

# The Mustang

Leading the stampede with award-winning coverage



Immigration Services >> MHS Spring Musical Preview >> pg. 2-3  
Problems with College Athletics >> MLB Season Predictions >> pg. 6-7  
Girls Softball Season Success >> pg. 8-9



Vol. 65 Issue 6

Mundelein High School, 1350 W. Hawley St., Mundelein, IL 60060

May Issue

## The power of pageant queens in our communities

Lia Koski  
*Editor-In-Chief*

Pageant queens are more than just pretty faces, they are contributors to change in our communities. Pageantry requires young women to dedicate themselves to helping others while also fostering confidence within themselves.

Pageant queens go through a selection process where they must practice their public speaking, physical elegance, and ability to think on the fly. They also create “platforms” where they highlight one issue in their community and find ways to help.

Current Miss Fremont Township’s Teen and past Miss Lake County Senior Lia Kagan, explained how the pageantry process works. “The pageant process is much more complex than most people think. Pageants nowadays are rarely walking around a stage in a pretty dress. Most pageants, like the Lake County Illinois State Pageant, have an interview portion where the contestant sits with a panel of judges for a varying amount of time (depending on the age group) and is asked questions about themselves, their viewpoints, aspirations, and community service,” said Kagan.

Kagan continued, “Onstage, there’s the speech portion, where contestants have typically thirty seconds to a minute to speak on a topic that is set by the pageant, which is usually their community service initiative/platform. There’s also an evening gown and onstage question/pop question. Not only is the contestant judged by their poise and confidence in their walk for evening gown, but they are asked a number of higher level questions depending on the age group.”

Kagan said why she loves and joined pageantry, “I love being a queen because I love sisterhood. I have connected with so many capable, motivated young women and seeing their success pushes me to be the best possible version of myself,” she added, “Serving my community as a role model has also taught me so much, connecting with members of my community and giving back in every way I can is the most fulfilling thing.”

Miss Mundelein, Senior Natalia Gutierrez, agreed that pageantry connected her with ways to help the community as well as younger girls. She said, “I get 2 bonus

little sisters: my Junior and Little Miss are both the most incredible girls. Being able to be a role model for them is one of the best experiences I’ve had this year, and I know that after our reign, I’ll always be their big sister.”

There are other benefits to pageantry as well. Junior Yael Pikus, Miss Vernon Hills and Miss Congeniality of Lake County, said, “Some, not all benefits of being a pageant queen are community service, increase in public presence and speaking ability, increase in confidence, new connections, and opportunities, as well as a year filled with amazing moments and memories that will be cherished forever.”

Miss Wauconda Junior Lily Vander Wal also agreed that “pageantry has definitely helped [her] develop [her] social and public speaking skills, which will continue to benefit [her] throughout high school, college, and life.”

Each one of these queens has their own platform which they plan and fundraiser events for in order to spread awareness throughout the county. They also all support one another by attending each other’s events.

Pikus mentioned her platform: “My platform is called Support the Girls which is all about providing support for the brave women who have dealt with or are dealing with Breast Cancer,” Pikus added, “I hosted four events this year, one of which included assembling a team of over 40 people to walk for the cause, raised over \$1,700 towards cancer research, and I met so many brave warriors in the process. I will be continuing with my platform even after my reign because I believe that everyone should feel supported and know that they are never alone.”

While Pikus contributed to cancer research, Kagan worked to fight Alzheimer’s Disease in elderly patients. Kagan said, “My platform or community service initiative is called “Amma’s Answer,” dedicated to my late grandmother (who I called Amma) who lost her battle with Alzheimer’s Disease in 2020. The goal of Amma’s Answer is to promote Alzheimer’s Awareness through volunteer work and advocacy. In my capacity as Miss Mundelein 2023, I held a walk within my community to raise money for the Alzheimer’s Association, and ended up raising over a thousand dollars, as well as collected nec-

essary comfort items for the residents of Gurnee Memory Care.”

Kagan continued to explain what she’s accomplished throughout her reign. “I helped organize a senior prom for the residents of Gurnee Memory Care, gathering town queens from all around Lake County to help with resident’s nails and makeup, and then we spent time with residents and their families, helping pass out food and keeping residents company. That was by far my favorite event I have ever had the honor to contribute to because seeing the joy it brought the residents and their families during such a difficult time made my heart so happy,” said Kagan.

Meanwhile, Gutierrez worked with younger children in order to make sure they all have equal access to school resources. Through her platform called “Confidence in Classrooms,” she supported the education of children coming from low income and single parent households.

Gutierrez added, “I held a winter clothing drive along with my event, ‘Share a Notebook Write a New Story.’ During this event I was able to get with my sister queens and decorate notebooks with positive messages, fun visuals, and encouraging words. I handed the notebooks out to a local school district in hopes they would increase classroom engagement with a fun new notebook to write in!”

Even with all of their hard work in their platforms and supporting the community, pageant queens still face misconceptions about their purpose.

Vander Wal said, “Pageants have changed drastically over the past few decades. Because of past pageant culture, most people assume that it’s all about appearances—big hair, perfect makeup, being thin, or having a talent like baton twirling. In reality, pageantry today is all about empowering younger generations of girls to be confident in who they are, finding their passions, and using that to better the world around them. Competing in a pageant was one of the best decisions I’ve made; It has helped me to be more confident and positive, as well as finding joy in community service.”

Pikus added that another misconception is that “Pageant Queens are vain and are all about looks and not smarts or personality. This is false, as our pageants are judged based on personality, congeniality,

and confidence, not on who has the prettiest hair or outfit,” she said.

Kagan mentioned how pageantry has provided her with life-long skills beyond just poise. Because of being involved in pageants, “I have felt prepared, polished, and calm in all of my job interviews as well as college interviews. I can handle almost any social interaction with grace from being constantly out in the community, connecting to people from all walks of life. As well, I have learned how to organize events and fundraisers, including gaining sponsorship from community business owners,” she said.

Gutierrez said, “The main focus about pageants is how it can grow young girls into women and how we can have confidence, all while helping others and dedicating our times as queens to important causes that a lot of the time directly impact us personally.”



*Pictured above from right to left is Natalia Gutierrez, Yael Pikus, and Lia Kagan at the Mundelein Park for an event hosted by the Lake County Illinois State Pageant Mundelein queens. At the park there were activities for people to participate in while enjoying being in nature.*



## Seeking immigration services within the community

Lia Koski  
*Editor-In-Chief*

The Trump administration has proposed to execute mass deportations of immigrants without documentation. It is important that the immigrant community informs themselves and prepares themselves for any encounter with the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. People can turn to non profit organizations and immigration lawyers for more information and support.

President and Principal Attorney at Immigration Law Associates PC in Skokie, Renee Burek, represents individuals and businesses in all aspects of immigration matters, including student and work visas, family and employment-based permanent residence, and complex naturalization and citizenship cases.

She said, “The Trump administration has been very vocal about their plans to remove those without lawful status from the United States, including through the use of various scare tactics hoping that many foreign nationals will self-deport. Stories of immigration authorities detaining long-term residents of the United States, mistakenly removing those with protected status, and ramping up enforcement at airports and border crossings (even for people with valid visas and green cards) have spread fear among immigrant communities throughout the entire country.”

Burek added, “People are afraid to go to work, to take their children to school, to attend religious services. The best defense to the current situation is to seek competent legal advice and know your rights as an immigrant. There are many community organizations that provide helpful resources and “know your rights” information, including the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) at [ilrc.org](http://ilrc.org).”

One local nonprofit organization that provides immigrant services is HACES (Hispanic American Community Education and Services), located in Waukegan.

Martha Hernandez, the program manager of NAI (New American Initiative) at HACES explained, “We assist clients with their citizenship process from beginning to end. We assist with a consultation, with their documentation, and we prepare their application to then mail it to immigration services,” said Hernandez. HACES also provides citizenship classes where students can prepare for their naturalization exams.

Due to the actions of the Trump administration and their proposals of mass deportations, Hernandez said how more than ever, immigrants have been seeking out HACES’s services.

Hernandez acknowledged how anxious the immigrant community may be right now, but she advises them to remain calm and stay informed. In order to help with this, HACES also provides a monthly

“know your rights” presentation. Hernandez said, “Inform yourself on your rights, get your documentation in order, do whatever you can to get more information from a lawyer or non profit organization.”

