

BLAIR ATHLETICS

March 2026 Newsletter

To the Blair Athletics community,

As we transition into the spring season, we are incredibly proud to share the remarkable success our student-athletes achieved over the winter months. It has been a historic term for Blair Athletics, marked by elite national performances and individual brilliance. In the pool, our swimmers demonstrated exceptional grit and talent, led by Hannah Wilson '26 shattering multiple school and pool records. In basketball, our programs reached extraordinary milestones: The boys' team entered the National Prep Championships for the first time in program history finishing second, while our girls' team continued their era of dominance by securing their 15th consecutive MAPL title and finishing as a top team at the Independent School Nationals tournament in North Carolina.

The excellence continued on the mats, where our wrestling programs earned top national honors: Our boys' team secured a hard-fought third-place team finish, while our girls' team followed suit with an impressive fourth-place finish at the National Prep Championships. Beyond these highlights, the depth of our athletic talent was evident across all venues.

Both our boys' and girls' squash programs showed consistent improvement throughout the season, culminating in strong finishes at their respective national championships. On the slopes, our ski team maintained a high level of steady success all year, while our indoor track athletes continued to hit new personal bests and elevate their performance with every meet.

These achievements stretch across a wide range of disciplines and reflect the dedication and competitive spirit that define our community. We invite you to dive into this newsletter to celebrate these victories and find resources to stay connected as our spring teams begin their own journeys toward excellence.

Warmly,

Blair Academy Athletics Department

RECENT HEADLINES

CURRENT BUCS

- Back-to-back New Jersey Gatorade Player of the Year Deron Rippey '26 cemented his legacy in Blair basketball as a McDonald's All-American and 1,000-point scorer at Blair.
- Varsity wrestler Salah Tsarni '27 won the 2026 U17 Pan-Am Team Trials in both Greco-Roman and freestyle at 92 kgs. At the National Prep Championships, he won the 190 lbs. weight class and was voted the Most Outstanding Wrestler. He also was named the Ray Mendoza recipient for earning the most team points.
- Boys' varsity basketball coach Joe Mantegna surpassed 500 career wins with a victory over Northfield Mount Hermon in January.
- Basketball forward Priyanka Ponnampalam '26 was selected to compete in the elite Philadelphia All-American Game.
- Emerson Gaitan '28 was named to the MAX Field Hockey Top 100 players list of the Class of 2028.
- Point guard Jaen Chatman '26 and center Coleman Elkins '26 were selected to compete in the Capital Classic High School All-Star Game.
- Wide receiver Mayan Muchugua '26 won the Maxwell Football Club's Mini Max Award this past winter.

ALUMNI

- Basketball guard Otega Oweh '22 earned All-SEC Second Team at the University of Kentucky.
- Basketball guard Olivia Miles '21 led Texas Christian University to a Big 12 women's basketball championship.
- Guard Zeynep Ozel '24 leads Dartmouth women's basketball in points and assists this season.
- Midfielder Brynne Grant '24 netted two goals for University of Michigan lacrosse in their stunning upset of No. 5 Florida.
- Wrestler Shayne Van Ness '21 continues his dominant run at Penn State, finishing the dual season undefeated at 27-0,

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capturing the Big Ten Championship and finishing runner-up in the NCAA Championships.

- EIWA's 2025 Freshman of the Year, wrestler Logan Rozynski '24, won the EIWA Championship at 157 lbs., leading Lehigh University to their second consecutive team title.
- Wrestler Marc-Anthony McGowan '23 won his second consecutive Ivy League championship for Princeton University at 125 lbs. and finished second at the 2026 NCAA Championship.
- Wrestling for the United States Naval Academy, Danny Wask '22 placed sixth and became an NCAA All-American for the second year in a row at 174 lbs.

SPRING VARSITY SPORT PREVIEWS

Boys' Varsity Lacrosse

Coaching Staff: Mike Squillante (HC), Brian Antonelli '93, Mike Squillante Sr.

Record last year: 11-5

Quote from the head coach: "The 2026 class finished their first spring on campus at seven and eight but, over the past two seasons, they have earned a combined 21 and 11 record. As a program, we are eager to see the success they have during their final spring on campus—leaving Blair lacrosse better than they found it."

