



JMU sophomore pitcher Alissa Humphrey sails a ball down the middle against George Washington. Savannah Reger / The Breeze

# PITCH BY PITCH

JMU softball's pitching mentality since the Women's College World Series and the mental blocks it's faced so far

from **IN THE CIRCLE**, page 1

"I think we did throw them into the fire against really tough competition at the beginning," LaPorte said. "You have to become more dynamic, and that's what we've tried to do with our pitchers."

In some ways, LaPorte said, this is the same pressure a new starting face in the circle gets every season — in other ways, however, it's amplified. Former JMU pitcher Megan Good (2015-19), in the circle when JMU took down Michigan to advance to the Super Regionals in 2019, was always compared to former pitcher Jaielyn Ford, who led the Dukes in 2016 when they hosted a Super Regional. Alexander, in turn, was compared to Good, and now Humphrey and Bermudez may be feeling these same effects at the beginning of the year.

"I think [they think] they have to live up to last year, and that's really hard," JMU assistant coach Libby Bowman, who works primarily with the pitchers, said. "It's making sure we create our own identity as a pitching staff."

Through 22 games this season, the Dukes have given up over 100 runs already — the most in the last three seasons. LaPorte's staff began using Bermudez and Humphrey as the starters, then went into the bullpen as games went on. But as the two were working through some early season mental blocks, different players had to step up.

Sophomore pitcher Meredith Wells is one player LaPorte described postgame against Maryland as the definition of a hard worker.

Sitting the bench last season, it's paid off LaPorte said about Wells. She said her sophomore is the only pitcher that's confident in herself and what she's got after the JMU Invitational.

That's one out of six who trust themselves,

from the head coach's evaluation.

"I think ... you hear the phrase work while you wait, and Meredith is the epitome of that," Bowman said. "You get confidence from success, making sure that we're getting a little bit better each day and building confidence from those really good moments and letting the bad moments stay in the past and not focusing on what's happened in the past."

## 'GROWING IS OK'

Ford, Good and Alexander got to the level they're at because of learning the college game and, LaPorte said, being dynamic. The WCWS averaged 1.2 million viewers per game in 2021, 60% better than the College World Series. With Humphrey in the circle for millions of viewers to watch, LaPorte said other teams have scouted her in ways not possible before and to a point where they know exactly what Humphrey is going to pitch right away.

For her pitchers to be successful, LaPorte said they have to become dynamic, too, especially when the whole world saw them pitch. Doing this, she said, solves the mental blocks and elicits confidence.

"You have to get better because teams are getting better against you," LaPorte said. "That's what happened with Odicci and Megan both — they really had to change their style and become more dynamic. Pitchers don't always want to do that. They like to be comfortable with their best, but sometimes their best is the hitters' best."

Historically, JMU's pitchers throw the ball fast — typically in the 70 mph range. Bowman said that this season, she's worked with Humphrey and Bermudez to speed the ball up while also adding different, reliable pitches to their toolbelt to build confidence. The pitching coach said she's seen these

players at their best, and what they can do, it's getting them there.

"In the fall, we did focus a lot on speed building," Bowman said. "Both of them gained about four to five miles per hour, which is a huge jump. Then in the spring, we try to really focus on hitting our location, making sure our spin is right."

Feeling good in the circle, Bowman said, only increases with game experience. Learning that a player can't rely on two pitches to make it through is important, LaPorte said, and that's where Humphrey said she's developed her change-up ball — a pitch where the ball is perceived as a fastball, but is much slower to reach the plate.

"That's when I'm most successful, is when I'm changing speeds constantly," Humphrey said.

LaPorte said the biggest element with her pitchers this season is that they aren't trusting what they're throwing, and it's why so many faces have cracked the starting lineup. From the two returners, Humphrey and Bermudez, to freshman Isabelle Fishman — who plays primarily in the outfield during the game — everyone's had time.

"I think that's the biggest thing right now ... the mental side of our games," Humphrey said. "We're really been focused on staying focused."

Humphrey and LaPorte said focus starts at the beginning of the week. Assistant coach Jennifer Herzig does the scouting for the team and sees what the other group's hitters tend to swing at. From there, LaPorte and Bowman develop a plan of who's going to start and who's going to pitch in relief. Both of those are announced before the game.

Bowman said she thinks "communicating that early is important."

## WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

As for where her staff is now, LaPorte said it's "getting there." The Dukes competed at the Memphis Tournament on March 18-19, taking on Northwestern State, East Tennessee and Memphis twice. On the second day, the Dukes picked up two wins after dropping both games on day one. In the second win over Memphis, JMU came back in the seventh inning to take the lead, and it was up to Humphrey to strike out the heart of the Tigers' lineup. She did just that.

"I think she's been waiting for it," LaPorte said. "The two hitters that we struck out to win the game were two of their hot hitters at that time, just having the confidence to trust her stuff and trust the pitch call."

JMU fell to Radford on the road 10-2 in six innings on Tuesday, with Humphrey in the circle after Wells was pulled. She herself was pulled for Bermudez in the third inning. In the second game of the doubleheader, the Dukes bounced back — winning 14-2 in five innings — and Humphrey pitched the full second game, getting herself back on track.

"I know that [if] I'm not having my best day, then one of the other pictures on my staff, on our staff, has my back," Humphrey said. "We're having more confidence in each other because of how important it is to complement each other right now."

As the Dukes head into conference play this weekend, Bowman said the pitchers enter with a better state of mind than the start. Bowman said the WCWS lingers, but for the most part, the team's finally mentally moved past that and, as the group picks up more and more wins, it shows.

**CONTACT** Savannah Reger at breezesports@gmail.com. For more softball coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.



JMU freshman infielder Fenwick Trimble gets ready for the next pitch against Florida State in the season opener. Courtesy of JMU Athletics

# Fresh on the field

JMU baseball freshmen make a quick impact on the Dukes' roster heading into conference play

By **JOHN BREEDEN**  
The Breeze

The freshmen baseball players have made an early impact on the Diamond Dukes. The likes of freshman infielder Fenwick Trimble and freshman catcher Jason Schiavone have become familiar faces in JMU's starting lineup.

"I think we've got a great crop of freshmen," head coach Marlin Ikenberry said.

Outfielder Bryce Suters is a freshman who's found a solid amount of playing time this season. He started one game March 5 against Quinnipiac — replacing the then-injured redshirt sophomore outfielder Chase DeLauter.

Suters had a career-high three hits in the March 4 game versus Quinnipiac — the game he entered in the top of the second after DeLauter left the game due to injury.

"No one wants to see Chase go down," Suters said. "I thought about if I step in [and] play my game, then it'll work out for itself."

Earlier that week, Suters scored his first career hit in the March 1 game against VMI. After his three-hit game March 4, he said it was "unreal" to get on the field and get settled.

"I've always dreamed about this, playing college baseball at JMU," Suters said postgame. "To have the week I've had so far, it's really fun."

Trimble has started in 19 of the season's 20 games. He currently has JMU's second-best batting average with a .314 to go with 22 hits and 19 RBIs. Trimble said he came to JMU to become a starter as a freshman and that thankfully, it's panned out.

"It's an awesome feeling, especially being

with such a talented group of older guys," Trimble said. "Being in such a good lineup at a young age is great, and I'm sure it'll pay huge dividends in the near future."

Ikenberry said Trimble has been the biggest standout freshman this season. The head coach said Trimble has had clutch performances all season and that it's great to see out of a "quiet, go about your business" player.

"He just knows the game, nothing really gets him too high [and] nothing gets him too low," Ikenberry said. "He'll have his at-bats where you're like, oh wow, he had a bad at-bat ... then I check myself ... well, that's one bad at-bat after the 50 good at-bats he's had."

Schiavone has also received a solid amount of playing time this season. He's started in five of his 17 games played, accumulating two hits and five runs in 26 at-bats. Schiavone said he's grown substantially in his first year.

Schiavone said that even if the results aren't showing baseball-wise, he feels he's gotten a lot of positives from the few months he's been a Duke.

"Being able to get a lot of innings in as a freshman ... I see a lot of good outcomes," Schiavone said, "because I'll feel more prepared for years coming."

Schiavone said being in the starting lineup is a confidence builder. He said that as a freshman, he didn't expect to play as much — but now he feels way more comfortable.

"I feel like I can contribute, [and] I feel like I can help my team win," Schiavone said. College and high school baseball have their differences. Trimble said everyone is better and more consistent. Ikenberry said he worries most about managing the freshmen's workload. He said a coach needs to know when to push and pull their players.

"You don't want them to hit a wall in the middle of April because they've never played this much baseball," Ikenberry said.