Immigration lawyers like Burek, can provide professional advice for specific situations regarding citizenship. “Those unsure about their options and rights should seek advice from a competent immigration attorney. A consultation with a knowledgeable attorney can provide them with an opportunity to explore potential options for legalizing their status. An attorney can also advise them of their rights and proper procedures to follow if immigration agents come to their home or place of work,” said Burek.

However, Burek added that when looking for a lawyer online, people should be careful and consider the lawyer’s credibility. “Fraudsters often prey on vulnerable immigrants by misleading people about their qualifications and falsely promising quick work authorizations and legal status. Falling victim to these scams can cause financial loss and expose immigrants to the risk of deportation,” she said.

Burek recommended that people use reliable sources of referrals from the American Immigration Lawyers Association ([aila.org](http://aila.org)) and verify the attorney’s credentials through their state’s bar association. The organization responsible for overseeing at-

orneys licensed in Illinois is the Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commission ([iadc.org](http://iadc.org)).

Another reputable non profit organization that can help is Mano a Mano Family Resource Center. Mano a Mano is located in Round Lake and provides immigrants with gaining access to healthcare systems, productive parenting programs, affordable legal services, children tutoring, and ways to mobilize civil engagement for the immigrant community.

One person who turned to Mano a Mano for help was Mafe Swanlund, a woman from Colombia. She said, “Mano a Mano was the first institution that literally offered me a helping hand. Two years ago, I moved to this city and from the beginning, they provided me with guidance on how to complete the necessary procedures for my citizenship process. They offered me activities, classes, and events to attend with my son so we could become familiar with this culture.”

Swanlund added, “Thanks to their support and excellent service, I can say that I am now a citizen of this country. This was all without complicated processes and without extra costs.”

Burek added how people can specifically reach out to her for guidance or with questions. She can be reached at [rburek@immig-chicago.com](mailto:rburek@immig-chicago.com) with any immigration related needs.

## Sunrise on the Reaping: a look into the newest Hunger Games novel

Hannah Roberts  
*News-Features Editor*

“When you’ve been set up to lose everything you love, what is there left to fight for?”

This motto was used for months to gain traction for the newest edition in the Hunger Games series *Sunrise on the Reaping*, the long awaited story of Haymitch’s games. In the original trilogy Haymitch was the mentor for District 12 tributes Katniss and Peeta. He was a severe alcoholic and pessimist.

Very little was known about his time in the 50th Hunger Games other than the fact that he had to face not the normal 23 tributes but 47. It was also known that the final showdown was between him and a girl from District 1 that involved Haymitch finding a rebound point at the end of the arena where anything dropped off that point would come flying back up.

On March 18th of this year, fans of the series finally got to know Haymitch’s story. From Reaping Day to the Games themselves to what happened after he got out, the story explores Haymitch in a way never before seen.

During the events of *Sunrise on the Reap-*

ing, Haymitch is freshly 16, with his birthday being the opening day of the novel. He isn’t the closed off, brooding alcohol addict readers are familiar with. Instead he is a boy filled with love for his mother, brother, Sid, and girlfriend, Lenore Dove.

The events of the Games are far from

“*Sunrise on the Reaping* is filled with action, unwavering love (in many forms), familiar characters, new faces, and wonderful writing.”

normal from the amount of tributes to the way that Haymitch himself was reaped for them. There are alliances formed across many districts, rather than the handful of people that is typical. Even the arena is far more deadly than usual.

*Sunrise on the Reaping* also gives us a look into President Snow in his middle years. The book reinforces just how evil President Snow is, and that he is willing to do anything to get the Districts to stay in line.

The novel also includes a slew of characters from the original trilogy that Haymitch seemed to know very well but reader’s never knew why. Each time a familiar character shows up it clicks into place, a piece of the overarching story of the Hunger Games. With every character that is introduced readers understand more about Haymitch and why he is the way he is.

*Sunrise on the Reaping* is filled with action, unwavering love (in many forms), familiar characters, new faces, and wonderful writing. It is almost as if author Suzanne Collins crafted the story from things she had already written into previous books in the series. The book is well worth the time of any fan of the Hunger Games.



Pictured above is the cover of the new Hunger Games novel, “*Sunrise on the Reaping*” written by Suzanne Collins. You can find a copy of this book at Barnes and Noble.

## Shakespeare meets satire: spring musical “Something Rotten”

Darby Schwerman  
*Staff Reporter*

How were musicals invented? Was Shakespeare really the greatest playwright of the Renaissance? *Something Rotten* by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O’Farrell explores these questions and so much more within a musical-theatre-joke and flashy dance number packed show.

The story follows the Bottom brothers, who are desperate for a hit play. “The very, very popular writer at this time, of course, was William Shakespeare,” explained director Jonathan Meier. “At its core, the play is about the Bottom brothers trying to come up with a successful play to compete with how popular Shakespeare is.”

The show features comedy of every kind, even including some adult humor, but the heart of the show is its countless theatre references. “I like how the entire show is kind of like a love letter to musical theatre, having references to other musicals, while still maintaining a cohesive story,” said senior Alex Benassi, who plays Nick Bottom.

*Something Rotten* has something for everyone, but is especially geared towards seasoned musical theatre enjoyers, “There’s a million Shakespeare jokes, and there’s two million musical jokes in there. It’s a little bit like *Inside Baseball*,” Meier commented.

In terms of what style of music to expect, “It’s a contemporary show, so it’s more like pop. It’s kind of what you would think of with more modern musicals right now. It’s not like *Guys and Dolls*, that was such an old show that was very classical. This is much more pop and fun,” said vocal director Cory Thompson.

Along with the fast paced music comes another exciting aspect of the show, its dance numbers. *Something Rotten* stands out. “It’s got some elements that don’t always make it into the musical. There are several tap dance numbers. It’s got some huge production numbers, which are a lot of fun to put together, and we’ve got a great creative team,” said Meier.

It takes a great deal of work to assemble a show this big, which is why it inevitably comes with some challenges. One of these is the dances, specifically tap, “It’s got a bunch of tap dancing. That’s a wonderful challenge, but it is a challenge, and it’s not exactly my wheelhouse. So I’m really leaning on the staff this year, meaning the choreographer and the vocal director, leaning on them more than usual, because it is their expertise,” said Meier.

The extensive effort that goes into the show doesn’t stop at dances. The show poses a unique vocal challenge as well. “Because these shows are written for Broadway tenors and basses, they tend to

sit really high for high school tenors and basses, so we always have to do some adjusting of what parts are singing what. But this year, I feel like the kids did like a fantastic job with it and learned it. There’s a lot of music and they learned it quickly,” Thompson explained.

Even through all of the hard work, the cast is dedicated and rises to the challenge, “I love all of the dancing and singing that the show is packed with,” said Benassi.

The cast and crew have formed unique connections with this show in particular. With a story like this, it’s easy to see why. “It’s got a really sweet story at its core. ‘To thine own self be true,’ is a line from *Hamlet*, and that’s really the crux of the play is finding who you are and staying true to that, which is a great message. Nick Bottom does a whole lot of really stupid things, but it’s all in service of trying to make a better life for himself and his family,” said Meier.

To witness the hard work the MHS theatre department has put into this comedic, heartfelt, energy packed musical, make sure to buy tickets online any time or in the commons the week of the show at a discounted price. The show airs Thursday through Saturday April twenty fourth, fifth, and sixth at 7:30PM, and Saturday at 2:00PM. Students can also attend previews during all lunch periods on April twenty third.

## Dismantling of the Department of Education

Shrushti Shah  
*Staff Reporter*

On March 20, 2025, Donald Trump signed an executive order to close the United States Department of Education.

On the official White House website, President Trump stated that he signed the executive order because he believes that the department has “plainly failed our children, our teachers, and our families,” and that “American reading and math scores are near historical lows.”

Trump believes that the Department of Education has constantly been failing parents and students in terms of quality of education while taking away funds from them. Thus, he thinks that the duties of the Department should be passed down to the states. In addition, the official website asserts that the states must take action to eliminate any funds rooting from “diversity, equity and inclusion.”

Stacey Gorman, the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning at D120, shared that MHS receives Title I, II, and IV funds from the federal government.

She explained that Title I covers funds to help underperforming students in the form of academic literacy, professional develop-

ment for teachers regarding interventions, and parent nights to assist parents in supporting their children.

Title II covers funds for professional development and mentoring teachers.

“All of our new teachers get two mentors from that fund,” she said.

Title IV goes towards electives, community connections and parental involvement. Title II and IV funds are shared with Carmel Catholic High School as they are a private school in District 120.

Gorman believes that MHS and other school districts in Illinois will be protected from losing federal funding because of the actions of the Illinois State Board of Education.

