandmother, aunt, uncle, and brothers were not in attendance, as expected. There was no postgame meal at Vue RoofTop, where Mandozzi and fellow seniors Nick Merryman and Brandon Wong would celebrate their careers.

"I wanted (Senior Day) to be just about us, to keep building on what we were doing and keep trending upward as a team," Mandozzi said. "I wanted to go out confident, focus on what we were doing; I wanted to have a good, solid day."

Fortunately for Mandozzi, he ended his collegiate career with no regrets. On March 7 at Ohio State, he reset his career-best score on high bar. But the end-of-season celebration the Hawkeyes enjoyed a year earlier was missing. On March 23, 2019, they clinched a share of their first regular season Big Ten championship since 1998 in Minneapolis.

That day was also a leadership coming out party for Mandozzi.

"We knew he had this potential and his gymnastics were beautiful," Iowa head coach JD Reive said. "We knew it was there and it started to show up last year."

The two biggest confidence-building milestones for Mandozzi were being a contributor to the Big Ten championship team and qualifying for the Senior U.S. Championships from Aug. 8-11, 2019, in Kansas City, Missouri.

"Making the U.S. Championships put him in a leadership position," Reive said. "Before, he was kind of a follower teammate, then he emerged as a good leader. He has grown so much over the course of this year."

Mandozzi, a native of Harvard, Massachusetts, primarily competed on high bar, vault, and parallel bars. He calls his entire junior season a highlight, when he set career-bests of 14.566 on vault, 13.750 on parallel bars, and 13.650 on high bar.

"I came off two years of kind of being lazy and not competing, and turning it around and competed that whole year," Mandozzi said.

He won his first event this season at Nebraska on Jan. 26 with a career-high 14.600 on vault. His final two meets — against Illinois and at Ohio State — saw him twice reset a career-best on high bar.

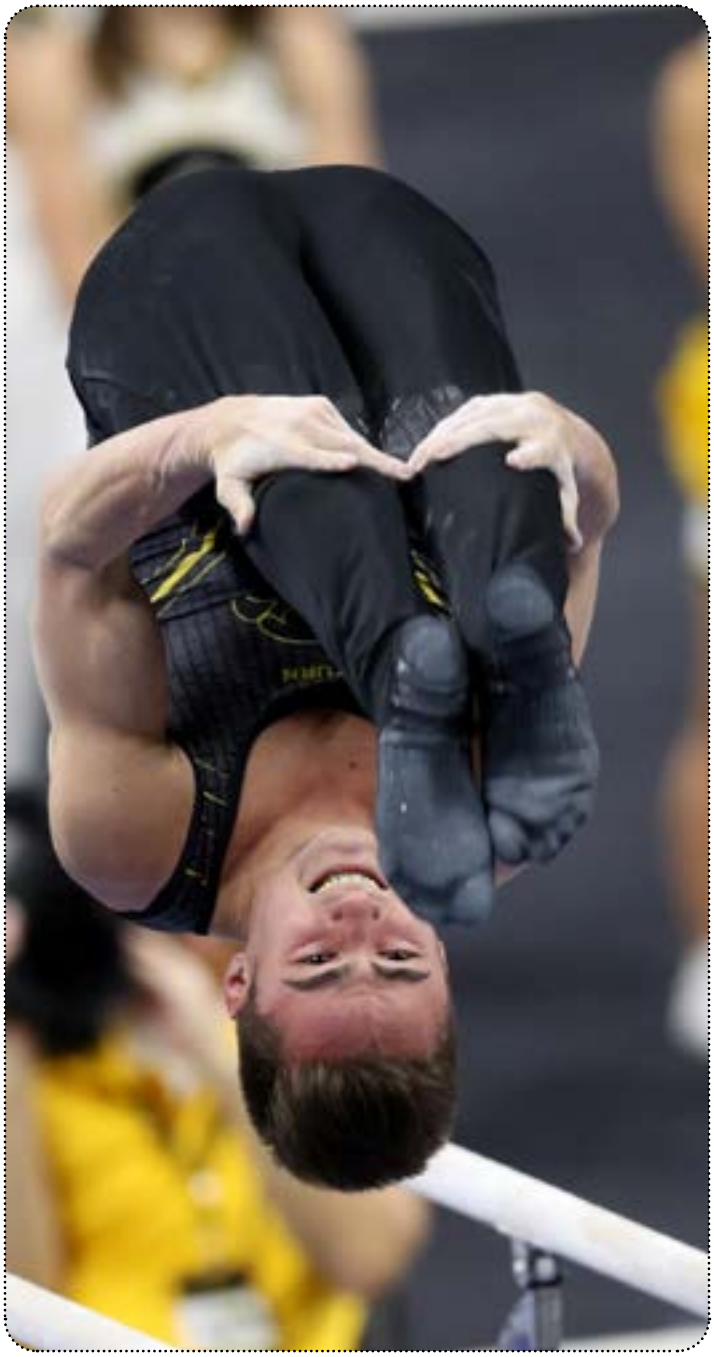
A health and human physiology major, Mandozzi will apply for nursing school at the University of Iowa and at schools in Chicago or closer to home in Boston.

Reive refers to Mandozzi's journey as a "great coaching story." The ninth-year head coach took pride in watching a student-athlete's transformation both athletically and socially. Mandozzi credits his growth to the University of Iowa and its men's gymnastics program.

"It has given me something to work for, given me purpose to stay in line and not get distracted in college," Mandozzi said. "It has given me a sense of purpose and something to work toward with an end goal."

