



University
of Rochester

2026

Lysle 'Spike' Garnish
Scholar-Athlete
Awards



September 4, 2026

The 2026 Garnish Scholar-Athlete Awards

Today we recognize 10 of our senior students as Garnish Scholars. The Garnish Program was created in honor of Lysle "Spike" Garnish, coach and mentor to many Rochester students from 1930 to 1948. He became a trainer and assistant basketball coach in 1931. He was named an assistant baseball coach in 1932. Spike was an assistant football coach from 1945-48.

The Friends of Rochester Athletics, through an alumni committee, reviews nominations of students from our varsity teams who have achieved at a high level in both their athletic and academic pursuits through their junior year. From these nominees, a small number are selected as Garnish Scholars.

Periodically, the Garnish Memorial Citation is given to a graduate, faculty member, or a staff member for dedication and contributions to the intercollegiate athletic program.

These students represent the ideal of the scholar-athlete. They lead our teams on the field of play, while doing outstanding work in the classroom. I am continually inspired by what our students are able to achieve when given the opportunities at a great institution like Rochester. What we know about the students that we recruit is that they set high goals for themselves inside and outside the classroom. What we learn from our Garnish Scholars, and reaffirm today, is that Rochester students are able to demonstrate educational excellence through an outstanding combination of athletic and academic achievement.

The Garnish Committee is proud to present to you these exemplary University of Rochester undergraduates and the Friends of Rochester Athletics continues to remind us of the values of this institution through the Garnish Program.

—George VanderZwaag
Executive Director of Athletics



The 2025 Garnish recipients (Top L-R): Anya Arseneau, Elizabeth Carelton, Aadit Jain, Max McClung, Ruby Moore, Corvin Oprea, Maddie White. **(Bottom, L-R):** Ashton Prescott, Jackson Kane, Cece Vassallo, each pictured with Executive Director of Athletics George VanderZwaag.



CREDITS: The 2026 Garnish winner interviews were conducted by Dennis O'Donnell.

Nate Attwell

Men's Swimming & Diving

HOMETOWN: Dobbs Ferry, NY **MAJOR:** Biochemistry

Your major is Biochemistry with Physics as a minor. Do they tie together at all?

I'd say they do quite a bit. In my experience, biochemistry applies the principles of chemistry (interactions between molecules and atoms) to the study of life (biology). Physics includes the study of a lot of the phenomena and principles explaining the molecular interactions of chemistry, so it's very rewarding to derive some of the fundamental theory behind what my "major" studies in a few of my "minor" courses!

What made Biochemistry and Physics attractive as an academic focus?

I think I've always been very interested in how things work, I recall being quite interested in submarines and rockets when I was younger. As I got older, I began to develop an interest in pharmaceuticals and their design, which led me to choose biomedical engineering as my initial major during my freshman year. From my first day in intro biology class, I was fascinated by the more "biochemistry" focused topics the professor discussed, such as the hydrophobic effect and the interactions of different types of lipids. So, I quickly switched my major, and I've discovered a deep interest in the fundamental chemistry (and underlying physics) behind the interactions of biological molecules, which tie into my interest in how things work. It is quite gratifying to see how all components of a system piece together, and my biochemistry and physics interests allow me to search for this feeling in a smaller, living landscape.

Last summer, you did an internship at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. What did you do there?

I was working in the molecular therapeutics division, where I assisted in experiments studying two proteins, pendrin and pfCRT (functions not super relevant!). I was very inexperienced with research, so my day to day work mainly consisted of fairly early steps in the overall experiment, like cloning (multiplying the DNA encoding the proteins) and purification of the proteins for future study down the line.

Which courses have you enjoyed in your first three years on campus? What made them enjoyable?

The most enjoyable classes for me in my first three years on campus have been the first two organic chemistry classes, and the first physical chemistry class. The organic chemistry classes were really fun for me, and I felt that the material enabled me to be very creative. The reaction mechanisms we studied in organic chemistry employ a lot of spatial and abstract thinking, and solving the problems showcased a fundamental understanding of the working of these systems, which was super gratifying to me. Physical chemistry introduced some of the fundamental quantum mechanics behind the atom, which also really hit at my interest in understanding how systems work. Furthermore, physical chemistry was a challenging course, but it was extremely rewarding to work through long problems and arrive at elegant solutions.

Coach Wylam talked about the goal each off-season is to improve your performance in the different events. As a first-year, you had the 11th-highest point total. That rose to fifth highest during your sophomore year, and to second highest last year. How do you achieve the improvement?

I think for me, it's just been about being as consistent as possible. I try my best to work to my maximum ability in each practice during the season, and I think this has helped me improve my performance in my events over my time at the university. In addition, I try my best to stay consistent with swimming during my winter and summer breaks, which gives me more time (than during the conventional six-month season) to develop my fitness and technique and not have to totally restart my training after each summer.



In an event as short as the 100 freestyle, how do you achieve the faster times? Is it based on technique?

I'm definitely not an expert, and swimming performance is pretty complicated, however I think improving in the 100 freestyle is broken into three categories: speed, endurance, and technique. Water is very viscous, and the arms and body need to be placed in such a way as to minimize resistance while maximizing the amount of water pulled by your hands. So, adjusting these positions are the technical changes that allow you to move more efficiently and generate more propulsion through the water. Then, speed is how fast you can move your arms and legs while maintaining this technique, with a higher stroke rate and faster kick with good technique allowing you to move faster. And then fitness quantifies how long you can maintain this speed before becoming fatigued and slowing down. So, to improve in the 100, these three areas need to be developed, which can be targeted with a variety of specific training sets. Fitness training pushes the body for longer efforts to build endurance, speed sets focus on maximum exertion for a short period of time, and technical sets are often very intentional, removing speed and simply focusing on the positioning of the body and arms.