Naaz Modan, an expert in policy and equity issues, wrote in an article called, “Trump’s Education Department changes could lead to systematic ‘chaos,’” that as a result of the department closing, students will be at a disadvantage because their equal access to education will be harmed if Title I funds are withdrawn and they do not have the same access to resources.

“Less guidance and responsiveness from federal agencies can increase fraud, waste, and abuse since there’s less oversight and less help when people have questions,”

Modan mentioned.

Gorman had similar concerns. Even though she understood that the students’ scores had been drastically low after the COVID-19 pandemic, closing down the Department of Education meant that it could be worse because of the lack of oversight.

“Who is going to check on the schools to see if they are teaching well?” she questioned.

Gorman added that if the federal funds are withdrawn, fewer people might be going to college because they would not have as many scholarships available to them as before which might lead to fewer research and internship opportunities for students.

“Without such research, student learning and development will be harmed,” Modan agreed.

Although the official White House website states that the executive order was passed to enable parents and students to escape from a system that is “failing them,” it may instead take away educational opportunities from students by limiting educational resources for financially disadvantaged students.

### The Mustang Staff

The Mustang is a student-produced publication published in print about every six weeks and also online by the journalism students of Mundelein High School, 1350 W. Hawley St., Mundelein, IL, 60060, phone (847) 949-2200. The Mustang provides accurate and objective coverage of events and topics that are interesting and relevant to high school students. The staff welcomes signed letters from readers for possible publication. These letters can be submitted to the Journalism Room A101.

**Editor-In-Chief**  
Lia Koski

**Online Editor**  
Eric Beauchamp

**News/Features Editor**  
Hannah Roberts

**Staff Reporters**  
Sunday Daniels  
Blake Guenther  
Xavier Hilgart  
Ashton Salski  
Darby Schwerman  
Shrushti Shah  
Daniel Stricklin

**Adviser**  
Diane Covert

Follow us on Instagram  
[@mundynewspaper](https://www.instagram.com/mundynewspaper)

Check out the  
online edition at  
[mhmustang.com](https://mhmustang.com)



## Boys water polo team embarks on a new era with new coach

Xavier Hilgart  
Staff Reporter

One win away. That was the story of the Mundelein High School boys water polo team in 2024. So close to the state tournament, but not quite making it. Falling in the sectional finals match to the Stevenson Patriots, the boys water polo team was in need of a new identity for their upcoming season. This issue was exacerbated when longtime coach Russell Gates retired from his position of head coach this past fall.

That vacancy would not last long however, as MHS alum and former water polo player Mike Ward took over the job. A 2016 graduate who himself was coached by Gates, Ward is more than familiar with Mundelein water polo. As a member of the MHS team from 2012-16, he accumulated three all conference and all sectional distinctions, including one 2nd team all state honor his senior year. Also a swimmer, he helped out multiple MHS state teams in the mid 2010s with his 100 backstroke, especially in 2016, where his excellence in polo and swim earned him MHS most valuable senior male athlete.

After graduating from MHS, Ward went on to play Division One water polo at Wager University in New York, the highest level of water polo achievable here in America before the olympic level.

Clearly the experience is there, however his main goal is how he can impact the team. “When Gates stepped down, I felt

there was little choice in the matter of his succession, he coached me, I felt I could offer a smooth transition” Ward said, and the players more than agree with that.

Captain and senior John Gorsica said this in reference to the transition: “I think the transition between coaches has been very smooth. Mostly because Ward was able to see how Gates already ran things. Paired with his extensive water polo experience and already having been part of the team.”

Despite some early season challenges, as all teams experience regardless of coaching experience, calling him well liked by the members of the team would be an understatement. Senior and fellow captain to Gorsica, Tovi Kharpak praised Ward for his focus on change. “He makes everyone step up,” Kharpak said. “Ward is not afraid to try new things and have other people step up.”

Getting people to step up is exactly his goal. His main focus as new coach was to build an equal, unified team, with his main focus being the basics first. As he puts it, “Each and every player can benefit from improved fundamentals, I don’t need to coach a full line up of all state players, all I ask for is a group of guys willing to work hard with the patience to master the most basic aspects of water polo.”

His goal is to create trust within the team. Trust in themselves, trust in their teammates and trust in the team.

This level of trust combined with the high expectations he sets upon the team

is creating lots of excitement not just during this current season, but for the future as well. He headlines his style with a phrase he heard from his Wagner coach for years, with it being, “get comfortable being uncomfortable.” As Ward puts it, “The quote embodies a mindset, a mentality to train and perform under exhaustive circumstances. If you’re tired from practicing hard, you’re doing it right.” Games are incredibly exhausting on the body, so the more often you feel that way in practice, the more prepared you should become.

Simply, his coaching style is one designed to elevate every player involved to their very best, and that is an exciting prospect for everyone involved.

Current junior on the team Shehan Chandrasekera also mentioned how he makes practices fun and enjoyable while still getting in the meaningful work required to improve. He said, “Although we have a lot of seniors on our varsity team graduating soon, I am sure that with Ward’s coaching, our sophomores and juniors will be able to step up and carry on our team’s legacy.”

Chandrasekera is not the only person thinking about the future however, as Ward’s list of goals extends well beyond this year. His main focus is actually on the summer, as Mundelein currently does not have a summer water polo club for either boys or girls. Some play on local clubs, however Ward is looking to change that by creating a Mundelein one, which he believes is very important.

“A good summer session bleeds into fall, the fall session bleeds into the swim season, the swim season is super important as it sets the tone for polo with so many guys doing both,” he said. In his eyes, winners are built year round, and his goal is to build winners.

One of the best ways to build a winning program is to increase the size of the program, and Ward is looking to do exactly that. He says, “I would love to foster a higher interest in age group water polo and increase attendance in the sport as a whole.”

He also added about his interest in masters water polo, an area lacking massively across the entire nation. After college ends, most water polo players never play again, as the only path up is the Olympic team. So for many people, they will spend no more than ten years even having an opportunity to play water polo, with many having way less than that.

Increasing participation in water polo, and aquatics in general, can only benefit the sport. For now though, his focus remains on the current season.

After a tough early season loss to sectional rival Buffalo Grove, they bounced back with two conference wins over Warren and Lake Forest, which included a 23–7 win over Lake Forest on senior night. With these wins hopefully shifting the momentum back their way, they turn towards achieving a second consecutive sectional final appearance.

## What’s in for Spring: a 101 lesson on the upcoming Spring fashion trends

Sunday Daniels  
Staff Reporter

Gone are the bulky jackets and snow boots, and in their place? Light layers, tube tops, and outfits that feel as fresh as the season itself.

There’s something about spring that just makes everyone want to try something new. Maybe it’s the sunshine, or maybe it’s the promise of summer right around the corner. Either way, students are stepping out in serious style. From breezy sundresses to crop tops paired with jean skirts, this season’s looks are all about mixing comfort with confidence.

“I love to balance comfort and glamour by trying to accessorize and doing different hairstyles,” said Natalie McDaniel. “Or doing a little more makeup to dress up in an outfit that I feel comfortable in.”

One of the most noticeable trends this spring is the return of pastels and lace with a twist. Think a flowy top paired with converse, or ripped jeans and a lace tank with a detail of a tiny bow just in the middle; Students are showing us how they make creative choices.



*Ballet flats, low-rise pants, and lace are some of the Spring fashion trends.*

“My spring inspo is mainly from Pinterest,” McDaniel added, “I feel like there is a lot of variety to pick from my must-have items and they show me how basic shirts can be paired with anything.”

Spring is also bringing back fun accessories. Cute sunglasses, stacked gold jewelry, and colorful phone cases are showing up in full force. And let’s not forget the shoe game— “I enjoy cute sneakers and even

sandals,” said Alexa Ritchart.

“A perfect spring signature is a pair of jeans with a flowy top or something bright with converse or birks,” said McDaniel.

Of course, the shift in weather also means adjusting for those weird in-between days. It’s sunny in the morning but freezing in the classroom by third period. That’s why layering is key. Lightweight cardigans, zip-ups, and even flannels are making their way back into the mix, giving everyone the flexibility to look cute and stay cozy.

“My go-to outfit for spring is usually a crop top that’s short sleeved with a jacket, and either jeans or leggings because it’s still a little cold outside,” Ritchart said.

As spring unfolds, the girls at school are ready to express themselves, whether that means trying new trends or sticking to personal style staples. And while fashion might be about clothes, it’s also about confidence—and that’s definitely what’s in this season.