His days as a gymnast have ended, but life as a Hawkeye continues.

"These guys around me will be friends for the rest of my life," Mandozzi said. "I don't know if any other part of my life will give me something like that. It has given me a love for the state of Iowa and this university for the rest of my life. I will always be grateful for that."







Couldn't Be in a BETTER PLACE

By **DARREN MILLER**

University of Iowa sophomore Gonzalo Leal Montero played 18 rounds this season with a stroked average of 71.89. (Photo by Brian Ray)

Tyler Stith watched Gonzalo Leal Montero's swing videos and studied his golf scores that were posted online.

But before the University of Iowa head men's golf coach offered a scholarship to the kid from Seville, Spain, he had to see him play in person.

"Sometimes the film and statistics can be a little misleading," Stith said.

So, Stith ventured to Spain, where on the eve of the European under-18 championships, he dined with Montero and his family.

"We talked about Iowa and our program and I talked to his parents about Iowa City and my philosophy and experiences as a coach," Stith said. "I had pretty much given him my entire arsenal on the University of Iowa."

That created a dilemma for Stith, since the next day he would ride six hours in a car with Gonzalo and his father to Murcia, 325 miles away. What possibly could they talk about? Soccer and Formula One racing, of course.

"Coach Stith is a big fan of European soccer and Formula One, two of my favorite sports to watch and follow," Montero said. "We discussed the situation of different teams and Formula One drivers. It was fun to share my thoughts and have those things in common with someone I met the day before. It was a good way to start our relationship."

Stith presented a persuasive sales pitch. Montero selected the University of Iowa based on its golf program and the fact it competed in the Big Ten Conference.

"I didn't know a lot about college and universities before coming to the United States, but coach Stith convinced me and helped me in the decision," Montero said. "I couldn't be in a better place than Iowa."

In two seasons as a Hawkeye, Montero has played 46 rounds with a stroke average of 72.04 and a low round of 66. Nothing has shown Montero's improvement more than the way he ended the 2019 fall season and opened the 2020 spring season. At the Royal Oaks Intercollegiate on Oct. 21-22 in Dallas, Montero tied for eighth with a 5-under par 208 (70-69-69); at the Puerto Rico Classic on Feb. 16-18 in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, he tied for 13th with a 4-under 212 (72-72-68).

"He has learned to become a lot more patient, trusting in his game over the course of 54 holes," Stith said. "If he stays patient and maintains emotional control, he will put up good scores and get into contention.

"He went six competitive rounds where he shot even par or better. If you look at his freshman year, almost every tournament he played there was at least one round where he would shoot three, four, or five over par and let his emotions get the best of him."

Known for his ball-striking and long drives, Montero has seen improvement in his short game, thanks to hours on the putting green. His top 10 finish and 10 rounds at or below par this season were second on the team to senior Alex Schaake (two, 11).

"I gained a lot of experience and consider myself more mature than last year on the golf course, but also in general," Montero said. "I talked to coach Stith and (assistant) coach (Charlie) Hoyle about the areas I could improve from last season, and I have been working a lot, especially on my short game, where I have a big margin to improve and to gain shots in every tournament.

"I still need to improve if I want to accomplish bigger things with this team, but I am happy because I see the progress and I feel we are going the right direction."



The Hawkeyes played three events in the spring before the NCAA canceled the season March 12 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Iowa won three of four at Big Ten Match Play on Feb. 7-8 in Palm Coast, Florida, tied for 10th at the Puerto Rico Classic, and finished sixth out of 15 teams at the Colleton River Collegiate on March 2-3 in Bluffton, South Carolina.

As a freshman, Montero played 28 rounds with a 72.14 average; this season he played 18 rounds and improved his average to 71.89.

"Last year was definitely a positive season," Montero said. "I did not have any experience with United States golf, and it was nice to compete and do well on my first steps in college.

"I am not obsessed with personal goals, because if you work hard and make smart decisions in life, you can achieve whatever you want to achieve. I am more of a long-term goals guy."

Montero possesses the skills to compete at the highest level of collegiate golf and could eventually emerge as a professional. Stith cites mental growth for his progress.

"He has matured a lot, learned to control his emotions, trust his game and be patient," Stith said.





Striving for PERFECTION

By **DARREN MILLER**

In three competitions this spring, University of Iowa freshman Lea Zeitler averaged 73.2 strokes per round. (Photo by Stephen Mally)

Through many years of struggling and succeeding with golf, University of Iowa freshman Lea Zeitler has come to realize it is one of the most frustrating yet satisfying sports to play.

With its range of eagles, bogeys and everything in between, golf has come to represent life in general for Zeitler. Her life specifically.

It didn't take long for Zeitler to emerge as one of the top junior golfers in Austria. Then she endured a prolonged slump. Her swing — and consequently, her low scores — vanished.

"I was struggling with life and golf," Zeitler said. "I did a lot of thinking and asked myself if I wanted to continue to play golf or do something else."

A member of the Austrian National Team since 2010, Zeitler stuck to the (golf) course, but switched to a coach in Spain. Then she thought back to a prophetic conversation she had with her mother and father on a trip to Florida when she was 10 years old.

"I told my parents I wanted to live in the United States one day," Zeitler said.

The thought of Zeitler playing golf and earning a college degree in the United States gained momentum. In 2014, Iowa assistant coach Michael Roters, then coaching at Idaho, watched Zeitler card a career-best round of 65 to win the European Girls Team Championship in Slovakia.

