

Minutes of the Meeting of the Faculty Board on Athletics
November 21, 2025
200 Main Building, 12-1:30 PM

Members Present: Patricia Bellia (Chair), Colin Barr, Pete Bevacqua, Ann-Marie Conrado, Patrick Corrigan, Brian Coughlin for Rev. Gerry Olinger, CSC, Bridget Deehan, Ann Firth, Umesh Garg, Pat Holmes, Mike Niemier, Cara Ocobock, Katie Wowak

Members Excused: Annie Coleman, Darren Davis

Athletics Liaisons: Missy Conboy (Policy/Legal), Heidi Uebelhor (Compliance), Jen Vining-Smith (Student-Athlete Services)

Guests: Breanna Jenco (Head Women's Golf Coach), Micaela Kastor (softball student-athlete), Jacob Simonis (Compliance)

1. Opening Prayer

Professor Bellia called the meeting to order and invited Professor Corrigan to offer the opening prayer.

2. Minutes of October 13, 2025

The Faculty Board on Athletics (Board) unanimously approved the minutes of the meeting of October 13, 2025.

3. Chair's Announcements

Professor Bellia approved the conference schedule for men's basketball and the spring schedule for men's tennis. In terms of schedule changes, she approved game time updates for men's and women's basketball, the addition of a tournament for men's golf (with no class miss implications), and a date shift for a fencing tournament (with the same number of overall class misses). Diving had a schedule change (shifting from the Texas Diving Invite to the SMU Invitational) that required two divers to miss class to arrive at the venue a day early for platform practice, and a women's tennis student-athlete was released from a single class to make a flight in advance of the ITA Sectional Championships.

The scheduling of the Pittsburgh football game for a noon start on November 14 necessitated some changes to the team's meeting and departure schedule. Professor Bellia approved the schedule adjustments in consultation with the Office of Academic Services for Student-Athletes. Based on various circumstances, six students were required to attend class in accordance with the original schedule and to miss team events prior to departure.

Professor Bellia approved three excused absence requests for individual student-athletes, including for swimmer Carli Cronk to participate in the Deaflympics; for fencer Ahmed Hesham

to compete in a World Cup competition as a member of the Egyptian national team; and for leprechaun Riley Catena to perform at a men's basketball game.

Professor Bellia also approved absences for post-season competition for women's soccer (ACC championship and NCAA second round), men's soccer (NCAA first round), women's tennis (individual NCAA championship, for Bianca Molnar in singles and doubles and Bojana Pozder in doubles), and men's tennis (individual NCAA championship, for Sebastian Dominko in singles). Women's tennis presented the possibility of a student-athlete having a match-day conflict with sophomore registration. Under the new policy that she and the Registrar proposed and that the Provost approved in summer 2025, the student was given an adjusted registration time. (That policy provides for an early priority registration time for students "facing a game-day conflict in a final elimination phase of the season.")

4. Introduction of Breanna Jenco, Head Women's Golf Coach

Professor Bellia and Mr. Bevacqua introduced Coach Jenco and spoke briefly about the interview process for the head women's golf coach. Coach Jenco shared that she is originally from Avon, Indiana, and played collegiate golf at Xavier. Following her graduation, the Akron coach offered her a graduate assistant position to allow her to pursue a Masters in Accounting. She then returned to her alma mater as head coach, a dream job, and she experienced both fun and success in that role. That said, Notre Dame was on the short list of "next" jobs she planned to pursue if it opened. She shared that Notre Dame really checks all the key boxes. Notre Dame's values and the academic reputation are in line with her own belief system and represent the caliber of institution at which she aspired to work. Her husband is from Naperville, and he is also a big Notre Dame fan, and they have two children (a daughter, JoJo, and a son, Maverick). In her short experience, the Notre Dame women's golf student-athletes have been great, but there are growing pains. She is committed to helping them to be successful across all facets of their college lives.

Professor Bellia asked about her experience (to date) recruiting to Notre Dame. Coach Jenco said it was great to be hired in advance of July 1 so that she didn't lose ground in the recruiting cycle. At Xavier, there was a lower response rate when she reached out to begin the process. But as the Notre Dame head coach, everyone wanted to talk to her. She feels her staff needs to do a good job prioritizing recruits, given the high response rate. She felt the staff performed well in recruiting, but lost one recruit to Vanderbilt and one to Georgia, with the Vanderbilt loss being the bigger disappointment.

Professor Garg asked about the class miss policy and how that affects scheduling. Coach Jenco shared that the schedule for this year was already set when she arrived, but she will change some things in the future. She plans to utilize fall break for competition, and she understands that the week leading into break is a tough academic week. She also shared that the trickiest part of golf is getting invited to key events. A team must have a .500 record to go to the NCAAs. It is also important to win a tournament. It takes creative scheduling to hit those marks. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of tournaments available in the Midwest in early spring. In a couple weeks, she will attend the coaches' convention, and network for this very purpose.