As a junior, you were added to the swim team's Recruiting Coordinator Council. How often does the group meet? What projects do you undertake?

This group met around 5-6 times a semester, mainly in advance of recruiting events, where prospective swimmers would visit the university, stay overnight with current swimmers, and learn about the program. We would plan and coordinate these recruiting weekend events, which include games and team trips in Rochester to provide these potential recruits with a fun and memorable experience.

Sammy Besztery

Baseball

HOMETOWN: Chicago, IL **MAJOR:** Data Science & Economics

Your academic majors are Data Science and Economics. How do they fit together?

Data is everywhere. Learning new ways to look at and understand data helps me look at economics from different perspectives and identify new patterns or explain how and why things work. Data science tools can really be applied to anything, so I think it pairs well with economics.

Please tell us what Data Science does.

It allows you to identify patterns and trends, look at things from different perspectives, come up with new ideas to better understand something, and find ways to improve things.

Are you doing any T-A work in either major? If so, what topics are you instructing to other students?

I have not yet done any T-A work in either major.

Which courses have you enjoyed in your first three years on campus? What made them enjoyable?

I really enjoyed Freakonomics and Econometrics because the professors were very passionate about the subject and challenged the students to participate, which really helped me learn the content. They were challenging classes, but the professors wanted to make sure each student was truly understanding the material. They pushed me to think in new ways, and I had great experiences and took a lot away from both classes.

Did you intern anywhere over the last two summers? What did you do?

I interned this past summer for Cooper Farms as a part of the Strategic Improvement team, where I took on several projects, including identifying and measuring egg loss and building an Audit App.

This is an exciting summer in Chicago with both the Cubs and the White Sox battling for division titles. Do you have a rooting interest for one or the other?

Definitely the Cubs. Hopefully by the time this is printed, they will have caught up to the Brewers for the division lead!

What's the most challenging part of playing shortstop?

Probably keeping your hands warm when you're standing out there in 30-degree weather in early March. It is a lot tougher to make a play when you can hardly feel your fingertips.



When URochester is in the field, are you directing the defense?

Everyone is usually set and ready to make a play. If not, I'll let them know. My focus is mainly on making a play myself and knowing where to be in different situations. Sometimes, with runners on base, I will call pick plays.

Were you a shortstop when you played at St. Ignatius?

I played some shortstop, but mainly second base. The shortstop was a classmate of mine and is also a college baseball player at Butler. He is a close friend of mine and is my training buddy when we are both back home during breaks.

Where did you play summer ball since you have been a URochester student?

I played in New York in the PGCBBL after my freshman year and in Ohio in the GLSCL after my sophomore year.

How did you become involved with the University?

I attended a few baseball camps after my junior year of high school, and Coach Reina reached out. I visited soon after with my dad and immediately knew it was the place I wanted to be.

Nora Chen

Women's Track & Field

HOMETOWN: Wallingford, PA **MAJOR:** Psychology & Brain and Cognitive Sciences

When you run in the 60 meter hurdles, does it seem sometimes that your back foot hits the track and the next hurdle is almost right in front of you?

No, not really. When we practice, we typically move the hurdles in slightly to account for both the physiological difference of the situation and to work on our turnover. This means that at a meet, the hurdles are actually spaced farther apart than we're used to at practice. However, the meet day adrenaline more than makes up for the difference, so it's not a problem. If anything, I feel like I'm taking too long to get to the next hurdle. It may look like the hurdles are immediately after each other, but I promise it looks and feels slower than that as the person on the track.

How do you build quickness for a race like the 400?

I guess it depends on what you mean by quickness and what part of the race you're talking about. The way I see it, the 400 requires two core ingredients for success: speed and strength. The speed and quickness you see at the start of the race is all about power. Similar to shorter sprints, this type of speed comes from getting stronger in the weight room and working on acceleration. However, the quickness you see towards the second half of the race is a different beast entirely. You can only hold your top speed for so long, so while the very beginning is all about getting out as fast as possible, the majority of the race is actually about doing what you can to ride momentum and preserve your speed. In the later part of the race, what may look like quickness is just deceleration at a slower rate than your competitors. This type of quickness is built through improving stamina and lactic tolerance, which we get from running longer distances at a higher percentage of our top speed (EX: 450m at 90% speed).

As each leg of the 4x400 relay is completed, the next foursome steps on the track waiting for a handoff. Is there any talk between the competitors, or is it all focused on your teammate running to you with the baton?

No, there's never any conversation when you're on the line. When you step up to receive your hand off, you have to act like it's just you and your teammate out there. You need to be focused on the incoming runner to help them find you, encourage them in the last few meters of their leg, and judge their body language to determine when you need to take off. When you're juggling all that information at once, there's no room for getting cozy with competitors. It's you, your teammate, and the baton: nothing else.

Let's talk about academics. Are your Psychology and the Brain & Cognitive Science majors linked at all?

Yes, absolutely! Psychology and BCS have a fair amount of overlap, and for that reason, it's a more common combination for double majors. They feed into each other very nicely because you get the best of both worlds: BCS helps to explain how the brain works and the mechanics behind it whereas psychology helps you understand why things work the way that they do and what this looks like at the individual level.

With the idea of keeping focused in the race itself, do your psychology classes help develop a competitive mindset?