Firing a 65 for a 9-under par 135 in 2014 was a highlight for Zeitler. What transpired over the next four-plus years was not.

"My parents saw me suffering," Zeitler said. "Turning pro was not an option because I was not good enough. I wasn't happy with how my life was going. My parents felt I should have a change because if I continued on that path, it wouldn't end well.

"It was a hard process getting out of the dark side. It took a lot of processing and practice."

Roters, who was entering his fifth season at Iowa, reached out to Zeitler in the fall of 2019. Iowa head coach Megan Menzel stayed patient in the recruiting process, hoping to land Zeitler, who she referred to as a "next-level athlete."

"She is one of those players you can rely on," Menzel said. "She is very skilled, has a lot of great training and is very mature as a player. The thing that gives you the most confidence is how hard she works."

Zeitler visited campus and knew quickly she had found a new home.

"A lot of people say that where I am from in Austria is paradise," Zeitler said. "Iowa City is paradise. This is my place."

Because of the uncertainties of professional golf, Zeitler knew a degree from the University of Iowa would be more important than any medalist honor. She is majoring in communication studies and deciding on a minor in either sociology or gender, women, and sexuality studies.

Zeitler comes from an athletic family. Her mother was a professional tennis player and her father was a coach for the Austrian Ski Association. Because of her mother's background, Zeitler began playing tennis at a young age.

"That didn't turn out so well," she said.

At 7, she started with golf.

"It is a constant cycle, you are always striving for perfection, but you know there is no perfection in golf," Zeitler said. "It is about trying your best every day. It is so frustrating sometimes, but you get so many rewards by hitting an amazing shot or holing a putt. The way you feel on the course, you can't compare it to any other sport."

Zeitler opened her Hawkeye career at East-West Match Play from Sept. 23-24 in Madison, Wisconsin. On the first day, she tied for fifth on the leaderboard with a 36-hole score of 2-under 142. The next day in match play, she defeated Alexis Miestowski of Indiana 5 and 3.

"The first tournament was a big deal for me because I came out of a one-year break," Zeitler said. "It was nice to see all the hard work turned out well."

Zeitler competed two more times in the fall, finishing in a tie for 22nd at the Magnolia Invitational in Starkville, Mississippi, on Oct. 13-15 (+7, 81-73-69) and in a tie for 16th at the Battle at the Beach in San Jose Del Cabo, Mexico, on Nov. 1-3 (+2, 75-75-68).

In three competitions this spring, Zeitler averaged 73.2 strokes per round. She tied for eighth at the All-State Sugar Bowl in New Orleans on Feb. 16-18 (-4, 72-72-71), tied for 10th at the Entrada Classic on March 9-10 on two courses in Utah (+8, 75-76-73), and tied for 53rd at the Westbrook Invitational on Feb. 23-24 in Peoria, Arizona (+4, 75-73-72).

"Lea is a very high-strung athlete who is driven in practice," Menzel said. "Then, when she gets to an event, she is oddly calm. She has a great process and it comes from knowing she is ready. She is able to go out, relax and enjoy competitive golf."

Zeitler said she needs to constantly develop every area of her game. She is savoring the positives that have occurred during her first collegiate season. On Zeitler's final three holes at the Entrada Classic, she carded a birdie, par, and birdie.

"I finished strong, so I can't be upset," Zeitler said. "Every time I go out and play, I give 150 percent and try to be the best I can."

Now she has an eye on August, when the season begins anew.

"I can't even put into words what my teammates and this season have meant to me," Zeitler said. "Just being here, representing Iowa, wearing black and gold. I am so in love with this place and I am so in love with being a Hawkeye. I don't ever want this to end, ever."




IOWA



Rygh Takes Advantage of ROWING OPPORTUNITY

By DARREN MILLER

University of Iowa sophomore Molly Rygh was a quick study when it came to the sport of rowing. As a freshman she worked her way up to competing in the Hawkeyes' Second Varsity Eight boat.

Dabbling in different sports has never overwhelmed University of Iowa rower Molly Rygh.

The sophomore from Cedar Falls, Iowa, participated in volleyball through her junior season of high school, then opted for cross country as a senior. She was a thrower in track and field, competing in the shot put and discus until her senior season. That's when she used the spring to train for two half marathons that she completed on two weekends over the summer.

Rygh had athletic experience on a court, a course, and a throws circle, but not on water. That changed during her first few days as a student at the University of Iowa.

The sport of rowing was familiar to Rygh since her mother competed at the University of Wisconsin and her older sister, Katie, completed a season in the novice program for the Hawkeyes in 2017-18.

"We have a cabin in Wisconsin, so we love water sports," Rygh said. "I had never rowed until college, but I had spent time on the water."

She was a quick study. Last season, when the Hawkeyes made their run to 13th at the NCAA Championships in Indianapolis, Rygh was one of several freshman walk-ons in the Second Varsity Eight boat. The Second Varsity Eight advanced to the C final and placed fifth in 6:41.614.

"Racing at NCAA Championships for someone who just started rowing was a cool moment," Rygh said. "This program has developed so many athletes; last year four freshmen who came as walk-ons rowed in that (Second Varsity Eight) boat. That was cool to see how we had grown throughout the year."

Rygh was born in Milwaukee and moved to Cedar Falls as a toddler when her father accepted a position as executive pastor of expansion at Prairie Lakes Church.

"I wasn't an insane high school athlete," said Rygh, although some might think it is insane to finish two 13.1-mile runs in Yellowstone National Park in back-to-back weeks. Rygh described the ordeal as "hard, but fun."

