

SWORN IN

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Class of 2005 alumnus Daniel Perez takes the oath as U.S. ambassador to Brazil on Aug. 25 at Columbus.



Collecting Columbus

600

PACKS
SOLD

1HR

TO SELL
OUT

75

TEACHERS



6

Teacher trading cards turned the 34th Walk-A-Thon into a full-blown trading floor, with 600 packs sold out in one hour. By Allan Tompkins & Diego Rodriguez-Deshon

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Columbus kicks off the 2026-2027 School Year at Beach Bash

By Mark Tanner

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LUXIN

Columbus Alumnus Danny Perez Sworn In as U.S. Ambassador to Brazil at His Alma Mater

Two decades after graduating, the former speaker of the Florida House returned to Columbus to be sworn in as U.S. ambassador to Brazil

By Oscar Pinto

Surrounded by family, friends, students, and members of the Columbus community, Daniel “Danny” Perez, a member of the Class of 2005, returned to the school he considers home to be sworn in as the United States ambassador to Brazil.

The ceremony was not just another day at Christopher Columbus High School. It marked a full-circle moment for Perez, who once sat in the same seats as the students watching him take the oath of office.

The Significance of the Accomplishment

Perez’s appointment represents a notable milestone for both him and the Columbus community. President Donald Trump nominated Perez to serve as the U.S. ambassador to Brazil, and the U.S. Senate confirmed his nomination on Aug. 7, 2026.

Prior to accepting this new role, Perez served as speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, a prominent leadership position in Florida’s government.

Faith and Brotherhood

The ceremony began with a prayer led by a priest from St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church. Columbus President Thomas Kruczek then stepped to the podium and spoke about the school’s mission and its lifelong influence on students.

Kruczek highlighted the question at the center of the school’s current marketing campaign:

“Who will you become?”

He told the students that Perez is an exemplary representation of what a Columbus education can help them achieve. Kruczek also expressed pride in witnessing an alumnus reach an extraordinary level of public service while remaining connected to the Columbus community.

Family

Following Kruczek’s remarks, he introduced one of the most significant individuals in Perez’s life: his sister, Ashley Perez-Biliskov.

She spoke about her brother’s perseverance, ability to connect with others, and qualifications for international diplomacy. Although she once could not have imagined her brother serving in this role, she stated that she could now think of no one better to represent the country.

“Obstacles are to climb and resistance is to push through. He will not quit,” Perez-Biliskov said.

She described her brother as someone who has “never met a stranger” because he always finds something interesting in every person he meets. This ability to listen, understand others and build relationships will be especially important as he navigates the complicated economic and political issues involved in foreign policy.

Perez-Biliskov also reflected on the challenges her brother has faced throughout his career.



The crowd at the event throwing up the C at the Columbus gym on Aug. 25, 2026.

“Danny was put through the crucible,” she said, explaining that he emerged stronger while maintaining the humility and wisdom to listen to others.



Daniel “Danny” Perez raises his right hand as Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle administers the oath of office in the Columbus gymnasium on Aug. 25, 2026.

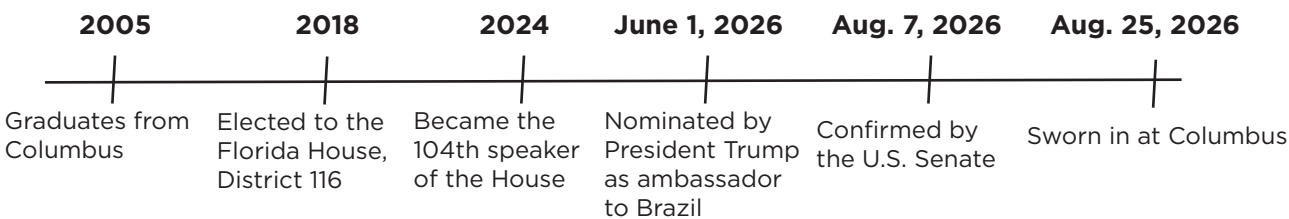
“No One Achieves Great Things in This Life Alone”

Perez began his speech by thanking the senior class for sharing the special moment with him.

“No one achieves great things in this life alone,” Perez said.

Looking out at the students, he reflected on how he once sat in the same chairs, walked the same hallways and learned many of the lessons that helped shape the person he would become. As a Columbus student, he could never have imagined that a president would one day ask him to serve as a U.S. ambassador.

The Road to Brazil



His words emphasized that the ceremony was about more than his individual success. It was also about the family members, friends, teachers, mentors and classmates who supported him throughout his journey.

His Mission in Brazil

Perez now faces an important assignment as the ambassador to Brazil, one of the world’s largest economies and a significant trading partner of the United States. In this role, Perez will manage complex diplomatic, economic, and political issues between the two countries.

He emphasized his responsibility to protect American citizens and promote U.S. interests in Brazil. Perez expressed gratitude to former President Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio for their confidence in him and for the opportunity to serve the country. While Perez expressed enthusiasm for the mission ahead, he acknowledged that leaving Miami-Dade County, along with his community and family, would be challenging.

“Thank you all for all your support and for being with me today,” Perez said as he concluded his remarks.

A Full-Circle Moment

The ceremony concluded with a video produced by CCNN, showcasing messages from Perez’s former classmates, fellow alumni, friends, and family members. Among those who congratulated him were his wife and mother, who spoke about the individual behind his public accomplishments.

As those messages resonated in the room, Perez’s journey came full circle. The student who once walked the halls of Columbus now prepares to represent his country abroad, carrying with him the values of faith, brotherhood, and commitment to service that have shaped his life.

David Pugh Named 2026 School Principal of the Year in Florida

Christopher Columbus High School Principal David Pugh has been named the 2026 Florida School Principal of the Year by Education Insider Magazine, adding another milestone to a career at Columbus that spans nearly three decades.

