



# The Ferris State Torch

94 YEARS OF ILLUMINATING THE TRUTH

Big Rapids, Michigan

Week of Jan. 15 - 22, 2025

www.fsutorch.com

# 2024 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS



Graphic by: Hailey Nye | Production Assistant

## News

Mecosta County Board of Commissioners revokes support for the Gotion battery plant. The plant was set to be built by 2030 but now, the plans are up in the air due to loss of support. The plant was met with mixed emotions. The plant planned on bringing over 2,000 jobs to Big Rapids. PG. 3

## Culture

College athletes juggle intense training, academic pressure and personal lives all while striving for success. This glimpse into the lives of Ferris student-athletes reveals the sacrifices, triumphs and daily grind that define their pursuit of excellence. PG. 5

## Opinions

With a new semester brings a new Torch. This week, the Torch Editorial Board brings updates for readers for the new year featuring new and upcoming changes for each section, goals for the Torch as a whole and new positions and media the Torch has planned for the new year, such as an increased social media presence. PG. 8

## Sports

Ferris football won its third national championship in four years following a decisive 49-14 victory over the Valdosta State Blazers. The win marked the Bulldogs' second championship claim over the Blazers, as they defeated them in 2021. Read along as the Torch breaks down the historic game. PG. 10

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# News

Caden Hofmann | Interim News Editor | hofmanc2@ferris.edu

## Michigan

Caden Hofmann  
Special Editions Editor

Michigan temperatures will reach near-record lows in the coming weeks. During Jan. 20 and Jan. 29, average temperatures in Michigan will reach the coldest of any time in the winter.

During this time throughout history, temperatures hover around 30 degrees during the day and nine to 16 during the night. Experts say temperatures could be 20-30 degrees colder than those normal temperatures.

Mark Torregrosa, a weather reporter for MLive states that we will be close to record temperatures but not there quite yet.

"Record low temperatures would be 13 to 20 degrees below zero," Torregrosa said. "Ten to 15 degrees below are certainly possible."

It is normal for Michigan to see its lowest temperatures from Jan. 20th to the 29th, and this year will be no different.

## Global

Caden Hofmann  
Special Editions Editor

### Russia –

The Kerch Strait oil spill causes Russia to form an emergency task force to combat it.

The spill was caused when two oil tankers, carrying 9,000 metric tons of fuel, were damaged by a storm and sunk into the body of water separating Crimea and Russia roughly a month ago.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sees the spill as an urgent issue.

"This is one of the most serious environmental challenges we have faced in the recent years," Putin said.

The Kerch Strait is a large global shipping route used to transport goods from the Inland Sea of Azov to the Black Sea.

The most difficult situation developed near the port of Taman, where the oil has continued to leak into the sea.

## National

Caden Hofmann  
Special Editions Editor

### Los Angeles –

Wildfires have ignited across Los Angeles, leaving thousands of people's homes and other buildings destroyed. The fires have taken a total of 24 lives. It is currently unknown how the fires began. One man was arrested on suspicion of arson but has not been charged.

High winds have caused the fires to spread, and more winds are expected this week, according to National Weather Service Meteorologist Rich Thompson.

"We're not out of the woods yet. We have some very significant fire weather ahead of us," Thompson said.

The fire has destroyed over 23,000 acres of land in the Los Angeles area. Progress has been made on fire containment, but the upcoming weather will cause containment complications.

# Changing climates

## What does it look like in Michigan?



Photo by: Shaunti'ara Reynolds | Torch Photographer

**Big Rapids receives snowfall late into the spring semester, a familiar site to Ferris students.**

**Kate Babel**  
News Reporter

Climate change affects everyone worldwide, and Michigan weather is no exception. Big Rapids weather has seen shifts from snowfall to warmth and rain throughout December and January.

Michigan has its fair share of weather phenomena, with Big Rapids receiving temperatures ranging in the 20s to lower 30s for the upcoming week. But what is the reason behind all of these weather changes? Why is Michigan different?

Physical geography professor Dr. Jennifer Johnson specializes in weather and climate studies. She explained Michigan's climate change is due to the neighboring Great Lakes.

"The lakes play a key role in moderating temperature in the state of Michigan, and they also impact precipitation by adding water vapor to passing storms and producing lake effect snowfall. Water has a huge capacity to store heat, and as the air has warmed over the last 70 years, so have the lakes," Johnson said. "The bigger the contrast in temperature between the cold air and the

lake water temperature, the better this lake-effect mechanism works. So, if the lake is two degrees warmer than usual, it's not warm enough for it to suddenly feel like it's not winter, but those extra two degrees make a huge difference in how much water vapor the air can pick up as it crosses the lake, allowing more snow to be produced."

Lake-effect snow is created when cold, dry air masses pass over comparatively warm lake water, which the lake warms up. Because warmer air can hold more water vapor, lakes can add moisture to these warm air masses through evaporation.

As the air continues downwind of the lake, it produces clouds and lake-effect snow with new heat and moisture it acquired over the lake. An increase in heat resulting from climate change can have a lasting impact on the weather, environment and people overall.

"As humans and the social, economic, agricultural and environmental systems we rely on adapt to climate change, there will be very few areas of life that aren't impacted in some way by the repercussions. Regardless of how one feels personally

about the topic or chooses to respond to the well-established peer-reviewed science, we are likely to be impacted in a variety of ways," Johnson said. "There is literally no individual or profession that exists that isn't impacted by weather." Climate change is on students' minds as an important environmental topic.

Digital animation and game design junior Alex Demeniuk gave his thoughts about climate change.

"I feel like it's a major problem for the world that doesn't get enough attention," Demeniuk said. "Nobody seems to really talk about it in any major political platform, it's always avoided, lazily glazed over like it doesn't matter or derailed in favor of a completely different point. And if they have, I just haven't seen it."

Regardless of personal views or how someone responds to scientific research, everyone is impacted by climate change in a multitude of ways. Climate change is not something that can be completely overlooked.

Environmental biology junior Elizabeth Shinn weighed in her thoughts. "Well, I know it's there. I'm not happy about it, but I can't convince other

people to change. I know I can help by at least being conscious about it. I'm not very educated on the subject, but I feel like even just awareness of it could help," Shinn said. "I know that humans can adapt to it relatively okay, but the animals are taking the largest hit. In one of my classes, it was mentioned that we are entering a mass extinction which worries me."

The city of Los Angeles is experiencing this right now, wildfires are spreading throughout the city and have taken over 25 lives and destroyed over 150,000 acres of land in the region.

This includes things like using reusable bags for groceries, reducing carbon footprint by walking or biking, eating more fruits and vegetables and reducing air pollution caused by the combustion of fossil fuels resulting in cleaner air. Reducing the effects of climate change will not only benefit our environment, but it will also benefit our health.

If you are a student interested in combating climate change, Ferris' university sustainability committee website offers ways students could do their part to create a more sustainable campus environment.