She didn't know it at the time, but compared to rowing, it was distance running — cross country specifically — that would be the closest thing she had done as far as mental preparation.

"In a cross country race, you are competing as a team, but you also have to be strong mentally because part of the team result rests on your shoulders," Rygh said.

While still in high school, Rygh visited her sister on the University of Iowa campus. Hawkeye assistant coach Jeff Garbutt asked if rowing was a sport she wanted to try. Rygh responded with a wavering "maybe."

She hadn't even decided on a college yet. She looked at Iowa State, Nebraska and a couple others, but at the time, she was interested in business. Iowa's business school stood out. So did the fact her sister attended Iowa and the campus was a not-to-close, not-to-far hour and a half from home.

And yes, Iowa had rowing.

"Rowing was an opportunity at Iowa that wasn't an opportunity at other places," Rygh said. "I visited, took a tour, did a Learn to Row clinic and got a feel for the ergometer. I decided rowing was something I wanted to try."



Iowa head coach Andrew Carter has seen the biggest evolution in Rygh's fitness, followed closely by her improved technical skills.

"She has put herself in the upper echelon of fitness on our team for what she can do in the weight room and on the rowing machine," Carter said. "All the things we measure, she has moved forward with leaps and bounds.

"Technically she has come a long way with her rowing skills, too. A year and a half into her career, she has become a pillar of our second crew and has been in our first crew on occasion. That's pretty impressive."

The promotion to the Second Varsity Eight as a freshman came as a surprise to Rygh, who intended to spend her first season in the First Novice Eight boat. During her first spring training, she was moved to the First Varsity Four and then promoted to the Second Varsity Eight. An assist for Rygh developing her skills was rowing with older, more experienced Hawkeyes.

Rygh was scheduled to kick off her sophomore spring season March 19 at a competition hosted by Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, then compete the next day at an event in Orlando. A week earlier, the NCAA canceled all spring sports competitions because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Now an elementary education major, Rygh returned to Cedar Falls to finish the semester. She is working out the best she can, but it's not the same as training in the P. Sue Beckwith Boathouse in Iowa City. There, after a workout, she would routinely chart results in a notebook. The notebook serves as motivation.

"One thing about rowing is that over time, we do so much work on the ergometer, that you can see your progress," Rygh said. "After every workout we write down how we did and what numbers we pulled for that workout. It's nice to look back on the same workout and see how you compared. You can track your progress over time and see how you're improving."

There is no doubt that Rygh is improving. She set preseason goals for 2,000 and 6,000-meter workouts and reached them both. Her next mission is working her way into the Hawkeyes' top crew.

"For this team in the past few years, that crew has positioned itself as one of the best in the country," Carter said. "You get into that crew, you're in one of the best crews in the country which makes you one of the best rowers in the country."



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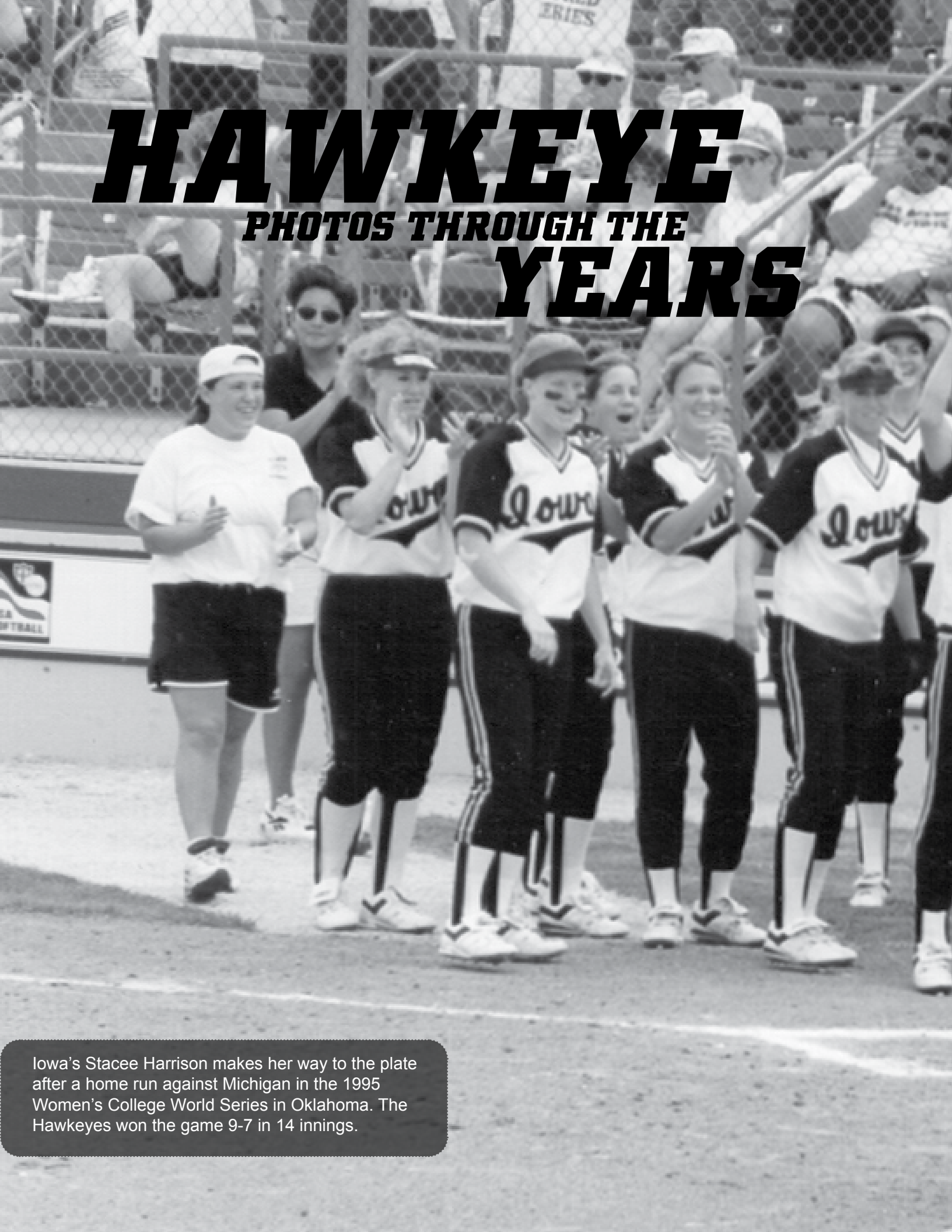
The final event of the 2019-20 season before the coronavirus pandemic ended all competitions took place March 11 at Duane Banks Field. The Hawkeyes notched their 10th win, downing Kansas, 3-1, to complete the two-game series sweep. Iowa finished the 2020 season with a 10-5 record. (Photo by Stephen Mally)