So whether you’re walking into school or heading out with friends after class, take a tip from the season: brighten up, layer smart, and don’t be afraid to show off what makes your style bloom.



## Mundelein High School show choir shines bright in grand finale, capping off a sparkling season

Sunday Daniels  
Staff Reporter

The energy was electric at Mundelein High School this past season as the school's award-winning show choirs took the stage for their season finale. The auditorium was packed with family, friends, and community members eager to witness the culmination of months of dedication and hard work. Mundelein's two competitive show choirs, Sound and Lights, delivered dynamic performances that showcased both their technical precision and raw emotion.

The groups, led by Director Cory Thompson, performed a mix of their award-winning competition sets and crowd-favorite numbers, earning standing ovations from the audience. "You get to that last song, and it's like the final mile of the marathon, right? You either come in crawling on your hands and knees, or you have to push and get to that finish line," Thompson said.

After months of rehearsals, competitions, and high-energy performances, the show choir season has officially come to a close. This year's season brought exciting victories, unforgettable moments, and plenty of hard work, leaving members with lasting memories and valuable experiences. For many performers, one competition stood out above the rest.

"Mine was probably our Fort Atkinson performance," said senior performer Sam Zwiefelhofer. "I think, one, we performed really well and won that competition, so

that was super fun. And I also feel like I just had a good time with my friends. I feel like we had a lot of fun."

Throughout the season, the choir showed noticeable growth both in their performance skills and their ability to work as a team.

"We graduated a huge senior class last year, so a lot of people in our varsity group this year are new," said Danielle Saweh. "I think that us starting off on kind of a rocky start, not making finals in the first competition, really kicked some newbies into gear along with everybody else, and it made us really lock in and work hard."

Like any season, this one came with its challenges. One of the biggest struggles was the first performance jitters for junior Sophia Tatevosian. "I love to perform; it's one of the things I'm most passionate about, but I get very, very nervous," said Tatevosian. "But it's nice to be able to overcome it because I think, 'I'm not alone in this, and we're all in this together.'"

Beyond the stage, some of the best moments happened behind the scenes. "Our gratitude wall," said Thompson. "They (Sound and Reverb) write down something they're grateful for or thankful for within our program... It's really neat to see the kids talk about their friendships."

Teamwork played a huge role in the choir's success. "We perform as a team, so everyone from the front to the back has to pull their weight, know their dances, know the melody, and do their parts so that we can succeed," said Saweh. "It's just nice to

be supported and hyped up by everybody," said Tatevosian.

Many people don't realize just how much effort goes into show choir. "It's a lot of work to sing and dance for 20 minutes straight. It doesn't look like a lot of work, and people sometimes question why show choirs fulfill the gym credit. It is hard," said Saweh.

Thompson also adds that "it's essentially a high cardio workout that you're doing under pressure with people watching you, and you're being judged."

Now that the season has ended, emotions are running high. "I feel bittersweet about it. I think that I've improved a lot, and I'm ready for this chapter of my life to close, but at the same time, I will miss it," Saweh explained as a senior.

"I definitely met a lot of cool people, and this has obviously been a part of my life for the past four years, so it's going to be different," Zwiefelhofer, another senior, said.

For future show choir members, the advice is simple: "You'll find so much good community," said Saweh.

"Come in ready to work," said Zwiefelhofer.

"You've got to know what you're signing up for. It's not just a casual activity," said Tatevosian.

As the curtain closes on another season, show choir is more than just a performance: it's a journey of hard work, passion, and friendships that last far beyond the final bow.



photo courtesy of Greg Ney

Representatives from the Reverb show choir, Sophia Tatevosian and Noah Letts, receive the first place trophy from the Fort Atkinson Show Choir Competition. Also on stage is Emilio Burgos from Noise.

## Mundelein girls lacrosse charges into the season with grit, goals, and glory

Sunday Daniels  
Staff Reporter

Lacrosse season is finally here. Players and coaches have high expectations, and with a mix of experienced seniors and promising underclassmen, this season is shaping up to be exciting. Teams have already started their preseason workouts, focusing on skills, strategy, and teamwork. Many players have been training since the offseason, working on their speed, endurance, and stick skills to gain an edge over their opponents.

Varsity coach Filley is feeling optimistic about what her team can accomplish this year. "I want to see girls who work hard and are committed to getting better. I love when a player has lacrosse experience, but there have been plenty of successful varsity players with no experience at all. They may have played other sports, but the most important skill they have is the desire to learn, grow, and be competitive," Filley explained.

One of the biggest storylines heading into the season is the level of competition within the conference. Several teams finished last year with impressive records, and with many key players returning, the battle for

the top spot is expected to be intense. Every game will be a test of skill, endurance, and teamwork.

"Last year, we beat Stevenson for the first time in our program's history. I want to repeat that this year. We are in a tough conference with Warren and Lake Forest who are not only competitive for the state title but are teams that are nationally watched and scouted by college coaches," Filley said.

Junior Molly Price, varsity midfielder with 100 career goals last year, is looking forward to her year on the team. "I've been working on my stick skills consistently outside of the season," she said.

While the varsity team is expected to step up, JV players are also making a name for themselves. Some have already caught the attention of coaches during preseason practices with their speed and effort, proving that they're ready to contribute when called upon.

Returning attack player Ava Cox, a new varsity contributor and a junior, has shown the skills of someone who embodies effort, even outside of the sport. "I have good attack skills, good communication skills, and I try my best to be vocal about my concerns with the team and what we can improve on.

I also strive to support everyone," she said.

Cox believes that the three key takeaways from lacrosse are "meeting new people, improving skills, and just working hard to be better," she added.

All players are eager to showcase their hard work in front of their classmates,

parents, and the community during their games. As they approach, anticipation continues to build. Whether it's seniors looking to leave their mark or young players ready to prove themselves, one thing is lacrosse season is going to be one to remember.



photo courtesy of VIP

Team photo of the girls varsity lacrosse 2024-2025 team.



# Currently college athletics is a mess

Ashton Salski  
Staff Reporter

College athletics is no longer built on the joy of playing a sport in college, but instead players are concerned with the money they can earn.

October 15, 2018 marks the day the NCAA transfer portal was added to simplify transfers for student athletes. At the time of the addition, in order to transfer, players had to sit out one year before eligibility with the team. As of April 2021, the NCAA allowed athletes to transfer one time with automatic eligibility allowing them to play the next year. In April 2024, the NCAA Division one council decided that athletes are now allowed immediate eligibility no matter how many times they have transferred in the past. Already this past year there were 20 transfer players playing on the final four teams of the NCAA basketball tournament.

On July 1, 2021 the NIL (Name, Image and Likeness) was added to collegiate athletics. This causes problems for high school athletes as they now have it harder than ever to get themselves recruited to division one programs as the programs with the most NIL cash can recruit directly from other collegiate programs. College athletes no longer play for teams based on play time and love for the program. They now play where they can make a boatload of NIL cash.

Guidance Department Chair Tom Buenik, whose three sons play sports, said, "Once you get good, you're going to get paid to go elsewhere."

Many people have a problem with this change ever since March Madness recently ended. Few upsets occurred in the tournament and no "Cinderella" run came true this year. This is due to the lack of NIL money the mid-major schools are able to spend on recruiting. According to NIL Wire, 50% of players were transfers in the tournament. Duke, the first seed in the tournament, spent nearly 20 million dollars on their roster, meaning their starting five players are earning a lot of cash.

Cooper Flagg, one of the most sought out high school football recruits, is now earning 48 million dollars worth of NIL a year to play in college. According to Sports Illustrated, the NBA league minimum is 1,157,153.

Buenik said, "I think kids are going to want to stay in college longer. They're going to red shirt, and they're going to do all these different things to stay as long as they can, because that's where you can make more money."

A big change may come into the NCAA world. According to NCSA a big change is expected to take place in the 2025-26 college season. There will no longer be



photo courtesy of Essentially Sports

Olivia Dunne who is involved in a 2.8 billion dollar lawsuit against the NCAA for NIL rights according to New York Post.

a scholarship cap for teams. Some teams may increase in roster ability and some may decrease. Football could increase from 85 players on scholarship to 105 roster spots, which changes the whole system. Other sports may have decreased roster spots which limits the amount of players out of high school being recruited for that sport.

Because of these changes, JUCO (junior colleges) and smaller schools are now a great idea for players who don't want to stop playing their sport. The transfer portal limits spots on the best division one teams leaving lots of recruitment out, but it also leaves a lot of ability to go to a small school and transfer from there.