# Support revoked for Gotion project

## Future of battery plant unknown after new county decision



Photo courtesy of Gotion, Inc.

An aerial view shows the greenery where the battery plant was planned.

**Emma Walters**  
News Reporter

The Mecosta County Board of Commissioners has revoked support for the

controversial Gotion battery plant set to be built near Big Rapids.

This decision has been reversed. A previous resolution stated the county's support

for the factory, which was expected to bring 2,300 jobs to the area by 2030.

The contentious electrical vehicle battery plant has caused rising tensions

throughout the community in recent years.

In 2023, Big Rapids saw protests against the project, with public outcry regarding the factory's possible environmental impacts on the surrounding area and the company's ties to China.

Gotion, Inc. North America is based in Fremont, Calif. and has been in the United States since 2014. However, the company is a subsidiary of Gotion High Tech, located in China.

That same year, Big Rapids made national news when then-Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy spoke against the Gotion factory at a local farm.

In Aug. 2024, now-Vice President elect JD Vance held a rally at the same farm alongside former GOP gubernatorial candidate Tudor Dixon, former Republican nominee for U.S. Senate in Michigan Mike Rogers and former chairman of the Michigan GOP Pete Hoekstra.

The rally, attended by 2,000 people, put an exclamation point on Republican Party opposition to Gotion's proposed battery plant.

In response to the revocation, Republican Rep. of Michigan's 2nd District, John Moolenaar, stated that the

decision represents the feelings of Mecosta County.

"The Mecosta County Commissioners' decision to end support for Gotion is yet another sign that the people of Mecosta County do not want Gotion," Moolenaar said.

Moolenaar, who has been a critic of Gotion since the debate began in 2023, serves as Chair for the House Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

Last year, Gotion sued Green Charter Township following the election of a new board, claiming that it was an attempt to undermine the project's progression.

Ferris State was brought into the Gotion debate when rumors of Ferris planning to house Chinese citizens employed by Gotion, Inc. were brought to people's attention, which led President Bill Pink to release a statement in early 2023 denying said rumors.

Ferris Dems President and sports communication junior Jonathen Hart was disappointed to hear about the board's decision.

"I think it is completely disheartening that we have pulled everything away from the community that fought for this in the past year and a half," Hart said. "Economically, I feel this program would

have helped Big Rapids thrive in a way that we haven't seen in a while."

The promise of new jobs and economic opportunities was not enough to convince Desiree Rowe, who lives within city limits, to support the project.

"Specifically, the water usage and containment of chemicals they could be using is concerning," Rowe said. "I feel like we do need that for our town's economy, but I feel like there are better avenues."

Graphic media management junior Drew Gendron-Wesley expressed concern over the potential loss of job opportunities in the area if the Gotion project is not completed.

"All of those jobs not being offered can make it harder for a lot of people to find jobs, especially in this area," Gendron-Wesley said. "It would be great for students, but even for the community as well. Because there are people who need jobs everywhere."

Gotion has not released a statement following the decision of the county board.

*Jonathen Hart was previously employed by the Ferris State Torch.*

# SGA appoints new vice president

## End of year meeting introduces new leadership

**Emma Walters**  
News Reporter

The Student Government Association appointed a new vice president during their end-of-year banquet.

The new vice president will be economics junior Jake McGaha.

Formerly the director of operations for SGA, McGaha explained that transitioning into this new position brought about better opportunities for campus involvement.

"I found myself really enjoying my time and commitment to student government," McGaha said. "I thought maybe I could do a little bit more for the organization than what I am doing right now."

McGaha's new position will oversee continued work on SGA projects that have been in development, including Campus Connect Live, which was announced in October.

Campus Connect Live is expected to be released sometime in the upcoming semester and will provide students with a place to livestream SGA meetings, as well as open up communication between students and ad-

ministration.

SGA President and computer information systems senior Stephen Bender explained that McGaha's appointment to the vice president role was a natural transition for the association.

"There are a lot of people who step up into leadership roles," Bender said. "He seemed to be the best fit for someone who was looking to go above and beyond."

Bender further noted that last semester contained a lot of behind-the-scenes work for SGA, but more will be offered for students on campus this semester.

The events planned include a professional development week, in which students will have opportunities to educate themselves on resume building, the use of LinkedIn and a bingo night.

Later in the semester, SGA will sponsor a meal-swipe event to combat loneliness on campus.

"I think loneliness is a huge issue on campus," Bender said. "Loneliness as an epidemic is something that is super serious. Student Government has the funds

and resources to help bring people together and make those people feel wanted and important."

The event will provide students an invitation to eat at The Rock with members of the Student Government and meet new friends on campus.

Forensic biology junior Samantha Nowak expressed hope that a new vice president will open the door for more opportunities for the student body.

"Other programs have hands-on student volunteering and other activities like gift wrapping," Nowak said. "So more fun activities for students would be nice to see."

Nowak also expressed a desire to see more discussion about student government around campus, stating that the lack of information available makes it difficult for students to know what SGA is doing for the campus community.

The SGA meetings occur every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m., in the Founder's Room of the David L. Eisler Center.



Photo courtesy of Jake McGaha

Economics junior Jake McGaha has been promoted to SGA vice president.

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# Commuter lot changes

## Commuter lot 1A converted to staff-only parking



Photo by: Jordan Wilson | Multimedia Editor

The 1A commuter lot by William’s auditorium is no longer for student use.

**Kate Babel**  
News Reporter

Commuter spaces in Lot 1A by Williams Auditorium were converted into staff-only parking over Ferris’ winter break.

This change was applied by representatives from the Jim Crow Museum Committee, university facilities, parking services and DPS. Each representative made this decision as a part of the construction process of the new Jim Crow Museum facility. All objects within the museum will be relocated to the new facility once the construction is complete.

Ferris Department of Public Safety Chief Gary Green provided information about the process.

“With the construction of the new Jim Crow Museum, the construction company will need a place to store equipment close to the build-

ing site. So, for that reason, commuters will need to park in the commuter lot across State Street at the North Storage,” Green said. “They will still have spaces: they will have to walk a little further.”

Groundbreaking for the newly expanded Jim Crow Museum began on Dec. 12, 2024. The new facility will be located near the State Street entrance to the campus. The museum is a space to learn about history and racism, featuring a 30,000-piece collection of racist materials, using the objects of intolerance to teach tolerance and promote social justice. It is expected to open in fall 2026, and by then, the space will have the possibility of reopening to commuters.

The new museum carries the same purpose of using racist objects for educational purposes by outlining racial struggles over the years and focusing on overcoming racial

injustice.

Marketing sophomore Emily May lives about five minutes away from Ferris and commutes to campus. She gave her insight into the conversion of the lot space.

“I feel like this could potentially affect my schedule because it will lengthen my walk when I have classes in Starr,” May said. “It will probably be a little more difficult in the colder months, but easier to adjust as it gets warmer.”

