

# sports

## Swim and dive teams preparing for postseason action

**CASS TOLLIVER**  
AU-Live Sports Editor

The Ashland University swimming and diving teams are heading into postseason as they prepare for conference and nationals.



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY JESSICA ZAPER

Junior Jessica Zaper peepares for one of her events.

The women’s team, boasting a recent win under its belt against Tiffin University on Saturday, Jan. 25, is fully prepared to enter Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletics Conference play, according to head coach Kyle Walthall. “Both our teams had a great regular season,” Walthall said. “I know that our record may not show that exactly, but the thing that we focus on the most is improvement and GLIAC play. When it came to our dual meets we were focusing on tactics, racing strategies and different methods of warming up.” At the Oberlin Invitational in late November, the men’s and women’s teams both secured a second-place finish with a combined 46 personal records. “We’ve had a lot of great improvements over the year. As far as stand-outs go, it’s the entire squad. They have all stepped it up huge,” Walthall said about his team. “Our short sprinters, like Jess, have made

enormous strides this year. I’m really looking forward to seeing her swim.” Junior swimmer Jessica Zaper typically swims the 50 freestyle, 100 freestyle and 100 breaststroke, but will be swimming the 200

breaststroke at conference this year. “This season Kyle had us find key words that he would know for us when we are training and for me, the only thing I could think about was nationals,” Zaper said. “At every practice the one thing in my head is nationals. I always ask myself: ‘How bad do you want to get there?’” The team now has about two weeks to rest in preparation for the GLIAC Championships. “We are in the middle of our final preparation cycle, so we’re going to be focusing on the little things in each event and not making any drastic changes,” Walthall said. “We are focusing on resting up, because the team is a little beaten up after winter training.” For the freshmen swimmers and divers, this is a whole new experience. The young team consists of mostly freshmen and sophomores, containing only two seniors (Aaron

Bradfield and Peter Reventlow) and one junior (Kyle Feuerstine). “I’m a freshman so I don’t know much about the swim team’s past, but if you look at the stats from the past two or three years, we are improving,” freshman Amar Sap-

canin said. “Everyone is improving their times, everyone is getting better, everyone is motivated, everyone is ready to race and cannot wait to race. I think that this is a new era for Ashland swim.” Sapcanin traveled from Bosnia and Herzegovina to be part of the AU swimming and diving team. “If someone were to ask me my favorite thing about Ashland, it’s swimming. That’s why I’m here because of the swim team. I went here not knowing anyone and I can now call them my family. Swimming here makes me feel like this is now my home,” Sapcanin said. Sapcanin’s events include the 200 medley, 100 fly, 100 breaststroke and 200 breaststroke, his main event. “At mid-season I just missed the B cut, so I’m really close to nationals and conference. My goal is to go to nationals and then go to finals,” Sapcanin said. The AU swim and dive team hit

its peak in 2011 with the men’s team finishing eleventh in the nation and the women’s team finishing fifth. The teams have not been able to compete at the same level since then. Walthall is expecting to climb out of their rut this season. “Ashland hasn’t sent a group to nationals in four years, if I remember correctly, but we are looking to send a good group this year. I think that with the training we’ve put in and the mental state of the team that we’ve got a great shot,” Walthall said. After coming off two years of injuries, Zaper is now prepared to swim at conference. “The thing I’m looking forward to the most is just going out there and being able to compete,” Zaper said. “I’m someone who focuses on times and I know what the standards are for nationals. I just have such a competitive nature and I love being able to get up, race and compete.” The Eagle women focus on community and encouragement to lift each other up throughout the entire season. “It’s hard with our team being so small, so sometimes it’s hard for us to compete, but we have such solid people on the women’s team that can go out there and do well and win races and show up for the girls,” Zaper said. “We are always

really supportive and encouraging of each other and we all know what our goals are for the end of the season.” The swimmers have been putting in double practices and training every week day in hopes of improving before the GLIAC Championships. The swimmers and divers practice for multiple hours a day, training for the upcoming meets. “People are going to be shocked at what Ashland is able to do at conference,” Zaper said. “We’ve been the underdog for these past few years, but I feel like this year people are going to finally start noticing who Ashland University is.” At the end of it all, the one thing the Eagles cannot lose is their team spirit. “We’ve been told from many coaches that it’s our spirit that we bring in the pool,” Zaper said. “We walk into a pool deck and it’s like we own it. We have the best cheers and we’re screaming and showing our love for every single person, so I’m really excited to see how our team comes together during that week and see how everyone’s going to race. A lot of our best times will come from conference.” The GLIAC Championships will begin on Feb. 19 at Saginaw Valley State University where the Eagles will be competing.