By Oscar Pinto

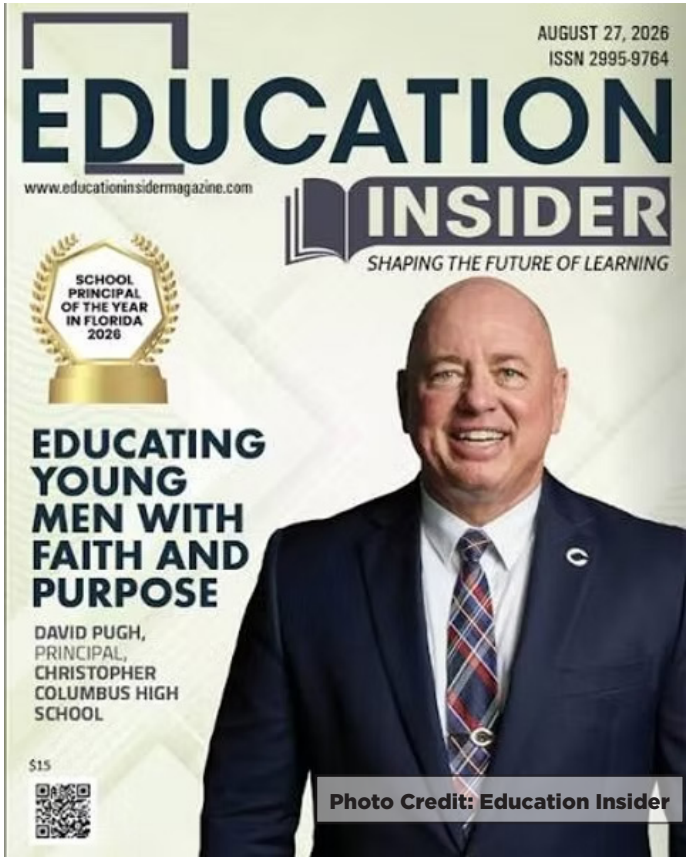
Pugh joined Columbus in 1998 and has held a variety of roles at the school, including counselor, coach, teacher and dean. He eventually moved into school administration and now serves as Columbus’ 13th principal.

Despite the administrative responsibilities that come with the position, Pugh has made being visible around campus a priority. He works closely with the school’s chief financial officer on administrative responsibilities, allowing him to spend more time interacting with students, faculty and staff throughout the school day.

“I am truly honored to be recognized, but I believe the success of our school is rooted in the strength of our entire team. It has always been my passion to lead and mentor young men and to make a meaningful difference in their lives. I am especially grateful to the Marist Brothers for their continued trust, support, and confidence in the work we do together,” Mr. Pugh said.

“He leads with integrity, has the courage to make difficult decisions and consistently puts the needs of others ahead of his own. He treats people with fairness and respect, and when he gives you his word, you can depend on it. What I respect most about Mr. Pugh is that these aren’t just leadership qualities he talks about...they are qualities he models every day. I’m proud to call him my friend, and I’m proud to see him receive the recognition he deserves,” Dean of Students Alex Trujillo said.

That approach reflects what Pugh describes as servant leadership — leading through service and maintaining a consistent presence among the people he leads. His path from the classroom and athletic fields to the principal’s office has allowed him to experience Columbus from several different perspectives.



The front page of Education Insider Magazine featuring Mr. Pugh.

Senior Martin Iparraguirre said, “I’ve never seen a principal like him; he is one of a kind, and he is always on campus, and truly we are blessed as a school community to have Mr. Pugh as our principal”

The statewide recognition now highlights a career that began at Columbus in 1998 and has remained rooted at the school ever since.

After serving the community in a number of roles over the years, Pugh’s latest honor recognizes his work from the principal’s office — and the leadership approach he has developed along the way.

Volunteers Tackle Mangrove Pollution at Peacock Park Back-to-School Clean Up

By Eason Brohee

On Sept. 22, 2026, at Peacock Park, volunteers gathered for a Back-to-School Clean-Up focused on removing trash from the mangroves and the surrounding area. The event provided students and community members with an opportunity to contribute while learning about the environmental issues affecting the region.

Event organizer Sofia Bond explained that much of the trash found in the mangroves does not originate solely from individuals littering the area.

“The trash actually doesn’t get here by people...The trash usually gets here through the currents and wind and wave energy, the way the bay is all set up,” said organizer Sofia Bond.

Bond stated that the layout of the area contributes to the accumulation of trash in the mangroves. However, with gloves, equipment and other supplies provided during the cleanup, volunteers were able to spend the day removing trash from the area while gaining insight into the importance of environmental stewardship.



CCNN reporter Eason Brohee reports from Peacock Park’s mangrove clean-up

“I enjoyed it a lot, especially because it’s helping the environment,” said volunteer Lucas Barrerotacey.

For Lucas, making a difference does not always require a large event. He noted that the problem continues to grow, and while efforts like the cleanup are important, there is still much that individuals can do on their own.

“Because right now it’s getting worse. So the least we can do is at least try to put it to a halt before restoring it,” said Lucas.

Bond stated that the primary objective of the event extended beyond the quantity of trash collected. She emphasized that the cleanup aimed to increase public awareness of the issue.

“I enjoyed it a lot, especially because it’s helping the environment,” said volunteer Lucas Barrerotacey.

For some, the event might have been viewed as just another cleanup. However, for the organizers and volunteers who understand the impact of plastic pollution, it represented an opportunity to improve Peacock Park.

Columbus Explorers Kick Off the New School Year at Annual Beach Bash

Columbus hosted its annual Beach Bash on Aug. 21, sending off the Class of 2027 and welcoming the Class of 2030 with student DJs, food trucks and school-spirit traditions.

By Diego Rodriguez Deshon

Students describe the first week of school for Columbus Explorers as a memorable experience. Throughout the week, there is a sense of anticipation among students for a notable event: Beach Bash. This event, held annually on the first Friday of the school year, provides an opportunity for students to celebrate school spirit, reconnect with friends, and create new memories.

This year's Beach Bash, held on Aug. 21, served as a sendoff for the Class of 2027 while welcoming the Class of 2030 into a tradition that will continue in the future. Each year, the senior class introduces incoming freshmen to the significance of school spirit and the importance of this event for the Explorer Nation. For seniors, the event holds particular significance as it represents one of their last opportunities to participate in Beach Bash before passing the tradition on to the younger classes.



Senior Explorers from the Left Vinny Diaz, Brandon Spaulding, and Esteban Alfonso posing during Beach Bash on Aug. 21, 2026.

Beach Bash Highlights

Beach Bash features music DJed by students, large crowds, food trucks and various games. These elements contribute to an engaging atmosphere where attendees can enjoy themselves and meet new people. Students from different schools also participate, providing opportunities for interaction across various groups. The event is organized by the Student Association Committee (SAC) and Christopher Columbus High School, whose collaborative efforts help make the event possible each year.



DJs for the Beach Bash event testing out their audio before Beach Bash on Aug. 21, 2026.



On Aug. 21, 2026, the annual Columbus Beach Bash was held. Pictured here is a crowd at the Columbus courtyard.

“The thing I enjoyed most at the Beach Bash was hanging out with my friends from other schools and really vibing out with the music they were playing,” said Miami Arts Studio senior Emily Carrodegua.

One of the biggest traditions at Beach Bash is the clothing students wear to represent their grade and school. Students from various schools wear distinctive tie-dye shirts in their respective colors, such as green for St. Brendan and purple for Lourdes, as part of their senior traditions. These outfits symbolize school pride and contribute to traditions that students hope will continue for years to come.

“Wearing my green Tie-dye shirt helps show my school spirit by connecting with others to create a community that will be remembered,” said St. Brendan senior Taylor Yanez.



St. Brendan seniors showing their school spirit at the beginning of Beach Bash on Aug. 21, 2026.