HAWKEYE
PHOTOS THROUGH THE YEARS



Iowa's Stacee Harrison makes her way to the plate after a home run against Michigan in the 1995 Women's College World Series in Oklahoma. The Hawkeyes won the game 9-7 in 14 innings.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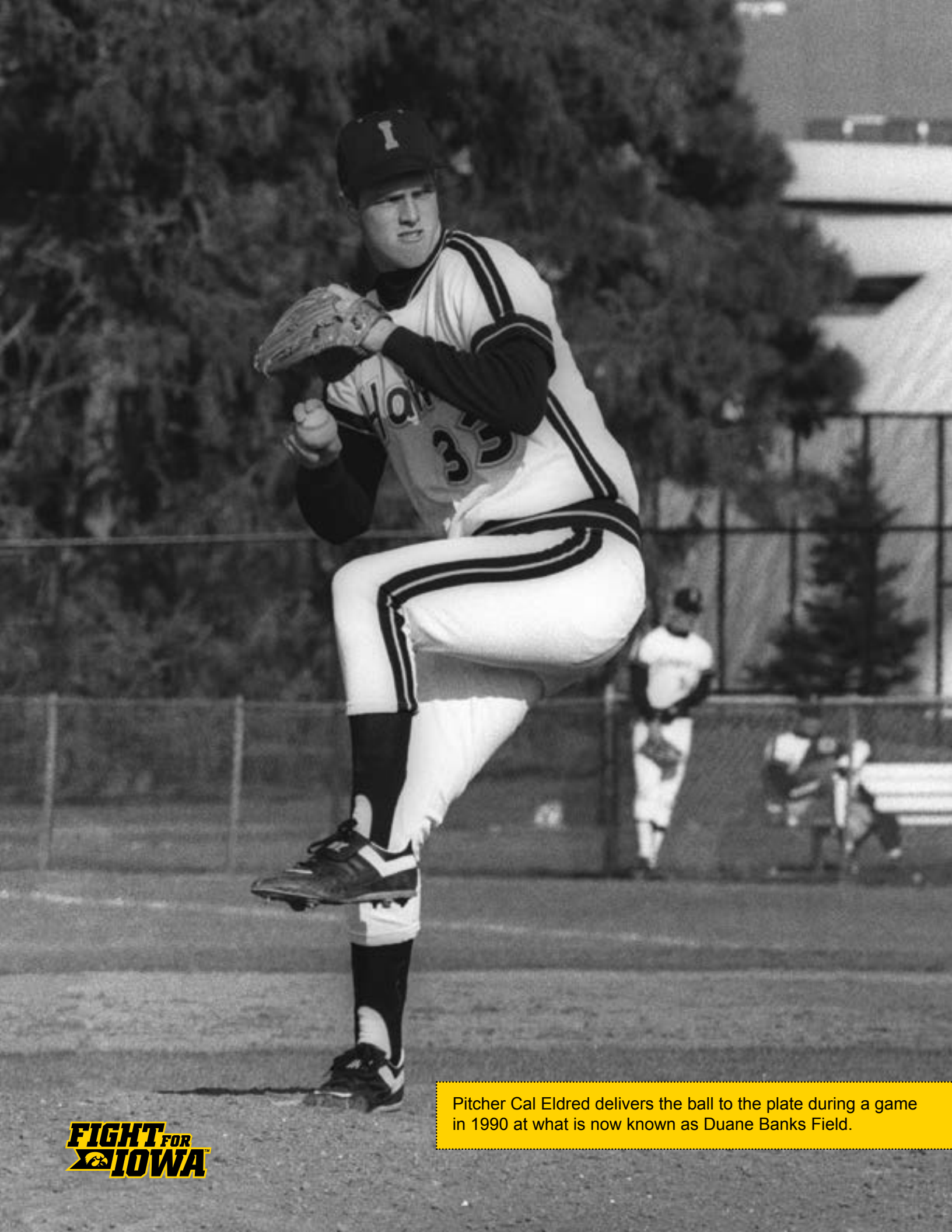
IOWA
Garrett crossing the plat

