

sports

New AU sport “STUNT” to have inaugural 2020 season

EVAN LAUX
Sports Editor

After over a year of careful planning, time and energy, the Ashland University cheer and dance coaching staff and athletic department has brought a new varsity sport to the university: STUNT.

“We’re always looking to see what sports are out there, and president Campo has always said to me to try to look at sports that we might thinking about having added to the catalog and put that in your back pocket,” Director of Athletics Al King said.

According to USA Cheer, the national governing body for sport cheering in the United States, STUNT “removes the crowd-leading element and focuses on the technical and athletic components of cheer, including partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, group jumps and tumbling.”

STUNT will be an addition to the already present AU cheer and dance teams, led by head coach Denise Farnsworth and assistant coach Brandy Marquette.

Farnsworth began her career with AU three years ago in 2017, where she quickly began thinking of ways to bolster the cheer and dance program and build up its athletes.

“My first season here, I had a cheerleader show me a STUNT video she found online and I watched it and thought ‘we totally need to get involved in this,’ and then it just grew from there,” Farnsworth said.

STUNT is one of the fastest growing collegiate women’s sports in the nation, along with wrestling and bowling according to King. It is currently being played at the college level by 14 NCAA institutions as a varsity sport, and by 26

NCAA schools as a club sport.

“We’ve looked at women’s bowling, and we’ve added lacrosse and

King’s decision to add STUNT to the sport catalog at AU was due in part to the success and growing



EVAN LAUX

The AU cheer team practices a STUNT routine provided by USA Cheer.

men’s tennis,” King said. “I really wanted to add another women’s sport and increase opportunities for women. This is one we ended up selling on and thought had the most potential.”

numbers of universities that have tested the water with STUNT already.

In Ohio, three schools currently have varsity STUNT teams, with AU being the fourth. Tiffin Uni-

versity and Hiram College have existing programs that began within the past three years, while Ursuline College joins AU in their inaugural 2020-21 season.

“It’s pretty huge in Michigan right now and you can see it trickling down into Ohio, a lot of the high schools in the Toledo area are really interested as well,” Farnsworth said.

Fellow Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletics Conference schools Davenport University, Grand Valley State University and Ferris State University all have STUNT programs. Davenport has the only other varsity program currently, while Grand Valley and Ferris both have club teams.

“Schools usually decide to add this stuff after they see if it works at other places,” King said. “If we have some success with STUNT and it goes well, there’s probably more of a chance that other schools will add it. There needs to be six schools with the program within the GLAIC to have a conference championship so for now that isn’t a thing.”

Instead of conference championships, a national championship is held by USA cheer each year. Next year, the championship will take place on May 1-3, 2020 at the University of Oklahoma.

12 games must be played to qualify for nationals. Although a defined schedule has not been made yet, Farnsworth says that the season will likely consist of six double headers played over six weekends in which four to six teams will show up to a single event, much like a track and field meet.

In a competition, two teams perform an identical routine before a panel of judges. The judges are looking for mistakes made by either team, in which they will take

score deductions.

There are four quarters: partner stunts, pyramids and tosses, jumps and tumbling and a team routine. The team with the best score of a particular routine will win a point, then have the ability to choose the next routine.

“We have a very competitive sport here and that will attract competitive women,” King said.

King and Farnsworth hope to bring in around 25 new women into the program in its first year.

“Competitive cheerleading has always been big for younger girls, but it’s new for our age group and skill level,” junior cheerleader Megan Kucharski said. “It’s gonna make our group a lot better as a whole and bring a lot of new girls in.”

Kucharski is on the leadership team for STUNT and has been apart of AU cheer since she was a freshman. She was a gymnast when she was younger, and has been cheerleading since she was 11.

“I think STUNT will take our exposure to a new level,” she said. “It will not only help the cheerleading aspect and make our program better as a whole, but also how we give back to the community with our service.”

The new STUNT team will be a completely separate entity from the existing sideline cheer squad, and each will have differing scholarship opportunities.

“When you look at sideline cheer, it’s more of a support system for other teams,” Farnsworth said. “STUNT is its own team that goes and competes head to head with other teams just like any other varsity sport. It’s really just an entirely new aspect of competitive cheer that hasn’t been seen at the college level too much yet, it’s going to be big.”