Ikenberry said he's a coach that has the best players play no matter what year they are. He said the freshmen stepping up pushes the upperclassmen to raise the level and that the upperclassmen have become teachers of the game.

"The conversations that our upperclassmen are having with the freshmen right now, I just let them go because they're really good teaching moments," Ikenberry said. "It's been a really fostering environment of teaching for these guys."

Schiavone said the best advice the upperclassmen gave him is to play the sport he's always been playing and to not let outside appearances or fans change the way he plays. He said it's about being confident in himself. Schiavone said he manages his focus by imagining it's just him up to the plate with a pitcher.

"That just helps me feel more comfortable, kind of zoning everything out [and] not really listening to what fans are saying or yelling," Schiavone said.

Trimble said the best advice the older players have given him is that it's a long season — a marathon, not a sprint. As the season progresses, Trimble said he doesn't have any personal goals — he wants to help the team win.

"Day by day, [I'm] attacking that day best I can," Trimble said. "Hopefully, that'll all add up and get us a bid into a regional."

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JMU ATHLETICS  
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

## THURSDAY, MARCH 24

All Day  
Track & Field at Raleigh Relays  
1 p.m.  
Men's tennis vs. Drexel

## FRIDAY, MARCH 25

All Day  
Track & Field at Raleigh Relays  
3 p.m.  
Baseball at Delaware

## SATURDAY, MARCH 26

All Day  
Track & Field at Raleigh Relays  
12 p.m.  
Lacrosse at Maryland  
1 p.m.  
Baseball at Delaware  
1 p.m.  
Women's tennis at Charlotte

1 p.m. & 3 p.m.  
Softball vs. Towson

## SUNDAY, MARCH 27

All Day  
Men's golf at Seahawk Intercollegiate  
All Day  
Women's golf at Chattanooga Classic  
1 p.m.  
Women's tennis at Davidson

1 p.m.  
Baseball at Delaware  
1 p.m.  
Softball vs. Towson

1 p.m.  
Men's tennis vs. Navy

## MONDAY, MARCH 28

All Day  
Men's golf at Seahawk Intercollegiate  
All Day  
Women's golf at Chattanooga Classic

## TUESDAY, MARCH 29

All Day  
Women's golf at Chattanooga Classic  
6 p.m.  
Baseball vs. Longwood

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30

3 p.m. & 5 p.m.  
Softball vs. George Mason  
5 p.m.  
Lacrosse vs. Towson



**'It meant a lot more'**

JMU swimmers share an emotional embrace during the ECAC Championship. Courtesy of JMU Athletics

JMU swim & dive shares emotional impact of chasing fifth-straight conference title

By MADISON HRICK  
The Breeze

It wasn't what they had in mind, but it was a memory the Dukes said they'd never forget.

JMU swim & dive has achieved a feat no other JMU sport can claim this season — winning a conference championship. It's not the CAA, but rather the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC).

"I'd be lying if I said this tangible representation of a trophy and the girls [getting] championship rings doesn't matter," JMU head coach Dane Pedersen said. "It really does. But all of that matters only because going into it, we knew we had a viable championship situation."

The journey to earning a new ring wasn't at all what Pedersen said he planned for it to be, when all through summer and fall training revolved around a record-breaking fifth-consecutive CAA title. But once the conference announced JMU's disqualification, the idea of winning a title disappeared.

"The CAA decision was just something I never saw coming, and there's no manual for how to deal with that," Pedersen said. "That's why I'm so grateful to the ECAC for having an open championship because it provided us a home."

The Dukes were a part of the same meeting when JMU Athletics administration shared the news to the entire student-athlete body. Where the swim & dive team's path differs is how Pedersen and his team took their next steps.

Pedersen said JMU hadn't participated in the ECAC Championship since he's been in Harrisonburg but that the Dukes used to

compete with the conference almost annually. ECAC membership is open for all NCAA divisions regardless of conference affiliation. The only requirement to join the ECAC is to pay an annual fee for either full or partial membership.

"It was really the first meet in my mind to turn to," Pedersen said. "Our program had gone to it many years ago ... and it's evolved and morphed in to different types of meets and people. Different teams use it for different reasons."

JMU participates in two major CAA meets each season — the conference championship at the end of the season and the CAA Pod Meet. This season, the meet was mere days after the announcement was made.

"I think it kind of actually helped the timing because we were going to compete against some of the top foes or rivals in the CAA that weekend," Pedersen said. "To say that the girls had a little bit [of] extra motivation would be an understatement."

Sitting on a bus headed toward Wilmington, North Carolina, Pedersen chose to bring the entire team — injured, competing, resting; it didn't matter. The head coach said it was unconventional, but it was his way of gathering the team to discuss their next steps.

"That was when Pedersen presented the ECAC. 'I think it was a great choice,' sophomore Jess Pryne said. 'We did it to compete [together] as a team, so when we showed out that weekend, I was super happy with it.'"

The Dukes took the CAA Pod Meet crown that day in what was described as a "farewell to the CAA." From then on, the focus was purely on the ECAC title.

The biggest obstacle to take on in preparation for the ECAC meet was facing new opponents, sophomore Madison Cottrell said. JMU was used to seeing Delaware, UNCW and William & Mary, but now it was up against Navy, University of Pennsylvania and Bucknell.

"That created a sense of newness, other than just the fact that we hadn't been on deck at that meet before," Pedersen said. "But it was a very hospitable, very congenial pool deck, a lot of positive energy from everyone."

Pryne said she didn't see much of a change, and she found a way to break two program records — the 200-meter and 400-meter individual medley.

"I am so proud of her; she is one of the most deserving people on the team for that," Cottrell said, "so being able to see her getting accomplishments like that was really a great thing to see."

Cottrell broke a record of her own at the championships, securing first place in the 100-meter butterfly.

"She deserved everything she got this weekend because she worked for it," Pedersen said, "but it was surprising just because it's always fun."

The Dukes held the lead every day of competition, taking the title by over 50 points. Pedersen received honors as the Coach of the Meet, and Pryne received the Most Outstanding Swimmer honor. Cottrell, who won the award for the CAA meet last season, said the best part of Pryne winning was "keeping it in the JMU family."

To celebrate, JMU lined up along the pool deck and pulled each other into the water — wearing

T-shirts and all. The team also gave its seniors crowns and sashes to signify being "officially retired."

"It's an amazing feeling to hold hands and jump like that," Pryne said. "I want to keep doing it."

Now, JMU prepares for a new season in an undetermined conference. The Sun Belt doesn't sponsor swim & dive, so Pedersen has been working with JMU Athletics to find a new home for his team next season.

This presents another opportunity for the Dukes: win three titles in three different conferences in three years. No student-athlete at JMU has earned that accolade before, making it not only program history but JMU history if achieved.

"It's honestly something I never thought that I would experience," Cottrell said. "It was great to have different competition and not have any expectations — just swimming and having fun."

But until then, Pedersen said this season's journey is only helping JMU prepare for what ever future lies ahead. Knowing the Dukes have held their own against new teams before, he said he's confident in their ability to learn once again.

"I do actually feel like even though it will be new, it'll be a new conference and new opponents, it will actually be more solidified," Pedersen said. "There'll be more knowns about it because we'll have an official conference home."

CONTACT Madison Hrick at breezesports@gmail.com. For more swim & dive coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.



**Steady Sadek**  
Redshirt freshman finds groove as men's tennis hits hot streak

By CRAIG MATHIAS  
The Breeze

Off to its best start since head coach Steve Secord took the helm of the team, JMU men's tennis found structure in the heart of both the singles and doubles lineups. Pairing with junior Holden Koons and playing No. 3 singles for the Dukes, redshirt freshman Youssef Sadek delivered in every way imaginable. Whether in convincing fashion or in rallying to win in three sets, Sadek helped propel JMU to a 10-4 record.

In his path to joining the Dukes, Sadek hit a roadblock due to the pandemic. Originally expected to join for the 2020-21 season, Sadek instead stayed home in Cairo, Egypt, where he took classes remotely while redshirting his freshman season.

While this was disappointing, Secord said, he's still happy with everything Sadek contributed in his time in Harrisonburg. The timing wasn't ideal, Secord said, but he's proud of how Sadek has fit in with the team.

"We knew he was going to fit in well," Secord said. "It was unfortunate we couldn't get him last year, but he's done well."

This didn't mean Sadek paused training or competing in high-level tournaments. Sadek said he made sure to improve on specific parts of his game while getting results in different International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments.

"When I went back to Cairo, I wanted to work on [my game]," Sadek said. "I [laid out what] I needed to improve the most at, and I just tried my best to work on this every day ... I was trying to play as much as possible in order to be ready when I came [to JMU]."