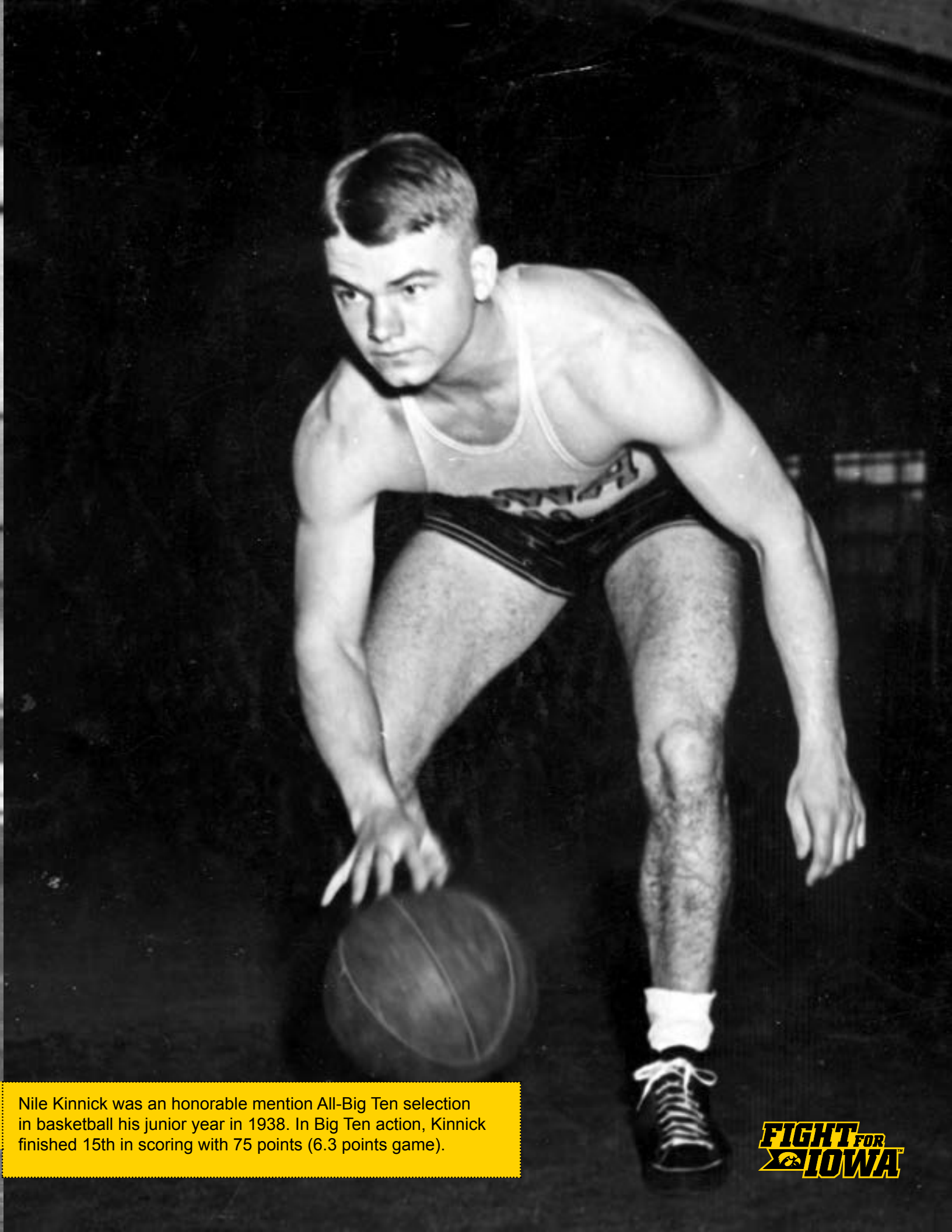


Garret crosses the plate during a 4-1 Iowa victory over Cornell in 1913. (Photo by F.W. Kent)



Pitcher Cal Eldred delivers the ball to the plate during a game in 1990 at what is now known as Duane Banks Field.

FIGHT FOR IOWA



Nile Kinnick was an honorable mention All-Big Ten selection in basketball his junior year in 1938. In Big Ten action, Kinnick finished 15th in scoring with 75 points (6.3 points game).

FIGHT FOR IOWA


IOWA



Iowa's Danan Hughes makes a snow angel in the south end zone of Kinnick Stadium during Iowa's 23-8 victory over Minnesota on Nov. 23, 1991. The victory gave legendary coach Hayden Fry his 100th victory at Iowa.