That's a great question. I would say that the answer is both yes and no for this one. If I look at the overall influence of the psychology courses that I've taken, I would probably say no. For the most part, I would say that what I've learned hasn't been super translatable to my success as an athlete. However, the big exception here has been PSYC 262: Approach to Human Motivation. This course is taught differently than most others in that it involves a lot of reflection about how the concepts learned apply to your life. It's something that's helped me to better engage with my sport and be a more balanced athlete.



Where have you been able to do research and interning in the summer and in early fall before track workouts begin?

Over the summer, I've been doing research at the Cognitive Development Lab (CDL) in Meliora Hall. In the fall, I'll continue my work within the CDL while also starting an independent study with Dr. Craig Cypher, our sport psychologist.

As an upper-class student, what do you speak about to the younger team members, both in terms of the track program and about the University itself?

There are so many wonderful people here at this university, both within the team as well as outside of it. Yes, there's always going to be something to work on within courses and within track, but there is incredible value in developing community. Work hard, study hard, but make sure you dedicate time towards building your friendships as well. Go on that spontaneous trip to the movies or out for ice cream with your friends. It may seem like a small, inconsequential choice at the time, but it's something that will continue to provide you happiness many months and years later.

Who were some of the upper-class students who helped to guide you when you were in your first year?

Being on the national 4x4 team my freshman year, I would certainly say that I got a lot of guidance from Kate Isaac, Megan Bell, and Madeline O'Connell. However, without Jael Fleurant, I don't even know if I would've joined the team and had the chance to meet any of these amazing people. When I met Jael, she insisted that I come get ice cream with the rest of the women's sprint team, even though I wasn't sure about doing track yet. Because of her, I got to meet all the wonderful women on our team and the rest is history. She was always my rock, and I'm forever grateful that she was the first person I got to meet.

Braydon Felsinger

Football

HOMETOWN: Landisville, PA **MAJOR:** Mechanical Engineering

As a senior now, you have to submit a project in Mechanical Engineering. Have you decided what that will be?

No, I have not decided what it will be yet. This coming fall, I begin my senior design course in which I will learn more about mechanical design using tools such as finite element analysis. During this semester we will work on 3-4 projects in various teams to complete a design project, doing all aspects of the project, including design, analysis, building, and testing. In the spring of 2027, I will start the second half of senior design in which we get to select a semester long project. The previous projects that I am interested in are the Houston Astros sponsored baseball bat contour analysis and the L3Harris aerospace projects, including the design of FMS prototypes.

Why did you choose Mechanical Engineering as a major?

Multiple reasons. I always enjoyed math, especially calculus, and engineering gave me an opportunity to utilize math in real world scenarios. Additionally, I took two engineering classes in high school where I got to see the impacts of engineering and was intrigued by the innovative aspect of it. A mechanical engineering degree will provide me with employment opportunities that will allow me to use my skills and education to work towards innovative designs, helping an industry move forward.

Where have you interned in ME?

This past summer I was able to intern at PPL Electric Utilities back home in Lancaster. I had the opportunity to work in multiple roles, including reliability engineering, where I learned about the power industry. One of the reasons I chose to intern here was because PPL gave me the chance to learn a new field / industry that I would not otherwise get exposed to as a mechanical engineer. This allowed me to expand my skills and increase my knowledge.

What did you take away from those internships?

One of the biggest takeaways I had from this internship is always taking the chance to try something new and not be afraid of being uncomfortable. I initially thought that the PPL internship role wasn't the most aligned with my educational background; however, once I was in the role, I realized I was able to be a contributing member of the team. I helped to scope out new projects, complete field work, and even completed my own project. In addition, I learned a lot from my internship at PPL, which I attribute to being focused on asking questions and taking advantage of every opportunity that the internship afforded me. I was able to work with various teams, shadow different groups in the company, and attend events that provided me with learning opportunities about PPL and the power industry as a whole.

Are you doing any T-A work in ME?

I am not currently doing any TA work, but I am exploring this role for Spring semester. For the fall semester, I will continue to participate in political science research under Professor Gamm. I learned about Professor Gamm's research from my teammates and began working on his research this past spring. I enjoyed working with Professor Gamm and Connor Kann, with the research being focused on examining a large archive of state party platforms and contributing to the completion of one of the largest databases on state political positions, identifying the origins of political polarization, and the culture war.

What are some of the big challenges playing in the secondary?

Some of the biggest challenges playing in secondary, specifically safety, is understanding the playbooks with checks to different formations, schemes, or personnel. At safety, I need to be focused from the time the last play ends, being ready to get the play call from the sideline and ensuring everyone knows the call. I also need to remain attentive to the offense leaving the huddle in order to identify formations and personnel. At this time, I will then need to be prepared to make checks based on these. Additionally, in the secondary we need to be focused on stopping the big plays. This is not only in the pass game, but when we get the chance, ensuring we make the tackle. We are the last line of defense in most plays and need to always be prepared to make the play in front of us.



As the receiver comes off the line, what are you looking for?

This is coverage dependent, but I am always reading my keys at the start of the play. No matter what, I am getting my run pass read and from there beginning to complete my 1/11 of the play. Specifically, if I am in coverage I will key the inside hip of the receiver as this allows me to see when they are going to break in a certain direction and can focus on their movement.

Do you counsel the first-year students on classes, time scheduling, etc. in addition to understanding the defensive schemes on game day?