Beach Bash is an event that showcases school spirit among students at Columbus. Explorers participate by wearing their school colors and beach-themed attire. The enthusiasm of the crowd and the variety of clothing reflect the diverse ways students express their connection to their school.

Freshmen play a significant role in Beach Bash as they step into this tradition. For many, the event serves as an opportunity to forge new friendships and reconnect with peers from middle school and other institutions. Attending Beach Bash during their freshman year often becomes a memorable experience, marking the beginning of their journey at Columbus.

“Beach Bash was so fun, I was hanging out with all my friends and just made memories I will probably never forget,” said freshman Juanpablo Rodriguez Deshon



Group of Students in beach attire showing school spirit at Beach Bash on Aug. 21, 2026.

Beach Bash has evolved over the years at Columbus, but one element remains constant: the excitement and conversation that fill the halls during the first week of school. The joy of making new friends, reconnecting with old ones and celebrating school spirit persists each year.

Apple Event 2026: Folding a New Chapter

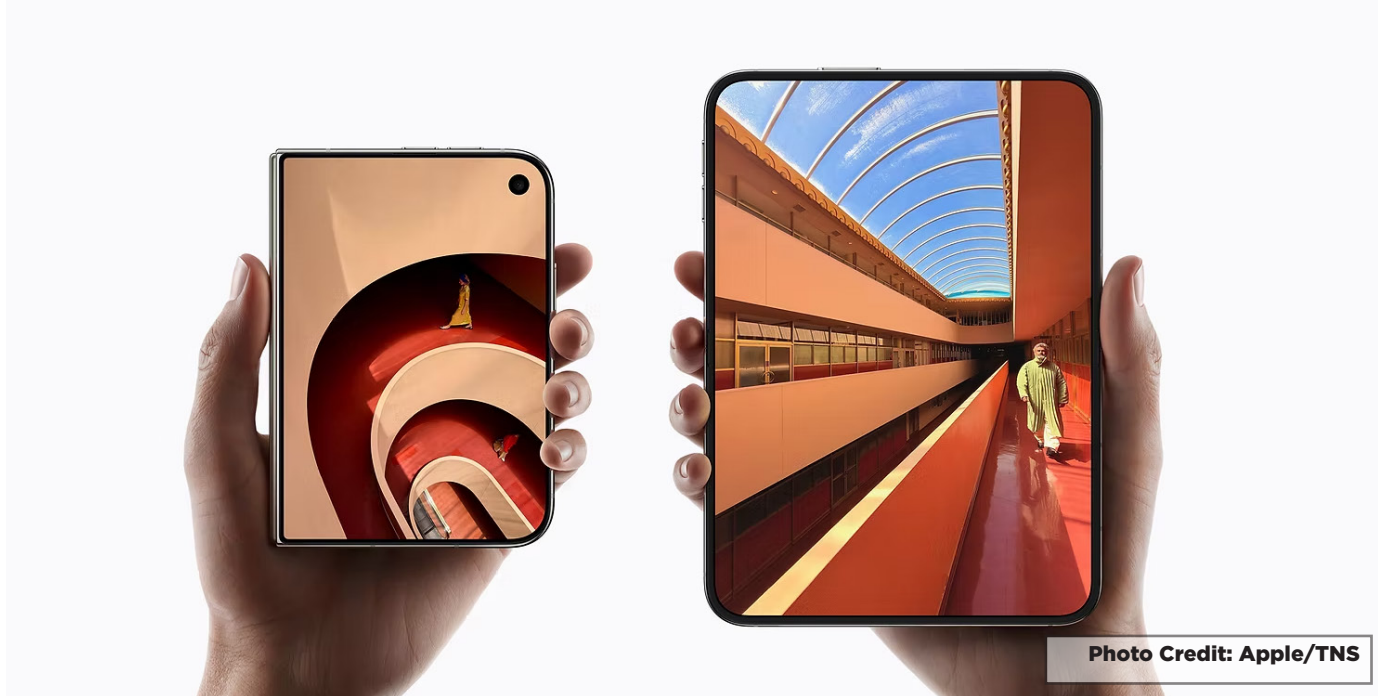
By Yamil Risi

On Sept. 9, 2026, at 1 p.m. EST, Apple began its annual September event. This year, Tim Cook is transitioning to the role of executive chairman of Apple's board, while John Ternus has stepped into the position of chief executive officer, effective Sept. 1, 2026. Ternus has been with Apple since 2001, but this marks his first time in the CEO role.

iPhone Duo

For the first time in iPhone history, Apple introduces a multi-screen iPhone: the iPhone Duo. This device features a 7.6-inch foldable nano-texture screen with a 5.4-inch screen on the back. The nano-texture screen significantly reduces glare, and the inner screen folds along a crease designed to be less visible than earlier foldable models from other manufacturers. The frame and hinge of the phone are constructed with titanium, enhancing both durability and lightness.

The iPhone Duo incorporates a dual-battery system that dramatically improves battery life. When using the inner screen, the phone can last up to 31 hours during video playback. Utilizing only the outer screen extends battery life to 44 hours. The iPhone Duo is available in two colors: Star White and Night Sky.



The iPhone Duo. It features a 7.6-inch inner display that provides a large canvas for viewing content, gaming and multitasking. Closed, it's similar in size to a passport with a 5.4-inch outer display.

Pricing starts at \$1,999 for the 256GB base model and reaches \$3,199 for the 2TB configuration. This marks Apple's most expensive iPhone to date. While the pricing may appear high, it is comparable to competing foldable devices such as the Google Pixel 11 Pro Fold and Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 8, both of which start at \$1,899. The iPhone Duo will not ship alongside the rest of the lineup; preorders begin on October 16, with availability starting on October 23.

iPhone 18 Pros

Apple also announced the iPhone 18 Pro and Pro Max models. Notably, this event does not include the base model iPhone 18, which is expected to launch in the spring of 2027.

This year's Pro models feature a new A20 Pro chip built on TSMC's 2-nanometer process.

The Neural Engine's processing power has doubled, now featuring dual 16-core configurations. The RAM has been increased to 12 GB, which is significant given the ongoing memory crisis. This increase in RAM allows for more advanced AI models to be run on-device.

Apple has relocated one Face ID component beneath the display, resulting in a noticeable reduction in the size of the Dynamic Island. The 48MP main camera now features a variable aperture, allowing it to adjust from f/1.48 to f/4, which enhances depth control and improves low-light performance.

The iPhone 18 Pro models are equipped with a larger vapor chamber that covers most of the back's surface area. This design helps the phone dissipate heat more efficiently through the chassis, directing heat away from the chip.

This year, the iPhone Pro models have experienced a \$100 price increase, likely due to rising memory costs. The iPhone 18 Pro starts at \$1,199, while the iPhone 18 Pro Max begins at \$1,299.