Girls' Varsity Lacrosse

Coaching Staff: Mackenzie Sember (HC), Valerie Lohr, Courtney Cronin

Record last year: 7-8

Quote from the head coach: "I'm looking forward to the talent we have this year. Every season brings a new team with a mix of returners and new students, and I love seeing how they come together. This is a group who genuinely cares for one another, and we're excited to celebrate all the little wins along the way."

Boys' Crew

Coaching Staff: Kat Gould (HC), Dylan Gould, Caitlin Dunne, Istvan Csanyi, Annie Gardner, Latta Browse

Record last year: MAPL Champions

Quote from the head coach: "This season the men's rowing team is working on continuing to grow as teammates and athletes. We are hoping to have a strong showing this spring, and that our depth will continue to push the program up. A rising tide lifts all boats."

Girls' Crew

Coaching Staff: John Redos '09 (HC), Dylan Gould, Caitlin Dunne, Istvan Csanyi, Annie Gardner, Latta Browse

Record last year: MAPL Champions

Quote from the head coach: "We're excited to get back on the water after a strong fall sculling season and a productive winter of training. It's hard to believe Chula Vista is right around the corner, and we'll be bringing our largest group yet, with 80 athletes and coaches attending. The athletes have put in consistent work throughout the year and are ready to give their best when we return to the Paulinskill."

Varsity Baseball

Coaching Staff: Matt Smith (HC), Dennis O'Neil, Joe Wagner, Dave Prezioso

Record last year: 9-7, NJISAA Prep A State Champions

Quote from the head coach: "I am excited to see our team compete. Coming off of an intense offseason training program and with high expectations following a state championship win, I respect and admire how our returners and new players have evolved. We are excited to compete in front of the Blair community this spring."

Varsity Softball

Coaching Staff: Nadia Abascal (co-HC), Christina Giambrone '06 (co-HC), Carolyn Conforti-Browse '79, Chris Thatcher

Record last year: 10-9

Quote from the head coach: "I'm looking forward to seeing our team develop and continuing our legacy of building a great season with the girls who love the game and have fun together."

Boys' Varsity Tennis

Coaching Staff: Rod Gerdson (HC)

Record last year: 11-0, MAPL Champions

Quote from the head coach: "The boys tennis team is poised for another successful season with its top three senior players returning to the courts and a host of new talented students ready to fill in the middle of the lineup. The new players bring youthful exuberance and energy to a veteran team. Here's to a great season!"

Boys' Varsity Golf

Coaching Staff: Andrew Sykes (HC)

Record last year: 9-1, MAPL Champions

Quote from the head coach: "We return five of our top six from last year's MAPL winning team, and a winter of practices by the boys has us excited for the coming season."



Girls' Varsity Golf

Coaching Staff: Paul Clavel '88 (HC)

Record last year: 5-1

Quote from the head coach: "With most of our returning top six players back and the addition of a couple experienced golfers, I'm really looking forward to seeing how this team competes. It will definitely take a team effort to post some low scores."

Outdoor Track & Field

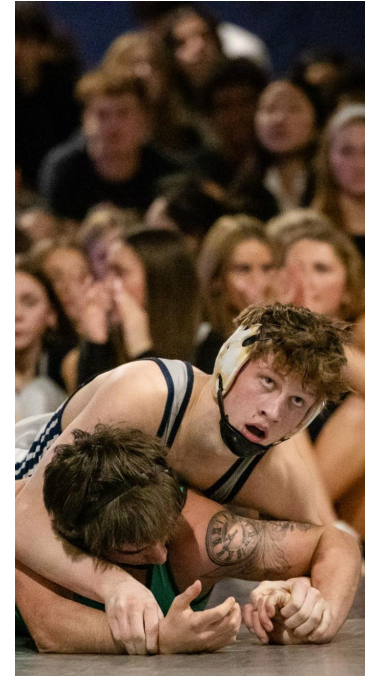
Coaching Staff: Eddy Thornton (HC), Mark Williams, Dana Donlon, Stirling Ince, Will Dollhopf, Emily Lunger '17

Quote from the head coach: "With a strong group of returners on both the boys' and girls' sides, we're excited to build on the momentum from a successful indoor season. This is a growing team, and the level of competitiveness—both within our squad and in the meets we'll face—continues to rise. We're looking forward to seeing the snow melt, getting outside and watching this group put together some fast times, big jumps, strong throws and special performances all spring long. Go Bucs!"