Yes, I try to help in anyway I can with the underclassmen on the team, even some of the 2nd and 3rd year players. In our family program, I am given a little brother who I help to mentor and am available to answer any questions he has. I am also a source for anyone on the defense, especially those in the secondary, for any questions, helping the younger players understand not only their position but the players around them. I also have other teammates come to me with questions based on coursework, who to go to if they need help with a class or subject, or are just unsure who to contact / talk to with anything going on.

How did you become involved at the University?

First being a part of the football family. We help with different activities and volunteering opportunities throughout the year such as the National Marrow Donor Program Registry, helping incoming students move in, setting up and tearing down events such as the activity fairs, along with much more. Additionally, I am involved with Morgans Message attending meetings throughout the semester to promote student athlete mental health.

Grayson Honig

Field Hockey

HOMETOWN: Pittsburgh, PA **MAJOR:** Data Science

You spent the spring in Florence, Italy for Study Abroad. How was that?

Study abroad was truly one of the most valuable experiences I've had in college. I got to meet people from all over the world and experience a completely different culture while still having a sense of community through the University of Rochester. What I loved most about Florence was that I wasn't just there as a tourist. I was actually living there- figuring out everyday life, exploring the city, trying new foods, traveling around Europe on weekends, and getting comfortable being somewhere completely unfamiliar. It definitely pushed me outside of my comfort zone, but I came back feeling much more independent and open-minded. I also made some really close friendships that I know I'll carry with me beyond college.

Florence has many Renaissance masterpieces. Did you have a chance to see any of them?

Yes! The Uffizi Gallery was definitely one of the highlights for me. I actually took a class while I was in Florence called History of the Jews in Italy, and a big part of the class focused on Jewish life during the Renaissance, so seeing the art from that period was especially interesting. One of my favorites was Botticelli's The Adoration of the Magi. We talked a lot in class about the political, religious, and cultural environment of Renaissance Florence, so being able to see artwork from that same period in person made a lot of what we were learning feel much more real. It was really cool to be learning about the Renaissance in class and then walk around Florence and actually see that history around me.

How did your internship tie in with your major of Data Science?

My internship this summer at BNY showed me what Data Science can look like in the real world. At school, it's easy to think of Data Science as mostly coding, statistics, or working with data sets. At BNY, I learned that there's a much bigger picture. I was working with data and technology, but I was also learning how to understand the business problem behind them, ask better questions, and think about how different pieces of a system connect. That was probably one of my biggest takeaways from the summer because it helped me see Data Science as much more than just the technical side.

What did you take away from the experience in Florence?

The biggest thing I took away was probably learning to be comfortable being uncomfortable. I was living in a new country, surrounded by people I didn't know, and doing things completely differently than I was used to. You have to figure things out as you go, and that made me much more independent. I also learned how much you can learn simply by being around people with different backgrounds and perspectives. Between Florence and the people I met there, I came back with a much broader perspective and a greater appreciation for experiences that push me outside of what I already know.

There is a concentration of business and economics spinning off from Data Science. Can you please elaborate on that?

One of the things I really like about Data Science is that it gives me a strong technical foundation, but I've also wanted to understand the business side of how technology and data are actually used. That's why I chose to take courses in accounting, marketing, and Brand Management: Made in Italy as part of my concentration. Accounting helped me understand how businesses measure performance and make financial decisions, while marketing and brand management gave me a better understanding of customers, consumer behavior, and how companies position themselves.

I think that combination is really valuable because Data Science isn't just about analyzing numbers or writing code. It's about understanding the problem you're trying to solve and being able to communicate what the data actually means to a business. My technical background in Data Science, combined with the business knowledge I've gained through those courses, allows me to look at a problem from both sides and think not just about what the data says, but how it can actually be used to make better decisions.



You interned at Techstra Solutions including work in IT consulting and AI research. What sort of tasks were you handling?

At Techstra Solutions, I focused on research around agentic AI and how it could be used to help the business automate different processes. I looked at how AI agents could go beyond simply answering questions and actually handle multi-step tasks and workflows with less manual involvement. A big part of my work was thinking through where these technologies could realistically create value for the business and what kinds of processes could be improved through automation. I really enjoyed that because it combined my interest in AI and Data Science with the business side of figuring out how technology can make processes more efficient.

In field hockey, you've developed a knack for scoring GWGs. You have 11 in three years (and 23 goals overall). One of your winners came in a shootout vs. RPI in 2024. Is the shootout a tense situation?

Definitely. A shootout is one of the most pressure-filled situations because everything happens so quickly and there's not much time to think. You know your teammates, coaches, and everyone watching are counting on you. For me, the biggest thing is staying calm and trusting what I've practiced. Once I'm out there, I don't want to think about all of the possible outcomes. I just focus on the next move and trust myself. Having played with the same teammates for several years also helps because I know they're behind me no matter what happens.

As a senior and a team leader, what will you talk about with the younger players?

I think one of the biggest things I want to talk to the younger players about is being coachable and working hard. Some of the biggest growth I've had as a player has come from being willing to listen, take feedback, make mistakes, and come back the next day determined to get better. You don't have to have all the answers, but you do have to be willing to learn.

Julianna Lyons

Softball

HOMETOWN: Pittsford, NY **MAJOR:** Biochemistry & Economics

On the last day of the Liberty League Tournament in 2026, URochester had to defeat Ithaca to force a winner-take-all game (vs. Ithaca) for the league title. Did the players talk among themselves before the first game? Anything you can share here?