"It depends on how important the sport is to you. Some kids choose other things about a school versus the sports. In a perfect world, you find a great academic school that you can play sports at," Buenik stated. "Transferring now is an everyday thing. So if you want to follow your dream of playing a sport, then find the school that you could play at."

Now with transfers, building a program from the ground up is going to become extremely difficult for college coaches to do. According to FOX Sports, Tony Bennet, head coach of Virginia basketball in 2024, shared how the transfer portal and NIL were one of his reasons for his retirement.

The struggle of NIL and transfers for coaches is real. In past years a school that normally isn't good at basketball, but was able to make a run in March Madness, could start to build their program. Players would stay and they would get recruits leading them to higher success levels. Now, the current situation allows the best players to go to schools with the most money, which knocks smaller schools out of the equation. Buenik shared, "I think that the worst part

of this whole thing is that you're just buying your teams. You're buying your wins."

Aaliyah Chavez who is the number one girls basketball player coming out of high school just committed to Oklahoma. Texas and Oklahoma battled in NIL money to get her on their team. They payed all the money not for her but to beat out their rival in the recruitment battle. Chavez got an estimated NIL at around 1.5 million in dollars. Chavez averaged 34.9 points in her senior season on top of 9.1 rebounds and 4.3 assists putting up an outstanding senior year.

NIL plays a big role in this change. When Nike CEO Phil Knight provides the Oregon football program unlimited NIL money to see them win games the situation becomes even more unbalanced. According to Yahoo Sports, Oregon already had a top four recruiting class for 2025 high school players. Having this enormous amount of NIL money now allows them to not only buy the best high school players, but the best players from other college teams as well.

According to msn.com, Olivia Dunne testified against a 2.8 billion dollar NCAA NIL settlement. She believed her NIL estimation was too low. This settlement would offer more than 2.5 billion to athletes who could not earn NIL before the NCAA changed their rules. Legal issues could affect the trajectory of college athletics.

According to ESPN, the legalization of college athlete NIL is going to become troublesome in the NCAA since players are going to have to exchange money to break their contracts. Money problems are going to affect coaches as well, since players are going to have to approach them for more money. College players are not professionals, so without agents it is going to become messy since the athletes are going to have to speak on their own behalf.

Buenik said, "I think that [NIL money] is the part that is going to ruin college athletics to a degree, because a lot of these kids are just chasing money, and that's not the right thing to do."

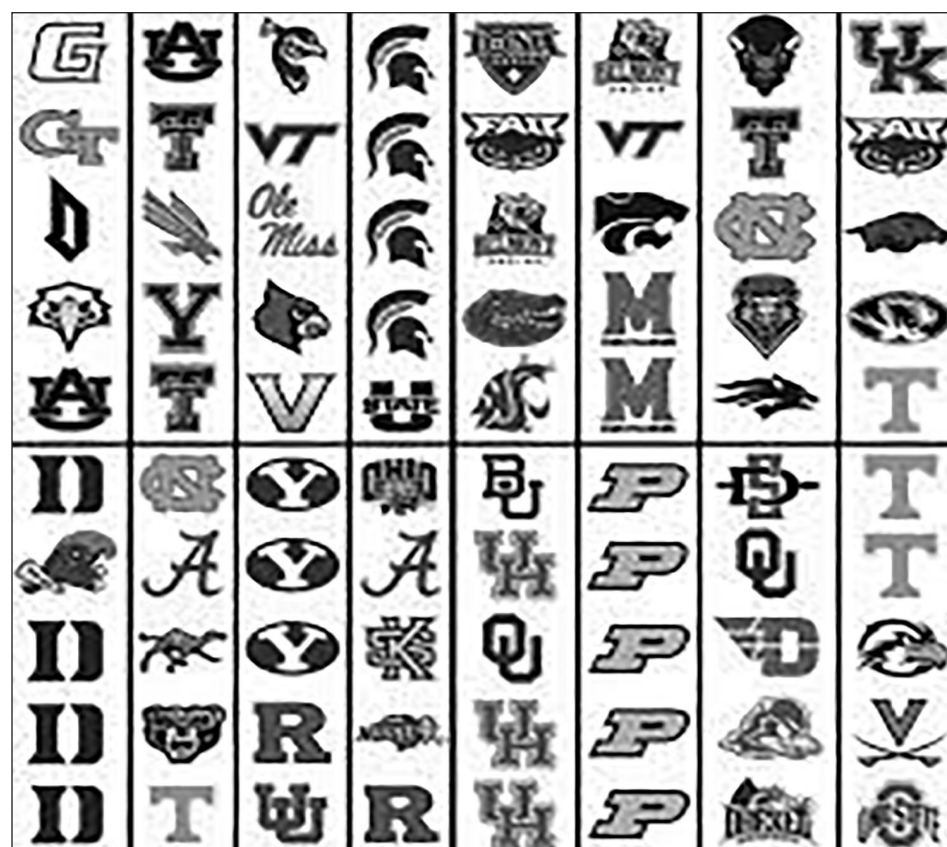


photo courtesy of Reddit

Where the players from each sweet sixteen starting five originally started their college careers before transferring.



# 2025 MLB season predictions, awards, and best teams

Blake Guenther  
Staff Reporter

Once you hear the bleacher bums screaming at Wrigley Field or the crack of the bat on a home-run onto Waveland Avenue, that's when you know that the new MLB season is here. Even though the season has just started, we've already seen records broken, shocking plays, and standout performances. Whether you're for the Cubs, Sox, or just a general baseball fan, the 2025 season is shaping up to be one of the most exciting ones in recent history.

As soon as the 2024 MLB Postseason ended, the thrill of the 2025 MLB free agency began. During the free agency period, we saw major moves like mega-contracts and trades. We are sure to see these moves shake up the regular season. One major move came from the Northsiders when they made the blockbuster deal back in December with the Houston Astros to send Kyle Tucker, an all-star outfielder, to the Cubs in exchange for Issac Paredes (3B), Hayden Wesneski (P), and a prospect Cam Smith. This move sent the league into shock as no one thought the Cubs, of all teams, would go out for a trade for a big name player. This was especially surprising given their history of mostly abstaining from big moves during the offseason. Cubs fans are thrilled as Tucker will bring some fire to their lineup that could really help them do some great things this season. We've already seen Tucker bring a spark after he homered in four straight games for the Cubs in the first couple games of the season. He also currently leads the National League in hits, homeruns, runs scored, runs batted in, and on-base + slugging percentage. Acquiring Tucker appears to have been an excellent move for the Cubs.

During the offseason predictions are made for the upcoming season. These surprise, disappoint, or make sense to fans of teams all over the league. Various sports media outlets predict every single team's records, winners of divisions and leagues, award winners, World Series champions and much more. This article will focus on potential winners of the divisions, winners of the National and American League as well World Series champions, and the most important awards in baseball. Writers from the MLB collectively predict the winners of each division, league, and the eventual World Series champion. They predict that the AL East will be won by the Boston Red Sox, the AL Central will be won by the Detroit Tigers, and the AL West will be won by the Texas Rangers. The preseason predicted winner of the American League pennant being the Boston Red Sox. In the National League they predict that the NL East will be won by the Atlanta Braves, the NL Central will be won by the Chicago Cubs, and the NL West will be won



*The Stars of the MLB: Juan Soto, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bryce Harper, Bobby Witt Jr., Fernando Tatis Jr., Aaron Judge, and Shohei Ohtani.*

by the Los Angeles Dodgers. The National League pennant is predicted to be won by the Los Angeles Dodgers. The MLB experts are predicting a Red Sox vs. Dodgers World Series with the Los Angeles Dodgers expected to be the 2025 World Series champions. If this prediction holds true, it would be the Dodgers' second World Series win in as many seasons.

As much fun as it is to look at what the experts think, the real experts might just be here at MHS. Some MHS students also have shared their predictions for the 2025 MLB season. The students did not predict the winners of each division, but did predict the winners of each league and the World Series champion. Jacob Matyasik, a MHS Freshman, predicts that the Detroit Tigers will win the American League and that the Los Angeles Dodgers will win the National League with the World Series champion being the Los Angeles Dodgers. Tommy Dunaway, a MHS Freshman, has completely different predictions for the season. He predicts that the New York Yankees will win the American League and that the Chicago Cubs will win the National League. Unfortunately for Cubs fans, he believes the Cubs will ultimately fall short in the World Series and the New York Yankees will be the 2025 World Series champions.