Professor Bellia asked Coach Jenco to comment on how the transfer portal and NIL affect her sport. She shared that with the *House* settlement, she needs to stay with a nine-person roster. It may be necessary to use the portal, as the larger classes are graduating and it is difficult to fill all those slots with freshmen. Regarding NIL, it will help supplement the scholarship piece. There are companies out at the tournaments approaching students about using their equipment (but fewer monetary deals).

In closing, she believes her team members are happy, enjoy the academic challenges, and are not inclined to leave. She hopes to have nine student-athletes who are all competitive for a spot in the line-up. This approach will be a change for the current team, but this supports student-athletes trying to get better.

5. Introduction of Micaela Kastor, Softball Student-Athlete, and Screening of *You are Home* (film by Micaela Kastor & Thomas Larson)

Professor Bellia introduced the short film *You are Home*, which tells the story of Melissa Cook Stadium. After the Board viewed the film, Micaela Kastor, one of the film's directors and a softball student-athlete, talked about Paul and Linda Demo's involvement with the softball team and the community. When Micaela found out about the Melissa Cook story, she was surprised that not many of her teammates were aware of what had happened to Melissa, even though they played in Melissa Cook Stadium and frequently saw Paul and Linda around the program. Ms. Kastor approached the Demos to encourage them to let her tell their story. She, along with her co-director Thomas Larson, spent about four months filming and conducting interviews, producing extensive raw footage that they eventually trimmed to the final 11-minute film.

They have shown the film at four different festivals throughout the country, and have received some awards, but that was not the goal. The film was intended as a "thank you" to Melissa's parents. Ms. Kastor also feels it is important to tell the story of each stadium and building on campus, so that students understand more about the history of those who support Notre Dame.

Mr. Bevacqua asked Ms. Kastor about her career goals. She shared that she grew up in Los Angeles and fell in love with the entertainment world and hopes to stay with sports and television. Ms. Vining-Smith asked Ms. Kastor to share how the Notre Dame softball alumni network has helped her. Ms. Kastor said that she had the opportunity to shadow Jen Sharron Richardson, a former softball pitcher and currently the producer of *The Jimmy Kimmel Show*. She also had an internship opportunity on the show *9-1-1*.

Professor Corrigan asked about the softball student-athlete experience, and the impact of the 56-game schedule and the associated travel. She responded by saying that the team loves to travel, typically leaving campus on Thursday and returning on Sunday. She went on to point out that there are many on the team with tough majors. Personally, she has had no problem working through academic challenges and mentioned that the team's academic counselor encourages the student-athletes to connect with their professors so that professors understand the students' other obligations.

The discussion turned to the challenges of student-athletes remaining integrated in the broader Notre Dame community. Ms. Kastor commented that while Notre Dame students are typically very rooted in dorm culture, she never felt fully integrated into it. That said, she has made great friends within her major and with her teammates. One of her great friends is her co-director, whom she initially approached with her idea for the film. Finally, she shared that she has never felt that student-athletes at Notre Dame are treated differently, as she has always been supported by the non-athlete community.

Professor Bellia congratulated Ms. Kastor on an amazing project and wished her continued success in her senior year.

6. Meeting with Micki Kidder, Vice President for Undergraduate Enrollment

Professor Bellia introduced Ms. Kidder to the group and provided information about her background. Ms. Kidder shared key information and entertained questions on a number of enrollment related topics, including: (1) demographic shifts creating the potential for an “enrollment cliff” (which, given Notre Dame’s broad-based enrollment plan, should not have as great an impact here as is projected for other institutions); (2) changing family perceptions of the affordability and value of a four-year college education; (3) the need to provide price assurance—i.e., to communicate the full cost of the college experience—to families, which are very price-sensitive at present; (4) the impact of and scrutiny associated with the Supreme Court’s 2023 ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, disallowing the use of race as a decisive factor in the college admissions process; (5) the future role of standardized tests, including return of Ivy League schools to requiring ACT/SAT scores, Notre Dame’s decision to remain test-optional at least for the 2026 and 2027 cycles, a commitment to coaches to be transparent and timely with any future decisions, and the need for students to demonstrate quantitative evidence of admissibility (such as AP test scores) even in an environment where fewer students are taking the ACT/SAT; (6) trends in international applications, including the challenges of fraud (fictitious schools, falsification of data and transcripts, testing center fraud) in connection with such applications; (7) challenges in the financial aid space; and (8) the high yield of the “The Rally” (i.e., Notre Dame’s admitted students weekends), with over 80 percent of students who attend ultimately enrolling.

Ms. Kidder discussed additional athletics-related issues, including the impact of roster sizes as adjusted by the *House* settlement, the effect of the overall increase in applications, processes surrounding the transfer portal, and mid-year enrollment.

After discussion, Professor Bellia thanked Ms. Kidder for her time and her partnership with Athletics.

7. Adjournment:

Professor Bellia deferred the remaining agenda items (Athletic Updates and Update on the Working Group on Student-Athlete Integration) to the December meeting. She adjourned the meeting at 1:35 pm.