Some analysts suggest that the upgrades to this year's iPhone Pro models may appear less significant as anticipation builds for the rumored iPhone XX (20), which is expected to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the iPhone next year.

Letter from the Editor

It is with great honor that my fellow members and I are able to present to you the first quarter print for The Log's 2026-2027 school year.

The journey that this club has taken from the day I walked into it to today is one that's honestly hard to believe. When I started in The Log, we were a Silver-rated publication and completely digital. Under the leadership of President Eddie Lopez ('25) in my sophomore year, I was able to watch the words I used to only see on a screen come to life on a paper I could hold and feel. And it didn't stop there—under President Alejandro Menendez ('26), The Log was finally able to boast an All-Florida rating—something that we couldn't have worked harder for.

Now, as President and Editor-in-Chief of this club that I've seen grow across my four years at this school, it is an absolute pleasure to see the next generations of writers come into this and share mine and many others' passion of writing. This quarter has seen countless school events and major global changes and for so much of that to be captured within these pages is nothing short of amazing.

Throughout this paper, you're not only educating yourself on cur-

rent events but also learning what matters to some of the young men here at Columbus—something that makes this paper that much more special to me and those who helped produce it. In current times, writing has become somewhat of a dying art among the youth and it so powerful that a club like The Log, that entirely depends on that dying art, has been able to survive and, more importantly, thrive because of all of those involved in making sure to keep it alive.

However, the finished product you see in front of you wasn't as easy to put together as it may look. None of the intricately designed articles and images could have been assembled without the work of our lead designer Maximus Barrenechea, who has worked relentlessly on not only completing, but perfecting every aspect of the paper so that you get to experience the best of our work.

To all of our officers who work tirelessly to get articles in by deadlines and edit those that need fixing, thank you—it's because of the determination from people like you guys that this paper can come to fruition.

Most of all, I want to give a special thanks to Mr. Busatto who is the anchor to this club and who's the

overarching reason why so much of what we have wished for has come to be the way it is today.

The beauty of The Log is its ability to act as a funnel for all of our students' ideas and passions to take true form. No matter what background one comes from, there's always something to write about which is just another reflection of Columbus and the opportunity that this school offers to its students.

As editor-in-chief, I hope to see this club only continue to go up and am happy to call so many of its members my friends who get to embark on the end of this journey with me. Thank you for taking the time to read this paper and I hope that the work of our club members are reflective of the amazing talent that comes out of this great school.

Adelante,
Allan Tompkins

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Collecting Columbus: Inside Worldcup-A-Thon’s Trading Card Frenzy

By Allan Tompkins & Diego Rodriguez-Deshon

One hour. That’s how long it took for 600 packs of AI-generated images of teachers and faculty members to sell out. Students assumed the roles of 1980s Wall Street brokers, yelling at teachers to secure them a pack of cards before they disappeared. Something feels different about this year’s Walk-A-Thon.

Walk-A-Thon is back for its 34th annual fundraising event at Columbus and has brought moments such as epic WWE showdowns between teachers and full-on concert productions for the student body. This year, however, it’s AI-generated teacher cards that are taking the Columbus community by storm.

Worldcup-A-Thon, this year’s theme, was initially framed as a simple competition: collect all 75 cards first for \$175, or finish after and earn Walk-A-Thon raffle tickets. But in the days since packs went on sale, the event has become something bigger than a prize chase—a trading economy with its own rules, its own black market, and its own winners.

“Ms. Taylor picked up 25 packs from me and between picking them up in B11 and walking back to her room (D25), she sold out,” said Mr. De Tuya.

The first batch of cards, which included 50 copies of each teacher, was gone in an hour and is being replaced later this week with a second batch of 100 copies of each teacher. What’s different about this second batch is that no longer will the cards have the defining “First Edition” trademark on their cardbacks.

“Of course I’m going to value the first edition cards more than the second because there are less of the first editions and they’re the originals at the end of the day,” said freshman Angel Bello.

After the second edition batch this week, a larger and final printing of 200 copies of each teacher will be sold the week of 9/28 so that almost every Columbus guy can have the chance to get their hands on a pack.

The hype behind the cards within the walls of Columbus is obvious, but it’s the demand for the cards outside of campus that has really surprised teachers like Mr. De Tuya.

“I have guys from my graduating class saying ‘Save me cards, I’ll pay \$20 a card if I have to,’” said Mr. De Tuya.

Even alumni dating back to legends like Mr. Lynskey want their share of these cards.

Worldcup-A-Thon has turned something students usually take for granted—the teachers who’ve shaped their four years here—into something worth trading, saving, and fighting over. What Worldcup-A-Thon is doing is somewhat uniting thousands of students and alumni through a shared appreciation for their teachers.

“It’s fun to see seniors and freshmen talking just trying to trade cards and it



AI-generated, with some of the actual cards included in Worldcup-A-Thon signed by their respective teachers.



Photo Credit: Diego Rodriguez-Deshon

kind of builds a sense of community and brotherhood in a way that we haven’t seen before,” said AP Psychology teacher Ms. Rodriguez.

Because of this shared appreciation, one of the most interesting parts of Worldcup-A-Thon is the personal value that each student has on his collection. One student may safeguard his Mr. Hermida card because of how big of an impact he had on him, while another may mindlessly trade him away for another teacher simply because he missed out on the legendary experience that is Mr. Hermida. In this sense, the value behind a card is determined by what that teacher meant to you.

As a result of this, not every student is necessarily trying to collect all 75 cards, but rather collect their favorite teachers, counselors or administrators. Many students have also taken the liberty to make a card even more special to them by getting that specific teacher to sign the card for them.

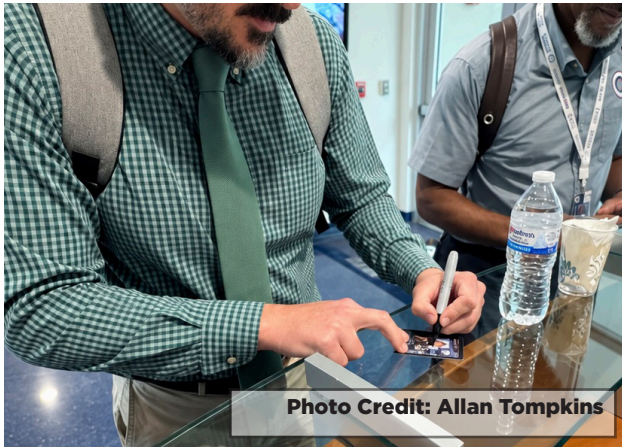
When asked how he felt about signing students’ cards of himself, Mr. Ulloa said, “For me, it’s nice to feel appreciated, so whether it’s for completing a set or because they genuinely want me to sign their card, it’s nice.”