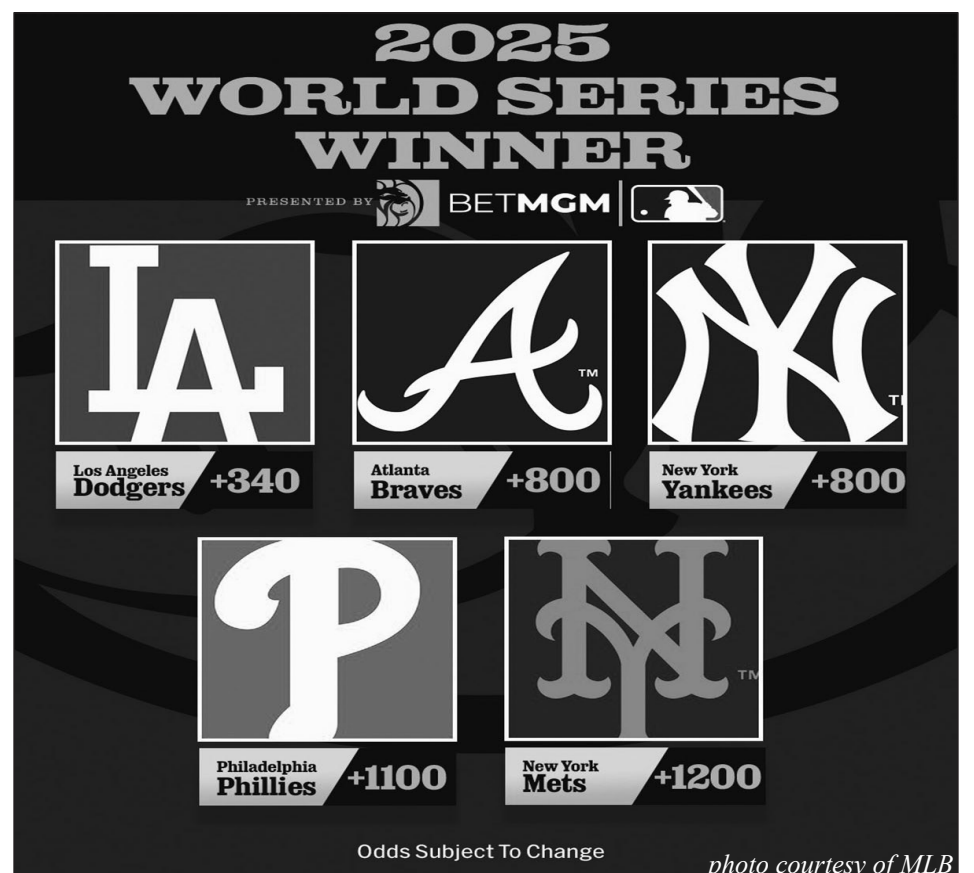
Now for some expert and student predictions on some of the MLB's most coveted awards, the National and American League Most Valuable Players and the National and American League Cy Young Award winners (the best pitcher from each league). Starting with the experts, NBC Sports' staff cumulatively predicted the award winners by voting for who would win each award. They predicted that the American League Most Valuable Player will be Bobby Witt Jr., a shortstop for the Kansas City Royals, the National League Most Valuable Player will be Shohei Ohtani, a pitcher/designated

hitter for the Los Angeles Dodgers, the American League Cy Young award winner will be Garret Crochet, a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, and the National League Cy Young award winner will be Zack Wheeler, a pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies. These predictions make sense to most MLB fans as all the players listed have been great players in past seasons and could very realistically win these awards.

Now for more MHS student predictions with Matyasik and Dunaway giving their opinions on who they think will take home the awards. Matyasik predicts that the winner of the American League Most Valuable

Player will be Luis Robert Jr., a outfielder for the Chicago White Sox, the National League Most Valuable Player will be Shohei Ohtani, a pitcher/designated hitter for the Los Angeles Dodgers, the American Cy Young award winner will be Carlos Rodon, a pitcher for the New York Yankees, and the National League Cy Young award winner will be Yoshinobu Yamamoto, a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Dunaway predicts that the American League Most Valuable Player will be Aaron Judge, a outfielder for the New York Yankees, the National League Most Valuable Player will be Shohei Ohtani, a pitcher/designated hitter for the Los Angeles Dodgers, the American League Cy Young award winner will be Tarik Skubal, a pitcher for the Detroit Tigers, and the National League Cy Young award winner will be Shota Imanaga, a pitcher for the Chicago Cubs. The common theme seems to be that Shohei Ohtani and the Dodgers are going to have one amazing 2025 season but only the future will tell.

As you can tell people all over baseball are thrilled for the MLB to be back for the 2025 season. Offseason moves are already proving to have an impact and some predictions are coming true. At the time of writing this article, the team with the best record in baseball is the Los Angeles Dodgers. We can only hope that this MLB season will live up to the hype surrounding it. The World Series champions will be decided in October, so there is plenty of time to watch a game and enjoy the beautiful game that is baseball.



*The Dodgers, Braves, Yankees, Phillies, and Mets have the best odds of winning the World Series according to BetMGM.*



## Mundelein girl's softball stampedes into the new season

Dan Stricklin  
*Staff Reporter*

Girls softball finished fourth in state last year and are off to a hot start this year with a starting record of 6-1.

After Junior Shae Johnson was injured, they turned to senior Sophia Zepeda, a CLC (College of Lake County) commit. She has started the season off strong so far striking out 55 batters across just seven games while only giving up 11 earned runs. Another player who got off to a strong start is senior Claire Connelly, a Indiana State commit who broke her third record here at Mundelein for most home runs all time with 35. Connelly has two home runs right now on the year and looks to add to that total as the rest of the season goes on. Connelly said, "My goal this season is to break the career RBI (Runs Batted In) record."

Sophomore Taylor Pyke looks to stay hot as the season goes on as she has three home runs on the year and 14 RBI's. The team in seven games has a total of 68 runs scored and only 23 runs allowed. It's clear that the team is still ready to make another deep run

---

“We want to have another successful season and grow as individuals. We also hope to make another state run.”

- Kielely Thomas

---

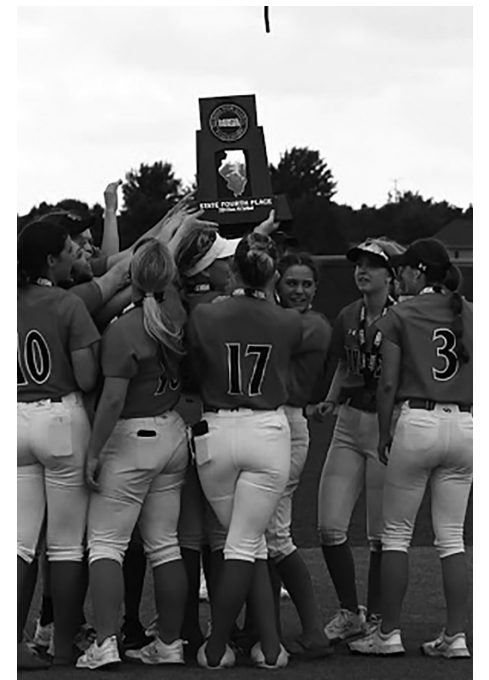
at state this year and the team believes it.

“I think the rest of the season will be very good since we have almost all of our team from last year returning and a very strong freshman class,” shared Junior Kielely Thomas. “We want to have another successful season and grow as individuals. We also hope to make another state run.”

Shae Johnson said “I think this season will be different from last year and we will have to work a little harder to beat some teams in conference but things have been going well and we have been working hard as a team and having a strong start so I think it will be tough but we have a chance to make another run.”

Johnson wants to be on the field right now, but can't. She's looking to be able to return to hitting soon and hopefully be able to pitch if they start making a run at state. Last year Johnson won pitcher of year and was a key part in the state run last year holding number nine ranked huntley to one run last year in their super sectional.

It will be interesting to see what they can do this, hopefully repeating their 2024 state run.



*Girls Softball holding up their 4th place state trophy after the game. Photo courtesy of @mundelein-highschool on Instagram.*

## Florida domination, a failed three peat and absent upsets: March Madness 2025 recap

Xavier Hilgart  
*Staff Reporter*

March. The weather is getting warmer, snow is starting to melt, leaves are starting to bud off of trees. March is the beginning of the warmer season of the year, but it serves as the end of a very different beloved season: college basketball season.

March madness is the ultimate finale of college basketball, and it is widely considered one of the most exciting sports events year in and year out. This year was no different, with the tournament being extremely hyped greatly by the presence of four historically good one seeds. Houston, Florida, Auburn and Duke, four teams that seemed to explode ahead of every other team in the nation this year, statistically did exactly that.

