

sports

The final shot

The story of two seniors walking towards the 18th hole

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Bobby Jones once said, “Golf is the closest game to the game we call life. You get bad breaks from good shots; you get good breaks from bad shots-but you have to play the ball where it lies.”

Playing sports is a way to help people grow into the person we are today. Each sport teaches athletes a different lesson in leadership and in life skills. Golf teaches you to accept the uncontrollable, it grows patience and holds you accountable for your honesty.

For seniors Austin Kondratick and Cole Smith, the life lessons they learned from golf started at a young age.

Their passion for golf started from learning from their fathers and it grew from there.

“I would go out on the course with my dad and my dad loves golf more than I do,” Kondratick said. “Just being able to do that with him, made me fall in love with the sport and that’s probably the best part about it, is I can go out there with my dad and spend all day out there and play golf.”

For Smith, his dad and him would go to a golf course on Sun-

day nights and put carts away in exchange for free play. This continued as Smith got older and his work was being exchanged for practice time. The relationship with the course helped his fondness of golf grow even more and even helped him become a better player.

“I had a couple other friends who did the same thing with me and they pushed me and made me love golf more because of the competition,” Smith said. “It was fun to go out there and beat them or have them beat me and make me mad. It made me want to beat them even more so that kind of competition out there was a good time.”

Before college, the competition started to heat up in high school. Kondratick competed for the Westerville Central Warhawks and Smith competed for the Roosevelt Rough Riders in Kent.

During his time as a Warhawk, Kondratick was an all-district honoree, first-team-All-Ohio Capital Conference athlete and was also second-team-all-district and all-OCC during his junior year. His sophomore year brought a third-team-all-district and all-conference recognition.

His last year in the black and silver earned him four event wins and



Kondratick (left) and Smith (right) pose for a photo together.

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a 74.8 scoring average.

Kondratick’s golf journey was far from over, all he had to do was find the place to continue it. A place that would still represent a home away from home feeling was at the top of the decision making process.

“When I was making my overall decision, I really kind of threw golf out the window when I chose Ashland,” Kondratick said. “When I came here I thought if something were to happen, if I got injured or if I would not be able to play golf, would I still want to go to the school? I found a home at Ashland and even if I was not a golfer here, I think I would fit in great and I would love being here regardless of my sport.”

The decision to come to Ashland did not come easy and Ashland quickly became up against about 15 other schools. After meeting with the then coach Darrin Jones, Kondratick took to heart some advice he gave him.

“Golf was super important to me and I wanted to go somewhere I could compete and talking to Dar-

rin, he told me something that stuck with me,” Kondratick said. “He said I could go to a decent sized Division I school and grow and develop in my first two years and then get tournament experience my last two years. That was something I did not want and he said if I go Division II, I can make an impact and if I played well I could win and compete. For Division III I could go and be a D-III All-American and be at the top tier and I also did not want that.”

Kondratick said that finding his fit at a school like Ashland, in the division two category, was a place he felt he could compete while growing and developing his own skills.

During his freshman year, he led the underclassman with a 77.4 average score. He finished off his first season with two top 10 finishes.

The 2016-2017 season brought a second place finish at the Malone Tournament with an overall one-under-par total score of 143. The finish earned a spot on the all-tournament team as well as a spot on

the GLIAC All-Academic Team.

Junior year brought his very first collegiate individual tournament win and a 73.6 average score. He finished first at the Ohio Valley Spring Championship with a combined two day score of 143. That tournament also marked the first team championship since 2012.

The 2017-2018 season also brought an appearance at the GLIAC Championships, where he tied for third. He was also a 2018 Golf Coaches Association of America Sirxon/Cleveland Golf All-American Scholar. The award is given to golfers that have a certain grade point average, under a 77 scoring average and play in a certain percentage of events.

Kondratick also earned a spot on the GLIAC All-Academic Team and was First-Team All-GLIAC. The AU golf team has not had a first team conference player since 2012.

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Women’s basketball looks to avenge last season

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The Ashland University women’s basketball team is ready to begin the 2018-19 season, a season that is intriguing for the Eagles.

The Eagles finished last season in a 66-52 loss to the University of Central Missouri in the Division II Women’s National Championship game. The loss snapped a 73-game win streak for the Eagles, as well as a chance to be back-to-back Division II National Champions.