Sadek reached the finals of three G5 ITF tournaments, winning one of them in October 2020. He also competed in the Junior Davis Cup in both the U14 and U16 divisions for Egypt. Both the Junior Davis and Davis Cup act as the "world cup of tennis," and members of the team are the best of the best from their country.

The resume Sadek built gave him the confidence he needed before heading to Harrisonburg, he said. Playing in tournaments into late June 2021 allowed for both experience and practice leading up to his redshirt freshman season.

"When I came back to the U.S., I felt much

more comfortable," Sadek said, "because I knew that I put in the work where I needed to."

Sadek came to campus to join the Dukes for the fall season, when the team participated in different tournaments throughout the semester. Sadek went 7-7 in singles and 4-9 in doubles with three different partners.

Despite not performing at the level he wanted to, Sadek said, the fall semester acted as a learning experience for not just himself but for everyone on the team. The tournaments in the fall are ramp-ups for the spring season and, while the goal is to win every match, Sadek said his experience has been just as meaningful.

"I feel like I've learned so much from the past semester," Sadek said. "I wasn't performing [at] the level I wanted to last semester."

Along with the rest of the team, Sadek picked up the pace in the spring. Through 14 matches and the Liberty Hidden Dual, Sadek is 12-4 in singles and 9-6 in doubles. In all six of his doubles wins, Sadek partnered with Koons.

With Koons and Sadek earning CAA Doubles team of the week Jan. 26, Koons said he's been impressed with how Sadek progressed in a short amount of time with the team and said there's plenty of room for him to grow as the season moves into April.

"He's a very calm, relaxed guy," Koons said. "[He's] a very steady player ... Everything is there for him, [and] hopefully he keeps growing every match."

Sadek has only lost three singles matches since Feb. 4. In each of those losses, Sadek took his opponents to a third set.

The improvement hasn't gone unnoticed, especially from his coach. Secord said Sadek's ability to take advice from others, combined with his willingness to work on his game every day, has allowed him to see this much improvement.

"He's been great," Secord said. "He was a little up and down, but he really listens. He's improving, and his work ethic is good. Every day, he's trying to get a little bit better."

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**FOLLOW THE MANIA**

Thursday, March 24, 2022

# Reach the milestones

Dougherty achieves her 500th save and 50th career win



Emma Connelly / The Breeze

By ZACH MENDENHALL  
contributing writer

What defines greatness? Although everyone has a different definition, JMU redshirt senior goalkeeper Molly Dougherty said she's truly found hers, pursuing on through her final year as goalkeeper for JMU lacrosse.

When JMU defeated High Point 11-6 on Feb. 26, Dougherty recorded her 500th save as a JMU goalkeeper, becoming only the sixth player in JMU lacrosse history to do so. When asked how she'll move forward from 500 saves, she said she'll continue to do so by "trying to play the best [she] can with [her] teammates and making sure that [she is], having fun while doing it"

Dougherty committed to JMU lacrosse at

15 years old while at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes Upper School and never looked back from there, beginning her playing in 2018 as a redshirt freshman.

When JMU lacrosse won the CAA National Championship in 2018, Dougherty stopped nine shots in the final, helping JMU win the title her first year of playing. She and current redshirt senior attacker Katie Chekosky are the only two players from that team remaining.

Dougherty earned her 50th win March 20 — another milestone accomplished in her senior year. Redshirt junior defender Rachel Matey said that throughout her time at JMU, Dougherty has had a clear impact on other members of her team.

"She got to see and learn from, like, a lot of experienced teammates," redshirt junior defender Rachel Matey said. "She took that experience and kind of implemented it into our own game and kind of helped others grow and become better players because of it."

With the list of accolades that Molly has achieved, what is it that makes Dougherty so great?

"She's matured on and off the field," Snyder continued. "She's starting to understand all facets of the game, not just the goalkeeper ... I've seen her become more of a leader on and off the field as well ... Her overall growth and her competence has gotten really, really strong."

When preparing for each game, Dougherty said she spends time with her teammates so she doesn't get mentally behind and, so far this



season, it's worked, she said.

"She's very professional in her approach every game," Snyder said. "She's never too high, never too low, but always ready and willing to attack."

Dougherty said her excellence stems from not only her hard work but the mindset and mentality she carries into each and every game.

"Everyone plays better when they have fun," Dougherty said. "Every day is a gift that you get another chance to play and get lost in the game."

Dougherty said she's mentally prepared each and every time she steps onto the field.

"I think that just comes game by game," Dougherty said, "just trying to play the best I can with my teammates and making sure that I'm having fun while I'm doing it."

Dougherty not only leaves an impact on the JMU lacrosse team's name but her teammates as well. Matey said Dougherty is "really good at laughing through [her] mistakes" and that "that's a really important lesson in sports — being able to brush off mistakes."

Dougherty said she shares lessons with her teammates and feels confident in being herself and the lessons she teaches to others. As Dougherty has played, she said, she's found comfort in her teammates' individuality.

"Each and every person on this team is, like, genuine and wants me to be myself," Dougherty said. "I find that super freeing ... We talked about playing free all the time, and I think that that's something that not every program gets to do."

With her drive and confidence for the

sport, Dougherty has also sparked memories among her teammates and coaching staff.

The 2021 CAA championship game, when JMU rallied from behind to win in overtime, was memorable for the goalkeeper.

"She walked right up to me and she's like, 'We're not losing this game,'" Snyder said. "Sure enough, we went out there and we won the CAA championship."

Dougherty said she's comfortable in her environment and is improving with each game she plays. Dougherty's final season at JMU has made her teammates aware of the coming adjustment to a new goalkeeper.

Redshirt junior Kat Buchanan is set to take on Dougherty's role after this season. "It's definitely gonna be a big gap to fill," Matey said. "I'm very confident ... Our second goalie has got to step into some big shoes, but they will fill them."

With her milestones and will to "live and die and bleed purple," Dougherty said she knows what she wants her legacy to be.

"I want my legacy to be someone who really committed and was loyal to this program," Dougherty said. "I want to be remembered for how much I appreciate what this program has done and how much it has made me into the woman I am today."

**CONTACT** Zach Mendenhall at mendenz@dukes.jmu.edu. For more lacrosse coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.

# Down the order

Analysis | What to expect as JMU baseball prepares for conference play

By GRAHAM SKINKER  
The Breeze

The Diamond Dukes are 20 games into the season and sit just above .500 at 11-9. Starting off 0-3 after being swept by No. 7 Florida State, the Dukes have won 11 of their last 17 games, including a statement win over a strong Virginia Tech team.

JMU is set to begin CAA play this weekend, traveling to Delaware for a three-game series. Although the Blue Hens currently sit below the Dukes in the CAA standings at 9-8, their record is misleading. Delaware has two ranked wins so far, grinding out a 5-4 victory against No. 12 Notre Dame on Feb. 20 and a 6-3 win over No. 22 Maryland on March 15.

One player the Dukes need to watch for this weekend is sophomore infielder Joey Loynd. He had an excellent start to his sophomore campaign, leading Delaware with five home runs and 19 RBIs. Loynd is currently batting .279 and is the Blue Hens' biggest power threat at the plate. He was on full display in Delaware's victory over the Terrapins, mashing a two-run homer to help secure a marquee victory.

JMU is likely to face Delaware's top starting pitcher in graduate Chris Ludman during the series. Ludman is currently sporting a 2.70 ERA through 33.1 innings pitched over his five starts so far. The pitcher is known for fanning opposing batters with ease: In just over 33 innings pitched, Ludman struck out 25 batters while only surrendering five walks. If the Dukes face Ludman, it'll be a big test for them early in conference play.

JMU and Delaware have faced off 60 times. In what's been a fairly even matchup over the years, the Dukes lead 32-28 over the Blue Hens. JMU has won the last two meetings and is 6-4 over its last 10 matchups. When traveling to play Delaware, JMU is 11-17. The two teams last matched up in Newark, Delaware, in 2018, when the Blue Hens swept the Dukes in a three-game series. If Delaware sweeps JMU, it'll pull within one game of .500 in the all-time series. This time around, it should still be a very competitive series for the two teams to begin CAA play.

Another notable conference matchup for the Dukes comes April 1-3 when they host rival Elon in a three-game series. This is an interesting in-conference matchup for JMU, as the Dukes have been long dominated by the Phoenix in baseball. JMU is only 2-15 all-time against Elon and lost the past five matchups. JMU has never beaten the Phoenix in Elon, North Carolina; however, it faces Elon at home,

where the Dukes picked up their only victories. JMU looks to get a couple of wins back against a school that's historically walked all over them.

