



sports

Morgan Bittengle finishing strong

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Every athlete approaches game day differently. More times than not, there is a cumulation of consistent events that transpire in order for that athlete to be mentally and physically prepared for battle.

Morgan Bittengle, senior striker for the AU women's soccer team, begins her routine by arriving at the Robert Troop Center a few hours before kickoff.

A combination of heating muscles and wrapping painful, but consistent, turf burns provides her with the physical readiness she needs to perform.

Along with that comes the relaxed environment of the training room which takes the stress away from the game and assists in forming clear thoughts and confidence. Following the training room, Morgan heads to the locker room where she is greeted by music, dancing, and a more intense vibe that facilitates excitement for the upcoming contest.

She sits in the same spot since freshman year and allows fellow teammate, Lauren Taylor, to do her hair. Half of a braid and then a pony tail followed by the usual gameday headband. The words of an R. Kelly song played before every game penetrate her eardrum and ignite a fire in her soul.

"I'm that star up in the sky, I'm that mountain peak up high, Hey I made it, I'm the world's greatest,"

Once the music cuts, head coach Danny Krispinsky delivers a pre-game talk to reinforce the game plan and provide motivation to his team before they take the field.

Once Bittengle takes the field, she passes back and forth with teammate Kelsey McKernan before proceeding to the same passing and running lines during the team's warm up.

All warmed up and ready, Morgan is given a blue, green, and yellow sour patch kid.

The same color every time for the sake of consistency.

She looks down at her wrist as she gets in position for the kick-off and reads:

"RISE UP"
The ball is kicked and the game has begun.
"Everything is ritual," Bittengle said. "We can't mess it up,"

Her routine has been consistent throughout her four years at Ashland, but it has taken more than a pregame routine for Bittengle to stand out during her career.

Bursting on the scene as a true freshman, Bittengle was awarded the GLIAC Freshman of the Year award for her outstanding play in her rookie season, and that was just



Bittengle celebrates with teammates after scoring the game-winning goal in an overtime matchip versus Ferris State.

the start of a soon to be dominant career. Unbelievably, her success was not foreshadowed. It was cultivated.

"She has fit what I thought she could be, but since she's got her, she has produced more than what I was thinking," Krispinsky said, "that's just a credit to her, how hard she has worked, and how much she has improved her game throughout the years."

Bittengle had no intention of coming on the scene and stealing the show. She simply wanted to contribute to the team in any way.

"I really just went in and wanted to work as hard as I could," Bittengle said.

Fortunately for the striker, she would make her mark early on in a clutch overtime game-winning goal against Lake Erie that would set the tone for the years to come.

"I don't necessarily think she had a great game, and I remember getting after her a little bit because we expected her to put the game away," Krispinsky said. "But that just showed as a freshman she could take criticism from a coach, but also not let it bother her too much, and comeback to have a game-winning goal in overtime."

That specific game is a personal highlight of Bittengle's career because it gave something that she has approached every game with, her confidence and a sense of purpose.

"I think that was the first time I felt like I was meant to be at Ashland," she said.

From that moment on, she would continue to make her mark on the program. Bittengle is currently third all-time in goals scored and points in all time school history. She is also tied with McKernan for the record of most assists in a game totaling at three.

"It's definitely a huge honor," Bittengle said.

However, she would be the first to say that her success is not result of

her efforts alone, but of the encouragement, support, and contribution of those around her.

"I got to share it with my teammates and the girls I have been here with for four years, and I would not have been able to do it without them," Bittengle said.

Along with her teammates on the field, her two parents, John and Shawn Bittengle, have been every bit of a part of her success.

"They've come to every single game since my collegiate career started, even all the way up to the upper peninsula," Bittengle said. "They've put just as much time into it as I have,"

There is no doubt there has been other factors that have contributed to the impact she has had on the program, but her ability has been the forefront of her production. Her abilities combine mental and physical aspects that are unique and give her an edge on her opponent.

"This is a player that has things that you just can't teach," Krispinsky said.

One being her immense competitiveness and drive to win.

"You have to be competitive to play any sport, and have a drive to win, but hers is what separates her from most people," Krispinsky said.

Morgan can be spotted fighting for position during corner kicks and using her awareness to put her in an ideal spot for a shot at the goal.

Through 14 games, Bittengle leads the team in goals (10), points (20) and shot attempts (51) despite missing three games.

Adding to her cunning sense of being in the right place at the right time, Bittengle has a bread n' butter cut that gives the allusion that she is preparing to shoot only to bring it back to the other foot.

"Everyone knows it's going to happen, but you can't help but jump for it," Bittengle said.

This move has created an immense amount of productivity; unfortunately, it has come with a price.

Bittengle was forced to sit out during the spring, part of the summer and the first three games of the season due to a stress fracture in her pubic bone.

The stress fracture is thought to be caused by the pressure this cuts puts on the pelvis.

But Bittengle being the competitor she is, won't let it derail her.

"Just like any other athlete, you push through it and with it being my senior season, I'm not going to let it stop me from playing and being out on the field," Bittengle said.

The injury has provided a silver lining, causing her to surpass her statistical marks from the previous season. The injury further developed her mental game.