Commuting students like May will still have available commuter parking all over campus. The new parking won’t be as close to the Starr building as most who take their classes in Starr would prefer. Students like May, who usually park in Lot 1A, will be getting some extra steps in. However, other commuter spaces are available by the FLITE center and around campus.



Photo by: Ciara Brooks | Torch Photographer

The commuter lot next to William’s auditorium and the Starr building will be the central storage for construction equipment for the Jim Crow Museum.

### ON THE RECORD

Caden Hofmann  
Special Editor

#### Fast and furious

Jan. 7, 1:36 a.m. - Officers responded to reports of two cars racing each other on South State Street. Drivers were reported to be driving at a high rate of speed, officers pulled both drivers over and they were both intoxicated. Both people were arrested.

#### Domestic dispute

Jan. 4, 1:23 p.m. - Officers assisted Big Rapids police with a domestic violence dispute near the Watertower Apartments. Roommates were reported to be physical with each other and one of the females felt unsafe.

#### Don’t call me, don’t come by my room

Jan. 12, 8:30 p.m.: A North Hall female student received harassing messages from two other females. Officers reported to North Hall, and both parties agreed to stop messaging each other.

# Culture

Blase Gapinski | Culture Editor | gapinsb@ferris.edu

## No days off

The intense life of a college athlete



Photos by and courtesy of Sam Mulder | Torch Photographer and Ferris State athletics

**Brady Rose (left), Tyler Hamilton and Alexis Kozlowski's (right) schedules as athletes all differ.**

**Blase Gapinski**  
Culture Editor

College athletes wake up daily with one foot in the classroom and the other on the court or field, balancing dreams, pressures and the relentless drive to excel. But how do they manage it all at once?

Despite the challenges, Ferris athletes find deep fulfillment in pursuing excellence, camaraderie with teammates and the opportunity to represent their school. This glimpse into their lives reveals the sacrifices, triumphs and unseen struggles that define the everyday experience of a college athlete.

For Tyler Hamilton, a junior business marketing major from Detroit, that balance is key. After transferring to Ferris State from St. Claire Community College, he's continued his basketball career with an unyielding focus on both his academic and athletic pursuits. Despite the challenges of maintaining such a rigorous sched-

ule, Hamilton finds strength in faith and family to push through each demanding day.

"My body's always tired, and I'm always mentally drained for the most part, but I'm here," Hamilton said. "I get my strength from God. I always ask Him for strength before I start my day, and that helps me get through the intense training. My brothers and my parents are also always there for me to keep my focus."

Hamilton's mother played at the DI level in college, and her passion for basketball became a major influence in his journey. Although football was his first love, growing closer to his mom helped shift his focus toward basketball.

"Football was my main sport, my first love, but as my mom and I's bond grew closer, she taught me more about basketball while growing up," Hamilton said. "I fell in love with basketball through her, and it was always one of those things my

brothers and I played together."

A typical day for Hamilton starts around 10:30 a.m. with a team film session and weightlifting. Practice follows, which Hamilton describes as "intense, but it's usually a good kind of intense."

After practice, the team receives a devotional from a pastor or dives into treatment. The day doesn't end there. Around 6 p.m., Hamilton and his teammates meet again for an hour of designated skill work.

In the evenings, after a long day of classes and practice, Hamilton finds solace in recovery, faith and rest. Whether it's a peaceful night's sleep, reading the Bible, or reviewing game footage, these moments allow him to recharge physically and mentally for the challenges ahead.

"I just try to always stay focused and prepared," Hamilton said. "I'm always learning more, either watching myself play, whether it's highlights

or watching mistakes I made all to get better. At first, I didn't do much recovery, but as I've become more consistent in my life, I've learned to take better care of my body. Now, I'm very active when it comes to my recovery."

Looking ahead, Hamilton's goals stretch far beyond college basketball. He envisions playing professionally overseas and eventually venturing into real estate and stocks. But no matter where his journey takes him, he knows the lessons he's learned as a student-athlete will remain with him.

"The team has helped keep me encouraged. I've learned a lot about becoming a better man from teammates and coaches," Hamilton said. "Ferris has helped me tremendously when it comes to building good habits."

For many college athletes, the day begins long before the sun rises and ends well into the night. With intense training schedules, academic demands and personal

responsibilities, finding balance is key to success.

Elementary education sophomore Alexis Kozlowski's life is one of constant balance and fierce dedication. Her journey from a small-town girl in Gaylord to a college athlete is not just about competing on the field, it's about competing for a future where she can inspire others, both as a teacher and a coach.

Growing up, Kozlowski wasn't just playing softball; she was part of a family—a local travel team that fostered her love for the sport and a deep sense of camaraderie.

"It wasn't just the sport that made me love it," Kozlowski said. "It was the girls and the coach. Because of them, I was able to fall in love with the sport."

Her day-to-day life is a delicate dance of early morning lifts, back-to-back classes and intense practices from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. With no room for distractions, Kozlowski has learned to prioritize and stay organized.

"Time management is crucial. I use a planner, and my teammates help me stay on track," she said. "It's all about knowing when to do your homework and when to study. You just have to balance it all and believe in yourself."

While balancing her athletic career with a demanding academic schedule is no easy task, Kozlowski thrives because she's learned how to lean on her team. Her teammates, like senior Brooklyn Verbeek, who is also an education major, offer invaluable support, whether it's for a quick academic question or a pep talk before a big game.

"We all help each other," she says, "Whether it's school, softball, or life."

This support network is vital for Kozlowski, who admits that while she has little time for socializing outside of softball, she's surrounded by a tight-knit group of teammates who are her closest friends.

Being a student-athlete has also shaped Alexis's personal growth. She credits her experience in sports with boosting her confidence and helping her become more vocal. "If I wasn't playing softball, I don't think I'd be as outgoing. Softball has made me a leader," Kozlowski said.

That leadership extends

beyond the field, where she carries herself with the confidence to advocate for herself with professors and peers. As she eyes the future, Kozlowski is determined to pay forward the lessons she's learned. Post-graduation, she plans to teach and coach, helping others build the same confidence and leadership she's cultivated.

"I know that I want to coach softball and become a teacher right out of college," Kozlowski said.

For Kozlowski, the grind is more than just a schedule, as it's the foundation of her future. With her commitment to the game and her studies, there's no doubt she's ready to tackle whatever comes next.

While the excitement of game day and the demands of the regular season may be what most people see, the true commitment of a college athlete extends far beyond those moments on the court or field.

For athletes like Brady Rose, a junior construction management student, the work doesn't stop when the season ends. Rose has been part of the football team since initially coming to Ferris in 2021. With a history of national championships behind him and the weight of expectations on his shoulders, he values the lessons of hard work, trust and time management.

