

# sports

## AU swim and dive team gears up for GLIAC meet

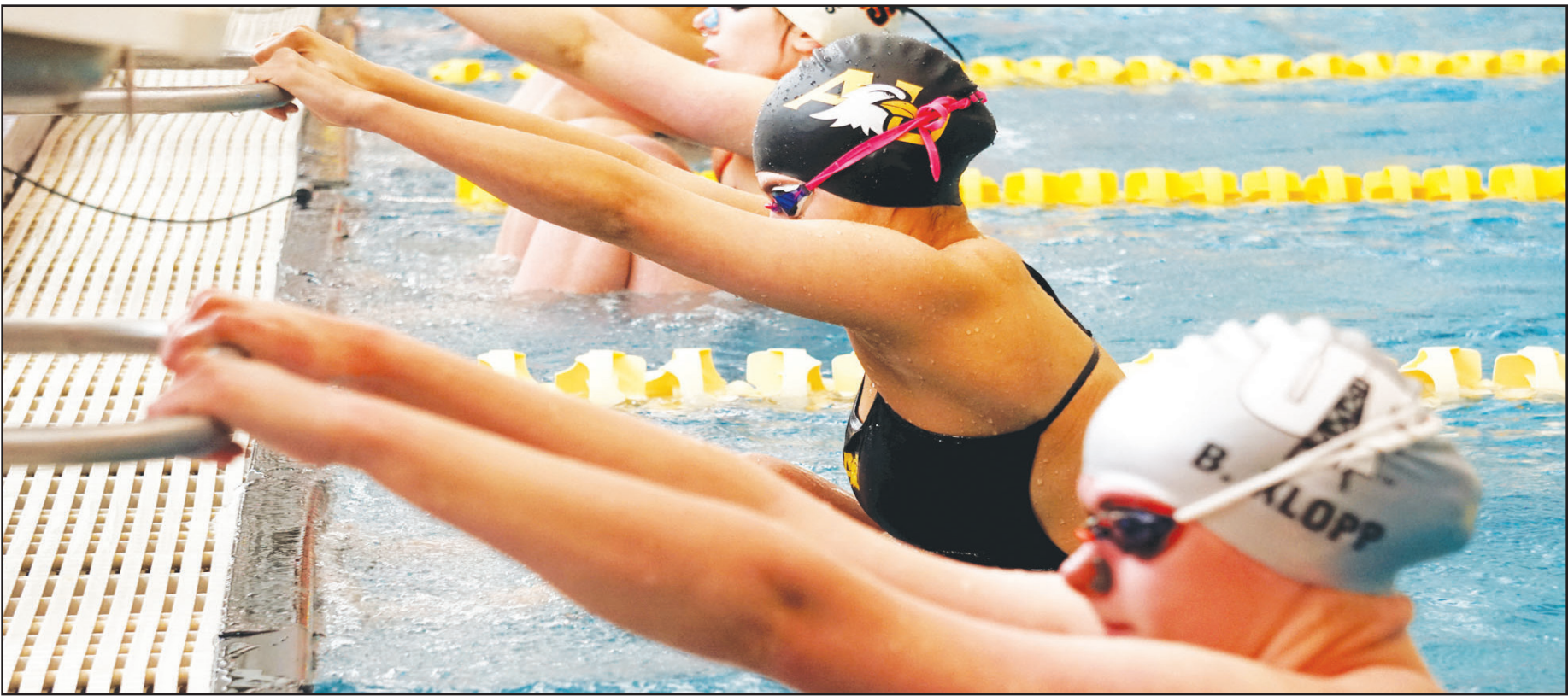


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AU women's swim and dive team competing against the University of Findlay, January 2021.

**BEN VOELKER**  
Reporter

After a difficult and challenging season, the Ashland University swim and dive team is gearing up to make one final push at the GLIAC conference meet in Holland, Mich. this upcoming week.

This year's GLIAC meet is going to look a lot different than it has in previous years.

"The layout of the meet is bizarre," head coach Kyle Walthall said. "We're doing something that we've never done before. I'm looking forward to it, I like to try new things. It will be an interesting meet."

As usual, the meet will span over a four-day period, from Tuesday to Saturday. However, this year, the men and women will be separated for the pre-

liminary rounds.

The men swimming early in the morning, and the women swimming later in the day. The top placers from the preliminary rounds from both sides swim again later that night in a final round.