However, none of it would exist without four new committee members tasked with picking this year’s theme: Mr. De Tuya, Mr. Rivero, Mr. Ventura and Ms. Rodriguez. Mr. De Tuya was the first to pitch the idea of a World Cup theme inspired by his love for the World Cup this past summer, while Mr. Corazon specifically recommended selling stickers and sticker books to fit the theme.

It wasn’t until the help of Mr. Harriman that the idea of stickers evolved into that of cards, which Mr. Rivero enthusiastically supported as a card hobbyist.

“Comics and trading cards are a big hobby of mine, so...for me, the best part is seeing something I enjoy become something the whole school can have fun with, while at the same time building school spirit and raising money for Columbus,” said Mr. Rivero.

The “World Cup” aspect of the fundraiser was fulfilled by assigning different homeroom teachers to different countries while counselors and administrators received their own unique “nations” such as MASopotamia. Teachers like Mr. Hermida and Mr.



Mr. Hermida signing one of his cards next to Mr. Bacz

Ortega, who don’t have homerooms, decided to fittingly represent isolated Antarctica.

“We have a student who’s from Belgium, on the basketball team and is in Ms. Brown’s homeroom so I was like, ‘Ms. Brown, you’re going to be Belgium,’” said Mr. De Tuya.

Originally, Mr. De Tuya had planned on printing 25 copies of each card and cutting them out himself; however, he was able to come into contact with the family of Brian Bech (’26) who owns a printing company that was able to get the job done at 50 copies of each card.

In terms of the designs of the cards, Mr. Rivero was largely responsible for 68-70 of the cards’ meticulously crafted designs while Mr. Harriman designed the other 5-7 cards. Mr. Harriman’s designs, in particular, can be identified by the cards without first names (ex. Mr. Crossman).

“We probably brought down the water level of Lake Okeechobee with all of those AI generations,” said Mr. De Tuya, jokingly.

What’s Next?

On the week of Walk-A-Thon (10/5), two new sets of cards will be released to everyone. The first is an expansion pack that will add 10-15 of the teachers who weren’t on the original list of 75 teachers. The second set is a Legends Series that will feature teachers and faculty members who have retired or passed away such as Mr. Foyo and Mr. Isenberg.

These new sets will be sold at the convention happening that week, which will also feature an opportunity to get your cards graded and slabbed by Mr. Rivero. Binders for these cards will also be sold at the convention and any rewards for completing collections will be given out then.

As for the mystery of the 1 of 1 foil Rivero card worth \$75, Mr. De Tuya revealed that it was intentionally not placed in the first edition set of cards and that it’s undetermined whether it will be placed in this week’s or next week’s batch of cards.

Some of the most memorable moments that students have forged at this school are during this time of year and it’s incredible how much tighter Worldcup-A-Thon has made an already close-knit Columbus community. As for next year’s theme, Mr. De Tuya simply hinted at the potential return of a Columbus Walk-A-Thon classic—an exciting event to already look forward to.

“It’s good to see Walk-A-Thon back and generating the excitement that we’ve always expected—that’s what it should be,” said Mr. Pugh. “For me, it’s just always been an opportunity for games in the classroom, food to be eaten, and just controlled chaos in the hallways. It’s just two weeks of ‘have fun.’”

Continued from page 6

Collecting Columbus: Inside Worldcup-A-Thon’s Trading Card Frenzy



Mr. Pugh holding a signed copy of one of his cards



Senior Andrew Hernandez showing off his collection of cards

Miami-Dade County Passes Budget, but Hurdles Remain

By Thomas Schaffner

At 4:22 a.m. on Thursday, while most of Miami-Dade County was asleep, the Board of County Commissioners approved the county budget for the fiscal year 2026–27. Following more than 11 hours of public comments, discussions among commissioners, and voting, the board adopted a budget totaling \$14.26 billion. Despite the budget’s approval, uncertainties persist regarding Miami-Dade County’s financial outlook.

Mayor’s Proposal

The budget process commenced in July when Mayor Daniella Levine Cava released her county budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year. The proposal maintained property tax rates while providing additional funding for the sheriff’s office and public transit, largely financed by the efficiency initiative Wise305 and the elimination of vacant county positions. However, the proposal also included cuts to 12 Metrobus routes with low ridership, as well as reductions in off-peak and late-night transit lines. The Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) program also experienced a million-dollar funding reduction in the budget proposal.

The Board of County Commissioners responded to the proposal with a mix of pushback and support. Board members expressed their support for maintaining steady property taxes but opposed decreases in transit funding.

Commissioners like Raquel Regalado of District 7 opposed cuts to early morning Metrobus lines, saying in the first budget hearing, “we should not cancel the early buses or fire our employees.”

The Sheriff’s Dispute

Miami-Dade County Mayor’s budget allocated nearly \$1 billion for the sheriff’s office, which includes a \$55 million increase over fiscal year 2025–26. However, Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz argued Thursday that this amount still falls short of the necessary funding. Cordero-Stutz requested an additional \$45 million to hire and train recruits, repair facilities, and cover binding union contracts, among other commitments.

During the hearing, the mayor and her office maintained that their proposal was sufficient, highlighting a 6% increase over the previous fiscal year and a total 36% increase from four years ago. The mayor’s team also asserted that their budget provided adequate funding to fill existing vacancies within the sheriff’s office.

Ultimately, the Board declined to fully accommodate the sheriff’s requests but approved a partial \$11.5 million increase for binding union obligations.



Miami Skyline

Amended Budget Approved

The Board of County Commissioners continued to modify the mayor’s proposal in several areas. Commissioners reinstated early morning Metrobus services, funded by utilizing transit reserves. This decision faced criticism from one member. Additionally, the Environmental Education and Leadership (EEL) program, which had experienced significant cuts in the proposal, will remain operational by waiving a \$10 million reserve requirement, allowing it to use existing reserve funds.

Ultimately, the Board of County Commissioners voted 8-3 to approve the final budget, with Commissioners Roberto Gonzalez, J.C. Bermudez, and Natalie Milian Orbis voting in opposition.

Uncertain Budget Future

Under Florida law, sheriffs have the authority to appeal county budgets to the Florida Administration Commission, which consists of the governor and the cabinet. During the final budget hearing, Sheriff Cordero-Stutz indicated that she was considering this option.

That willingness left some commissioners concerned, including Chairman Rodriguez, who said “it does give me heartburn to get \$11.5 million and put it into the sheriff’s budget and still have her go and appeal to the state.”

Should the sheriff escalate the budget dispute to the state commission, the Board of County Commissioners would have to reconvene and find cuts elsewhere to compensate for the additional sheriff’s funding. That could mean further cuts to transit, parks, or libraries, leaving uncertainty about the future of the county’s finances.

Amendment 3

While the sheriff’s funding dispute was a focal point Thursday, Amendment 3, an initiative on the November ballot to increase the homestead property tax exemption, loomed large. The amendment, placed before voters by the state legislature, aims to raise the tax exemption on homesteaded properties (primary residences) from \$50,000 to \$150,000 in 2027, and eventually to \$250,000 in 2028.