Rose, originally from Muskegon, grew up with football in his blood. His father, a former athlete himself, played a pivotal role in shaping Brady's passion for the sport.

"I got my passion for football from my dad as I grew up around football my whole life," Rose said. "My dad coached at Mona Shores, so I was always at their practices and games. I've always wanted to be a Mona Shores football player, and once I was old enough, I became one."

Rose's life as a student-athlete at Ferris is about more than football. As a construction management major with a minor in finance, he faces the ongoing challenge of balancing the demands of academics and athletics. His days often begin early, with 8 a.m. classes followed by football practice at 11.

**CONT. ON PG. 7**

# Robots, competitions and solidarity

FIRST Robotics heads into the semester with exciting events and opportunities



Photo by: Jordan Wilson | Multimedia Editor

**FIRST Robotics hosted RoboDay last September, filling the Wink Arena with 25 competing teams who built and battled their teams of robots.**

**Tate Zellman**  
Freelance Reporter

After facing a period of inactivity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FIRST Robotics registered student organization has successfully revitalized itself, rebuilding a solid foundation for continued growth and success.

The RSO offers a range of opportunities, such as building robots and bringing those robots to competitions against other universities. It is one of the many RSOs that promotes science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the Big Rapids area.

This RSO is connected to the College of Engineering Technology. Their core values are special interests, volunteerism and civic engagement. Students get a chance to apply these values by learning about the robotic industry, developing mentoring skills and providing support to the local community.

Mechanical engineering technology senior Kyle Hickmott, the club's president, strived to bring the club back after it shut down.

"This is the second iteration of the RSO," Hickmott said. "The RSO was going strong for years until 2020 when the club essentially disbanded. Once I got to Ferris in the fall of 2022, I found out that Ferris had a First Robotics Club. I reached out and was able to get into contact with professor Nathan Leatherman, and from there

we were able to get the club restarted."

At the end of September, FIRST Robotics hosted an off-season event called Roboday. The event had a total of 23 teams attend and compete. The teams in the competition had to build their robots on their own. Having the opportunity to build and use robots in competitions is why Hickmott believes more students should join FIRST Robotics.

"I think more students should join because being a part of FIRST is a pretty good time, the events are huge and the robots are cool and very interesting," Hickmott said. "Being a part of FIRST will get you access to a lot of volunteering opportunities, and no matter what your interest is, there is something in FIRST that would speak to that interest."

Manufacturing engineering freshman Kate Kohl joined the club, and it has inspired her to pursue a career in the engineering field. She said joining FIRST Robotics helped both technical and practical.

"I joined FIRST Robotics because I was interested in learning more engineering skills, like CAD design, programming and electrical work," Kohl said. "I also enjoy how every year there's a completely new competition with new challenges."

Some RSO members were involved in FIRST Robotics competitions in high school or middle school. The club

has various volunteer opportunities that allow students to get engaged at lower education levels. Many of the students involved mentor for FIRST Robotics teams at the high school, middle school and even elementary school level. Students can also assist teams with specific skills such as programming and

design.

The club's vice president, psychology junior Mackenzie Clayton, was in robotics when she was in high school and loved it. Clayton has enjoyed taking the opportunity to be a volunteer at events.

"As a former FRC member in high school, it's really cool to be on the other side of

things," Clayton said. "Helping other teams by mentoring and hosting FRC events has been a lot of fun."

During the upcoming semester, FIRST Robotics will be hosting an FRC district competition from March 27 to the 29th, where they will be building the competition field and running the high

school competition between 40 teams from across Michigan. They will also be taking a trip to Saginaw Valley State University to participate in a state finalist competition, where they will compete for their spot at the FIRST World Competition, which is held in Houston.



Photo by: Jordan Wilson | Multimedia Editor

**The RoboDay event featured real-time team building and engineering practices through competition.**

# Torch Tunes

## Soundtrack for the drive



Graphic by: Hailey Nye | Production Assistant

**Aiden MacLean**  
Culture Reporter

As the mornings grow crisp as we return from winter break, the daily commute to campus becomes an integral part of our routine.

Whether you're an early bird catching the first rays of sunlight or a night owl returning from late-night study sessions, the right soundtrack can transform the drives from home or class into something memorable.

Here's a curated playlist to enhance your journey to and from campus, capturing the vibes of morning motivation,

midday energy and evening relaxation.

**Morning Motivation: Starting the Day Right**

"Here Comes the Sun" – The Beatles. Begin your day with a classic that radiates warmth and optimism. "Here Comes the Sun" is the perfect track to shake off the morning chill and fill your car with sunshine, setting a positive tone for the day ahead.

**"Wake Up" – Arcade Fire.**

For those mornings when you need an extra push, "Wake Up" by Arcade Fire is the perfect anthem. The gradual build-up and uplift-

ing chorus inspire a sense of awakening and readiness to tackle the day's challenges.

**"Coffee" – Sylvan Esso.**

Nothing says morning quite like a good cup of coffee, and this electronic indie track captures that caffeine-fueled energy. Its quirky beats and catchy lyrics will give you a burst of energy as you head to your first class.

**"September" – Earth, Wind & Fire.**

Even as the new year begins, "September" keeps the upbeat, danceable energy alive. This feel-good classic will have you grooving in your

seat, starting your day with a smile.

**Midday Energy: Powering Through the Day**

"Blinding Lights" – The Weeknd. As you head out for a midday break or a quick drive between classes, "Blinding Lights" offers a high-energy beat that keeps you alert and engaged. Its retro vibes are perfect for maintaining momentum throughout the day.

**"Electric Feel" – MGMT.**

Keep the energy flowing with MGMT's "Electric Feel." This track's funky, electronic beats provide a playful soundtrack to boost your spirits during

those midday slumps.

**"Uptown Funk" – Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars.**

Need a quick mood lift? "Uptown Funk" is a guaranteed pick-me-up with its infectious rhythm and lively vocals. It's the ideal jam for cruising around campus, keeping your energy levels high.

**Evening Relaxation: Winding Down**

"Take It Easy" – Eagles. After a long day of classes and activities, "Take It Easy" is a soothing companion for your drive back home. The mellow guitar and calming lyrics create a relaxing atmosphere, helping you unwind as you

head home.

**"Someone Like You" – Adele.**

Adele's soulful "Someone Like You" provides a perfect backdrop for those long reflective evening drives. Her powerful voice and emotional depth resonate, making it a fitting track for introspection after a busy day.

**"Sunset Lover" – Petit Biscuit.**

As the sun sets and you head home, "Sunset Lover" offers a chill, electronic vibe that's both soothing and uplifting. The gentle beats and dreamy melody capture the tranquility of twilight.

**"Home" – Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros.**

There's no better way to end your commute than with "Home." This folk-pop anthem celebrates the joy of returning home after a day out, leaving you with a warm and content feeling as you pull into your driveway.

