

# Time for Some Action

## Women's lacrosse program ready to get its inaugural season underway

After making the decision to bring men's and women's lacrosse to campus in December 2009 and watching the men's program successfully complete its first season in 2011, the time has come for the women's team to officially begin its first year of intercollegiate competition. With a roster of 18, the team may have its hands full during its initial season competing as a NCAA Division III member, but for these women the start of the season can't come soon enough.

"I am very excited for the first year. We have already started nontraditional season practice and I know that everyone on the team can't wait for the actual season to start. It is definitely exciting to be a part of the first-year program because many students have never seen a women's lacrosse game before or have ever heard of lacrosse in general. It is just really exciting to be a part of the inaugural team at Thiel," said Kelley Bellia, a first-year neuroscience major from Beaver Falls, Pa.

Bellia and the other members of the program's first full recruiting class arrived on campus this fall, but joining them on the roster are a number of women who teamed up with the program after the College announced its intention to add the sport in 2009.

"Being a first-year program did aid me in deciding to come to Thiel. I wanted to go to a small school where I knew I could play lacrosse right away. I knew that by attending and being on its first-year team I could definitely play as a freshman, whereas

at other schools you may never see the field until you're a junior or senior. It was also just cool to know that you are a part of the first women's team and are a part of establishing a legacy," said Bellia.

Heading into the 2011-2012 academic year, Thiel joins a steadily growing group of 216 Division III schools with a women's lacrosse program, and is one of just 37 schools sponsoring the sport in Pennsylvania. What was once a niche sport in the Mid-Atlantic and New England states is now one of the fastest-growing games in the country.

"I think the campus will really enjoy the women's lacrosse program because we are new to the school and a lot of people do not even know what lacrosse is—it really is nothing like men's lacrosse; we play differently so it will be exciting to see how fans react to the new style of play. As we start our first full year some expectations of our team are, first and foremost, perform well as a team in the classroom and to make sure we are all doing our jobs by going to classes and making sure we are doing what we are supposed to be doing," said Casmeir Mahdi, a first-year early childhood education major from Odenton, Md.

Handling the head coaching duties is Kati Robbins, hired in early September to replace Whitney Turnbull, who after a year of laying the groundwork for a successful program, left Thiel in August.

"It is a huge honor to be the first head coach of the women's lacrosse program. Whitney [Turnbull] did a



great job recruiting high-caliber players to Thiel who want to be a part of a new program and made the transition very easy for me to come in and focus on coaching and recruiting," said Robbins. "The young women on this team are just as excited I as I am for games to begin and to build the Tomcat women's lacrosse tradition. It really is an exciting time in women's lacrosse and I am excited to build this program from the ground up and increase the awareness of women's lacrosse in western Pennsylvania."

Robbins arrived at Thiel after serving as the head coach of NCAA Division II member St. Andrews Presbyterian College since 2009. Following the 2011 season, a pair of Robbins' players were named to the [usacollegelacrosse.com](http://usacollegelacrosse.com) NCAA Division II women's all-American team, while another was selected to the Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA) all-South region second team.

Prior to becoming the head coach at St. Andrews, Robbins was the head coach at her alma mater, Wittenberg University, from 2006 through 2009. In her final season at Wittenberg, she led her Tiger squad to a North Coast Athletic Conference (NCAC) final four berth, the program's first since 2003.

Before entering the head coaching ranks Robbins served as an assistant at Gwynedd Mercy College (2003), College of Wooster (2002-2005) and Franklin and Marshall College (2006).

A 2002 Wittenberg graduate, Robbins was a four-time all-NCAC selection as a member of the Tigers women's lacrosse squad and was named to the Brine regional all-American squad on four occasions.