BLAIR HAMMER AWARD

Recipients of the Blair Hammer Award are not necessarily the most accomplished athletes on a team—or even varsity players. Instead, the award honors students who embody the qualities engraved on the hammer itself: Grit, strength, teamwork, character and effort.

This season, we are proud to award the Blair Hammer Award to: Eloise Weekes '29, girls' basketball (JV)
Weston Borgers '28, wrestling



UPCOMING EVENTS

- 4/4 BOYS' VARSITY AND JV LACROSSE VS. ST. PETER'S PREP AT 1:30 P.M.
- 4/15 GRANDPARENTS' DAY: GIRLS' LACROSSE, BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL GAMES AT 4:00 P.M.
- 4/17 TENNIS AND GOLF AT 4:00 P.M.
- 5/9 MAPL TRACK-AND-FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS AT BLAIR AT 12:00 P.M.

CHECK US OUT

- [Blair Athletics Instagram](#)
- [Blair Athletics Livestream](#)
- [Blair Athletics Sports Photos](#)
- [Blair Athletics Website](#)

ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2026

COLIN J. KILRAIN '77

Vice Admiral Colin Kilrain '77 spent just one impactful year at Blair as a postgraduate wrestler, but it proved successful in elevating him to national prominence. In 1977, he was the national prep champion in the 189 lb. weight class. After the hilltop, Colin wrestled at Lehigh University, where he was a three-time All American. Colin was ranked number one in the country his last two years at Lehigh and placed third at the NCAAs three times, from 1980 to 1982. He is one of only nine four-time champions in the 110-plus year history of the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association and one of just three wrestlers to win a championship at three different weight classes (167, 177 and 190). Colin was a two-time captain at Lehigh and won 90 percent of his matches with a 87-8 record, securing a place among the top 10 wrestlers in the school's history.

Colin also wrestled internationally, earning the opportunity to represent the U.S. on two separate international teams. Colin was inducted into the Roger S. Penske/Lehigh Athletics Hall of Fame in 2007 for his legacy at the school and his career of service as a Naval Special Warfare SEAL officer in the U.S. Navy. The National Wrestling Hall of Fame awarded him the Outstanding American Award at the state level in 2011 and national level in 2014. The award “is presented to those individuals who have used the disciplines of wrestling to launch notable careers in other walks of life.” Colin is the proud father of Sean '20 and Liam '23, who continued the family's wrestling legacy at Blair.

NICOLE HELMSTETTER '89

A four-year Buc, Nicole Helmstetter '89 distinguished herself as a three-sport athlete on the hilltop, playing on the field hockey, basketball and softball teams. In the fall of 1987, Nicole assisted the field hockey team in capturing the New Jersey prep “B” state championship. In basketball, she helped the team reach the state finals for the first time since 1977 in her sophomore year and served as captain as a senior, earning all-state honors from the *NJ Star-Ledger*.

However, it was on the softball field where Nicole truly shined. She was Blair's Most Valuable Player during her first season and again as a junior, leading the team in batting and fielding percentages, and elected captain as both a junior and senior. In the spring of 1988, Nicole captained the New Jersey prep “B” champion team, leading them to a perfect 15-0 record. In recognition of that impressive run, the team was inducted into the Blair Athletic Hall of Fame in 2021. Through all four softball seasons, Nicole was named to the NJ All-State Prep team. She was also honored with All-Area, Northwestern New Jersey, First Team designation. During her junior and senior years, Nicole won the Rick Stowell Prize for softball, and she won the William Zester Memorial Award as a senior, given to the female athlete who best represents Blair in competition.