Before the games that Saturday, we talked about taking the day one game at a time. We couldn't get too ahead of ourselves or the task of beating Ithaca twice may seem too overwhelming. By reducing it to thinking about one game, one inning, and even one out at a time, we kept ourselves focused on what we could do for the team in the present moment. This mentality was super helpful in allowing us to beat Ithaca back-to-back.

URochester won that first game, 2-1, with Maddie White throwing a two-hitter. You played a big role in the second win, hitting a grand slam HR to spark an 8-5 victory. What do you recall about that game?

Going into the tournament, I was in a hitting slump and wasn't performing my best at the plate. Previously that day I had come up to bat with runners in scoring position and I wasn't able to drive them in, which was frustrating because I really wanted to produce for my team and help us win the Liberty League title. So when I was able to come up to bat in a big situation with the bases loaded and hit a home run giving us a substantial lead over Ithaca, I was overjoyed. Breaking out of my slump in such a big moment was so exciting, and I was most excited that I was able to help contribute to our win.

In the last two years, you have started all 83 games (77 at third base, six catching). Do you want to catch more games this season?

I would love to catch more this season if I have the opportunity. Our catcher last year was a senior who graduated, so Coach has mentioned that I will likely get the chance to step into that role, which I am very excited about. Catching was my main position growing up, so returning to catching my senior year would be a really fun way to wrap up my softball career.

Playing at 3B brings you closer to the hitter to try and take away the slap hits by a left-hand hitter. Have you had any who feinted a slap, then swung away with you creeping in?

Yes, there have been many times when I am playing in, protecting against a bunt or a soft slap and the batter hits it past me, hard off the bat. This is actually exactly how Coach has me set up to play. My approach is to play close enough to defend against anything softly hit, forcing the batter to try to hit it past me. If the batter then decides to take a full swing, I then adjust my positioning on the next pitch accordingly.

Is that the most challenging part of playing third base?

I think the reaction time is definitely the hardest part of playing third base. When a right handed batter hits it to third, it usually means they turned on an inside pitch and likely hit it pretty hard. Oftentimes I don't have the time to think about my footwork or approach before the ball gets to me which is challenging. This aspect is especially difficult when I am playing in to protect against a bunt or slap-hitter.

You have worked in the URMC Halterman Lab and the Fu Biochemistry Lab. What responsibilities did you have in both labs?

In the Halterman Lab, I am a technical assistant and I help collect data from the patients involved in our studies. We study how telemedicine programs can help families manage their children's asthma, so I speak to patients and their parents over the phone to complete quarterly surveys about their asthma symptoms and experiences with medication use and telemedicine visits. In the Fu Lab, I am investigating the effects of mutations in tRNA modification enzymes and how this contributes to neurodevelopmental disorders such as epileptic encephalopathy. Last semester, I worked on validating a knock-out human cell line we had created.

Last summer, you were selected for the 'Dfine' medical internship in Barcelona, Spain working hands-on with patients. What did you learn at that internship?

At my internship in Spain, I learned so much about clinical medicine



practice and surgery. I was able to shadow patient visits, treatments, and procedures where I learned about hair transplants, the effects of various dermatology treatments, and also how to effectively interact with patients as a provider. I got to have many of these interactions in Spanish, so I improved my Spanish comprehension and speaking skills through this experience as well. Additionally, I was able to work with various surgeons, observing and even scrubbing into surgeries, where I got to see many different types of plastic surgeries and learned about maintaining sterility, suture technique, and intubation.

You've spent more than 100 hours shadowing doctors at Unity Hospital, Monroe Community Hospital, and the Mary Cariola Center. Do the doctors ask for your input and observations when they are done with rounds?

When I was shadowing in the pediatric emergency department at Strong, we would see some intriguing cases where the underlying reason for their visit was unclear or their story did not add up. The doctor I was shadowing worked with the other providers to try and figure out the situation, but she would also allow me to share my thoughts about what might be going on. Although I will say, I think that is pretty unusual, as most often doctors will just ask if I have any questions about the cases we have seen that day.

You've been elected as a Student-Alumni Ambassador. What will you be doing?

As a Student-Alumni Ambassador, I get to participate in a variety of activities promoting the Alumni network at U of R and welcoming incoming students. Our main event each year is working Meliora Weekend, but the position also involves attending networking events, giving campus tours to alumni, staffing Welcome Week activities for incoming first year students, and more. This summer I got to work the Annual Garden Party at the Memorial Art Gallery for university leadership and other society members, faculty, and alumni, which was a super fun experience.

Tia Poulakidas

Women's Basketball

HOMETOWN: Naperville, IL **MAJOR:** Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

What is the next step for you academically once you complete your degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology?

After completing my degree, I hope to pursue opportunities where I can work with wildlife and gain research experience. I am also considering veterinary school, with the possibility of pursuing a career in wildlife or zoological medicine. My next step will likely involve gaining more hands-on experience in wildlife research and animal care, while exploring whether vet school is the right path for me.

You served as President and founder of the Pan-Orthodox Students' Group last year. - How did that evolve?

The last two years I served as vice president and I co-founded the group, but this year I am now serving as president. There was no active space for Orthodox Christians on campus my freshmen year, and it was something I really wanted to have moving forward with my undergraduate career. In the fall of 2024, I thankfully met our president of the last two years, Rachel, and I helped her in the process of making a formally recognized club for Orthodox Christian students. Since then, we've been slowly growing our member base by attending services together, holding group discussions, hosting guest speakers, and more.

You interned at the Phillips Park Zoo and the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago. What did you do at each zoo?