"She was able to see the game in a different way and help coach the younger players," Krispinsky said. "It allowed her to mature as a player and understand the game like a coach."

Seeing the game through a different perspective has caused her to come full circle since freshman year and achieve the GLIAC Player of the Week award twice this season.

Bittengle is currently the conference leader in game-winning goals (6), and the team is ranked second in the GLIAC behind Grand Valley state. The Eagles have won eight of their last nine games while only yielding one loss in conference play, and they credit this to their upset loss to Walsh last season in the GLIAC conference tournament.

"We thought last year was our year to make it to the NCAA tournament, and we knew that loss was the reason we didn't get in," Bittengle said.

Bittengle said that the loss has been a major source of motiva-

THE WEEK AHEAD

Women's Soccer

Oct. 27 vs Tiffin

Volleyball

Oct. 27 vs. Wayne State

Oct. 28 vs. Grand Valley

Nov. 4 -5 @ Purdue N.W & Davenport

Nov. 7 vs. Findlay

Football

Oct. 28 @ Wayne State

Nov. 4 vs. Grand Valley

Cross Country

Nov. 4 @ NCAA Division II Midwest Regional

Women's Basketball

Oct. 29 @ OSU Exhibition

Nov. 5 @ UConn Exhibition

Nov. 10 vs. ODU

Men's Basketball

Nov. 10 vs. Lake Erie

Swimming & Diving

Oct. 28 vs. John Carroll

Nov. 3 vs. Wayne State & Tiffin

Nov. 4 @ Tiffin

tion for the team, and for the nine seniors who plan to go out with a bang. As the latter portion of the season continues, the road ahead will be a challenge, but Coach Krispinsky is confident that the team will be able to continue its momentum.

"To the girl's credit, they've stayed tough, they've stayed mentally focused, and we're playing well as a result of that," Krispinsky said. "We've got to stay hungry and humble."

The women's soccer team will play on Oct. 27 against Tiffin at 7 p.m. on Ferguson Field.

Swimming continues rebuilding process

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The Ashland University Swimming and Diving program looks ahead to another season for its second year under head coach Ron Allen, a season they hope to use to continue to rebuild.

The program was at its peak most recently in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, being nationally ranked and having a number of All-Americans and individual national champions during those years.

However, the past couple of years the program has not been as successful as those times, but the veteran coach hopes to bring the Eagles back as a household collegiate swimming name.

"I watched Ashland University over the years and I was like wow, this is a great team. They're doing big things here," Allen said. "We need to get this program back to that level."

Allen, who was brought in as a

late hire in September of 2016, brought in a different way of teaching swimming and a new regime that is unlike most coaches.

Last year, Allen focused on getting to know his swimmers and getting a feel for the program while still competing in every meet.

Last year, the Eagles only had two seniors, one for the women's team and one for the men's.

This helped Allen because it allowed him to build a stronger and longer foundation with his athletes.

"I think as a general note, for training for the year and how we finished the season, I think it was a good year, not great, not superior, but a good year," Allen said.

Having a small senior class last year, led to bringing back a more experienced team as a whole, but also a strong senior class for this upcoming season. This year the Eagles have six men and five women who are seniors who hope to lead the team throughout the season.

For the women, one of the swimmers Allen is hoping to contribute to the team the most is senior captain Grace Reichard.

Last season, Reichard was three spots away from making it to nationals and Allen said that they want to get her there this year.

Another senior captain looking to do big things for the Eagles this year, is Zoe Scarpone who continues to be a leader for this program in and outside of the pool.

"I want to see the team do their very best every day whether it be in the pool, in the classroom, in the weight room, at Convo with their meal choices, or making sleep a priority," Scarpone said.

Scarpone scored well at conference last year and hopes to improve her times this year and have the most fun while doing it.

The men's team also boasts a strong lineup of returning seniors such as Ryan Deemer, Chris Georgiadis and Keegan Goeke.

Many of the men placed last year

at conference but Allen hopes that all of them can improve on their times and have an even stronger showing in meets and at conference this year.

In their second year under coach Allen, the swimmers are adapting to his different style of training and have really taken on the attitude that Allen has brought back to the program.

"Coach Allen is a driven coach. He has experience and knows exactly what we need," senior captain Nick Noe said. "He is making this team train harder while also creating a positive atmosphere."

Along with the freshman that the swimming and diving program have added this year, Allen has also hired a new grad assistant for the program. Olivia Olesiak will be the new diving coach and hopes to bring a new emphasis to the diving program.

Olesiak is a 2017 graduate of Division I South Dakota State and was a diver for the Jackrabbits dur-

ing her athletic career.

She set program records in both 1-meter (275.85 points) and 3-meter diving (305.71 points), and was named All-Summit League twice.

"We're going to create a diving program here that really hasn't been a program," Allen said. "[Olesiak] is a quote on quote rookie coach, but she is doing very well already."

This season, the Eagles have added three more dates of competition into their schedule than they had last year.

The Eagles will have three home meets this season as well as two additional dual meets that will be at home.

The first meet for the Eagles will take place on Saturday, Oct. 28 as they will host John Carroll.

"If we can get every individual on the team to get 10-15 percent better, then we're in a position to really do something big with our team," Allen said. "My personal goal is to be competitive."