

# purple swarm



## 900 miles later

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It is no secret that the Ashland community is a fan of the university and their athletics. For the past two years community members, known as the Purple Swarm, have been filling seats in Kate's Gym to watch the women's basketball team during the longest winning streak in Division II history.

The Elite Eight games were no different. During the 2016-2017 season, the women's team recorded their first perfect undefeated season and won their second national championship in front of a huge crowd in Columbus, Ohio.

This year was no different despite the game being held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Many members of the Purple Swarm packed up their cars, or even booked their flights, just to watch the team make a run at another national championship title.

Some came from Ashland, while other alumni came from all across the nation including places like Las Vegas and Florida.

Many of those fans include parents of players and life long fans of the university.

"Today when I walked in and I saw the Purple Swarm had already arrived, I was blown away," Kirk Snyder said. "One of the

reasons our daughter [Laina Snyder] chose to come to Ashland was because of the big fan base that comes to follow the team."

Director of Alumni Relations Jeff Alix, planned events to be held where the Purple Swarm could meet collectively before the games to eat, hangout and get rallied up before the game.

"We had some pregame events going on at the local Buffalo Wild Wings prior to our games," Alix said. "I still think we're going to see a good turnout certainly as it relates to other teams here, we always travel well."

A crowd that started when Sue Ramsey was the head coach, continued on the Purple Swarm tradition even well after she was gone.

"It is something that has developed over the years," Alix said. "You know Coach Ramsey in her 20 year tenure really fostered a lot of those relationships and Coach Fralick and her staff have done a great job continuing that."

Among those in the crowd of the Purple Swarm was a person everyone refers to as Superfan Tony. Tony shows up to every women's basketball game and even attends other athletic events when he can.

Not only does Tony travel to home games, but he follows them all across the country including to Connecticut, Michigan and South



(From left to right) Ben McClay, David Grim and Patty Stimpert drove 14 hours to watch AU play in the National Championship game.

Dakota this year.

"It's unbelievable. It just says so many new highs," Tony said. "The people are so nice and it is just an enjoyable thing to do."

Tony first met coach Ramsey many years ago after she started stopping at his fruit stand and got to know the coach and the team

really well. He started attending games and mentioned that when he retired, attending games and cheering on the Eagles was going to be his retirement gift.

The Purple Swarm has helped the Eagles get through some exciting and tough times throughout the season and have been there

through every tear, chant and team huddle.

Even after the season come to a close, the floor was full of purple and gold shirts hugging, giving encouragements to the players and coaches and thanking them for giving them memories they will cherish forever.

## National Championship watch party

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The stage was set for the Division II Women's Basketball National Championship in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on Friday (March 23). However, not all of Eagle nation was able to make the 14-hour trip across the Midwest United States.

Instead, fans of all ages filed into

Kates Gymnasium before game-time to cheer on the Eagles as the Ashland University athletic department hosted a watch party.

As the game got underway in Sioux Falls emotions were high in South Dakota as well as inside Kates Gymnasium. Mitchell Ott, a junior and business management major at Ashland attended the watch party with a few friends and was hoping the atmosphere to be

equivalent to the Cleveland Cavaliers watch parties.

"Last year I didn't follow them a whole lot, but this year I've been following them every game," Ott said. "And when we played our Regional Final game here at home, I was in the crowd for that too."

As the Eagles continued to advance in the Elite Eight, Ott said that the plan was to make the

trip out to Sioux Falls, however plans fell through for him and his friends.

There were more than just students at the watch party, as families and even university professors spent there Friday night as a community with other Ashland fans.

One professor in particular was Dr. Rebecca Corbin from the chemistry department as she sat and enjoyed the game with her husband Dr. Perry Corbin who is also a professor in the chemistry department.

Corbin has taught at Ashland for seventeen years and has been supporting the women's team and attending their games for the last seven years. They love to come to the games because they are fun to watch and the two professors like to support their students.

"We hadn't come to one of these watch parties before but we wanted to come out with some of our colleagues and friends and take it all in," Corbin said.

The championship game remained intense as it kept the fans in Kates Gymnasium on the edge of their seats all game. When the Eagles scored the fans put their hands together and cheered as if they were at the Sanford Pentagon

in South Dakota.

Another student in attendance of the watch party was senior Calum Watt who took in the atmosphere with a group of friends. Calum made multiple trips down to the Elite Eight in Columbus last season to cheer on the women, but was not able to make the journey this season.

He said if the University would have started a bus for fans and students to make the trip to Sioux Falls he 100% would have gone.

"It just kind of shows what the community is like here that the size in Sioux Falls is just as big as it was in Columbus and we still have people filling the entire watch party as well," Calum said.

The watch party gave Ashland students something to do on a Friday night, the opportunity to support and cheer on their fellow Eagles.

However, as the game continued fans started to become nervous and frustrated as the Eagles could not catch a break in their fight against Central Missouri.

As the final horn sounded fans left Kates Gymnasium in sadness but were proud of what their women's basketball team had accomplished.



Despite being 900 miles away, AU fans gathered by the hundreds to support their Eagles.

ZACH READ