Since property taxes are collected by counties and municipalities rather than the state, Miami-Dade County could experience significant reductions in tax revenue under the amendment’s provisions. This reduction may lead to substantial cuts in public transportation, libraries, and law enforcement, although funding for schools is protected from any potential impacts under the initiative.

“Should [Amendment 3] pass, we’ll be right back to the drawing board, and we will have a lot of adjustments to make,” Levine Cava warned earlier this month.

The Explorers put on a Homecoming Show

By Mark Tanner

Homecoming night featured a dominant foot- ball performance, the crowning of the HOCO court and a packed student section.

The Explorers celebrated Homecoming with a dominant 58-0 victory over the Homestead Bron- cos on Thursday, improving their record to 5-1 this season. The score of 58 marked the Explorers' high- est-scoring game of the season.

Before the game, the atmosphere around the field was lively, featuring a student tailgate. Fresh- men, sophomores, juniors, and seniors each set up their own tents with various themes, activities and food. The Conquistadors, Columbus' student section, contributed to the excitement with drums, flags, and a large crowd that maintained high ener- gy throughout the evening.

The excitement peaked during halftime when this year's Homecoming Court was announced. As sparklers and red, white, and blue smoke filled the field, Lauren McNamara and Christian Martinez were named the 2026 Homecoming Queen and King.



From left to right- Lauren McNamara and Christian Martinez celebrate after being crowned HOCO King and Queen.



Red, White, and Blue smoke fills the sky during Columbus' HOCO game.

Amir Sears and Gabriela Gonzalez received the titles of Prince and Princess.

The running game was a significant factor in the



Columbus two-way football player A'Mir "AI" Sears during the game.

victory, with Cecil Smith rushing for 69 yards and two touchdowns on just seven carries, while Matteo Barreiro contributed 84 total yards and two touch- downs.

The defense has been a major strength for Columbus this season. Through the first six games, the Explorers have allowed an average of only 13.3 points per game. The 58-0 victory over Homestead continued this trend and marked Columbus's third consecutive win.

For Columbus, Homecoming was not solely about the final score. The packed stands, the Homecoming court ceremony, and the festive atmosphere provid- ed fans with plenty to celebrate.

With the 58-0 win, Columbus aims to maintain its momentum heading into the next game against Southwest. The Explorers are scheduled to host Southwest at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 1.

Cuba's Anniversary of Silence

By Allan Tompkins

Human rights organizations have recorded 107 anti-government protests in Cuba in June 2026, nearly double the previous record. The current situation in Cuba appears to be at a critical juncture, yet there seems to be limited media coverage aimed at elevating this issue from a local to an international platform. For residents of Miami with familial or emotional ties to Cuba, the lack of aware- ness regarding what may be a significant turning point in the country's struggle raises questions: if the situation is at its worst, why is it not receiving more attention?

On July 11, 2021, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a combination of government misman- agement of the virus and shortages of food and medicine led to the largest anti-government protests in Cuba since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. These protests attracted worldwide attention and prompted Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel to cut off internet access and detain approximately 1,400 protesters. This event, now referred to as 11J, sparked nationalistic sentiments among Cubans globally and remains prominent in Miami, where phrases such as #SOSCUBA continue to be dis- played on Cuban bread sold at local bakeries.

However, according to *Prisoners Defenders*, a non-profit human rights organization reports that Cuba is currently holding 1,306 political prisoners, including 40 minors and many individuals who participated in the protests on July 11, 2021. In April 2023, the Cuban government pardoned 2,010 pris- oners; however, those involved in the July 11 protests were specifically excluded from this amnesty. This situation, characterized as a significant and largely peaceful expression of dissent, has led to severe and prolonged punishments for many, which has received limited attention from the international community.

The grassroots movement against oppression in Cuba gained significant visibility in 2021. However, on the five-year anniversary of the July 11 protests, many Cubans express frustration that their plight is largely overlooked. In today's information age, the rapid consumption of news may affect how we perceive and respond to real-world events.



Protest gather during Rally for Democracy in Cuba at Miami Dade College's Freedom Tower, in Miami on Saturday, July 17, 2021.

One possible explanation lies in what researchers call empathy burnout. The *United Way of the Na- tional Capital Area* (UWNCA) a recent study found that Americans reported a 14% decrease in their empathy during the pandemic compared to before it, citing exhaustion from a continuous cycle of crises—COVID-19, political unrest, and one emergency leading into another. Even after the COVID-19 pan- demic, crises did not diminish as the Russia-Ukraine conflict escalated, and tensions involving the U.S. and Iran continue. If this fatigue is genuine, Cuba may be experiencing the consequences of unfortu- nate timing.

The feelings of being overwhelmed and lacking the energy to engage with surrounding issues can be attributed to the extremes that social media presents to billions worldwide. Today, it appears that if a news headline does not surpass its predecessor in intensity, it is deemed unworthy of attention. In the case of Cuba, there is no prominent conflict or immediate threat of nuclear confrontation, which contributes to its relegation in the news cycle while more sensational headlines dominate the discourse.

These sensational headlines ultimately serve as distractions that foster division among people

and hinder awareness of larger injustices occurring daily. This lack of awareness has allowed individuals who express dissent to be imprisoned for up to 20 years with minimal response from the international community.

In my experience at a school where many stu- dents have Cuban heritage—reflected in the music they listen to, the stories of their grandparents, or a flag displayed in their homes—most of my class- mates are unaware of the situation just 90 miles from their classrooms. Despite the majority of pro- tests for Cuba occurring in Miami, even geographic proximity does not seem to motivate a significant portion of my peers to engage with the struggles faced by their families and friends.

While many residents of Miami owe their current circumstances to the courageous efforts of their families who fled Cuba, it seems unjust to neglect those who remain. There were 107 protests for Cuba in just one month. Cubans have not gone silent; rather, we have.

Giants. Titans. Teachers.

By David Ulloa

I attended Columbus at a unique time. I first walked through these hallowed halls at freshman orienta- tion in August of 2001. If Columbus had a voice, then it would have sounded something like Jules in *Pulp Fiction*, saying, "I'm in a transitional period." Sandwiched between the wild, wild west of the 1990s and the modernization of the 2010s, this time at Co- lumbus was filled with change and experimentation. It is also one of the only times in Columbus histo- ry that Dr. Carter Burrus wasn't on campus. But that doesn't mean he wasn't there.

From the time I sat down in my first period, Br. Ed Breslin's Algebra I class in D-16, Carter's presence was everywhere. Teachers would speak about him and how he had shaped them as students and men- tored them as fresh-out-of-college educators. So to say that Dr. Burrus wasn't on campus is a little more than a little misleading.

