

ESPRIT DE BLAKE:

A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

By Andrew Tellijohn



“I don’t think I would be as successful
a student if I didn’t have athletics.”

Hillary Crowe '11

Tim Zellmer '11 captained Blake's football team last fall, and this winter he holds the same honor on the basketball team. The senior arrived at Blake in ninth grade. He is a rock solid student with interests in math, science and economics, and he plans to continue his gridiron career at a division three school in the Northeast in the fall.

Hillary Crowe '11 will captain three girls' sports teams during the 2010-11 school year. She's also interested in math and science, and she's already accepted an invitation to attend Harvard next fall where she'll study and play hockey.

Zellmer and Crowe are just two current students at The Blake School who excel in multiple sports and in the classroom. They are part of a tradition that dates back well before the 1974 merger of the Northrop Collegiate School, the Blake School for Boys and the Highcroft Country Day School.

It's a tradition with which they are familiar and one they are proud to do their part to uphold.

"It's been a huge part of my experience at Blake," Zellmer says.

STUDY SHOWS SPORTS ENHANCE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Crowe and Zellmer aren't alone. A recent study of students who have graduated from Blake since 1989 reveals that students who participated in extracurricular activities experienced higher satisfaction at the School than those who didn't.

Athletic Director Jim Lindsay calls athletics a part of the fabric of the Blake community. Head of School John Gulla says athletic participation is important for a variety of reasons.

While the desire to win is normal in competition, it's just as important simply to be an active, well-rounded person.

"Anybody with common sense knows you are a better student if you are fit," Gulla says.

Crowe agrees with that assessment. While she enjoys competing and will continue to play in college, she also appreciates the life lessons that come from competition and learning how to effectively manage time.

"I don't think I would be as successful a student if I didn't have athletics," Crowe says. "It's forced me to manage my time a lot better and to be more efficient. Without athletics I would have a lot more time, probably would be watching TV more and wouldn't be as focused a student."

Left: Girls' varsity hockey captain Hillary Crowe '11 (Photo by Tess Cameranesi)

Furthermore, say Gulla and other School administrators, sports bring with them an "esprit de corps," particularly when teams or individuals perform well and the School gets behind them.

Blake shows its support by allowing students to attend competitions when teams reach state tournaments and providing tickets for them to do so, says Paul Menge, assistant Upper School director and girls' varsity soccer coach.

"To compete at state and have the support of peers while doing so is a really positive experience for any kid who is an athlete," he says.

HISTORY OF SPORTS AT BLAKE

Sports have long been important at Blake and its predecessor schools going back to the early 20th century when such activities were used more as a strategy for getting kids out and active.

Athletics evolved at the School much as society changed, says Janet Woolman, author of Blake's history book, "Expecting Good Things of All – 100 Years of Academic Excellence."

The 1920s saw professional sports grow in popularity and along with this growth came increased school spirit. Blake had its first homecoming in 1925, and competitions, rather than sport for exercise, began gaining importance in the 1930s. After World War II, the School began committing to building infrastructure for sporting events and, in an independent league, Blake was consistently competitive, Woolman says.

"PLAYING SPORTS IS KIND OF WHAT I DO. I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT IT."

TIM ZELLMER '11



Above: Tim Zellmer '11 served as this year's varsity football captain. (Photo by Jim Leslie)

Boys' sports have been growing almost ever since. Girls' interscholastic sports thrived early on, Woolman says, but faded after the 1920s when a theory was floated that women would suffer nervous exhaustion by playing sports competitively. Even so, heated intramural contests continued at Northrop.

They rebounded in the early 1970s after the ratification of Title IX, which required gender equity among boys and girls in any educational program receiving federal funding. In 1994, girls at Blake gained an added measure of respect after winning their first Class A state title (in basketball).

"That was a turning point in terms of guaranteeing women's sports at Blake more respect," Woolman says.



NOT ALL ABOUT WINNING

Not all sports at Blake are winning state tournaments, but collectively, the School has been competitive enough to finish first or second for the last half-dozen years in the Wells Fargo Challenge Cup, an award that recognizes collective excellence in athletics and fine arts.