“I think something that we took from that loss is that nothing is guaranteed,” head coach Kari Pickens said. “Our focus this year has got to be not just focusing on the end goal, but coming in everyday and getting better every single day in practice.”

Pickens will be leading the Eagles as a first year head coach. She was

an assistant for the Eagles for five seasons and was promoted to associate head coach at the beginning of last season under former head coach Robyn Fralick.

Pickens played for the Eagles under former head coach Sue Ramsey and was a huge impact from 2011-13, becoming one of the best statistical players in Ashland history, recording 1,414 points.

“With coach Ramsey, I took away how important relationships are and really forming that trust with my players,” Pickens said. “With coach Fralick, I took away the importance of honesty and direct communication. I think those are some things, as a leader of a program, that you have to do well to put your team in a position to be successful.”

In what will be her first year, Pickens has one large goal for her team, being the best rebounding

team in the nation.

“I hope whenever I leave as a coach, I can say that our teams did that really well and hopefully that will be a hallmark for us,” Pickens said.

Pickens views the mentality of the returning players as a very good opportunity to see them grow. The Eagles bring back three starters from last season including junior guard Renee Stimpert, senior guard Maddie Dackin and junior guard Jodi Johnson.

Some of the other players who came off the bench last year include senior guard Brooke Smith, junior forward Sara Loomis, sophomore forward Karlee Pireu and junior guard Sarah Hart.

“My expectation for the girls coming in who have experience is to do the little things well everyday,” Pickens said. “I never want to have to coach about effort or

toughness and those are the things that I expect out of them.”

While Pickens wants to determine the pace of play by being a force on the rebounding end of the ball, the Eagles lose two of the best rebounders in Ashland history.

Forward Laina Snyder, who ranks first in career rebounds with 1,207, and forward Andi Daugherty, who ranks third in career rebounds with 923. The Eagles lose those two from a rebounding end, but also from a scoring end with both players having combined for 4,310 career points in their time at AU.

One of the returning players who seems to be the main source of offense for the Eagles will be junior forward Jodi Johnson. Johnson begins the season coming off a career year last season, averaging 19 points a game and leading the nation with 3.7 steals per game.

Johnson was named the WBCA Division II Player of the Year and the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Player of the Year last season.

“Accolades like those obviously do not come without great teammates,” Johnson said. “I feel like being surrounded by great teammates made that even more special.”

Johnson made a large impact on the offensive end of the floor last year, but the defense and the passion for the game is a staple of her game.

“I feel as though I am a very focused person,” Johnson said. “That just goes along with having fun and loving the game and loving the people I am playing with.”

One of the leaders to start the season will be senior guard Maddie Dackin, who averaged 10.9 point per game last season and has seen a large amount of experience over the past two seasons.

“Going into my final year, the priority is going to be leadership,” Dackin said. “Being able to help

the younger girls with all the experience that I have had. Having the other girls on the team who are upperclassmen with experience gives us a chance to help those younger girls on the team.”

The Eagles have an abundance of younger players and newcomers to the team this season, six players to be precise. Sophomore forward Sara Price enters the season as a transfer from Ball State University being one of the bigger names entering the season.

With only a few practices in the books, the amount of playing time that the younger players for the Eagles will receive is still undecided.

“I think that should be determined still, but I have been very pleased with their effort and their performance in practice,” Pickens said on the younger players. “We have a lot of really talented players coming in and so I am excited to see how they develop within our system here at Ashland.”

The Eagles begin their preseason play when the team travels to Purdue University to take on the Boilermakers in an exhibition game on Nov. 4th. Pickens sees this as a tremendous opportunity for her team taking on a Division I women’s team.

“It’s a great experience for our girls to be able to go into an atmosphere of a Big Ten school and play against a Division I team that is maybe a little more athletic than us and play against a crowd like that,” Pickens said. “Purdue always has a phenomenal following and I think that having that experience will test where we are at right now and it allows us to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses early in the year.”

The preseason exhibition matchup against the Purdue Boilermakers is set to begin at 2 p.m. on Nov. 4th and will be broadcasted live on 88.9 WRDL at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind.



ZACH READ

Pickens talks to her team in a huddle during the team’s first scrimmage on Oct. 19.