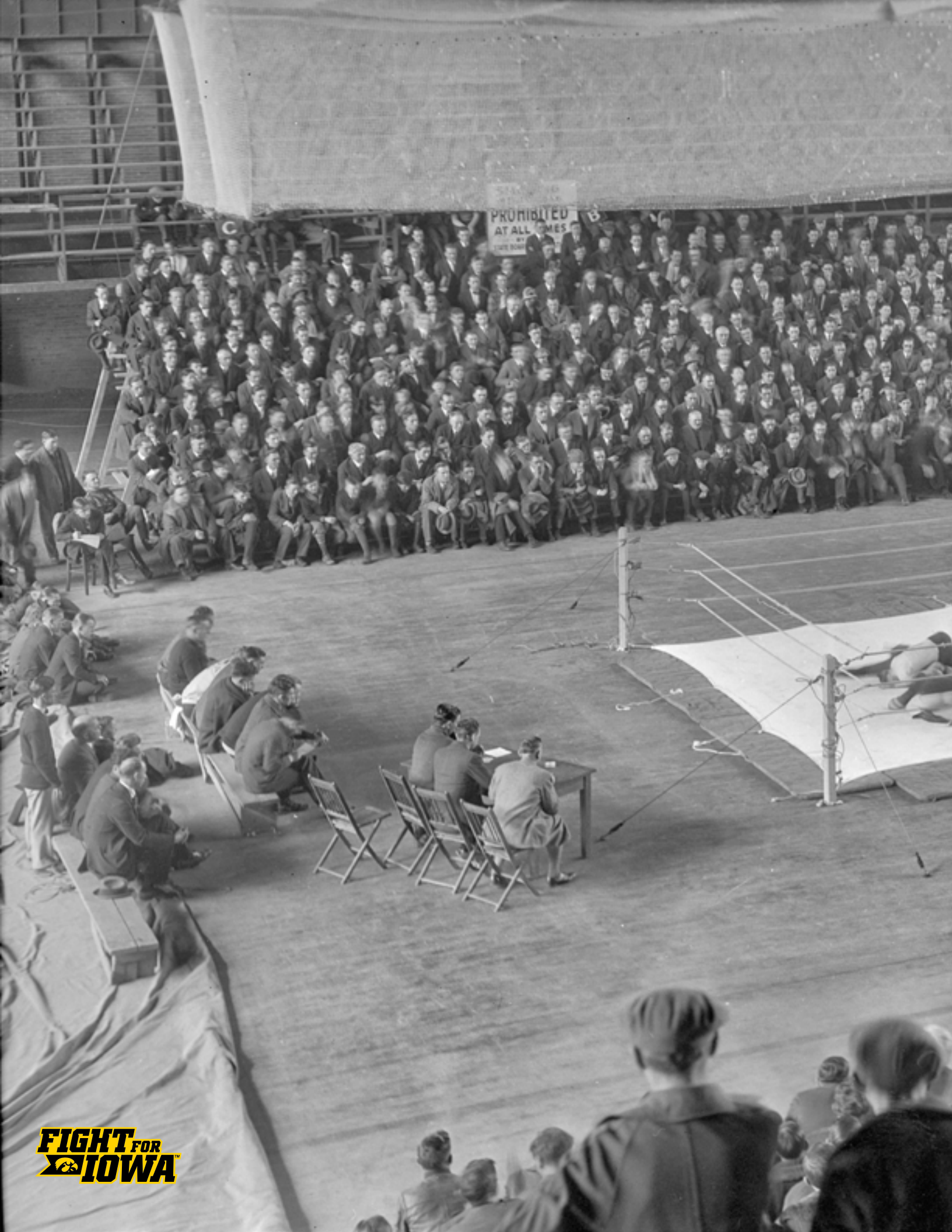


Fans watch as Iowa takes on Iowa State in 1920. (Photo by F.W. Kent)





The 1931 Iowa men’s golf team.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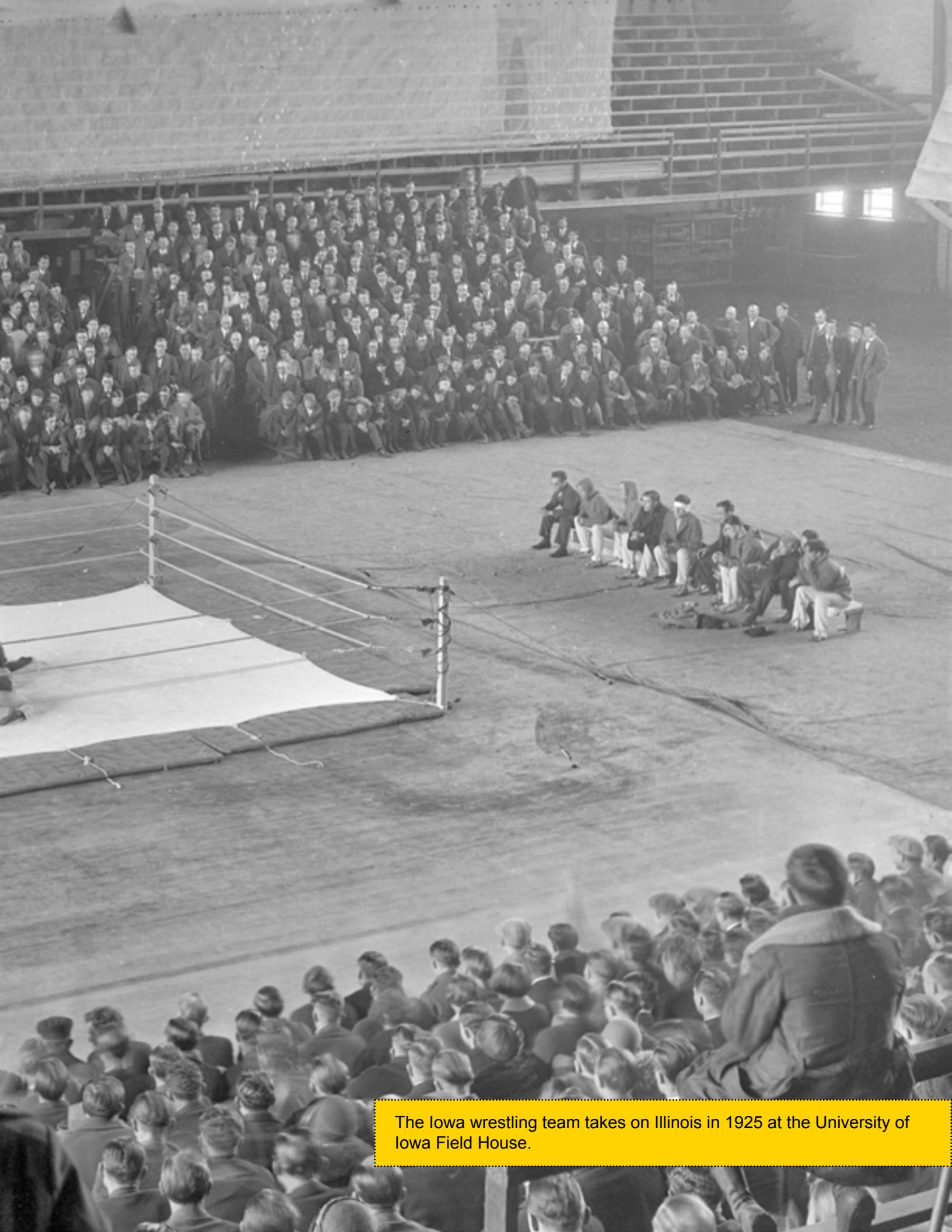