After Elon, JMU's next conference matchup comes April 8-10 when it travels to the College of Charleston for a three-game road trip. Charleston is currently No. 3 in the conference standing at 12-8 and has a 21-10 all-time record against the Dukes, with wins in seven of the last 10 matchups. Like Delaware, this is another team with some marquee victories — the best of these having come over No. 2 Texas on March 15.

The Dukes are set to face Northeastern at home April 15-17. Another CAA team with a stellar early-season resume, the Huskies were dominant against No. 8 North Carolina State, sweeping them March 4-6. Northeastern followed that with another win over No. 18 Clemson on March 13. The Huskies are currently 12-7-1, second in the CAA. JMU is just 19-26 all-time against Northeastern, but it's beaten the Huskies nine times at home. The Huskies have been the best team in the CAA thus far and will pose a tremendous challenge for JMU.

For its final series of the season, JMU will host UNCW. The Seahawks are leading the CAA at 12-7. UNCW doesn't have any ranked wins, but it does boast victories over Sun Belt programs Appalachian State and Coastal Carolina and the Big Ten's Ohio State. This will be an intriguing series to wrap up the season, as the two teams are deadlocked at 58-58 in past matchups. The Seahawks have dominated the Dukes recently, winning the last five matchups and nine of the last 10. Nonetheless, the two teams have been neck and neck over the years and are set to battle it out in a three-game series to close the season May 19-21.

JMU is off to one of its better starts in recent years. Head coach Marlin Ikenberry and the Dukes look to continue their solid start as they clash with some conference rivals for the last time in the CAA.

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Treavor Cockburn / The Breeze

# Show up, show out

Former Dukes compete in annual Pro Day

By MADISON HRICIK  
The Breeze

JMU football held its annual Pro Day for its 11 declared members for the 2022 NFL Draft. Familiar faces, including quarterback Cole Johnson and defensive end Mike Greene, participated in multiple drills in front of over 20 scouts from across the NFL.

"Coming here and showing off to the scouts was a big thing," Greene said. "I talked to some of the scouts before coming in today, and I've tried to talk to everyone today, too."

Greene boasted some of the top scores across the board, tied for first in bench press with redshirt senior offensive lineman Liam Fornadel (27 repetitions) and taking third highest in the vertical jump (30.5 inches).

The former captain said he's trained for three months after the season for the draft, mentioning how he slimmed to 280 pounds to further impress scouts.

"I tried to treat it like a game day," Greene said. "[I tried] to feel relaxed and look at basically the same routine I used to do on Saturdays."

Johnson also said he felt good about his

overall performance, both during the strength and speed tests and during his passing drills. The quarterback threw to four receivers during his passing script — former wide receivers Riley Stapleton (2015-19) and Ishmael Hyman (2014-17), former tight end Dylan Stapleton (2018-19) and redshirt junior wide receiver Alex Miller.

"It just worked out perfectly," Johnson said. "They were able to come and try to get back in the NFL ... and those guys make my job easy."

The Stapleton brothers had their Pro Day canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic, but Dylan Stapleton signed with the Houston Texans after the NFL draft that year. Even though he reached the milestone, the former tight end broke his shoulder during training camp and was released. He's been working to get back into the league ever since.

"Just getting this opportunity to come back down here and showcase my talents means a lot," Dylan said. "I think I performed well, and I'm looking forward to another opportunity."

While Riley Stapleton didn't see an NFL campus like his brother did, the wide receiver spent the majority of his time at a personal training facility working with not only his brother but other NFL prospects in Pennsylvania.

"I did my original training ... for about eight weeks, then everything shut down," Riley said. "So being able to train other clients as well as myself to prepare for this was very beneficial for me to hone on the technique."

Originally, Johnson said he wasn't planning to use the brothers during his drills but rather his teammates from the 2021 roster. Realizing it wasn't an option, he spoke to the two instead and said "it worked out perfectly."

JMU quarterback coach Tino Sunseri said that although the Stapleton brothers only had three days to prepare with Johnson, there was a certain comfort level playing with former teammates.

"Whenever you have familiarity with the people you're throwing to, I think it's always going to help," Sunseri said. "That brotherhood ... it gets a natural feel being on the field together."

Grant Johnson contributed to this story.  
Finish the story at breezejmu.org

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Cambria Lee / The Breeze

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# The Breeze

JMU'S AWARD-WINNING NEWSPAPER SINCE 1922

SEPTEMBER 29, 2022 VOL. 101 NO.7 BREEZEJMU.ORG

## Sold out Family Weekend game adds to ticket sale upswing

By **MADISON HRICK**  
*The Breeze*

It took all of about 10 minutes for students to get tickets for JMU football against Texas State. After that, JMU Athletics announced the game was sold out.

The quick sellout can be attributed to Family Weekend, one of the Dukes' most popular games each season. This season, the ticketing department was coordinating with Athletics to announce a sellout even before student tickets were available.

"We made sure all of our ducks were in a row for Family Weekend," JMU Director of Ticketing Services Brad Burgess said. "Then we got with Kevin [Warner]'s team as well, and our graphic designs to get things in place ... so that we can communicate that as quickly as possible."

JMU fans had discussed online the likely early sellout for Family Weekend as early as the Sun Belt Conference football schedule announcement back in March. But Family Weekend has a lot more on tap than just the football game, and the ticketing services office continues to navigate the football season as the Dukes prepare for another packed home game.

"We've got to be ready to go in front of a sold out crowd for Family Weekend," JMU football head coach Curt Cignetti said. "We need to play with a lot of energy and to our standard."

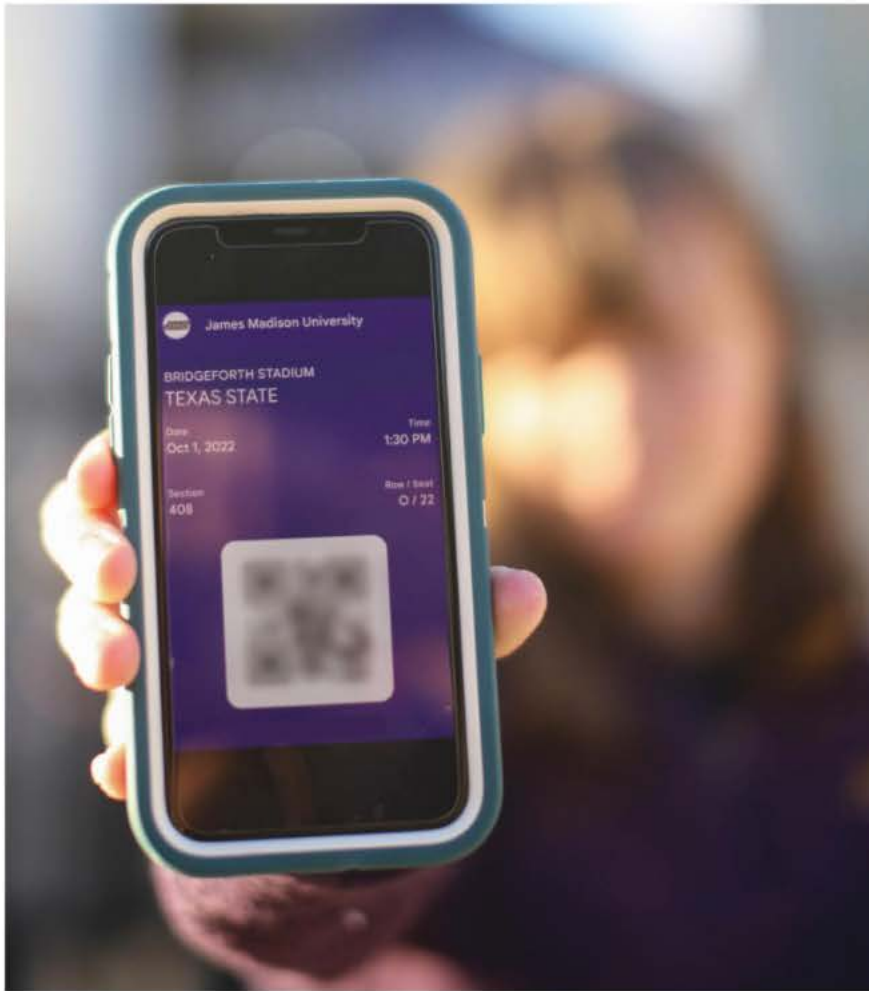
### Ticket availability for Family Weekend

Since Family Weekend is already a high-demand event, JMU Athletics usually plans ahead for its football tickets. The biggest planning element, Burgess said, is deciding how many general admission tickets and student tickets to make available.

JMU allows families to tack on their student's free ticket once tickets go on sale to ensure the entire family can stay together. So, in a sense, while the standard two-week student ticket notice occurred last Monday, as long as people were buying the standard \$30 general admission ticket they could purchase a student ticket as well.