**"Weightless" – Marconi Union.**

Touted as one of the most relaxing songs ever recorded, "Weightless" by Marconi Union is perfect for winding down. Its ambient soundscape gently guides you into a state of calm, making it the ultimate track for the end of your drive.

With this playlist, the drive back to campus becomes more than just a chore, it transforms into a musical journey that energizes, motivates and soothes. Whether you're driving through crisp morning air or winding down after a long day, these tracks are your perfect companions. So, hit play, roll down your windows and let the music guide you through your drive.

**NO DAYS OFF CONT.**

"My days are pretty busy. I'm always moving, always going. But I make sure I keep my focus on school because that's my main priority," Rose said.

For Rose, managing his time effectively is essential to maintaining both his academic standing and athletic performance. "There's not a ton of time for personal activities," Rose said. "I mean, obviously school comes first. I'm here to get a degree. I make sure I check my schedule on Sunday or Monday, depending on the week, to see what I have to do. Then, I focus on what's due first throughout the week. I feel like I've always been pretty good at balancing football and school since I've been doing it for a while."

In addition to football and academics, Rose has a deep

appreciation for his personal time. An avid outdoorsman, he values the moments when he can escape to nature.

"I'm a big outdoorsman, so I like to hunt and fish. I try to get out when I can, but football's always a priority. Now that the season's winding down, I'm hoping to get into some ice fishing or turkey hunting later in the spring," he says.

Despite the intense pressure of being a student-athlete, Brady feels supported by his family and teammates. As a football player at Ferris State, Brady's expectations are high. The team has won three national championships in the last four years, and the pressure to continue that success weighs on every player.

"The pressure is high to win again," Brady says. "We've won two national championships in a row, and we lost last year. So, there's

always that pressure to get back to that level."

But Rose doesn't let the weight of expectations distract him from his responsibilities.

"I always make sure my schoolwork is done before I lock in for football. If I need to focus more on football, I get my schoolwork done earlier in the week, so I can give everything I have to the team," Rose said.

For Brady, the lessons learned on the field like hard work, discipline and trust extend far beyond football.

"Being on a team like this teaches you a lot about trust. You have to trust the guy next to you to do his job, and you've got to work just as hard as he does. It's all about doing your part," he says.

As he moves closer to graduation, Brady remains focused on his future. While football is still a major part of his life, he's also looking

ahead to his career in construction management.

The life of a student-athlete is never easy, but for Rose, it's a journey defined by hard work, discipline and unwavering support from his family and teammates. As he moves forward, he continues to honor the lessons of his past while building the foundation for his future both on and off the field.

At Ferris, the balance is more than just a daily challenge. It's a testament to the passion, strength, and grit of these athletes who continue to inspire, achieve, and lead by example. It's not just about what they do, it's about who they're becoming, both as players and as people. In the end, the true measure of success is not just in the wins or grades but in the journey itself.

## Heard on Campus

"I'm going to shoot Brutus in the foot if he doesn't move"

Hear something funny on campus? DM us on Instagram @fsutorch for your submission to be possibly featured

# Opinions

Jackie Moglia | Opinions Editor | [mogliaj@ferris.edu](mailto:mogliaj@ferris.edu)

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## EDITORIAL BOARD:

# Ushering in change

### Updates for the Torch in 2025



Photo by: Anthony Malinowski | Managing Copy Editor

**Torch editors Blase Gapinski, Caden Hofmann, Dylan Rider and Jackie Moglia discuss the upcoming Torch edition.**

### Torch Editorial Board

Happy Wednesday and Happy New Year.

Despite being off for a month, the Torch has been hard at work improving our paper and how we report news. We're excited to be back and able to implement these improvements.

Since taking our break began, we've focused on updating each section. At the Torch, we feel it's important to be transparent about our goals. This allows you, our readership, to help hold us to them.

Before we highlight what you can expect from us in the Spring 2025 semester, we'd like to highlight what we introduced in Fall 2024.

Last semester saw the

return of the Fire Pit, the Torch's podcast. Under new podcast manager Liz Brown, we've been producing weekly installments featuring discussions about that week's edition of the Torch and interviews with Ferris personalities. In our opinions section, we've re-introduced biweekly comics. Our cartoonist, Blake Flanery, brings back something the Torch hasn't had consistently since 2019. In sports, we've prioritized same-day reporting and post-game recaps right after a game has ended. Alongside those same-day recaps, you can also find the final scores of home games for hockey, football, volleyball and both men's and women's basketball on @fsutorch on Insta-

gram.

For Spring 2025, we aim to improve upon everything we've done. Furthering the Torch's online presence is an overarching goal. We began a series called "Torch Asks" on YouTube and Instagram. We need to make that series more consistent, so our goal is to produce them on a bi-weekly basis.

Our news section is getting a minor revamp. On our production side, we've changed the section layout so it's less "blocky." Our "On the Record" section will have a permanent place on page four. We'll also be able to feature smaller news stories or event information in a news briefs section. For a variety of quick news blurbs, Michigan,

global and national news will permanently live on the side of page two.

For sports, we still aim to venture outside of in-print recaps. With our same-day reporting being available online, we'd like to focus on sports features, game previews and any storylines that Ferris' various sports offer.

Culture will still be dedicated to focusing on the student community and representing the culture at our university. We're making a small addition to the section, bringing back a small "Overheard on Campus" section. Put your eavesdropping to use. Message the Torch with the funniest thing you've heard on campus, and you might be featured.

Our opinions section wants to hear more from students and faculty. If you have an opinion about Ferris or something that's going on in Big Rapids, message us. We also want to stoke debate and feature more side-by-side differing opinions in the section.

Finally, we're planning on highlighting our photographers by featuring photo galleries on our website. We've begun this by posting our national championship gallery on our website.

We're excited to bring some new and needed changes to our paper this semester. We make these changes to intrigue and interest, you, our readers, more and more.

As always, thanks for reading.



# New year, new hair.. new me?

A trim is still a change



Photo by: Jasmine Baar | Videographer

Students take matters into their own hands, which involves salon-quality hair supplies.

Jasmine Baar  
Videographer

Could a haircut or color brighten our darkest season? A new year brings hope for self-development, but it can be challenging to turn over a new leaf when you feel stuck

in the past.

This year, I decided to make a change in hopes that it would motivate me to improve in other areas of my life. From blonde to copper, I wanted to find out if the "new hair - new me" ideology could work.

Changing your hair can boost your confidence. Whether it's a trim or a chop, hair holds memories and letting go of the past can catapult you into a brighter tomorrow.

Daylight hours are shorter, and seasonal depression is

at an all-time high. The lack of sunlight can make us feel uninspired.

A new semester holds so much uncertainty, and the changing seasons are filled with a sense of waiting. Waiting for warmer days, waiting for more sunlight.

It was challenging trying to start my New Year resolutions when I felt so stuck in my old ways.