"It speaks to the breadth and depth of the program," Lindsay says. Some of the sports at Blake have stronger and longer-maintained histories of success than others. Boys' and girls' lacrosse and hockey, for example, are multiple-time winners. Others are in various levels of growth and improvement.

Lindsay says several characteristics of Blake's athletic program stand out. First, there is a high level of participation that reaches 90 percent

of Middle School students, despite there being no participation requirement.

**BLAKE HAS
WON AS
MANY STATE
TITLES (25)
SINCE 2000
AS IN THE
PREVIOUS
TWO DECADES
(SINCE 1980).**

Left: All Blake's varsity team captains gather on stage as the 2009 Challenge Cup is presented to Blake.

Now many girls' programs at Blake, including hockey, soccer, tennis and lacrosse, are consistently competitive statewide, Woolman adds.

MIDDLE SCHOOL EMPHASIS

In recent years, one of the biggest changes in athletics at Blake has been increased emphasis on Middle School programs. Blake has always been among the most aggressive schools statewide in providing opportunities for senior high athletes. But in the last five years Blake's Middle School program has gone from just a couple of options to a flourishing program in which 90 percent of Middle School students participate in at least one sport.

That emphasis started when Middle School Director Joe Seivold, Assistant Athletic Director Joan Seivold and Lindsay made a concentrated effort to grow the program. This newer, robust program gives more students a chance to represent their school, participate, and share in the excitement of being part of a school team. It also provides varsity coaches an earlier opportunity to start molding younger students for their programs.

Raina Green, who teaches Middle School social studies and coaches Blake's varsity volleyball and track teams, says she tries to help these younger students understand what it will take and where they might have their best chances to excel. She can also work with them as Middle Schoolers throughout the year to aid in their improvement.

"Improvement is the key," she says. "That's where I'm pressing the hardest."

The Upper School does require students to participate in at least one interscholastic sport in their ninth grade and tenth grade years, but they have plenty of choices. There are 28 sports offered, 14 each for boys and girls.

"It speaks to our belief that it's not about wins and losses, it's that there are some inherent values to being on an athletic team and to having that experience," Lindsay says. "We recognize for some of our students it may not be a labor of love, but hopefully we turn kids on to some new activities."

Lindsay also is proud of a couple of additional tenets of the School's athletic program: Blake allows and encourages students to be multi-sport athletes if they choose and the School has a no cut policy. The latter doesn't mean a student is guaranteed to play at the level he or she wants to play at or that there isn't going to be occasional disappointment. But if a student wants to play a sport, the School will attempt to find a way to accommodate him or her.

"We are going to provide a team for every level of ability," he says.

"We're blessed with having the resources to add teams, add coaches as needed."

CHALLENGES

The fact that Blake has many sports and high participation in those sports is great for students, but can provide a few challenges. For one, Lindsay says, providing practice facilities for such a large number of

Feature continued on page 31



GIRLS IN SPORTS

A Blue and White Legacy

By Lindsay Townsend Youngdahl '98

In recent years, Blake girls' athletic teams have been at the forefront of the School's athletic triumphs, winning state championships in basketball, fencing, hockey, lacrosse, soccer, and track and field. In addition to hard work and dedication, this success can be attributed to the School's century-plus tradition of girls' athletic participation, which dates back to the early years of Northrop Collegiate School.

From Northrop's inception, sports were an important part of the student experience. In the 1920s and '30s, many girls participated in sports, including basketball, field hockey, ice skating, swimming and tennis. The Northrop girls participated in annual basketball games and field day competitions against St. Paul's Summit School and held spirited intramural competitions between classes. For many years, the biggest athletic event at Northrop was the annual intramural basketball playoff known as "The Tournament." These athletic events for girls not only promoted camaraderie and teamwork but also invoked a sense of school community.

Although interscholastic sports diminished by the 1930s, intramural contests were an important part of Northrop. The fall "Old Girls' Party for the New" included a drawing to

determine whether a new student would be a "Blue" or a "White" during her years at Northrop. Cyrus, the teddy bear mascot displayed in Northrop's lobby, wore a blue or white ribbon, depending on which team won the most games the previous year.