My time at Phillips Park was mainly animal care: cleaning habitats, food prep and feeding, and providing enrichment for the collection animals. Though zookeeping isn't something I want to do in the long run, I had a really great experience there and it definitely solidified my wanting to work with animals. This summer at the Brookfield Zoo I interned in their Environmental Quality department. The biggest part of the job was conducting water quality tests for all the aquarium systems and water features throughout the zoo. We also conducted air quality tests, which are needed less frequently, and regularly process data loggers for temperature and humidity readings across the hundreds of habitats throughout the zoo.

How did the internships come about?

The summer following my freshmen year is when I worked at Phillips Park, which is a short drive from where I live. A family friend knew I was looking for experience in animal care and recommended I try for there. The Brookfield Zoo in Chicago is somewhere I grew up visiting, and their internship program was something always on my radar. It has definitely been a dream having had the opportunity to work there.

You also interned at the Forest Reserve Project. Can you talk about that?

My county's forest preserve district regularly has opportunities for volunteers to assist in their restoration efforts of the local ecosystems. In Illinois (my home state) less than 0.1% of the original prairie remains, with many of the animals that live there having disappeared or are struggling to survive. In past summers where I wasn't working full time, I enjoyed being a small part of that mission to restore the native ecosystem and biodiversity of the area.

On occasion, the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology students go on a field trip to Antarctica. Is there any talk of such a trip this year?

In years past I know they've done semester trips to the Galapagos Islands, which is every ecology and evolution student's dream. With the basketball season running in both semesters and through winter break, I wouldn't be able to participate in a trip like that. But I am hoping that my career path will eventually be able to take me to some cool places around the globe!

As a senior and a team-leader, what will you talk about with the younger players?

First and foremost, it's important our younger players know they can come to me and all the team leaders with anything, whether it be about basketball, academics, or adjusting to the student-athlete life. Balancing the long season with school, and handling all the challenges



that come with that, can be really tough. A fantastic culture has been built on our team over the years, and it's important the younger players know we are all here for each other. On the court though, my biggest goal for my last year is to lead by example: bringing energy, working hard, and being a good teammate. I hope that through this, I can help continue the culture that has been built here and help others in becoming the future leaders of the team.

You were chosen to serve as vice-president of the Varsity Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (VSAAC) this year. What projects is the group planning for 2026-2027?

I can say for certain one of our biggest goals for this upcoming year is to increase engagement within VSAAC and make sure our general committee members feel more involved. We want to plan events that student-athletes across different teams are genuinely excited to participate in, while also creating more connections between athletics and the broader UR community. We really want to get more people excited about Rochester athletics and use our platform to expand our impact in the local community.

How are you able to balance a challenging academic major, leadership roles in the organization you founded and in VSAAC, and playing a varsity sport?

I can definitely say I've been determined to make the absolute most out of my time here at U of R, and I think a big part of balancing everything is being very intentional with my time and learning how to prioritize. I've been forced to be very organized because my schedule is already structured around practices, games, and classes. I can't do everything perfectly, so I've learned to be realistic about what most needs my time and energy. The biggest part of this though is who I surround myself with; my teammates, my classmates, clubmates, coaches, and family, all people who I can lean on and have helped me stay committed to the things that are important to me.

Ethan Samora

Men's Tennis

HOMETOWN: Upper Arlington, OH **MAJOR:** Computational Biology & Statistics

You are studying Computational Biology AND Statistics AND Spanish. Plus you find the time to represent the University on the tennis court. What's your secret?

Honestly, that's a great question, and if there were a secret I'd share it, but there really isn't one. It's just you and a willingness to put in small, sustained effort over time, plus some sacrifices along the way. Being deliberate with your time matters too. I try not to multi task and instead focus on one thing at a time. If I only have a half an hour to study, it might not be much, but I want that time to actually be dedicated studying, not spent half thinking about research or an upcoming match. What helps is that each of these worlds, computational biology, statistics, Spanish, tennis, all come with their own perspective and its own group of people, and that lack of overlap keeps any one of them from getting stale. At the end of the day, it's definitely something everyone can do. I've just worked little by little, one hour at a time, and let the effort gradually pay off.

Last year, you secured a team win over #39 Lake Forest College. The UAA brought three more ranked opponents onto the court. How do you succeed, especially with the rugged academic schedule?

The biggest thing that's helped me succeed in both academics and athletics, especially around crunch time with UAAs and finals, is having hard cutoffs and knowing when to switch gears. If I've been doing drills for two hours, another hour isn't going to move the needle much, but switching to an hour reviewing statistical concepts or biological pathways might make a real difference. It also helps to know what you actually need to work on and be okay sitting with that uncomfortable feeling of not being good at something yet. For example, stepping into the court and taking time away from my opponent is something I never did previously, but is something I used to clinch the match against Lake Forest. That's a lesson sports teaches you early, but it's carried over into my schoolwork just as much: if you only work on what you're already good at, you'll never get better than you already are.

Can you discuss Computational Biology for a little bit, please.

That's something one of my favorite professors, Dr. Fay, would be able to explain far better than I could, but essentially, it's a combination of biology, statistics, computer science, and data analysis used to tackle complex biological problems. Living systems are incredibly complicated, so traditional biological modeling often falls short when you're trying to explain things like large-scale genomics or protein folding. There's a certain level of uncertainty built into living systems, and that's where statistical concepts like conditionality and data analysis come in. Computational biology has an extremely broad range of applications, it's actually how the human genome was mapped and assembled.

Where does Statistics fit into this?