In previous years, I'd turned to retail therapy. This year, instead of a new wardrobe, I want to stimulate myself in ways that don't involve overconsumption.

This is when the idea was created, a fresh look could symbolize the change I was so desperately seeking.

It started with a trim at the hair salon. When I had an inch cut off, I felt some weight lift off my shoulders. What started as a small act of self-care became an awakening.

That single act inspired me to go further, embracing a bold change. Each step, from the cut to the color, felt like shedding a layer of the past, creating room for something new to grow.

I had been a blonde for too long. In my younger days, I changed my hair from silver to pink and everything in between. My parents always allowed me to express myself in healthy ways and, like most teenage girls who are constantly undergoing change, so did my hair.

Despite this, over time, I began to fear change. When everything seems out of your control, you tend to hold onto the things you consider familiar and safe.

Blonde became a mask I would hide behind, often using the dumb blonde stereotype to my advantage. I only recognized this when I sat down to set my New Year

resolutions. It's easy to admit defeat and continue to follow bad habits.

I couldn't become the person I wanted to be while carrying around an old version of myself. I took my Pinterest boards and ran to the hair salon.

Letting go of the past can be symbolic, like counting down the seconds to midnight.

We all deserve opportunities for a fresh start. The new year is a chance to wipe the slate clean, with new mindsets and approaches.

If you feel unmotivated to start new goals, I challenge you to make a change that excites you.

This new look didn't just change how I saw myself in the mirror... It influenced how I approached my ambitions. Instead of fearing change, I embraced new beginnings. I'll be starting the semester feeling more confident, more willing to take risks and more open to embracing uncertainty.

Hair is tied to identity and is so personal. Altering it, even in small ways, can give you the courage to confront other areas of life that feel stagnant.

Ultimately, a haircut or color isn't just about self-expression, it's about reclaiming control.

For me, it was a reminder that even in the darkest months, we have the power to make choices that spark joy.

## New year new you



Comic by: Blake Flanery | Cartoonist

# Sports

Connor Grypma | Sports Editor | grypma@ferris.edu

## Bulldogs reign victorious

Ferris football reclaims national championship



Photo by: Sam Mulder | Torch Photographer

**The Bulldogs finished their season on a 14-game win streak.**

**Caden Hofmann**  
Special Editions Editor

Ferris State football claimed their third national championship in the last four seasons with a convincing performance over Valdosta State.

The Bulldogs dominated en route to their third national championship win under head coach Tony Annese with a 49-14 score on Saturday, Dec. 21 over Valdosta State in McKinney, Texas.

Annese was extremely proud of his team's victory

to secure the DII national championship.

"It's more for me seeing the elation on my players, coaching staff and fans' faces," Annese said. "Ferris is a very proud school and I feel pride knowing I positively impacted them in a small way.

You're going to have heart-break in your career and you're going to have elation. I just feel fortunate to have this elation."

The Bulldogs' defense was stout as usual, allowing just 311 yards compared to the Bulldogs 465 and holding the Blazers quarterback to 41.6% (5-12) through the air in the first half.

Junior quarterback Trinidad Chambliss led Ferris on offense, as he accounted for 231 yards and five touchdowns in the win.

Chambliss knew the key to victory was his team doing their jobs.

"We had a great game plan for them and all we had to do was execute," Chambliss said. "Our offensive line was amazing throughout the whole year and our skill guys made the plays they needed to."

The Bulldogs came out firing following a Valdosta punt on the opening drive. A 43-yard run by Chambliss set Ferris up in a great position and Chambliss capped off the drive with a one-yard

touchdown run to make it 7-0 Bulldogs early.

The defense got the ball right back for the Bulldogs and a trick play passing touchdown from junior slot receiver Brady Rose to junior wide receiver Cam Underwood put Ferris on top 14-0.

The second quarter was much of the same for Ferris. They outscored Valdosta State 14-7 thanks to two passing touchdowns from Chambliss, extending the Bulldog lead to 28-7 going into the half.

The 14 points allowed in the first two frames was just the third and fourth time the Blazers have allowed 14 points in any quarter this season.

Following another Chambliss touchdown to open the half, the Blazers answered right back with a score of their own to make it 35-14.

However, on the very next Valdosta State drive, defensive end Tyrone Fowler recovered a Blazer fumble and brought it to the end zone to extend the Bulldogs' lead to 28.

Ferris put the game on ice on the next drive with a short touchdown pass to Underwood, as they held a 49-14 lead until the end of the game.

Underwood led the team in receiving, catching three passes for 86 yards and two touchdowns.

The Bulldogs held the Blazers to just 43% (6-14) on third down due to their stifling defense led by senior linebacker Konnor Near.

Near was on both of the Ferris championship teams in 2021 and 2022. He transferred to the University of Oklahoma last season but returned to Ferris to finish out his collegiate career.

One of Near's goals coming back to Ferris was to win again in McKinney.

"Winning again was definitely the goal," Near said. "I'm 13-0 in the playoffs as a member of the Bulldogs and am proud as heck to say it."

The championship win completed a 14-1 season for the Bulldogs as they once again claim the national title.

## Running to glory

Kannon Katzer's journey from DI walk-on to national champion

**Nolan Matthews**  
Sports Reporter

Following a historic 2024 season, Kannon Katzer has quickly become a household name for Bulldog football fans everywhere.

However, Katzer's success wasn't served on a silver platter. His records come with years of dedication and hard work.

Katzer started playing football when his mother signed his older brother, Haven, up for their local Pop Warner team, which was coached by Kannon's father. Even though Katzer was too young to play for the team, his father was able to pull some strings to allow Katzer to join the team.

Katzer has always had to prove himself. Standing at just 5'9" and 190 pounds, people always seemed to underestimate him, even in his time at Mt. Spokane High School. Katzer ran for 2,543 yards and 34 touchdowns on the ground, totaling 3,200 yards and 39 total touchdowns which earned him

3A Greater Spokane League Player of the Year. Those stats rival his childhood idol, NFL Hall of Famer LaDainian Tomlinson's senior year where he ran for 2,554 yards and 39 touchdowns, even with Katzer's senior year statistics, he never received a college offer.

Katzer didn't let that get to him. He loved the game too much to give up. Katzer decided to walk onto Washington State where he earned a spot on their roster and appeared in one game during his time as a Cougar. It was a week three game in 2022, against Colorado State, where he appeared late in the fourth quarter alongside current Miami Hurricane and Heisman trophy candidate Cam Ward, in a 38-7 blow-out win—showing off his talent rushing six times for 54 yards and one touchdown. However, his time as a Cougar did not last.

"I was told when I got recruited that they would put me on a scholarship after a year because they had a full

running back room," Katzer said. "But they did want me, so I decided to bet on that. Then a year rolled by and the coaches that recruited me got fired. Once they brought their new guys in, I ended up getting lost in the political game there."