The merger of Blake and Northrop, along with the School's compliance with Title IX, opened the floodgates for female athletic competition. Interscholastic events were first scheduled for girls' track and softball, followed by volleyball, basketball, swimming and tennis with the formation of the Tri-Metro Conference and the School's joining the Minnesota State High School League.

Today Blake offers 14 different sports for girls. Most Upper School girls participate on at least one Blake team and many are multi-sport athletes. The opportunity for participation in athletics has helped develop empowered female leaders and, like their sisters of Northrop, has helped to cultivate an overwhelming sense of pride and spirit within the School community.

TODAY'S GIFT IMPACTS A LIFETIME

In a recent young alumni survey, 96% of respondents agreed that a Blake faculty or staff member had a strong and favorable influence on them.

This year, more than 90% of Blake employees have demonstrated this commitment to students by making a contribution to the Annual Fund.

Please honor these inspiring individuals by making your own contribution to the 2010-11 Annual Fund today. To make a gift, visit www.blakeschool.org/give or call the Advancement Office at (952) 988-3430.

Thank you!





90 PERCENT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN AT LEAST ONE SPORT.

teams can prove logistically tricky, as can transporting students from the Upper School in Minneapolis to Hopkins, where all the athletic facilities are located.

And coach Green says the large number of sports and other activities available for students can spread quality athletes out enough that fielding a competitive team becomes challenging. Still, she says, providing so many options for students is equally important as winning championships.

“It’s a challenge in that way,” she says. “So what do I do as a coach? I focus on improvement. I focus on helping instill in them that we need to be competitive night in and night out regardless of what the final score is.”

COMING BACK FOR MORE

While Blake has a strong overall athletic tradition, students and administrators stress that these students are not just successful in their sports of choice. Athletes from Blake dot rosters at prestigious colleges and universities across the country where they excel in the classroom as well. Part of playing sports, adds Green, is helping develop the whole person. “In doing that, it’s not just about winning, it’s about giving the kids a good experience,” she says.

By and large it seems those experiences have been positive. Crowe and Zellmer both entered Blake in ninth grade knowing few of their new classmates. Sports gave them a social network that helped them transition to their new school, and they’ve built friendships they expect to stand the test of time.

“Sports were a huge social outlet for me,” Zellmer says. “Playing sports is kind of what I do. I’m passionate about it.”

Both have noticed how Blake alumni frequently return to watch younger generations attempt to carry on the School’s tradition of success, and they both plan to do the same.

“I think that speaks volumes about how much they’ve taken away,” Crowe says. “I know when I’m on breaks I’m going to come back and support my teammates. I’ve just taken so much from it. The friendships I’ve made and the bonds, it’s just been tremendous.”



State Championships by Year

2010 G. Lacrosse
B. Tennis
B. Swim/Dive

2009 B. Swim/Dive
G. Hockey

2008 B. Cross Country
B. Soccer
B. Lacrosse
G. Lacrosse

2007 G. Hockey
B. Alpine Ski

2006 B. Alpine Ski
B. Lacrosse
G. Track & Field

2005 B. Lacrosse
G. Fencing

2004 G. Fencing



2003 G. Hockey
B. Tennis

2002 B. Fencing
B. Tennis

2001 G. Track & Field

2000 G. Soccer
B. Tennis
G. Lacrosse

1999 G. Lacrosse
G. Basketball

1998 G. Basketball

1997 B. Golf

1996 B. Tennis

1994 B. Tennis
G. Basketball

1993 G. Tennis

1992 G. Alpine Ski
G. Tennis
B. Tennis

1991 G. Tennis

1990 G. Tennis

1987 B. Tennis
G. Tennis

1984 B. Tennis
G. Tennis
B. Golf
Gymnastics

1983 Gymnastics

1982 B. Tennis
B. Golf

1981 B. Tennis
G. Alpine Ski
Gymnastics

1979 B. Tennis

1978 B. Alpine Ski
G. Alpine Ski