Statistics has an application in both my current studies and what I hope to do after in the future. Outside of simply enjoying it and wanting to learn more about certain branches, like Bayesian analysis or nonparametric statistics, it was extremely helpful when taking classes like Computational Biology or even for the MCAT. Outside of school, I work as a data analyst for the Akron Children's Orthopedic Department, which has a very high research output but often gets held up at the data analytics stage so I help get research projects completed and sent to either the poster or publication stage. That's something I hope to continue doing as there are a lot of questions to be answered in orthopedics, especially pediatric orthopedics, and that's how I enjoy contributing most.

When you complete your studies at URochester, what is your next career step?

I am currently applying to medical school, so if all goes well, I will start that next year. That just leaves the not-so-simple task of getting in, but that's a problem for another day! I try not to worry too much about that since a lot of it is out of my hands, so my time is much better served focusing on the here and now, a mindset that has really helped me a lot. Eventually I want to go into orthopedics, which is a really interesting specialty with a lot of former athletes in it, but that's many years away.



How do your majors work together?

Eventually, I want to be a physician with a dedicated focus on research, so the biology major helps with the medical school prerequisites and it's one of the standard majors for people integrating into medical school while also learning about how the body and world works. Statistics will allow me to be very efficient in research output for both my own projects and for other people's as well. They don't necessarily work together in my day-to-day life but there is a lot of overlap and hopefully when I end up pursuing medicine and research they will work together.

You interned in research at the Cleveland Clinic. What did you take away from that?

The biggest thing that surprised me at the Cleveland Clinic was just how much data and research is currently going on. The physician I worked with is one of the heads of research for the entire Cleveland Clinic and he told me that there are upwards of 400 projects currently in the works. I had no idea that research output at just one hospital system could be so intense, which just cemented my desire to pursue research and be able to contribute as best as I can. I also had fantastic coworkers who all truly wanted to make a meaningful difference in the patients' lives, which had an enormous impact on the quality and productivity of the work there.

When did you begin playing tennis competitively?

I started playing at a very young age, and there are baby pictures of me trying to swing a racquet, but I only started competing and playing in tournaments around age 11 or 12. I really did not enjoy junior tennis, just because it was so individualistic. The fact that high school and college tennis is a team sport just made it so much more enjoyable for me. I've built so many close friendships through collegiate tennis and I wouldn't give it up for anything.

Daniel Steinacher

Men's Soccer

HOMETOWN: Williamsville, NY **MAJOR:** Financial Economics & Mathematics

In the last two seasons, the defense allowed a goal or less in 24 matches. What makes the group so successful?

Our group is truly special. I think what makes a strong defense is one that is never individual and is constantly communicating. We are the last line, so we can see most of the field and have a good view of what is happening in front of us. A huge part of our job is communicating with our midfielders and attackers because, at the end of the day, it's not just the defenders defending our goal; it's the entire team.

Have you always been a defender, including in high school, at URochester, and with club ball?

Since I started playing soccer at five years old, I have always been a defender and haven't looked back. I played center back for my Amherst travel team, stopper and sweeper for my modified soccer team, and left, right, and center back for my club team, RNY, throughout high school. So pretty much every position in the back line at some point. Someone actually asked me a few days ago why I enjoy being a defender, and I think it's because I can really leverage my strengths there. I was never the fastest player on the field or the best shooter or dribbler. My strengths were passing, reading the field, and communicating, which all happen to be pretty important for a defender. Once I started playing the position, I never really wanted to go back. Every level has been different, but those basic skills have stayed pretty consistent.

When did you start playing organized soccer?

I first started playing organized soccer when I was five years old. My parents signed me up for Timbits soccer, and from that moment I was hooked. I was always playing in the backyard with my dad and my dog when I was younger, so it just naturally turned into playing more competitively as I got older.

You averaged almost 77 minutes per match in 2024 and nearly 80 minutes in 2025. How do you train in the summer to get ready for that?

Summer training is probably the most important part of getting ready for the season. I'm always balancing lifting, running, soccer, and injury prevention. I play on a U23 summer team in Rochester called RNY FC, where I usually have games twice a week and practices a couple times a week. On the days I'm not playing soccer, I'll usually do some fitness work at the turf, lift, or spend time stretching and working on mobility. Summer is really about preparing your body for the intensity of the fall. For me, staying healthy throughout the season is the biggest priority, so making sure my body is ready before the season starts is really important.

You are working at M&T Bank in Buffalo on an internship. What duties do you have?

I worked with the Compensation team for my internship. I was able to use a lot of my background in statistics and mathematics to compare pay data across the bank and see how we were positioned against the market. The goal was to help find accurate and fair ways to make sure employees were being paid competitively. There was a lot of analysis involved, but there was also a lot more collaboration than I expected. Talking with people across different business lines helped me get a much better picture of how a large company like M&T actually functions. I also looked at some pain points within our team's processes and found ways to improve them, which I eventually presented to leadership on my team.

What will that internship do for you when you are in the fall semester?

I learned a lot about leadership and how teams function during my internship. Being in a large corporate environment and seeing how managers prepare for meetings, communicate with their teams, and get to know their employees on both a personal and professional level gave me a lot to think about going into the fall.

I'll be a captain of the soccer team and the president of TAMID, a business club on campus, so I think I can apply a lot of those lessons to both organizations. One of the biggest things I learned is that



gaining the trust of the people around you can really help drive results and success. Whether that's in a corporate environment or on the soccer field, people are much more likely to work toward a common goal when they trust the people around them. I'm excited to bring some of those lessons with me this fall.