Even with this, Katzer was able to push onward thanks to his incredible dedication to the game that he loved. When asked about his dedication, Katzer credited his mother, Melissa, who passed away in 2020.

"One of the biggest obstacles of my career was right before I went to play college football, that's when I lost my mom," Katzer said. "When that happened I kind of just debated if I wanted to keep doing this thing, and luckily I decided to keep doing it. My mom always gave me that push to be a little bit better and even when she passed, I think that just gave me more motivation to be better."

He decided to transfer out of Washington State and signed on to play at

Citrus Community College, a JUCO team in Glendora, California. During the 2023 season, Katzer appeared in 11 games and ran for 975 yards, averaging six yards per carry, alongside 16 touchdowns. He also posted 200 receiving yards and added an extra two touchdowns through the air on the way to earning All-Conference honors.

He caught the eye of Ferris head coach Tony Annese. He loved his play-making ability when recruiting him and made a hard push to sign Katzer.

"His big play making ability along with his speed and toughness really jumped off the screen," Annese said. "But towards the end of our [2024] season he really tied the whole offense together down the stretch both on the ground and through the air."

**CONT. ON PG. 11**



Photo by: Sam Mulder | Torch Photographer  
**Kannon Katzer rushed for 1,128 yards in 2024.**

# Chambliss steps up

The story behind Ferris State quarterback Trinidad Chambliss



Photo by: Sam Mulder | Torch Photographer

**Junior Trinidad Chambliss tallied 26 rushing touchdowns this season.**

**Caden Hofmann**  
Special Editions Editor

Under the lights, Grand Rapids native and Bulldog quarterback Trinidad Chambliss stepped up to bring Ferris football to the promised land once again.

Chambliss was a DII All-American, Harlon Hill finalist, GLIAC Player of the Year and led the Bulldogs to their third national championship in four seasons.

After winning the starting job out of camp, losing the

opening game and doubting his own ability to lead the team, he was forced into the full-time quarterback role after an injury to junior quarterback Carson Gulker and led the Bulldogs to the championship.

Growing up, Chambliss began playing sports at a very early age. He comes from a sports-driven family as his father played college football, his mother played volleyball and basketball in high school and his brother Tyler played football and basketball as

well. His brother Tyler Chambliss says Trinidad could catch a football before he could walk.

"Our dad used to roll up socks together and toss it to him," Tyler said. "He was catching stuff before he was walking and talking."

Chambliss' journey to Ferris almost didn't happen. During the recruiting process, Chambliss had to make a decision. He was an All-State player in both football and basketball and

held offers at the next level for both sports. At one point, Chambliss was close to picking basketball over football.

"I honestly wanted to play basketball in college but no schools were reaching out," Chambliss said. "I was getting scholarship offers for football and decided I guess I'm going to play football. My love was for basketball but God works in mysterious ways and he chose the path of football for me."

Chambliss felt that he was underrated and underrecruited, whether that be due to his size, frame or just the mold of player that he was.

"I was definitely underrated and underappreciated by schools," Chambliss said. "I guess I didn't fit the eye test coming out of high school, I wasn't six-foot-three made of muscle. It was annoying because I knew the type of player I could be in the right situation."

Tyler thinks the chip on his shoulder helped Trinidad throughout his journey.

"He always plays with that feeling of being slighted," Tyler said. "He attacks everything the same, whether that be diet, workouts, or film, he's just obsessed with it in the best way possible."

Chambliss held other DII offers but wound up choosing Ferris due to the family's feelings toward the Bulldogs and the togetherness shown during the recruiting process.

Chambliss did not appear in any games during his first two seasons and played sparingly during the 2023 season. This discouraged Chambliss but pushed him to work harder than he ever had to earn a starting job in 2024.

The underdog mentality and strong work ethic that Chambliss has kept throughout his career, even

after having feelings of being underrated and overlooked helped him when he was thrown into the full-time quarterback role in just the third week of the season.

The people around him feel the same way. Former high school teammate and current Ferris State basketball player Ethan Erickson says that is what sets Chambliss apart from the rest.

"He is always out-working everybody," Erickson said. "He obviously is the most skilled person out there but that work ethic he has always separated him."

After the week zero loss to Pittsburg State, Chambliss doubted his ability to lead the team, but his teammates and coaches supported him.

"I didn't know if I could be the quarterback of this team," Chambliss said. "I didn't think I was good enough, I'm thankful for my team and those moments over the season where I found myself and doing things that I never thought I could do."

Throughout the Bulldog's history under head coach Tony Annese, they have run a dual quarterback system. To start the year that was no different, Chambliss won the job, but Gulker split the reps and served as the running quarterback. Sadly, Gulker's season ended the following week after he suffered a broken leg during the win over Lake Erie. This forced Chambliss to take a large portion of the snaps and be the sole signal caller.

Chambliss took the challenge head-on and did not back away.

"It really sucked losing Carson but I knew then I had to lock in even more," Chambliss said. "It was time to prepare harder, watch more film because there's a lot of

quarterbacks in the room but no other quarterback in that room had game experience like me and Carson. It was a lot of pressure but pressure is a privilege and I just grew so much as a player and a leader."

After the week zero loss, Chambliss led the team to an undefeated rest of the season, including a national championship win over Valdosta State.

Chambliss secured many accolades this season, including GLIAC Player of the Year, numerous GLIAC Player of the Week and tied the Ferris record for passing touchdowns in a game with six.

Chambliss expressed his gratitude for the coaching staff putting him in a position to succeed and the "incredibly special" team around him.

Chambliss threw for 2925 yards with 26 touchdowns through the air. He also rushed for an extra 1019 yards and 25 touchdowns on the ground.

Emotions were high during the national championship, but Chambliss and the team stayed calm for the big game.

"It was just another game for us, as funny as it sounds McKinney is a home game for us now," Chambliss said. "We expect to be there in December playing for a national championship. The whole trip nobody got over their heads and we just made sure we finished business. I signed up for it, national championship is the standard here."

Moving forward, Chambliss will be returning to Ferris State for his final season, vying for their fourth title in five seasons. He plans on using this off-season and next season to better his mind and skills as he looks to extend his playing career past the collegiate level.

## RUNNING TO GLORY CONT.

Katzer ended up transferring and signing to Ferris before the 2024 campaign, but coming was not seen as the leadback for the Bulldogs heading into the year. In their week one game at Pittsburg State, Ferris lost 19-3 in which Katzer did not touch the ball once during that game. Katzer spoke on what may have changed after this loss.

"That Pittsburg game was a nightmare game for all of us, we had five turnovers and we really didn't know who our quarterback was," Katzer said. "I don't know if I'd say we overlooked them, but we honestly weren't ready. I think losing that game was a

huge reason why we won the national championship, because we just did not want to lose like that again."