"I have high expectations for the first season of women's lacrosse. Our schedule pits us against top teams in the region like The College of Wooster and Kenyon College. Also, we are playing some new programs like Otterbein College and Olivet College. If the team works hard this offseason we have a pretty good chance of producing a winning record in our first season," said Robbins. "That will be a huge goal for us, but is a goal I feel we can accomplish. Having a roster primarily full of freshmen can be a challenge with learning the speed of the game but it's also exciting because they will be able to go into every game with no pressure on their shoulders. Any team that has a new coach taking over will have a learning curve with new drills, expectations and rules, but it has been an easy transition because the team is excited to learn."

Robbins and the Tomcats will embark on a very ambitious 16-game schedule in 2012, beginning with a game at Ohio Wesleyan University on Feb. 25, 2012. But for those who can't wait for the team to play its first official contest on campus Feb. 29, 2012 against Saint Vincent College, the Tomcats will host a scrimmage against Waynesburg University on Feb. 15, 2012.

## Thiel Coach Qualifies for U.S. Olympic Trials

Assistant cross country and track and field coach Jed Christiansen ran to a 14th-place finish at this year's 34th annual Bank of America Chicago Marathon in October, and in doing so secured a spot in the 2012 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials in Houston, Texas. It was his first full marathon.



Christiansen was just the third American competitor to finish, completing the race in a time of 2:18:31 (a pace of 5:18 per mile). A time of 2:19:00 was required to qualify for January's trials.

"I think it is important to dream in life. So many people don't really believe that they can achieve much, but with God's help, a lot of hard work, and great perseverance, even that which seems impossible can be achieved. Limits can be broken," said Christiansen.

Christiansen, a native of Greenville who is in his second year as a member of the Tomcat athletic department, graduated from Calvin College in 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in K-12 physical education and a minor in health. A four-year member of the Knights' cross country and indoor and outdoor track and field teams, Christiansen was an eight-time All-American and helped lead the Knights' cross country team to a Division III national championship in 2006.

Christiansen will compete at the trials for the opportunity to represent the U.S. at the 2012 Olympic Games in London, England. The top three male and female finishers at the Houston event will comprise Team U.S.A.

"There are a lot of great runners that try over and over to make the trials and don't quite make the cut, so it is pretty incredible that I was able to do it my first shot. I'm still in some disbelief that I was able to," said Christiansen.

Just minutes after completing the marathon Christiansen's thoughts were, as usual, with his Thiel runners and what his experience, and performance, could do for the program.

"My focus is on giving this program everything I have, and my motivation going into the Chicago Marathon was knowing that I needed to do my best because this team could feed off of that success and it would give prospective student-athletes the confidence that they will be coached at a high level when they're deciding to attend Thiel," said Christiansen."

# Tomcats in Spain

## *Thiel women's volleyball makes trip to play overseas*

Most collegiate student-athletes only get to travel within the United States for their sport, but the Thiel volleyball team was able to travel to a different country. This summer, our team went to Spain for 10 days, traveling to Madrid, Toledo and Barcelona. It was a completely different experience going from city to city because each was unique in its own way.

We went on walking tours and were able to see some incredible sights and also learn a lot about the culture and history of Spain. Some of the biggest and most memorable sights we saw were the Royal Palace, the park where Gaudi lived, the Plaza Mayor, the bull fighting museum and arena, the Salvadore Dali museum and several cathedrals filled with intricate details on the inside and outside. Our tour guide was fantastic and made sure that we saw everything we possibly could, and every place that we went was absolutely beautiful.

"There were so many things to see and do that were so different from what we do in the U.S., but we were able to relate them to things that we do at home. For example, the bullfight that we went to in Madrid was a tradition and a pastime for the people in Spain just like a baseball game would be for people in the United States. Also, it was really neat to be in the city of Madrid in the Plaza Mayor, especially at night, because it felt like we were in a big city like what would be compared to New York City with a big night life," said senior outside hitter Megan Kay.

One of the best experiences that I had in Spain was the bullfight. We witnessed the long-time tradition of bullfighting, which takes place in a huge arena with stone bleachers. There are three bullfighters who each fight two bulls. This was definitely one of the most interesting things that we did in Spain and it was an extremely unique experience.