Since the 1996-97 season, college basketball teams have been ranked using KenPom rankings. KenPom is a predictive formula that does exactly what it says. It is not a definitive ranking, however, it is widely used due to its historical successes.

KenPom's rankings absolutely love this group of one seeds, with all four of them being in the top ten of all teams since they began tracking in 1996. That alone is an incredible feat, but once the tournament started it was up to them to prove those rankings right, and they more than lived up to those lofty expectations.

Outside of slight scares from UConn in their matchup against Florida and Purdue in theirs against Huston, all four breezed

straight to the Elite Eight. Once there, many assumed they would actually start to be challenged.

The Elite Eight is generally one of the most competitive parts of a tournament in American sports. Recent thrillers to occur there included the 2019 matchup between Duke and Michigan State, where the Zion Williamson led Blue Devils were upset by the two seeded Spartans, ending the season of the team many thought was one of the best ever.

This year however, the Elite Eight proved to be no trouble at all for the one seeds, with all four easily winning. Houston breezed past the 2nd seeded Tennessee Volunteers, winning 69-50. Auburn knocked off Michigan State, another 2nd seed, winning 70-64, and Florida beat Texas Tech 84-79. Those two represented the closed margins of vicotry, whereas Duke was the opposite. They beat Alabama 85-65, winning by a mragin of 20 points. Overall, the four one seeds won by a total margin of 50 points, and an average margin of victory of 12.5 points, a truly dominant showing.

The final four is where it heated up, with Florida and Walter Clayton Jr. handling Auburn, winning by six. On the other side, the Cooper Flagg led Blue Devils fell to Houston in possibly the game of the tournament. Down 6 with only 34 seconds left, Houston pulled off an incredible comeback to knock off the tournament favorites. Sharing eerie similarities to that 2019 Duke team, unfortunately Duke once again failed to come through when heavy favorites.

The national championship was set. Florida versus Houston. Two #1 seeds battling it out to prove who truly is the best. In a game that was expected to be great, both teams more than lived up to the expectations, however Florida rose just slightly higher. In their true 2025 fashion, the Gators rallied from being down at most 12 points in the second half to come out of it with a national championship.

Now, while this tournament was undoubtedly exciting, per usual, it has sparked many debates about how recent changes to recruiting and the introduction of NIL are affecting the tournament. Many people are not happy with the lack of parity that this tournament seemed to have.

A popular draw of March Madness is right there in the name, the madness. The underdog story, a Cinderella run, a massive upset. To many, those stories are what make March Madness so good. Whether it's 2011 VCU's Cinderella run, where they went from a first four play in team all the way to the final four, or last years NC State team, where DJ Burns and company rallied all the way to the final four from the 11 seed, losing to Purdue to fall just short of the championship, Cinderella runs are a huge part of march.

However this year, it seemed like the upsets just weren't there. Of course there were some upsets, like #12 ranked McNeese and Colorado State knocking off #5 ranked Clemson and Memphis, respectively, in the first round. However it just seemed like none of them caught

fire. They were one and done, which was exciting in the moment, but did not create any lasting stories like in years past.

Despite the controversy this year's tournament bred, it still produced as a staple of American sports. According to Bleacher Report, the first two rounds of the tournament averaged 9.4 million viewers, the most since 1993. Also, the championship game, which was after all the lack of upsets happened, still drew over 18 million viewers, which was the most since the 2019 championship.

Only time will tell the lasting impacts of the complaints and problems brought into the light by this year's tournament, though it was undoubtedly still incredibly popular and created countless new storylines for fans to follow into next season.

With this win, Florida became the first school to win three or more NCAA Division 1 Football and basketball titles. Also, last time Florida won the NCAA basketball title (2007), they followed it up by winning the national championship in football the next year in 2008. Will they do it again? Will Houston, who were minutes away from their first national championship, get over the hump next year? Or Duke, who time in and time out have come up just short with superstar players on roster, will they finally get it done if Cooper Flag decides to return?

We will have to wait to find out, but one thing is for sure, March Madness 2025 was incredible, even if it may have been a bit less mad than normal.



# NFL draft predictions and recap of the offseason for the Bears

Ashton Salski  
*Staff Reporter*

The draft decisions being made this offseason might make it one of the most interesting in years. The 2024 season ended with the Philadelphia Eagles winning the super bowl and the Kansas City Chiefs as runner ups.

The Tennessee Titans own the number one overall pick in this year's draft but they are not in a good position for next season. The Titans are more than one player away from competing in big games against big teams. After an underwhelming year from Titans quarterback Will Levis, the Titans could be heading for a big name college quarterback such as Shedeur Sanders or Cam Ward. Levis played in 12 games this season, which is three more than his rookie year, threw for almost 300 more yards and four more touchdowns, but had eight more interceptions and ended with a total QBR (Total Quarterback Ranking) of 27.8. This leads the question whether or not the Titans try to pick their franchise quarterback or head a different direction. If the Titans head another route they could trade for Atlanta Falcons quarterback Kirk Cousins and some extra picks according to ESPN. With that they could have

more confidence in a player such as Abdul Carter, a edge rusher out of Penn State, or Travis Hunter, who played wide receiver and cornerback for Colorado and is arguably the most skilled athlete in the draft.

Mock drafts leading up to the draft have been very interesting. According to CBS Sports a mock draft of the first round of the draft has Cam Ward going to Tennessee with the first pick and Shedeur Sanders, another top quarterback, going to the Cleveland Browns with the second pick. The New York Giants recently signed Russell Wilson, an aging quarterback and are going to be in need of a young quarterback soon. With that being said, this is a less skill based quarterback draft in which CBS Sports has the Giants selecting Abdul Carter the edge rusher out of Penn State.

There is also a new coaching staff for the Patriots which could make things interesting. New England recently recruited Mike Vrabel as their new head coach after a rocky past season. Drake Maye, a young quarterback who was picked in the 2024 draft is looking for a number one target this season. With the signing of Stefon Diggs, a rookie wide receiver would be in a great situation for a rookie season. Travis Hunter, the number one prospect in the draft, played both cornerback and wide receiver

last season. He could be a top target for Maye at New England according to CBS.

Many say the Chicago Bears have had a great offseason. They signed three potential offseason line starters, which contain a first team all pro guard, an experienced center for Caleb Williams, and a guard out of Los Angeles who has played under the Bears head coach Ben Johnson before. After a rough past season the Bears are looking for a promising upcoming season for the young team and quarterback. Caleb Williams had a decent start to his Bears career, but the record did not show it. Williams struggled in the backfield getting sacked 68 times last season marking the third most times in history. Not only did the Bears sign offensive lineman, they also stacked up their defensive line, adding Grady Jarret and Dayo Odeyingbo. Grady Jarret is a veteran defensive tackle who can definitely help stop the run and pressure the quarterback. Odeyingbo is a rotational player on the defensive line who had a good pressure rate last season but did not have the stats to show for it. Odeyingbo can play both edge rusher and tackle on the defensive line which can help Montez Sweat, who had a down year last season but has a big upside with two other targets the opposing offensive line needs to prevent. Den-

nis Allen, a past head coach is the defensive coordinator for the Bears this season and is a proven great defensive play caller.

The Bears own the tenth pick in the draft and have some important decisions to make. According to Yahoo Sports, ESPN's Matt Miller released a mock draft for all seven rounds. At the tenth overall pick Matt Miller has the Bears taking the best running back prospect in recent years, Ashton Jeanty. Jeanty had an incredible previous year at Boise State and Ben Johnson ran a duo running back system which could work this year with D'Andre Swift. In the second round pick 39, Miller thinks the Bears will draft Kenneth Grant out of Michigan. Miller has Xavier Watts, a safety from Notre Dame going to Chicago with the 41st pick. The Bears have a strong group of safety's which would mean Watts may not get lots of snaps this season. Veteran Kevin Byard is approaching his last year on contract and as a older player it is uncertain if the Bears re-sign him. Jaquan Brisker is a good young safety for the Bears but has been struggling with injuries recently.

The Bears still have a lot of offseason remaining and time to think about which direction they want this team to go. There is no doubt this draft could make or break the Bears future with all the talent available.