"That gives them the opportunity to sit with their students [and] get their tickets all together," Burgess said, "and they know that when I come for Family Weekend, we are all going to be together as a family."

see **TICKETING**, page 19



JMU Ticketing and Athletics have prepared for Family and Homecoming Weekend games to be sold out for JMU football. Photo illustration by Abi Middleton / *The Breeze*

## Opinion | Students can impact U.S. democracy, but they must participate in local elections



Less than half of all college students voted in the 2016 election, according to Tuft University. Breeze file photo

By **EMMA SELI**  
*The Breeze*

In a representative democracy, voting is a civil duty citizens hold to elect their representatives in the government — this includes the U.S. president and members of Congress. The upcoming state and local elections are classified as midterm elections and take place halfway through the current presidency.

State and local elections, while sometimes overlooked, are important; these elections are for governors, delegates and other local officials. Last year, Virginia held a gubernatorial election on Nov. 2, in which Glenn Youngkin (R) beat Terry McAuliffe (D), who held the office from 2014 to 2018.

On Nov. 8, there'll be 11 congressional races held in Virginia for the U.S. House of Representatives, along with numerous local elections throughout the state. Voting in these elections is vital, and it's a freedom many around the world don't have.

Student voting, specifically, is important and gives students the opportunity to engage in elections and participate in our democracy as a whole. Congressional election results determine which political party — Republican or Democrat — dominates the House and the Senate. In such a politically polarized society, voting is crucial.

see **VOTING**, page 10

## JMU community impacted by student debt relief

By **SARAH ECCLESTON**  
*The Breeze*

Sixty-seven percent of students consider the cost of tuition at the university they choose to study at before enrolling, according to the U.S. Department of Education. At the end of August, President Joe Biden introduced a plan that'll forgive up to \$20,000 of student loans per person.

According to the White House, there are three parts to Biden's plan — providing aid to ease the financial damage of the pandemic, holding universities accountable for raising prices and making the loan system easier to manage for current and future student loan holders.

see **DEBT RELIEF**, page 4

**FAMILY WEEKEND SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE**



Former JMU kicker Ethan Ratke (2016-21) is training 3-4 times a week in hopes of continuing his football career. Breeze file photo

## Kicker's next quest

### As NFL misses field goals, college football record-holder readies for his opportunity

By GRANT JOHNSON  
The Breeze

The sixth-largest crowd in Kidd Brewer Stadium history quieted Saturday at the end of JMU's first drive versus Appalachian State. Fair enough — the drive ended in three points for the road team.

For JMU, the field goal 6:50 into the game by redshirt junior kicker Camden Wise signified something more than a fleeting lull at "The Rock." It was the first made field goal by a JMU kicker other than kicker Ethan Ratke (2016-21) since Nov. 17, 2018, versus No. 15 Towson in the last game of the regular season that year.

That was 41 games ago. Now, Ratke, nine months removed from his JMU playing days, 542 points and 101 made field goals later, is looking for more.

#### From the feet, up

Ratke got "the cleats they had in the back" from JMU as a redshirt freshman in 2017. He said he didn't think much of it. He began the year as the fourth-string kicker, to be fair.

By the end of fall camp, Ratke had climbed to second string. The starting kicker, then-junior Tyler Gray (2015-18), injured his hip flexor against William & Mary during the seventh regular season game in that same year.

So, Ratke and his white cleats were tested against live bullets, starting in the third quarter versus the Tribe. He passed the first test: 2-for-2 on field goals, 3-for-3 on extra points.

It was relatively smooth sailing for Ratke at first. JMU, by the end of the 2017 regular season, hadn't lost in 23 outings dating back to the previous September. Ratke overtook

kickoff duties, made 4-of-5 field goals and all extra points in his first four full games. But the cleats accumulated holes. Ratke said it was because he always dragged his right foot. The left side of his right cleat was lined with openings, starting at his big toe.

Even still, they were his shoes, his cleats, after all, which he said he wanted to roll with the whole season. Former JMU punter Harry O'Kelly (2017-21) said Ratke was superstitious about them. Ratke felt he had to keep his pair.

That changed versus No. 10 Stony Brook in JMU's first matchup in the 2017 FCS playoffs. Ratke went a combined 4-for-6 on field goals and extra points. Ratke attributed the missed kicks to his cleats, one being the only missed extra point of his career that wasn't blocked.

The cleats became "unusable." "It would just kind of be like a tear, and it just slowly opened up even more from just the impact on the ground," Ratke said. "Eventually it was just like a big hole that was there, and so I felt like a big hole was kind of impacting, catching on the ground when I kicked, and that made me want to switch."

For the FCS quarterfinals the next week versus Weber State, Ratke exchanged the holed cleats for the same model but a half size down to 8 1/2. He didn't wear the new pair all week.

Ratke remembered that Dec. 8 Friday night as "very cold," he said in a text to The Breeze. He stayed by the sideline's heaters most of the time, he said, and adrenaline pumped to the point he didn't feel the frigidness.

Then came the first test in his new cleats: A 46-yard game-winning field goal attempt, with JMU's 24-game win streak and the FCS semifinals on the line.

Ratke kicked. JMU won. Five years later, he's the all-time college football leader in

kickoffs (542) and field goals made (101).

"He was a very nervous, shy guy at first," O'Kelly said. "Then, I think ever since that Weber State kick, he really had that 'I'm a dog' mentality, and he was — he was a dog."

After the kick, Ratke said, classmates and friends told him no college moment would be better. A young Ratke disputed that.

"I don't want this to be the peak of my career," Ratke recalled telling himself. "So, I remember kind of keeping that in mind, and then start thinking about all the other goals I would want to achieve throughout my career."

#### Next-level ambition

NFL kickers are struggling early in 2022. According to a Sept. 16 article from The Athletic's Mike Sando, Week 1 kickers were worse in clutch kicks than any week since at least 2000. By the end of Week 3, the 33 kickers who've attempted a field goal are 79.7% on 174 attempts. Ratke made 101 of 117 field goals in college, or 86.3% of them.

Ratke, not on an NFL roster, is readying for an opportunity. He said he's kicking 3-4 times a week. He finished his public administration graduate program at JMU in the summer after interning at enCircle, a nonprofit that provides services for people with disabilities. He said he wants work in public service if the NFL doesn't pan out or, even if it does, serve in the offseason. He's currently job-hunting around Richmond.

One kicker got drafted in the 2022 NFL Draft in April and six were signed as undrafted free agents — all from Power 5 programs. For the duration of Ratke's career, JMU was an FCS program.

That doesn't mean it's impossible for Ratke to make it to the NFL: Arguably the greatest

NFL kicker of all time, Adam Vinetari, attended the FCS' South Dakota State. Four of the 33 NFL kickers who've attempted a field goal in 2022 are products of the FCS or lower division schools, or schools that were FCS for the beginning of their college careers.

"I think had we been in the Sun Belt for the last few years, his opportunity gets better. Same for a few of our guys," O'Kelly said. "I think they got overlooked purely because we're in a conference where there was no really other good teams. I mean, there's one other good team every year, but really, we're the dominant force."

Ratke knows his other knock: He hasn't attempted many long in-game field goals, and he wasn't the primary kickoff specialist at JMU except for in 2017, when Gray went down. His longest made field goal at JMU was the 46-yarder versus Weber State in the FCS quarterfinals. Longs of the seven drafted and undrafted 2022 rookies in their last years of college? Fifty-one (three, 52, 54, 56, 57, 57 and 62 yards).

He's been working on it and, frankly, Ratke said he doesn't think long-distance kicking has ever been an issue. He said JMU just hadn't been in positions to try many long kicks while he had the job. Once a week, Ratke said he's practicing 60-yard kicks and feels comfortable hitting them.

JMU's pro day on March 23 allowed Ratke to show off his leg in front of 20-plus NFL scouts. But Ratke couldn't attempt a field goal longer than 52 yards — because of rain, JMU moved its drills to a half-football-field indoor facility. A retractable side opening let Ratke move back to maximum distance.

He nailed it, with room to spare.

see RATKE, page 20



JMU student tickets were sold out in about 10 minutes for Texas State. Savannah Reger / The Breeze

## JMU vs. Texas State ticket sales demonstrate growing trend

from TICKETING, page 1

Once the student tickets were available on Sept. 19, however, there were only around 1,500 at the 9 a.m. opening window. JMU allotted a certain number of student tickets to accommodate students whose families aren't attending the game but still want to go. These tickets were the ones available at 9 a.m. But that doesn't mean only 1,500 students get to go out of 25,000.

In addition to general admission, student tickets and pre-purchased season tickets, JMU also reserves blocks of tickets for other groups, such as any traveling Texas State fans, sponsors or community groups.