Typically, the Eagles' formula for success at GLIAC is simple. However, it has had to be completely reworked for such an abnormal year.

"Usually, preparation for our conference meet starts the second our conference meet ends the previous year," Walthall said. "But a lot of that went out the window this year. Our prep for the GLIAC meet this year has restarted about five or six times. But right now, I just want us to go out there and have some fun. Regardless of how it turns out, I've been excited for it."

This season has been particularly tough for the Eagles due to the coronavirus pandemic. In order to work around COVID-19 guidelines, serious changes to the practices had to be made.

Members of the team have had to practice separately in different "pods." There must only be one swimmer on each side of the lane. Masks must be worn at all times when out of the water. It is a far cry from the way practices operated last year.

"The biggest challenge for me while swimming in a pandemic has been not being able to train and see my fellow teammates," said junior Morgan Gardner.

"I am all about having a good team atmosphere and being there for them. But in the end, I feel like we are closer than we have ever been before."

The pandemic and GLIAC

guidelines have also prevented the team from competing in meets during the fall semester, they have only been able to compete in three the entire season.

"The lack of swim meets this year has been strange," Gardner said. "But for me personally, it hasn't affected how I swim at practice. I always try to work my hardest everyday no matter if there is a meet over the weekend or not."

Despite the circumstances, many swimmers have remained positive about this abnormal season.

"We're in tough times," said freshman Josh Hagan. "But I don't want to look back on this year and have any regrets, because then you are just living the tough times twice. I want to go into better times knowing I did everything I could and

made the most of a hard year."

Many members of the team have chosen to opt out of this season due to covid-19 related issues. This has particularly affected the men's team – who are down to just five swimmers and a diver for this season.

"In a way, there's been a little bit of a negative result to it. We don't really have a full boys' team," Hagan said. "But in another way, with it just being the six of us, we are able to bond between each other, and I feel a lot closer to these five guys than I did last semester."

While the season has been tough, Gardner, Hagan, and others are excited to close out the season as strong as possible.

"I'm very hungry to compete," Hagan said. "It's been a whole year since I've tapered for a meet like this. I am ready to go."

## No fans allowed inspires AU fan cutouts inside Kates gymnasium



Photo retrieved from goashlandeagles.com

Fan cutouts for games in Kates gymnasium pictured above.

**NIKO SCARLATOS**  
Reporter

When talking about the Ashland University Men's and Women's basketball teams, you cannot forget about the support that they constantly get from the community. The students and fans are always selling out Kate's Gymnasium cheering on their teams. This year, however, things are a little different.

The coronavirus has affected so many things over the last ten plus months and that includes sports. Due to protocol, sporting events have been played without fans in the arenas or stadiums.

It has certainly been a new experience for everybody, not just the players. Dusty Sloan, the Director of Athletic Communications spoke about the importance of fans. "The fans are really the lifeblood of this place, beyond the actual student athletes and coaches," said Sloan. "We always want to make sure that they have a great experience here just like how we want to make sure that our student athletes have a great experience here."

The women's team has not shown on the court how much they miss the fans. The team just finished up its home schedule in the 2021 regular season and ended with a home record of 8-1, the only loss

coming on January 22nd in the hands of the Saginaw Valley State Cardinals.

Nonetheless, the players would love nothing more than to showcase their talents in front of the fans in the crowd.

With no one in the crowd, the school knew they needed something to make things feel as normal as they possibly could. Multiple sports teams at both the professional and Division One collegiate levels have gone in two directions. Either fake crowd noise being played through the speakers during the games or putting fake fans in the seats, known as cardboard cutouts.

"It still is obviously a different feel with no fans but it does help the sight lines to have those fake fans in the seats," Dusty said. "We wanted the fans to still be given the opportunity to be a part of the program as much as humanly possible during the pandemic."

Fans have been able to send in pictures of themselves in Ashland gear and have those photos be placed on cardboard and in the stands at Kate's Gymnasium.

Ashland chose not to go with the fake crowd noise through the speakers during games. "We realized that just having the visual of the fans being in the crowd is better. When you talk about crowd

noise, yes we do not have much and it is not nearly the same as what it used to be but we do provide music during the pregame and halftime and also during timeouts," said Sloan.

AU has done an excellent job in keeping the fans and the community involved with the teams during a time when the sides can easily feel very distant from each other.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of stress and hard times for many people all over the world but sports do a beautiful job of keeping people sane and allowing them to enjoy things that they did not believe they would be able to enjoy for a long time.