(Above) The team outside of the Dali Museum with Tori Grafeman, an American living in Barcelona who plays volleyball on a professional Spanish team. (Below) The Thiel team poses with one of the Spanish teams post-match.

We also tried a lot of different food in Spain. All of the restaurants were fantastic. At some, we were served three-course meals. At other times, we went to buffets and the selection of food at the buffets was outrageous. There was a huge selection of different foods. They had varieties of meats, fish, pastas, vegetables, fruits, desserts and basically anything! We definitely left every meal with full stomachs and we enjoyed trying new things.

During our Spain trip, we played four volleyball matches against teams in Madrid and Barcelona. It was exciting to play volleyball in a different country.



The main difference that we had to get used to was the volleyballs. In Spain, they use completely different volleyballs than we do in the United States, so we had to adjust to that challenge. We played some pretty good competition and finished with two wins and two losses. We even got to play against some professional volleyball players, which was a great experience for all of us.

The TCVB Spain trip was a huge success. Everybody really enjoyed it and had so much fun experiencing a different country. It was also a great team bonding experience for all of us and it brought us closer together. We are all thrilled that we got to go on such a wonderful trip.

## A Tomcat Takes on the “Big City”

Planes are zipping by. Traffic noise always a constant. Construction equipment up and running at 6 a.m. Mass transit everywhere. This does not sound like Greenville, Pa.; population 6,000. This is our nation’s capital—with a population of about 605,000.

This semester, I took my studies to Washington, D.C., for my final three months as a Thiel student. I am a part of a program called LCWS (Lutheran College Washington Semester). The program brings 30 students from across the globe to study in D.C. and teach two classes per week. Wednesdays are designated for field trips to D.C. landmarks like the State Department, White House, Capital Building and Pentagon. So what have I been doing with all of my time? That’s the really fun part...

4001 Nebraska Avenue NW is where I can be found on just about any given day. I was presented with the opportunity to intern at possibly one of the coolest places in the DC Metro area, NBC Washington. I work in the sports department of one of the 12 cities in the U.S. that have four major sports teams. There is never a dull moment here as sports and news are always going on!

In the beginning I would watch the games on my television, which I transferred to my computer. From that point I would take any and all exciting plays and “clip” them, which means record and add them to a folder. As I was doing this, one of the stations’ producers would take my clips and turn it into a

The Spain trip was the second international excursion for the women’s volleyball team since Coach Steve Brewer took over in 2006. The program made a trip to Barbados prior to the 2008 season.

“Having the opportunity to take my teams overseas has been outstanding. Allowing the girls to see all the wonderful things about other cultures, while at the same time realizing all the things that make our own country so great, makes the international experience much more than just a volleyball vacation. The entire experience makes you realize, and appreciate, all of the things we take for granted as U.S. citizens,” said Brewer.

—Alyssa Chine '13

highlight reel, which is what gets aired every day. My mornings usually consists of locker room press conferences with the Redskins and Capitals. With basketball season right around the corner we’ll be adding Georgetown University, George Washington University, Howard University and the University of Maryland to our lists of things to do.

This opportunity is something I never really thought would happen and my new life in Washington, D.C. is something that can’t be summed up in 500 words or less. What can be is that this experience taught me that what I’ve done with my life during my time at Thiel has definitely played a role in my recent opportunities, and hopefully, the many more to come.

The hours spent in the Academic Success Center, talking with alumni, coaches, faculty and staff has prepared me for the real world and my life outside of Greenville. These people have taught me that, while my time was absolutely precious at Thiel, there are so many more things out there! Thanks to Thiel College and the people who have worked with me over the past three years, I have been able to experience just that with this LCWS experience.

—Nina Gabrelcik '11

Editor’s Note: *Gabrelcik has been writing about her experiences as a Thiel student-athlete in The Bell since 2008. She graduated in May 2011 with a degree in media communications/communication studies.*



*Gabrelcik with her sister, Cammillee, and her mother, Debra Hagan, outside the NBC studios in Washington, D.C.*