## Scouting the future: how recruitment culture shapes youth baseball

Blake Guenther  
*Staff Reporter*

Youth baseball continues to grow in popularity each year. Thousands of kids across the country play on recreation, club and travel ball teams. With every kid trying to look like and play like they are in the big leagues, there is a surge in recruitment of players to all-star teams and tournament showcases. In recent years, the number of showcase tournaments a player can participate in are at an all-time high. When showcases are happening every weekend and open to most anyone for a fee, this begs the question, are these showcases and teams really legit?

There are two perspectives on youth baseball recruitment. One side believes showcases offer the best competition and participation is the best way to be recruited. The other side questions the value of a showcase and team that will add you to the roster if you are willing to pay the fee to play. Players join these teams and travel to these showcases to demonstrate their skills. There is a cost in both time as most showcases are held during weekends, and money as most showcases require players to pay a fee to be eligible to play and be seen by scouts. Many players go with the goal of being recruited to play college,

or even professional baseball, to continue playing beyond high school the game they love so much. This would make it seem that if you're committed enough to devote many years and dollars to these showcases they could be a legit means to a future playing baseball.

A popular showcase group is Perfect Game. During Perfect Game events, thousands of kids participate in basic baseball skills competitions to show off and receive a PG Grade. The grading scale is from 1 to 10, with 1 being horrendous and 10 meaning there is potential to be a future MLB player. It is difficult to know in advance what kind of PG Grade will be received. Many people who participate or have had kids go through the showcases say that everyone who goes receives at least a 5 to keep them coming back to the showcases. Additionally, Perfect Game's website indicates anyone can sign up and participate in a showcase.

Many people here at MHS play baseball and play on travel ball club teams during the summer. Club teams are not free, but they are not showcase teams like the PG All-Americans. Playing for a club team still provides an opportunity for exposure at the various tournaments they play in and players can still elect to participate in showcases (not just Perfect Game) to gain

more exposure.

One of the many MHS students who play for a club team is Connor Eaton, a MHS freshman, who has played baseball in the Mundelein community since he was five starting at MBSA to now playing high school baseball. Eaton's travel ball team is Slammers, which is a top travel program in the area. Slammers teams travel to many tournaments all over the country in hopes of creating exposure for their players and program.

Eaton loves baseball and is excited to play for a program like Slammers as he shared, "I feel like playing Slammers will help me develop as a baseball player in ways I have never been able to before and that all the exposure I will be having will hopefully help me see success in pursuing baseball in the future."

Eaton's Slammers team will be playing in various tournaments throughout the summer and even some Perfect Game tournaments (which are different from showcases). Eaton said, "I feel that the tournaments for Perfect Game are really going to be competitive and that the competition makes those tournaments legit as the teams are always good but the showcases on the other hand are not as competitive or legit."

Eaton elaborated on this as he shared, "If you go on social media and search up

Perfect Game fails or worst Perfect Game players you can find countless videos of terrible baseball players in these showcases simply because they paid the money to be there which I do not feel is legit at all."

This is one of the reasons that Eaton says he'll never go to a showcase on his own dime because he believes that the program he is with is legit enough to help him showcase his skills and he knows that he is a good player and doesn't need to pay for a PG Grade to tell him that.

While it's clear that you can argue either side to the question "Are youth baseball showcases and teams legit?" in the end it really only matters what you think of yourself as a baseball player. Believing in yourself and improving as a baseball player is all that really matters, especially at younger ages. If you have a love of baseball, it does not matter where you play, showcase or not, as long as you are having fun while playing baseball.



# Noodle notes: a Chicago ramen restaurant review

Darby Schwerman  
Staff Reporter

Is “real ramen” really better than the packets? If you’re eating at Chicago Ramen in Mundelein, the answer is yes, by far.

As an avid top ramen lover myself, I was skeptical about any other kind of ramen being worth it if I could pay two dollars for some, but I was proven wrong. Chicago ramen was worth all the hype. Just three minutes from MHS, Chicago Ramen provides authenticity, locally.

Not only was the food delicious, the atmosphere was illuminating as well. From the outside, an array of glowing lanterns was visible. Warm lighting, comfortable wooden furniture, and captivating decor created a welcoming vibe. Upon walking in, we were greeted immediately by a server and instructed to seat ourselves.

We decided to start with an appetizer of garlic edamame. It came in a decorative tray with a side of ginger. It was warm and had a sweet, rich, but not overbearing garlic flavor. It was the perfect portion for two people and lasted us through waiting for our main course.

The menu was relatively straightforward in terms of ramen choices. The different types included a tsukemen category, beef curry, chicken mabo tofu, red or white miso, vegetable, and chicken. Each type could be customized with toppings like an egg or sweet corn, as well as the option of a spicy version.

When it came time to decide on an entree,

I chose a classic chicken ramen, and my date chose the spicy red miso ramen with an egg. When the ramen was brought to the table I was ecstatic. It was beautiful. It had an array of colorful toppings and smelled heavenly. The noodles were soft and thin and the chicken was perfectly cooked with just the right amount of saltiness.

The table had been set with different toppings like fresh garlic, sriracha sauce, and different seasonings, so I decided to enhance mine with some sriracha. Though the chicken flavor was already delicious, the sriracha brought it to another level.

Of course I had to sample the spicy red miso ramen, which was even better. It was so good I was almost annoyed I hadn’t ordered it. The broth was thicker and had an incredibly rich umami flavor, but was a lot saltier than the chicken. The spiciness was flavorful and very tolerable for any palette.

Though we sat there so full of ramen we could take a nap, I couldn’t resist ordering dessert. They had my favorite, crepes. We chose the “Naruto” crepe, which had nutella, whipped cream, strawberries, and bananas. The crepe was good and a perfect portion for two, but nothing special compared to the ramen. If it didn’t take so long to come out it would have been worth it, but I would recommend saving the extra ten bucks and leaving after the main course.

I left the excursion with a full stomach, satisfied taste buds, and a cup of ramen to go. We had a great time with our server, thoroughly enjoyed our food, and overall had a positive experience at Chicago Ramen.



photo taken by Darby Schwerman

Pictured above is the traditional chicken ramen dish from Chicago Ramen. It is topped with seaweed, a fishcake, and a variety of flavorful seasonings. Also pictured is a side of garlic edamame.

## From kitchen scraps to garden gold: the benefits of composting

Hannah Roberts'  
News-Features Editor

When it comes to disposing of trash, most people are familiar with a normal trash bin and recycling; however, there are other options for disposing of trash, for example, composting.

According to an article written by the Environmental Protection Agency composting is, “the managed, biological decomposition of materials by microorganisms.”

In simpler terms, according to MHS Senior Samantha Jaffe, who is interested in starting her own compost, “Composting is collecting food scraps, paper, or any other natural product to allow them to break down into nutrient-rich soil.”

Composting is based on a simple balance of “green” materials, which are nitrogen-rich, and “brown” materials, which are carbon-rich.

According to an article written by a sustainability blog called Composty, green materials can be things such as fruit and vegetable peelings, coffee grounds, sea-

weed, pet hair, and old flowers.

According to the same article, “brown” materials can be things like fallen leaves, shredded newspaper, straw or hay, old mail, or egg cartons.

There are many things that are perfect to put in a compost but there are also things that should be avoided. Meat, fish, or dairy products could create a bad smell and attract unwanted attention from animals. Also, adding pet waste or dead plants can spread harmful materials and bacteria in the compost.

Composting is unique in the fact that a compost can give back to nature faster than normal trash or recycling. A compost eventually provides nutrients to help improve soil health and provide nutrients to plants.

Composting may seem a bit more time consuming than just throwing your waste in a trash bin, and it’s true but the benefits to nature, and to the self, could make the process worth the time it takes.

Math Instructional Assistant, Brett Sorby, has his very own compost at home. There are two reasons why Sorby started composting. He said, “it (composting) is better than

simply throwing your food away because it reduces the amount of materials in landfills.”

The benefits of composting don’t stop at the environment, it can also be a good way to keep busy.

Sorby stated he composts because, “it is very therapeutic to work with your hands...it is nice to see a natural process unfold before you.”

With all the information about composting it might be difficult to know where to start. However, the beginnings of a compost and tips from community members are all around, everywhere from the kitchen to the front yard.

Sorby stated, “I recommend to start with grass clippings and leaves piled on to a part of your property not frequented. It can get a little smelly at first...mix it with a shovel weekly and...prevent it from getting wet.”

Composting can be a great way to help out the environment and if the whole Mundelein community started, it could make waves in the reduction of waste in

landfills.

According to Jaffe, “It (composting) helps the environment, reduces the community’s waste, and comes at a minimal effort for the community.”



photo from Alamy Photography

Pictured above is a photo of a compost with many plants and grass.