Warner said that in previous years, having an estimated 4,000 student tickets sold following the season opener, regardless of Family Weekend, is still "pretty good." In fact, the ticketing office regularly expects Family Weekend to sell out or come close to it every year, even before planning commences.

"Family Weekend is the one game that kind of always takes care of itself," Warner said. "That game always sold itself out ... regardless of how the team is doing."

The hardest part of creating these blocks for Family Weekend, Burgess said, is creating an estimate as numbers are updating. Warner said the ticketing office does everything it can to make the most accommodating allotment and allow opportunities for students to go to as many games as possible.

This is also the first "true" Family Weekend for freshmen, sophomores and juniors due to the pandemic, so the demand to experience Family Weekend in its real intention — including families wanting to be with their student at the famed football game — has also increased.

"I think we're still having some of that post-COVID effect," Burgess said. "So, that whole, you know, perfect storm of things has brought everything together to sell out."

This "model" JMU has used in calculating the number of student tickets may change in the coming years as students become more interested in going to games, Burgess said. The ticketing office is learning from the trends and growth that's occurring this year as the football team plays this season.

"This is a model we've had for a number of years now," Burgess said, "and in first-year FBSS, we're trying to understand that our trends are making sure that we're able to put the right butts in seats."

Since the victory over Appalachian State last weekend happened after JMU announced the Family Weekend sellout, there wasn't any sort of trend in ticket sales stemming from that particular game. However, the general trend in ticket sales is still increasing, even after the first two home games against Middle Tennessee State and Norfolk State.

Warner said that following the first home game of the season, there's a level of unpredictability with how many students will attend the rest of the games on the home slate. That's what the

increased trend has shown the most — at least, so far.

Outside of JMU vs. Texas State, Family Weekend hosts multiple events across campus. For the majority of them, the JMU ticketing office still sells tickets for events like Friday Night Flights and, during Homecoming Weekend, the University Program Board's concert featuring Flo Milli. That doesn't mean the ticketing department isn't able to help customers with the different events. Rather, Burgess said the ticketing department is, in a sense, the "front porch" of all ticketed events and customer relations at JMU.

#### StubHub's effect on ticket sales

Just because JMU announces all 25,000 tickets are sold, that doesn't always mean 25,000 fans show up at Bridgeforth Stadium that Saturday — and if they decide not to go to the game, the ticketing office doesn't accommodate refunds.

They will, however, tell fans to go to StubHub and resell tickets there. StubHub is JMU's direct online-only partner resale service that the ticketing department certifies.

"That allows them the ease and access they can make to a game, they can sell it directly," Burgess said, "because we know that they're a trusted platform that works with our ticketing company."

The process to sell a ticket or purchase a resale is fairly simple and allows JMU fans to get a return on their own investment.

While there are other ways to get rid of an already purchased ticket, one popular platform being JMU Nation Ticket Exchange on Facebook, Burgess said fans should be more careful with those types of exchanges or resale platforms since those aren't partnered through the ticketing office.

This also includes more well-known platforms like Ticketmaster and VividSeats, which are widely used by other collegiate ticketing departments and for professional sports. But JMU only partners with StubHub.

The only time JMU does accept returned tickets is with group blocks, in which those tickets go on StubHub as a "resale" ticket. Those no longer need to be purchased as a block, but fans can use them again as single-game purchases.

"They can still get value out of those sales that we've already declared to sell out," Warner said. "That's not a large number of tickets, but it does still present us a chance to maximize our sales."

So, if fans can't make it to Harrisonburg — because of, say, the weather — the ticketing office has options available.

#### Hurricane Ian could crush the party

On Wednesday morning, Warner released a statement to Harrisonburg media:

"We've been in close communication with meteorologists all week and, at this time, do not anticipate any change from our 1:30 p.m. scheduled kick time."

Hurricane Ian, a Category 4, made landfall in Florida midday Wednesday and has forced college games on the southeastern coast

to postpone or cancel. Even ESPN College GameDay moved its setup indoors to keep the event for Clemson vs. NC State.

However, the Dukes have no intention of canceling the Family Weekend event, Warner said. JMU will monitor the weather conditions leading up to and during the game, he said, but mostly for thunderstorms.

JMU has a command center that will monitor lightning within 10 miles of campus and make a general safety announcement if needed. But aside from that, JMU is expecting a cool, wet game.

"If there's any impact directly from the weather before [or] during the game, we are able to anticipate that and address it," Warner said. "I don't think it's really going to impact

anything significant."

The biggest question remaining: How many JMU fans are willing to brave the weather?

Assuming Dukes fans are OK with clear plastic ponchos and rain-stained streamers on Saturday afternoon, not much should change. Family Weekend is more than just the football game, although the excitement surrounding the team right now could be worth the wet afternoon.

"It's going to be up to each individual family to decide, 'How does the weather impact my decision to attend?'" Warner said.

CONTACT Madison Hricik at breezesports@gmail.com. For football coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.

## JMU ATHLETICS WEEKLY SCHEDULE

7 p.m. Men's soccer vs. Kentucky	
<b>THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29</b>	<b>SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2</b>
None	All Day Women's golf at Evie Odom Invitational
<b>FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30</b>	All Day Men's tennis at ITA All-American Championships
All Day Women's golf at Evie Odom Invitational	All Day Women's tennis at Liberty Hidden Dual
10:15 a.m. Cross country at Paul Short Run	1 p.m. Field hockey vs. Syracuse at Villanova
6 p.m. Volleyball at Texas State	<b>MONDAY, OCTOBER 3</b>
6 p.m. Women's soccer vs. App State	All Day Men's tennis at ITA All-American Championships
<b>SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1</b>	All Day Men's golf at Georgia State Invitational
All Day Women's golf at Evie Odom Invitational	<b>TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4</b>
All Day Men's tennis at ITA All-American Championships	All Day Men's tennis at ITA All-American Championships
All Day Women's tennis at Liberty Hidden Dual	All Day Men's golf at Georgia State Invitational
1 p.m. & TBD (exhibition) Lacrosse vs. Maryland & at Towson	<b>WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5</b>
1:30 p.m. Football vs. Texas State	All Day Men's tennis at ITA All-American Championships

# 'He's money'

Ratke trusts leg despite few long-kick attempts

from RATKE, page 18

"Thinking of distance as an issue is not something I think about," Ratke said. "Fifty-two is more than someone has seen for me in the game, but most guys are going in and going back to 60 in their pro day, like the guys who were getting signed or taken to a minicamp."

Ratke said he received some interest for an NFL minicamp invite after his agent sent out his pro day footage, but nothing panned out. A few congratulatory handshakes at the pro day from scouts didn't amount to anything more.

That doesn't mean an opportunity can't present itself, especially if missed kicks in the clutch continue this NFL season. O'Kelly said he wouldn't be surprised if Ratke's shot comes.

"If you want a guy who's going to kick a field goal and not miss inside 50 yards, it's Ethan Ratke," O'Kelly said. "He had a couple unfortunate messes when he got into his head a little bit, but he's money every time he goes on the field."

### The good ol' days

Ratke is one of four specialists who defined an era of JMU special teams: O'Kelly, holder Alex Miller (2018-21) and graduate long snapper Kyle Davis, the only one still rostered by JMU in 2022. From 2019-21, they ran the show when the JMU offense and defense rested on the sideline. Davis guessed they amassed 5,000-6,000 snap-hold-kick reps together.

For Davis, now, 2022 is different. He said Wise, Ratke's replacement, is the "polar opposite" of Ratke. Wise is more relaxed, while Ratke worked himself up before many kicks. Davis' job frequently became helping Ratke, his roommate, simplify the job, encouraging him to just kick the ball.

"If he was thrown off a little bit, you could tell it threw him off," Davis said. "He would freak out throughout the game and stuff, so I just tried to play that calming role."

With time, Ratke stopped worrying so much before every kick. His holder, Miller, described Ratke's on-the-field demeanor as "level-headed."

Over the span of all those kicks, stressed and not, Ratke said the top of his right foot and toes swelled; it didn't hurt, he said.

He got new cleats every year at JMU, but he was big on keeping the same pair every year. On senior day in 2021, when JMU wore all black, Ratke still sported his white cleats. Head coach Curt Cignetti never told him to change them, Ratke said.

He can't fit into those Weber State size 8 1/2s anymore, but he thinks he still has them somewhere.

They were too valuable to throw out.

**CONTACT** Grant Johnson at breezesports@gmail.com. For more football coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.



JMU redshirt junior defender Brittany Munson stars on a defense that's allowed four goals in 11 games. Abi Middleton / The Breeze

# Defensive dominance

Stifling back line catalyzes JMU women's soccer's early wins

By KAIDEN BRIDGES  
contributing writer

After breaking defensive records in this year's nonconference matches, the Dukes' defense is hungry as they press on into their inaugural Sun Belt Conference season.