The Iowa wrestling team takes on Illinois in 1925 at the University of Iowa Field House.


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Iowa's Bri Toelle celebrates a goal against Pacific on Aug. 21, 2015 at the Iowa Soccer Complex. (Photo by Brian Ray)


FIGHT FOR IOWA



University of Iowa head wrestling coach Dan Gable looks for a stalling call during Lee Fullhart's match against Oklahoma's John Kading during the 1997 NCAA Finals at the UNI Dome in Cedar Falls, Iowa. (Photo by Brian Ray)



FIGHT FOR IOWA



University of Iowa midfielder Dani Hemeon celebrates after scoring against Penn State on Oct. 25, 2014 at Grant Field. (Photo by Brian Ray)


FIGHT FOR IOWA



Iowa's Carson Schaake hits a tee shot on nine during the second round of the 2015 John Deere Classic on July 10, 2015 at the TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Illinois. (Photo by Brian Ray)


HAWKEYES
IOWA HAWKEY
FIGHT FOR IOWA



The Iowa Hawkeyes celebrate after defeating Iowa State in the final game of a 3-1 victory on Sept. 11, 2015 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. (Photo by Brian Ray)



FIGHT FOR IOWA



University of Iowa pitcher Kyle Shimp douses head coach Rick Heller with sports drink May 28, 2017 after the Hawkeyes defeated Northwestern in the Big Ten Tournament championship at Bart Kaufman Field in Bloomington, Indiana. (Photo by Brian Ray)


FIGHT FOR IOWA



Iowa's Brandon Sorensen wrestles Minnesot''s Ben Brancale at 149 pounds on Feb. 2, 2018 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Sorensen won the match by fall in 3:32. (Photo by Brian Ray)

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Iowa's Bobby Hansen dishes a pass against Northern Iowa at the Field House in 1981.



FIGHT FOR IOWA



The University of Iowa field hockey team defeats Northwestern, 4-3, in overtime Nov. 13, 1988, in the second round of the NCAA Tournament inside Kinnick Stadium. (Photo by University of Iowa Center for Media Production)


FIGHT FOR IOWA



Iowa's Andrew Fierke reacts to his time in the 500-yard freestyle bonus finals of the second day at the 2019 Big Ten Swimming and Diving Championships on Feb. 28, 2019 at the Campus Wellness and Recreation Center. (Photo by Brian Ray)


BIG
CHAMPION
BIG



The Iowa Hawkeyes celebrate a victory over Maryland in the Big Ten Championship on March 10, 2019 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana. (Photo by Brian Ray)


B1G
MEN'S OUTDOOR
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Iowa's Karayme Bartley holds the team trophy and celebrates with teammates after winning the men's Big Ten Outdoor Track and Field Championships at Francis X. Cretzmeyer Track in Iowa City on May. 12, 2019. (Photo by Stephen Mally)


FIGHT FOR IOWA



On Feb. 3, 1985, the University of Iowa set an NCAA women's basketball attendance record against Ohio State with 22,157 fans inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.


FIGHT FOR IOWA



On Feb. 3, 1985, the University of Iowa set an NCAA women's basketball attendance record against Ohio State with 22,157 fans inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.



University of Iowa defensive back Josh Jackson makes a one-handed interception against Ohio State on Nov. 4, 2017 at Kinnick Stadium. (Photo by Brian Ray)

FIGHT FOR IOWA



Iowa's Laulauga Tausaga celebrates after winning the discus at the 2019 Outdoor NCAA Track and Field Championships on June 8, 2019, at Mike A. Myers Stadium in Austin, Texas. Tausaga won the event with a school record-setting 207-feet, 6-inches. (63.26m). (Photo by Darren Miller)

FIGHT FOR IOWA


FIGHT FOR IOWA



University of Iowa quarterback Nate Stanley throws a touchdown pass to tight end T.J. Hockenson with Ohio State's Nick Bosa draped around his ankles Nov. 4, 2017 at Kinnick Stadium. (Photo by Brian Ray)



KAREEM ALLAF, SENIOR, DUBAI, UAE
ITA Central Region Senior Player of the Year
ITA Central Region Most Improved Senior



JASON KERST, SENIOR, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN
Robert F. Ray Faculty Representative Award
Big Ten Conference Postgraduate Scholarship
ITA Central Region Arthur Ashe Leadership & Sportsmanship
ITA Central Region Rafael Osuna Sportsmanship Award

FIGHT FOR IOWA