ZACHARY ESPOSITO '02

During his four years at Blair Academy, Zack Esposito '02 established himself as one of the most accomplished wrestlers in school history. He earned three individual national prep championship titles and helped the team to a first-place finish each year. A fierce competitor, he was a two-time Ironman champion, two-time ASICS High School All-American and three-time Beast of the East champion. Along with his national recognition, Zack earned Blair's Stephen Curry Prize for marked improvement during his first year at the School, the Robert Dalling Prize for the student who best represented the School in athletic competition at graduation and the Jamieson Wrestling Prize.

Zack continued his impressive wrestling career at Oklahoma State University (OSU) as a three-time NCAA All-American and three-time Big 12 Conference Champion, winning four-straight NCAA Team Championships. Zack captured the 2005 NCAA Championship and became one of the most accomplished wrestlers in OSU history. He is tied for 10th at OSU with 120 career victories, and his 32 career major decisions stands sixth on the Cowboys' all-time list. He proudly represented the United States on the international stage at the 2008 World Cup.

After college, he remained on the Oklahoma State University coaching staff for 14 years, coaching 44 All-Americans and helping the Cowboys to six team Big 12 championships and 48 individual Big 12 titles. His coaching resume extends internationally, where he has coached the U.S. winning teams at the 2018 World Cup and the 2017 Junior Freestyle Worlds. Today, he continues to shape the sport of wrestling as the associate head coach at North Carolina State University, continuing to produce NCAA champions and multiple All-Americans. In his first year at NC State, Zack helped lead the Wolfpack to an eighth-place finish at the NCAA Championships.

PAULA HONG '16

As a ninth grader in 2013, Paula Hong '16 notably blazed her way onto the golf course as the overall champion in the Swing Against Cancer Tournament at Peddie School, defeating both boys' and girls' fields with a final score of 71. Her dominance on the course only grew from there. A four-time All-MAPL and three-time NJ prep “A” state champion, she maintained an impressive average career score of 39 and is the only girl in program history to win multiple individual state championships. Paula captained not only the golf team, but also the volleyball team, which she played on for all four years. In recognition of her achievements, she received the golf award twice and the 2016 William Zester Memorial Award, given to the female athlete who best represents Blair in competition.

Paula matriculated to Georgetown University as a government major with a minor in journalism. While there, she completed many internships, including a stint at ESPN as a multimedia intern for the renowned *Pardon the Interruption* show. After graduating Georgetown, she followed her passion with golf as a tour media official with the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), promoting the LPGA Tour brand by elevating player stories and events through daily tournament coverage, press materials and feature writing, while comanaging LPGA Korea social media and coordinating with PR agencies and tournament directors to ensure strong media coverage. Today, she covers all



verticals, including sports, for her clients who invest in digital programmatic advertising at StackAdapt and recently obtained her MBA from UMass Amherst.

RICHARD L. STOWELL SR.

Assistant Director of Athletics and Coach Rick Stowell Sr. dedicated 23 years to Blair athletics and the generation of young athletes he mentored in football, basketball and baseball. Coach Stowell was named the *New Jersey Herald* Basketball Coach of the Year in 1973, and he helped lead the 1974 football team to an undefeated season. In 1978, he coached the baseball team to a first-place ranking by the *New Jersey Herald*. The Classes of 1965 and 1971 dedicated the *ACTA* yearbook to Coach Stowell as a testament to his leadership and impact, and he was inducted into the Sussex County Sports Hall of Fame in 1977. The dedication in the 1971 *ACTA* reads “To Rick Stowell, for your whole and earnest giving of yourself to us all.”

Beyond the championships and team titles, Coach Stowell’s greatest legacy may be the athletes he helped shape. He mentored several future Blair Athletic Hall of Fame inductees, including Craig Scott ’68, Mike ’71 and Mark ’74 Lieberman, Thomas McLean ’73, Skip Waddell ’73 and David “Moochie” Waddell ’76. After Blair, he went on to coach baseball at Boca Raton Academy, where he continued to make his mark with a regional championship in 1982. Coach Stowell and his wife, Teresa, proudly raised three sons, Rich Jr. ’76, Randy ’79 and Ronnie, before he passed away in 2001.