"The Sun Belt is a very good league," JMU assistant coach Devin Zvosec said, "and I want to make sure our players are prepared to face any kind of playing style."

Through the first 11 games of last season, JMU women's soccer conceded 13 goals. But the Dukes have set the bar high early after forcing four straight shutouts, the highest record in program history during nonconference games.

The program record for most shutouts in a single season was set in 2002 after JMU finished the year with 11. Its five shutouts through six games left coaches optimistic and players eager for more.

"I've been extremely proud of our defensive performance so far this year," Zvosec said. "From the back line defending to the team defending, every player is committed to excellence."

The Dukes are pushing even more now that they've entered conference play. After Sunday's tie against Southern Mississippi, JMU is 2-0-1 in the Sun Belt, ranked first in the east division standings and handing shutouts to its conference opponents.

Through 11 games so far, the Dukes allowed only four goals and have 44 total saves. The team has the lowest numbers of goals allowed, tied with defending conference champion South Alabama.

JMU redshirt junior goalkeeper Alexandra Blom was named Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Week after her two shutouts and seven

saves last week. She earned the nickname the "Polar Bear" last season after working with assistant coach Rob Donnenwirth, for her power and strength. Blom is the only Sun Belt goalkeeper to have over .800 in saves this season.

After playing a juggernaut of a nonconference schedule last season — and heading into conference play 3-5-1 at the time — head coach Joshua Walters said this level of difficulty would only aid the Dukes in the future.

Now that this future is JMU's reality, that difficulty has started paying off.

"Coming into this season and the new conference, we knew we wanted to show everyone what we are about," redshirt junior defender Brittany Munson said. "I think we all just bought into the idea of not letting our opponents have any chances on goal, and we've been doing just that."

Munson was named Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Week in weeks 1 and 2 after she helped the defense hold VCU to 12 total shots, and Morehead State to four. She's been a leader holding down the team defensively — not only does Munson help shut down the defense well, but her technical skills help the rest of her team offensively by helping produce attacks up the field. So far this season she's accumulated 867 minutes on the field.

"[Munson] has taken a huge step in her game to become the anchor of our back line," Zvosec said.

From being aggressive and fighting in the midfield to working hard in the definitive third, Zvosec stressed that the team has to have a mutual understanding of what it means to defend as one team.

"We just want to make sure that as the

season goes on and as games get harder that we are always communicating and helping one another out," redshirt senior defender Ashby Larkin said.

Larkin plays a major role in the back this season. The 5-foot-10 defender brings height to the defense and logged 518 minutes through the last 11 games.

JMU's defense is leaning into its youth. The Dukes currently sport around 10 players in their rotation, ranging from freshmen to seniors in their defensive third.

"It doesn't matter what year a player is. At the end of the day, they're all JMU Dukes," Zvosec said. "That's something they've all bought into this year, and that mindset has been a huge factor into our success as a back line and team defenders."

The Dukes face Appalachian State on Sept. 30 in Harrisonburg. The Mountaineers are 2-1 and second in the Sun Belt East Division. Through 11 games, App State has scored 11 goals out of 135 shots and allowed 15 goals in return. It'll be a defensive challenge for the Dukes as the Mountaineers average about 12 shots per game and are tied for fourth place in most shots taken so far this season. These teams have only faced each other one time in 2014, where JMU produced a 2-1 win.

"I'm really proud of our defensive unit as a whole because we have such a competitive group, and no matter who comes on the field, they always make a difference and always play as hard as they can in order to keep the shutout streak that we have going alive," Larkin said.

**CONTACT** Kaiden Bridges at bridg4ke@dukes.jmu.edu. For more women's soccer coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.

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JMU vs. Texas State	JMU	JMU	JMU	JMU	JMU	JMU	JMU
Arkansas State vs. ULM	ULM	Arkansas State	Arkansas State	Arkansas State	ULM	Arkansas State	Arkansas State
Baylor vs. Oklahoma State	Baylor	OSU	OSU	OSU	OSU	Baylor	Baylor
Navy vs. Air Force	Air Force	Air Force	Air Force	Air Force	Navy	Navy	Navy
Clemson vs. NC State	Clemson	Clemson	NC State	Clemson	Clemson	NC State	Clemson
Florida State vs. Wake Forest	Florida State	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Florida State	Wake Forest	Wake Forest

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When forward/midfielder Miranda Rigg (2015-19) spoke as a Duke, teammates listened, JMU head coach Christy Morgan said. Courtesy of JMU Athletics

Rigg, 25, became the youngest head coach in Longwood history this year. Courtesy of Longwood Athletics Communications

## 'Walk the Walk'

Former JMU player turned coach brings youth, confidence to Longwood field hockey

By ZACH MENDENHALL  
The Breeze

Graduate defender Kara McClure described former teammate, JMU field hockey forward/midfielder Miranda Rigg (2015-19), as "resilient, hardworking and passionate." This year, Rigg is taking all of the above into a new role, this time off the field.

Rigg is switching out the mouthguard for the whistle as the new head coach at Longwood. She's replacing former Lancer head coach Iain Byers, who was the school's winningest field hockey head coach.

"At the end of the day I'm here to help them reach success on or off the field as people," Rigg said in a Sept. 8 email to The Breeze.

Rigg is the youngest head coach in Longwood history at 25 years old and served as a student assistant coach while at JMU.

Previously an ice hockey player, Rigg brings a unique perspective to Longwood. JMU field hockey head coach Christy Morgan said Rigg's experience on the rink led her to better understand of the speed of play and execution needed in both.

"She could anticipate very well," Morgan said. "She really feels the game and knows the right move to eliminate a defender."

Rigg comes to Longwood having served as an assistant at La Salle while simultaneously coaching at the Mainline Mayhem Field Hockey Club. She joined Longwood in the spring as an assistant before being promoted.

Rigg was a member of the USA Field Hockey Women's National Team for the 2020-21 season. The former forward/midfielder was named to the CAA All-Rookie Team at JMU, scored the most points for the team during her sophomore year (32) and was named to the All-CAA First-Team twice. She sits eighth all time in goals scored (45), and seventh all time in career points (101).

"I loved playing for JMU," Rigg said in a Sept. 8 email to The Breeze. "It brought daily challenges as not only a college student but as an athlete. We were shown how to deal with adversity at all times which I carry into life now ... Just being a student athlete at JMU has prepared me to know all the ins and outs of what my players go through on a day to day basis."

McClure said Rigg brought a clear level of discipline to her play, and she expects she'll bring the same discipline as a head coach. She added that Rigg always strived to be the most hard-working player on the field.

"[Rigg] was such an inspiration when it came to watching her play," McClure said. "She motivated all of us to be just like her, and

she was just a huge role model on the team."

Rigg and McClure are former "accountability partners," meaning the two were often in charge of supporting one another. At the end of the 2019 season, McClure said, they wrote letters to each other about what makes someone special.

McClure, a sophomore when Rigg was a senior at JMU, said she still keeps her letters close and even rereads them whenever she feels down.

When Rigg was at JMU, McClure said it was her compassion that stood out.

"She cared about this team more than anything in this whole entire world," McClure said.

With Rigg's new position comes new challenges and new players to put before herself. But she said she's ready to take them on — she'll try to not only craft good field hockey players, she said, but she's also looking forward to building off-the-field character.

While playing for JMU, Rigg brought a "calm way about her," Morgan said — someone who was a quiet, confident presence in the heat of competition. Morgan described Rigg as "just a get-it-done person."

"You add skill and you add confidence and you add the ability to teach the game," Morgan said, "and it makes for a really, really effective coach."

Rigg has a "stern voice," Morgan said, and teammates respected her — she was one of those players who set the example.

"People listened when [Rigg] spoke," Morgan said. "She could walk the walk and talk the talk."

McClure said she feels the lasting impact Rigg's left on her — before being her teammate, McClure said, she might've been more scared or less confident to complete tasks. Now, McClure said she feels like she can "complete any task" and accomplish anything.

"[Rigg's] confident in her ability to be strong enough and resourceful enough to reach out for whatever she doesn't know," Morgan said. "We've all told her as her ex-coaches to reach out to us and we'll be a resource for her."

Rigg goes on to coach a team with a winning record in its last three seasons and looks to bring the same this year.

"I think the greatest lesson she could teach all of us is to go for it," Morgan said. "If you want something badly enough, you do the work. You tap into the resources that you have, and you make it happen."

**CONTACT** Zach Mendenhall at mendenz@dukes.jmu.edu. For more field hockey coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.