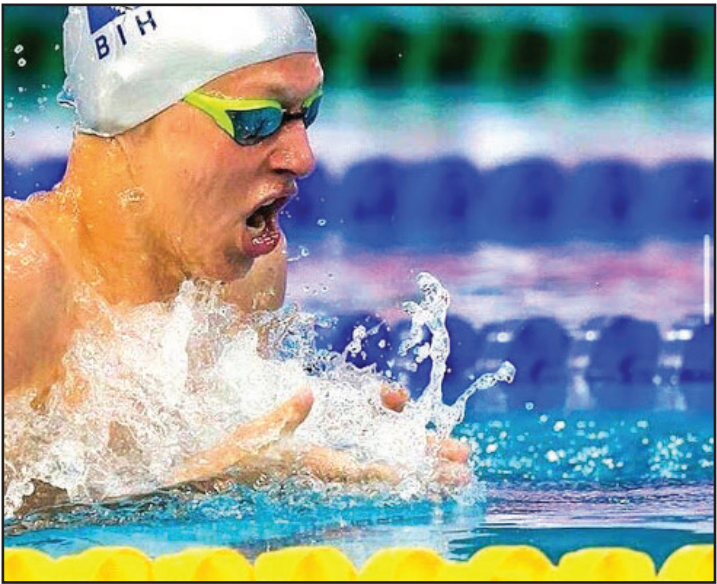


PHOTO SUBMITTED BY AMAR SAPCANIN

Freshman Amar Sapcanin in the pool at the European Championships

## Tennis teams enter spring semester under Christian Hamilton

**MASON JONES**  
Reporter

The new year has just begun, but for the Ashland University tennis team, the athletic year is half over. The AU men’s and women’s tennis team are now beginning their spring season of play, with the men having duel matches and the women playing to finish strong. The Eagle men are just beginning their duel matches, currently 3-0 overall, with the women having finished last fall with an overall record of 9-10 overall, 3-6 in conference. The Eagle women won their first Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletics Conference tournament match in fall 2012, and hope to expand on that momentum moving forward

as they continue with spring play. “The men and women are eager to get into these matches, and we are excited for the groundwork that we are laying,” Interim Director of Tennis Operations Christian Hamilton said. “A lot of the focus has been on these upcoming matches.” Hamilton, who assisted former tennis head coach Lexi Bolesky, took over her position when Bolesky resigned from her status as head tennis coach last fall. Hamilton is grateful that he was able to work with Bolesky for the past year and a half. “She was a huge mentor to me, as it was like her passing the torch as she has helped me as well as this program moves forward in the right direction,” he said.

Hamilton hopes to improve the progress of the tennis program even more as he continues to train and guide his team toward a bigger and better future for AU tennis. “What it really comes down to is that team effort to want to get better, so what I always tell the men and women is that everyday we go to practice, your job is to try and make the person across the net from you better,” Hamilton said. “That’s the goal that we try to instill in them, so that everyday when the players go out and do that, they get better and our mentality gets stronger.” Senior Brianna Brdicka agrees with Hamilton’s sentiments. “Everyone has to do their part to produce a team win,” Brdicka said. “With the mentality being to



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Priyank Soni is one of three seniors graduating after this semester.

always try to help each other and pursue a victory.” Brdicka has been to the GLIAC Championships and has been trained under former Coach Bolesky for most of her college career. Brdicka has great confidence in her team as she has witnessed the help and support of her team in action as she is on the court. “I try to win not just for myself, but for the team,” she said. “When you’re out there playing singles it’s difficult since you’re alone and not with your duos partner, but knowing that you have support coming from your teammates and coaches really makes the match less stressful. No matter what happens, I know that I’ve got my teammates and coaches by my side all the way through.” Three Eagles will see their final season of play this spring: seniors Priyank Soni, Brianna Brdicka and Alison Brooks. “They have been influential

to this program, and they have learned over these past four years what it takes to be an Ashland Eagle,” Hamilton said. “I believe they’ve taught that to the underclassmen, which is invaluable. They will be missed, but their guidance and leadership will continue to be present through the underclassmen.” Both the men’s and women’s teams are young, with predominantly underclassman athletes. Hamilton is also looking to bring in more talent next fall through recruitment. The men’s team will play their next match against Edinboro at the Westwood Racquet Club on Feb. 9 at 3 p.m. while the women’s team will begin their spring season facing off against Tiffin at the Lakewood Racquet Club (Lexington, Ohio) on Feb. 22, time to be determined.



AU ATHLETICS

Christian Hamilton was named Interim Director of Tennis Operations after head coach Lexi Bolecky’s departure.