When I returned as a faculty member in 2014, Carter had already made his return. I knew him be- fore he was introduced to me. Only this man could be the subject of the stories I had heard all those years ago. And right away, I understood why a ver- itable fleet of Explorers had decided to come back and call Columbus home.

On career day a few years ago, I found myself looking at a room full of students minus the guest speaker. Both Burrus and Lynskey had made their way to my room to be with the guest speaker. After a few minutes, we three looked at each other and decided that since it was career day, we'd talk about our experiences as educators. Answering question after question, one thing became clear: the three of us had nearly identical philosophies. The students picked up on this immediately. When asked how we all came to think so similarly about education, the answer was simple: the Marist Brothers taught Bur- rus, Burrus taught Lynskey, and Lynskey taught me.

I used to joke with Fred Panzer every year when it came time to teach *The Great Gatsby* that he was going to be teaching it again to my students. I had annotated my copy of Fitzgerald's magnum opus with Mr. Panzer's commentary and still used that copy (still do, in fact) to teach it year after year. I felt it kept Fred teaching me a bit longer. So in this roundabout way, Carter's praxis is still the one used to teach our current Columbus students.

A few weeks ago, Javi Hermida, our esteemed History Department Chair, asked me if I thought Co- lumbus would be the same today if Carter had not returned to teach. Initially, I rationalized that he em- bodied much of what the Marist Brothers of his time represented in the classroom and that eventually we'd end up where we are today. But I quickly realized that this was wrong. We decided that although the above was true and that Carter did, in fact, embody the old Marist spirit, his particular brand of Marist Charism was informed by his life experiences, making his a unique philosophy distinct from that of the Brothers'. Indeed, even his return marked a milestone in sparking similar plans to return in other Explorers. OB, Foyo, Lynskey, Scholer...they owe it all to Carter.

Adam Scholer is another presence that was inescapable in my years as a burgeoning Explorer. Because of my lifelong need to express myself ar- tistically, I came to know Scholer first as the director of drama. His 2005 *My Production* is still talked about - sure, that's done mostly by him and me, but I can assure you that it was a hit. My then girlfriend, now wife, who was many times the actor I was, helped us out on this production. Anyway, one day in class after a very long night of rehearsal, Scholer turned



Adam Scholer stands next to his podium



Carter Burrus sits at his desk

to me and asked, "Dave, how did you convince a girl like Stephanie to go out with you?!" Despite how that might sound, I knew it was a compliment. I smiled and said something to the effect of I had no idea, but was happy it had worked. I'll never forget his response to me. He said "You do whatever it takes to hang on to that girl. She's golden, man." He wasn't telling me anything I didn't already know. But whatever Scholer said was law in my book. I contin- ue to do whatever it takes to hang on to that girl.

While I was never fortunate enough to have Mr. Scholer as an English teacher, his influence as my speech and debate teacher is integral to where I ended up in life. His ability to teach the lessons both in and outside of the curriculum was paramount to me and countless other Explorers becoming the men we are today. He was real, he was raw, and throughout it all, we felt loved and respected. There are many teachers who I take with me into my classroom every day, teachers who helped shape me into the Marist educator I am today. Panzer, Chacon, Morrissey, Foyo, Lynskey, and Scholer chief among them.

But it's possible that no single person is as re- sponsible for today's Columbus as Br. Kevin.

We knew who he was before we even stepped foot on campus. The Shark, they called him. He raised money like no one else. He took lip from no one. And if the Yankees had a bad night, beware the next morning. All these stories did him a great disservice, because when first laying eyes upon him, it was immediately apparent that he was so much more imposing, and more important, than all that. When he called "GIVE ME A C..." you felt as if he'd somehow know if you did anything less than give him all the C you could possibly muster. He seemed empowered with all the might of a Greek god. Some of this was mystique that had been built around him, and I'm pretty sure he enjoyed, and still does enjoy, the clout.

But something incredible happened during my junior year. On that first day of class in the fall of 2004, I received my course schedule and was shocked to see the name Handibode next to the class Algebra II. Somehow, in all the hubbub of those first two years, it had escaped me that as a Marist Brother, his primary vow was to educate as St. Marcellin Champagnat had. A further shock occurred, again something that shouldn't have taken me by surprise, when I discovered that Br. Kevin was an outstanding math teacher. I had always floundered in my math classes. At least I had before I started at Columbus. But Br. Kevin had a way of teaching math that felt at once dangerous and rewarding. We didn't want to disappoint him and we craved his praise. His class felt uniquely import- ant, an incredible feat when you consider that my

schedule saw me moving from Mr. Panzer's class to Br. Kevin's.

I'll never forget the months leading up to the World Series that year. As a Red Sox fan, I was used to disappointment, but not that year. Br. Kevin and I had enjoyed a banter that teetered somewhere between playful and antagonistic. And the day after the Sox came back from a 3-0 deficit to beat the Yankees in that series, securing their spot in the World Series, I sat at my desk and waited for him to arrive. I still didn't know how I wanted to play it. Was the teeter-totter of banter leaning towards playful or antagonistic today? Br. Kevin didn't give me a chance. He walked in, looked right at me, pointed an index finger at me and said, "Dave, not a word out of your mouth today." Even in that, he was teaching me a lesson; he was teaching me how to win grace- fully. And I think no other phrase quite so nicely sums up Br. Kevin and Columbus as an institution, as "winning gracefully."

This year marks a historic one for Columbus for many reasons. There are lots of wins to celebrate. But the losses for me are the reasons this monumen- tal year will stick with me. With the retirement of Carter Burrus, Adam Scholer and Kevin Handibode, so much of what has made Columbus the school it is today leaves our campus. Giants. Titans. Teachers. How does Columbus move forward from here? We will continue to win, of course. It's what we do, after all. We win in all aspects of the formation of young men. But how will we continue to win? How do we continue without Carter? Without Adam? Without Kevin?

I've given a lot of thought to this question since discovering that all three would retire at the con- clusion of this academic year. But I've known the answer all along. And it's so clear. Because it all goes back to something I realized my freshman year at Columbus. If I, as a freshman, could feel Carter's presence at the school without him physically on campus, why would it not be possible to carry it on after this?

But it puts the onus on us to keep this legacy going. We say it all the time: Adelante! Of course, it means forward, onward to bigger and better places. Never stagnant, ever forging towards the great unknown. We are Explorers after all. But the thing about moving forward is that directionality begins somewhere. And where that journey begins informs how those intrepid adventurers arrive at their final destination. So it is up to us, the remaining Explor- ers, to keep Carter, Adam, and Kevin in our school. Find for me a person who says that Cunningham, McCullagh, Foyo, Culmo, Signore, Pardo, Panzer, Irvine and company don't still live on in our halls, our classrooms, our spirit and you'll have found a liar.