JMU head coach Curt Cignetti's father, Frank Cignetti Sr., was inducted to the College Football Hall of Fame in 2013. Photo courtesy of IUP Athletics

## Honored by all

Curt Cignetti remembers father following Week 2 win

By MADISON HRICIK  
The Breeze

A small sprinkle of rain was just starting to fall in Harrisonburg when JMU football head coach Curt Cignetti shared an announcement on Twitter.

"I was blessed to have a great Dad! He inspired me and so many others," the head coach wrote the morning of Sept. 10, "Love you Dad! Rest in peace."

The announcement of Frank Cignetti Sr.'s death came as a surprise to the JMU fanbase, but Cignetti coached the Dukes later that day during their second home game against Norfolk State. Following the 63-7 blowout victory, he pointed out one connection between his own coaching career and his father's.

JMU and Norfolk State agreed to a shortened fourth quarter. Cignetti said it reminded him of when Frank Cignetti Sr. coached with a running clock during the 1967 Pitt versus Notre Dame football game.

"So ironic," Curt said thinking of the memory following the Norfolk State postgame press conference, "but it's also

ironic that he would choose to pass when my brother and I both have open weeks. So he planned that one pretty good."

While fans enjoyed the victory to open the Dukes' season at 2-0, the players had a little more than the action on the field on their minds — they wanted to win for their head coach and for Frank Sr., to honor the mark both have left on the college football world.

"Everyone just wanted to rally and play for [Curt and] play for his dad," graduate running back and JMU captain Percy Agyei-Obese said, "and just get this win for both of them."

Frank Sr. formerly helmed the West Virginia University (17-27) and Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) (182-50-1) football programs, compiling a career record as a head coach of 199-77-1 in 24 seasons. He played as a wide receiver at IUP in the late 1950s before beginning his coaching career. Eventually, the College Football Hall of Fame inducted Frank Sr. in 2013. He remains one of the top 50 winningest college football head coaches.

Curt described his father as critical when it came to football, joking that had Frank Sr. watched Saturday's game, the late head coach would've taken notes to share with the Dukes in the locker room.

"He would have had seven or eight things on his notepad that we could have done better tonight," Curt said. "But I will, too, so it's good."

The Cignetti family's roots are deep within college football, with Curt at JMU and his younger brother, Frank Cignetti Jr., working as the offensive coordinator at Pitt. When Curt began his journey as a head coach, he said, he didn't even tell his father. He instead waited for IUP to announce his role later on.

Curt said he always wanted to eventually become a head football coach — that was his dream career. Frank Sr. did get to watch his elder son coach multiple times, mostly before Curt came to JMU.

Curt said he'd been "passed up" by a few schools when applying for a coordinator position, but his desire to be a head coach didn't falter — eventually, he successfully made that jump. Curt led IUP to 13 NCAA Division II playoff appearances as its head coach. He said Frank Sr., being a critical coach, wanted to share his ideas and thoughts with Curt, even if Curt wasn't interested in hearing it.

"You know, sometimes I wasn't the best at taking constructive criticism," Curt said with a small laugh.

Frank Sr. had battled a rare form of cancer since Curt was in high school, but attended his sons' games when he could, Curt said. Although the late Cignetti only attended one JMU game, Curt said he still raved about the program. The Dukes said they all felt the impact Frank Sr. had on Curt and the program.

"He was always so complimentary of our team here, so complimentary of how we played," Curt said. "But, you know, my dad influenced so many people. [He's] kind of a legend, really, back where he spent most of his life and was really a good person."

Curt and Frank Jr. both helped lead their respective teams to victory during their season openers: JMU's 44-7 win over Middle Tennessee and Pitt's 38-31 win over West Virginia in the 2022 "Backyard Brawl." It was the last weekend of college football Frank Sr. saw.

While the JMU players enjoyed the touchdowns and the streamers raining down across Bridgeforth, they said their hearts were focused on playing the best football they could.

All to make Frank Sr. proud. "I mean, hearing the news this morning kind of hurt a little bit, knowing what [Curt] was going through, really," redshirt junior offensive lineman Nick Kidwell said. "I know that he was coaching with a heavy heart today. So, we just knew we had to get the job done for them."

**CONTACT** Madison Hricik at breezesports@gmail.com. For more football coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.



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All Day  
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6 p.m.  
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7 p.m.  
Women's soccer at Coastal Carolina

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

All Day  
Men's tennis at UNCG Invitational

All Day  
Women's tennis at Elon Fall Invitational

7 p.m.  
Men's soccer vs. Georgia State

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

All Day  
Men's tennis at UNCG Invitational

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JMU is 1-3 in its last four games, scoring just one goal in that span. Savannah Reger / The Breeze

# On the wrong foot

## Analysis | Slow starts, few shots at forefront of men's soccer's rocky stretch

By CRAIG MATHIAS  
The Breeze

After its 3-1 win on opening night against Binghamton, JMU men's soccer looked primed to begin 2022 with momentum ahead of Sun Belt Conference play.

However, in their four games since, the Dukes have scored once and given up six goals in three losses. With JMU beginning conference action Sept. 17 against Georgia State, it'll need to fix the early season woes to be competitive in a conference with three preseason top-15 programs. Finding the answer to what's gone wrong begins with seeing what worked in the opening-night win.

In the 3-1 victory, the Dukes capitalized on their opportunities in key moments. Down 1-0 just before halftime, redshirt sophomore defender Josiah Blanton went coast-to-coast for the tying-goal — giving JMU momentum going into the second half.

The Dukes also capitalized on prime chances versus Binghamton, exemplified by redshirt senior defender Tyler Clegg's free kick, which he smashed off the post and in to the goal to give JMU a 2-1 lead. Freshman forward Cam Arnold put the game away with his goal as the squad scored its third goal on five shots on goal.

Despite this performance, JMU's success wasn't sustained in the following match. The team had a goal disallowed and its opponent, NJIT, took advantage of its lone shot on goal in the contest and stole a 1-0 win in Harrisonburg.

JMU head coach Paul Zazenski said postgame that improvement in future games was necessary. "It was one of the rare times that I would say it's just not good enough," Zazenski said. "I'm pretty disappointed in the group, and I would rarely say that about my team. But, it simply wasn't good enough today."

After totaling nine shots on goal in the first two games, JMU mustered one shot on goal in the 3-0 loss to U.Va., dropping to 1-2. On the other hand, the Cavaliers registered 13 shots on goal and dominated. While the Dukes did defeat U.Va. in 2021 in exciting

fashion, the Cavaliers are an accredited program in the ACC, which makes the loss not as eye-opening as NJIT. But with how high expectations are within JMU's program based off recent success, JMU won four straight CAA titles before its 2021 fall campaign, any loss is frustrating.

In their fourth game against Duquesne, the Dukes only registered two shots on target in the 2-0 loss. After nine shots on goal through two games, this number dropped to just three in the process of falling to 1-3.

A similarity between the U.Va. loss and Duquesne is giving up early goals, which led to the Dukes not overcoming the deficit. JMU gave up its first goal to U.Va. at 16' while Duquesne jumped out to a 1-0 lead at 6' and added the second goal at 16' in its 2-0 win.

The Dukes turned it around in their second and final ACC matchup in the regular season. A second half with five shots on goal included a breakthrough from Arnold at 73' to propel JMU to a 1-0 victory over NC State. JMU's second win this season was also only the second game this year it had more shots on goal than the opponent; its first was the NJIT game.

Outside of the NJIT game, the losses have followed a similar formula: Falling behind early combined with a low number of shots on goal has been the recipe for the Dukes' slow start this year.

Other factors that could be contributing to this is Zazenski still figuring out his best starting 11. In five games, JMU has sent out five different starting lineups. Some of these lineups have included multiple freshmen, including freshman goalie Sebastian Conlon being in goal for three of the games.

Luckily for the Dukes, there's still 12 games on the schedule before the Sun Belt postseason tournament, and defeating the Wolfpack was the perfect start. With plenty of season left and a lot of experience within both the coaching staff and the squad, there's no reason to believe the Dukes can't turn it around.

**CONTACT** Craig Mathias at [mathiack@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:mathiack@dukes.jmu.edu). For more men's soccer coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.

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ODU vs. U.Va.	U.Va.	U.Va.	ODU	U.Va.	U.Va.	ODU	ODU
Troy vs. App State	App State	App State	App State	App State	App State	App State	App State
Penn State vs. Auburn	Penn State	Auburn	Auburn	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State	Penn State
NDSU vs. Arizona	NDSU	NDSU	NDSU	NDSU	NDSU	Arizona	NDSU
Liberty vs. Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest	Wake Forest
Michigan State vs. Washington	Michigan State	Washington	Michigan State	Michigan State	Michigan State	Michigan State	Michigan State



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