Please tell us how your majors (Financial Economics and Mathematics) tie together.

I didn't really know what I wanted to study when I got to college, and I was undecided until the end of my sophomore year. I eventually decided to pursue a double major in Financial Economics and Mathematics because I thought both were challenging and interesting, but in very different ways. Financial Economics gave me a strong understanding of financial markets, economic factors, and how those things affect businesses and people. Mathematics forced me to approach problems in a much more abstract way. As my classes became more advanced, I was doing a lot of proofs and theory, which was definitely different from what I was used to. I don't necessarily want to pursue a career in mathematics, but I think studying it has made me a much better problem solver. It taught me how to break down complicated problems and look at situations from different perspectives, which I've found useful in finance and really in everything I do.

Did you have a chance to see any of the World Cup matches in person? Did any of the teams catch your fancy?

Unfortunately, I didn't have the chance to see any of the World Cup matches in person, but the overall atmosphere throughout the country was amazing. I tried to watch as many games as I could and really enjoyed following the tournament. The World Cup only happens every four years, so being able to experience it in the U.S. was something I really wanted to take in. I especially enjoyed watching France because they have so many talented players and somehow get them all to play together, which is not always easy to do.

Jenna Ufberg

Lacrosse

HOMETOWN: Bala Cynwyd, PA **MAJOR:** Microbiology

You're one of the Liberty League's best defenders. How do you develop the inner fire to excel in a league that may, on any given week, have three teams ranked in the top 15 nationally?

The Liberty League is incredibly competitive and full of amazing athletes, and I honestly love that. I'm a very competitive person, so playing against great attackers and defenders pushes me to be better. It can be easy to feel intimidated when you know how talented the players across the league are, but I try to approach every game with confidence and think, "Why not me today? Why can't I be the one to make that stop?" I also have the privilege of practicing every day against some of the best attackers in the league, alongside an incredible defensive unit, and they constantly make me better. At the end of the day, I try to compete as hard as I can, trust my teammates, and have fun doing it.

Let's say a friend is coming to watch you play (having never seen a match before). The friend arrives just after the match starts. Where should the friend expect to see you do on the field?

It depends on who wins the draw. If we win it, you'll probably see me sprinting up the field to be an outlet for our circle players and help us get the ball over the restraining line. If we lose the draw, I'll be matched up with whoever my assignment is that day, tracking them back into the eight-meter and helping our defense get organized and ready for the possession.

What keys are there that tell you the team is playing well (regardless of the score)?

For us, the biggest indicators are our communication, chemistry, and energy. When we're playing our best, it really feels like we're one unit. Everyone shows up wanting to succeed, but even more importantly, wanting the person next to them to succeed. We're a gritty team that takes a lot of pride in doing the hard work—winning 50/50 balls, communicating through every possession, and executing the little things that might not show up on the stat sheet. When we're doing those things and playing for each other, you can feel it regardless of what the scoreboard says.

Is there a key to taking the ball away from an opponent?

A lot of it is reading the situation and knowing when it's worth taking a risk. I'm naturally a pretty aggressive defender, so I love going after an attacker's stick and trying some riskier checks. I actually played attack until high school, and I think that helps me defensively because I can read cradling patterns, anticipate passes, and sometimes predict what an attacker is going to do next. The other huge part is trusting my teammates. If I'm going to take those risks, there are going to be times when I get beat. I can play aggressively because I have complete confidence that the rest of our defense has my back. I wouldn't be able to play the way I do without that trust.

Did you intern anywhere over the last two summers?

Two summers ago, I interned with a biotechnology startup in Tel Aviv that was developing rapid at-home and point-of-care urine diagnostics. I helped collect samples from a hospital for product testing and worked closely with the company's leadership, particularly helping with communication and business development involving American donors and industry contacts.

This past summer, I participated in Jefferson Abington Hospital's nine-week Pre-Med Program. I shadowed physicians across specialties including emergency medicine, surgery, internal medicine, OB/GYN, oncology, neuroscience, and the NICU. It gave me the opportunity to see medicine from a lot of different perspectives and learn from physicians and other members of the healthcare team.

What did you take away from those internships?

The biggest thing was how much I value working directly with people and doing work that has a real impact on someone else. My biotechnology internship gave me experience with the science and business sides of healthcare, while my experiences at Broad Street Love and Begin the Turn showed me how much circumstances like poverty, housing insecurity, addiction, and access to care can affect someone's health.



At Jefferson, I was able to see how physicians bring the science and human sides of medicine together. Across all of these experiences, I learned how important it is to listen to people, meet them where they are, and treat them with dignity.

You are a member of the Red Cross Club and a board member of Chabad. What do you do with those groups?

Chabad has become a huge part of my experience at Rochester. I started by attending Shabbat dinners, holidays, and weekly classes, then joined the student board my sophomore year before becoming President my junior and senior years. In that role, I help organize events, welcome new students, and work to make Chabad a place where everyone feels comfortable and supported. That became especially important after October 7th, when a lot of Jewish students on campus were struggling and needed a place where they could openly express what they were feeling. Chabad really became a second family for me, and as President, I've tried to make sure other students can find that same sense of belonging. It has given me some of my closest friendships and taught me how powerful a strong community can be.

How did you become involved with the University?

I came to Rochester really excited about college and knew pretty early that I didn't want my experience to be limited to just classes and lacrosse. I was lucky to have older girls on my team who immediately took me under their wing and introduced me to different organizations, professors, and opportunities around campus. Seeing how involved they were made me want to find my own communities and eventually do the same thing for younger students.