Women’s soccer ends nine-game win streak

NIKO SCARLATOS
Reporter

Finding a way to build a winning streak is something most teams find difficult to achieve. The ability to take the field each and every day and play with consistency is hard even for the best of the best. But for the Ashland University women’s soccer team, success means sticking to the same routine and taking each moment day by day.

The Eagles had a nine game win streak prior to Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference contender Grand Valley State University on Nov. 1. The team found themselves ranked No. 11 in the nation, while tied for first place in the GLIAC standings.

The Eagles started their season 2-0 with home a win against Lewis followed by a road win over Tiffin. The Eagles then suffered their first of two losses of the season, falling to Findlay by a score of 3-1.

“After we lost to Findlay I think we all just rallied,” senior goaltender Hannah Lee said. “We figured out what worked and what did not work and really came together as

a team and I’ve never been a part of a team that has been this close.”

After the loss to Findlay, the Eagles went on to win nine straight games and a tie against Trevecca Nazarene. During the streak, the team triumphed over Saginaw Valley State (2-1) and beat Ferris State University twice (2-1, 3-1).

The win streak started back on Sept. 27 with a win over Northwood (2-1). The Eagles got goals from Faith Lewis and Brianna Fourman in the victory. From there, the team took off and has not looked back since.

Getting a head start in the off-season is a huge factor when trying to string together multiple wins in a row, especially for a streak that lasted particularly long.

“We talk about the season as a whole. It is not just the fall, it’s the preseason that started back in January,” women’s soccer head coach Taylor Clarke said.

Clarke is in his second season at the helm of the Ashland University women’s soccer team.

“It has been a long building process and it is an accumulation of



HANNAH WITTEMAN

Redshirt senior Sydney Wright guards a Grand Valley State player.

all the things we have done,” he said. “Having a good winter, a good spring, then a good summer and then it finally reaches this final stage. It’s where it all comes together.”

The Eagles fell short in the first round of the NCAA Tournament a season ago, losing 1-0 to Ohio Valley. Despite the heartbreaking end to the 2018 season, the loss empowered the team to be extra motivated for 2019.

The Eagles have not only made their case for being a top team in the country, but have now also implemented themselves as front-runners to win a conference championship in a conference that has very tough competition.

Two wins over the Ferris State Bulldogs and a win over the Saginaw Valley State Cardinals stand as evidence that AU can compete competently within the GLIAC.

Up until Nov. 1, the Eagles were undefeated in the GLIAC. A tough loss to No. 2 Grand Valley State (14-1-0), however, would give the Eagles their first conference loss, making their record 7-1.

Two days later the team bounced back to defeat Davenport 2-1. The

Eagles had the better of the play for a majority of the game and held a 61-39 advantage in possession, but the game remained scoreless at the intermission. Both Ashland goals were scored by senior forward Deajah Swihart, in both the second period and overtime period.

The Eagles are looking to continue to make statement after statement, including winning a GLIAC title, sophomore midfielder Tori Baker said.

Motivation can certainly go a long way. Being doubted from the start and having critics can sometimes be a blessing in disguise. There are multiple examples of players or teams proving those critics wrong and this 2019 Ashland team is yet another perfect example.

“Throughout the season we’ve been using what we call ‘kindell to the fire’ with all the things that have happened to us,” Baker said. “We use our preseason ranking as fuel just to motivate us and keep us going.”

The team believes it is crucial to have at least one motto that can stick with a team throughout the entirety of a full season.

There are many words that can

describe the 2019 Ashland University women’s soccer team but some have stood out more than others. Amazing, determined, heart and character seem to all be equally important for the Eagles in finding their success this season.

“We all have different personalities but we all click,” Swihart said.

Swihart is currently the leading scorer on the team, with 10 goals this season.

“Everybody is amazing,” Clarke said. “This team has such a great group of individuals and we honor that.”

The Eagles have gotten contributions from everyone during this magical run. Seven different players with multiple goals on the season, along with outstanding play on the defensive end and in the box by Lee.

Everything has fused together to create a team that has had great success so far in the season.

The Eagles next game is at Saginaw Valley State on Nov. 8 at 1 p.m. After that, the GLIAC tournament will begin with the quarterfinal on Nov. 10 at 1 p.m. at Ferguson field.



HANNAH WITTEMAN

Senior Deajah Swihart drives down the pitch against Grand Valley State.