Following the week one loss, Katzer saw his touches start to rise. In week two against Lake Erie, he totaled 10 carries for 54 yards. However, his breakout game occurred in week nine against Northern Michigan. On just five carries, Katzer ran for 126 yards (25.2 yards per carry) and a touchdown en route to a 55-9 blowout win.

Katzer continued to improve in the playoffs, where in the opening game against Central Oklahoma he ran 12 times for 200 yards (16.7 yards per carry) and three touchdowns in a school record-setting 78-17 win. In the national championship

victory, he ran 14 times for 97 yards while catching a touchdown early in the second quarter. Throughout Ferris' 2024 playoff run, Katzer tallied 538 yards, averaging 11 yards per carry and seven total touchdowns.

Katzer said winning the national championship didn't truly hit him until the confetti blew into the air.

"I remember sitting on the bench, looking at the other guys around me and that's really when it sat in, like holy cow we just freaking won a national championship," Katzer said. "And then I remember it truly hitting me when I was standing by Coach Annese and Trinidad [Chambliss] and seeing the confetti blow up in the air. It all just felt like a movie, just

super surreal and it's definitely one of the best moments in my life."

Katzer's 2024 season was something Bulldog fans have not seen for quite some time. The Bulldogs are known for having mobile quarterbacks and not having to have a "bellcow" running back. Katzer ran for 1,128 yards and 11 touchdowns on the year. This was the first time a Ferris running back eclipsed the 1,000-yard mark since Andrew Terry in the 2004 season.

Katzer credits his offensive line, affectionately known as the "Nasty Boys", for his incredible season.

"You look at all of these incredible running backs, and if you know anything about football more than half

the time these guys have a great offensive line blocking for them," Katzer said. "The hard games are won in the trenches, and having that sturdy offensive line gives the quarterback time to step into the pocket and throw or tuck it and run, or it gives the running back some great holes to hit and run through."

Katzer's personality shines through off the field as well and run game coordinator Sam Parker lets everyone know it.

"He's a great teammate and an incredible young man," Parker said. "I had the privilege of being baptized with him in August. We will forever have a connection of faith and fellowship together, which for me is far more special than anything

he could ever accomplish on the field."

With a national championship under his belt and eyeing yet another championship this upcoming season, Katzer has overcome many obstacles in his path to get to where he sits. When asked about how it feels to be a part of something historic and always be tied to Ferris' history for the rest of time, Katzer couldn't be happier.

"You know, really thinking about it, it's awesome, I guess I'm pretty blessed to be apart of this and glory to god for getting me to this point in my career."

# Heart of a champion

## Iosefa Saipaia's rise to Ferris State football stardom

**Caden Hofmann**  
Special Editions Editor

Faith, family and football are the three most powerful things when talking about Polynesian athletes. For Ferris State linebacker Iosefa Saipaia, it's no different.

Similar to many Samoan families, their last name is very important to them.

"The way I was raised is that your last name is everything," Saipaia said. "In everything you do, you represent your last name. If I was a janitor, I would have to be the best janitor in the world. In football I play the best football I can to represent that last name."

Saipaia showed that on the field this season as he led one of the top defenses in the nation to the national championship.

After earning the starting linebacker position midway through last season, he built up success and turned in a tremendous 2024 campaign.

Saipaia led the Bulldogs with 93 total tackles. He also recorded one interception and eight tackles for loss.

Saipaia was always destined to be a football player, his father Blaine, played seven seasons in the NFL for the St. Louis Ramd and the Detroit Lions. Two of Iosefa's six siblings also played college football, including his older brother, Sio Saipaia, who was a member of the Ferris football team this season.

Sio couldn't be happier to suit up alongside his brother every week.

"Playing with Sefa was an incredible blessing," Sio said. "I got to see the same little brother I player Halo I with, watched Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on Saturday

mornings with, accomplish so much in three years."

Since Saipaia grew up watching his dad play, hanging around the facilities and attending games, the love for the sport came easily to him.

"He never forced the game on us which was a good thing," Saipaia said. "It was just natural; you want to do what your dad does. Around middle school, I realized that I wanted to do this thing and take it as far as I could."

After starting for his high school team as a freshman in Colorado, his family decided to move to Ohio for better football. He would play mostly junior varsity his sophomore season before suffering an injury pre-season that forced him to miss half of his junior year. However, he broke out his senior year, earning All-Ohio and becoming a larger name on the recruiting trail.

Saipaia received looks from a couple of DI schools, but COVID-19 made the recruiting process more difficult. He was still getting FCS looks and committed to FCS school Robert Morris.

However, Saipaia decided to take one last visit to Ferris before signing day and the school showed him enough to get him to flip his commitment.

"I could feel all of the love from the coaches," Saipaia said. "[Tony] Annese preaches about love all the time and I could tell that he meant it, I wanted to be a part of that family."

Saipaia saw mostly practice-squad work his first two seasons, as he prepared the starters for the games ahead. Yet, he knew it was all a part of the plan and used his family's faith to keep



Photo by: Sam Mulder | Torch Photographer

**Iosefa Saipaia collected 93 tackles and one interception in the Bulldogs' championship season.**

working.

"It was kinda like being a part of the family in my culture, you have to know your role," Saipaia said. "My role in this family at the time was to be a scout team guy and give it my best. I wore that with pride and did everything I could to make the team better."

Midway through the 2023 campaign, Saipaia won the starting job and did not look back. The team would ultimately fall in the first round of the playoffs to Grand Valley and Saipaia took it upon himself to make sure that did not happen again.

"I knew something needed to change, we didn't have any leaders vocally and I didn't want to lose again like that," Saipaia said. "I had to get rid of things that were distracting me and re-focus and re-evaluate why I play this game, who I am and what I want to do."

His leadership can be seen through the way his

teammates talk about him, junior running back Kannon Katzer had high praise for Saipaia as a leader.

"He doesn't just lead our defense; he leads our entire team," Katzer said. "Everybody follows him because he has earned our trust."

Bouncing back meant a lot to Saipaia, along with the rest of the team, the early playoff exit didn't sit well with him.

Saipaia and the Bulldogs bounced back, reclaiming the national championship with a convincing 49-14 win in McKinney, Texas.

Even though Saipaia was a part of the two other championship teams, being a leader and a playmaker on this one meant a lot to him.

"Making big plays on a big stage like that is a different feeling," Saipaia said. "Just being able to do that in front of my family, being able to give glory to God it was amazing. After that loss in the playoff the year before

everything I did was to get to that feeling in McKinney again."

Following the championship win, Saipaia entered his name into the transfer portal and has decided to commit to Bowling Green State University, a DI college in the MAC conference.

A lot went into the decision to transfer but Saipaia feels like he has made his mark as a Bulldog.

"I feel like I did everything I could," Saipaia said. "I played the role of the scout guy, played the special teams specialist, I played the backup who won the starting spot and proved he belonged and I played the team captain role. With one more year left, I just wanted to throw my hat in the ring and show I can be that guy at the DI level."

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