It's not for the benefit of the faculty or the innu- merable alumni that this task falls upon us. It is for all our current and future Explorers. Columbus is greater today than it was when I graduated. Car- ter has intimated this much as well, and I'm certain Adam and Br. Kevin would agree. So it is that we must remember where we came from, who got us here, and fuel our charge ever forward to greatness with that spirit.

To Dr. Burrus, Mr. Scholer, and Br. Kevin, I owe everything to you. Thank you. Adelante.



Brother Kevin stands in front of the bleachers in Bro. Kevin's Court

A New Grip: Jason Gonzalez’s Journey

By Liam Gatcliffe

For the past three years, the athletic facilities of Christopher Columbus High School have seen Jason Gonzalez, class of 2027, come and go in various ways. Whether on the gridiron as a junior varsity football player or on the mats for the wrestling team, sports have been a significant part of Jason’s life. Little did he know, however, that the sight of chalk flying and the sound of barbells clanging would accompany the next chapter of his journey.

Into Weightlifting

Jason was a legitimate multi-sport athlete, participating in baseball, boxing, football, and wrestling. He decided to focus on football and wrestling for his career in Columbus. However, in the final game of his junior varsity football season, Jason injured his wrist. He had to make a switch, as his two favorite sports were no longer options.

As a way to recover, he turned to the equipment at the Columbus Athletic Gym.

“Weightlifting sounds cool because I could control how I’m doing and to help my wrist recover. I’d been in the gym from



Jason and his grandfather posing over 10 years ago.



Jason Gonzalez '27 working on his technique for the upcoming weightlifting season.

a young age. When I was 8 was like the first time I was seriously in the gym,” said Jason Gonzalez ’27.

Coach Fernando Machado has put the rest of the team on notice regarding his undeniable talent.

More importantly, he emphasized the player’s discipline and work ethic. “Even when he goes on vacation, he finds a place to lift,” said Machado.

A Legacy

Even before competing, Jason was already familiar with the gym. His grandfather owned a gym, where Jason grew and matured over the years. Although his grandfather’s ownership helped spur his passion, his presence in Jason’s life meant much more.

“My dad was our neighbor, our kid’s number one cheerleader. He was at every

practice that he can be at,” said Jackie Gonzalez, Jason’s mom.

Jason’s grandfather passed away. Nevertheless, the legacy he left on Jason’s athletic journey remains strong.

“Even though I’m not doing football or wrestling anymore, I know he [my grandfather] would love watching me weight-lift,” Jason said.

As a place that was initially used for healing and recovery, the weightlifting gym has become a home for Jason. His passion for sports has enabled him to overcome the challenges of his athletic career in Columbus. With this drive and motivation from his grandfather, Jason is thriving in this new environment.

The gym has become a connection to his roots and has helped him grow into the person he is today.

Leave Better Than You Walked In - Mr. Ruiz’s English Class

By Liam Gatcliffe

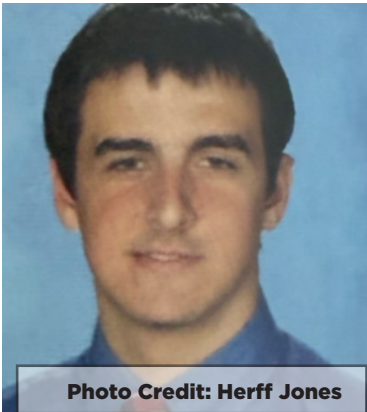
Throughout the campus, students in 10th and 12th grades have entered their English classes prepared for another year of poetry, grammar, and reading comprehension. They sit down and realize they are in for an exciting experience this year. A graduate of the 2012 CCHS class, who is a Philadelphia Eagles fan and movie enthusiast, has returned to Columbus.

Mr. Ruiz aims to provide his students with an unforgettable English class experience.

Background

Erik Ruiz, a member of the class of 2012, left college to join the military. He quickly began to appreciate the structure that his years of service provided. During this significant departure from academics, he maintained his passion for writing, literature, and history. After completing his service, he sought a career that would combine this newfound structure with his interests. This journey led him back to the Westchester classrooms he attended more than a decade earlier.

Reflecting on his military experience, Ruiz acknowledges that the challenges he faced during his service played a crucial role in shaping him into the person and educator he is today.



Erik Ruiz as a high schooler, returning now to teach at his alma mater.

“Everything [in the military] was hard. So whatever challenge I face now I just remind myself that it could always be worse,” Ruiz said.

“The Ruiz Style”

Mr. Ruiz was asked about his approach to the school year, specifically regarding the academic curriculum and the essential life lessons he aims to impart to students as they prepare to graduate in June.

“Respect, knowledge, growth, maturity, etc. The grade will come regardless... I want to make you better than you were when you walked in,” he said.

Mr. Ruiz possesses an extensive repertoire of cinematic, video game, anime, and television references that he effectively incorporates into his lectures. By frequently using pop culture to reinforce abstract ideas and concepts, he demonstrates the interconnectedness of literature and storytelling across various mediums.

His choice of films is particularly noteworthy. Mr. Ruiz considers Mark Waters’ 2004 film Mean Girls to be especially impactful.

“Yes, it’s a comedy but that comedy is rooted in real emotions. It’s a coming of age story about fitting in and growth, one that we all experience,” he said. “On the surface it’s a funny and raunchy comedy but from a writing standpoint it’s a stroke of genius that can be dissected endlessly.”



Erik Ruiz '12 begins his first year as a CCHS instructor.

Coming Back to The C

In the broader context of Christopher Columbus’ history, it was only recently that Ruiz was seated in a sophomore English class. When asked about his transition from student to educator, he shared the following insights.

“I remember Pugh, Pelegrín, Trujillo, OB and everyone else just being teachers. I was afraid of some of them. And now I consider them friends and a new found family. It’s a wild adjustment but it has been so incredible to call the men I once looked up to colleagues,” he said.

Mr. Ruiz is eager to leave an impact on sophomores and seniors alike, which extends beyond the English curriculum. Many students look forward to the engaging classes where conversations about the Philadelphia Eagles, stories, and cultural references create an impactful learning environment that Ruiz hopes will resonate long after graduation next June.

Continued on page 11

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Leave Better Than You Walked In - Mr. Ruiz’s English Class

Principal Mr. Pugh says Ruiz brings a wide range of skills to the school.

“Mr. Ruiz understands that the foundation of teaching within the Marist Charism begins with building meaningful relationships and genuinely caring for every student. His previous teaching experience,

combined with his service in the military, has shaped his growth as an educator and strengthened his ability to lead and serve with compassion, empathy, and purpose. He brings a wealth of experience and a genuine commitment to the young men entrusted to his care,” said Mr. Pugh, CCHS Principal

Ruiz hopes his students leave with one lesson.

“I want my students to always be better versions of themselves,” Ruiz said.

Hearts & Honey

By Eason Brohee

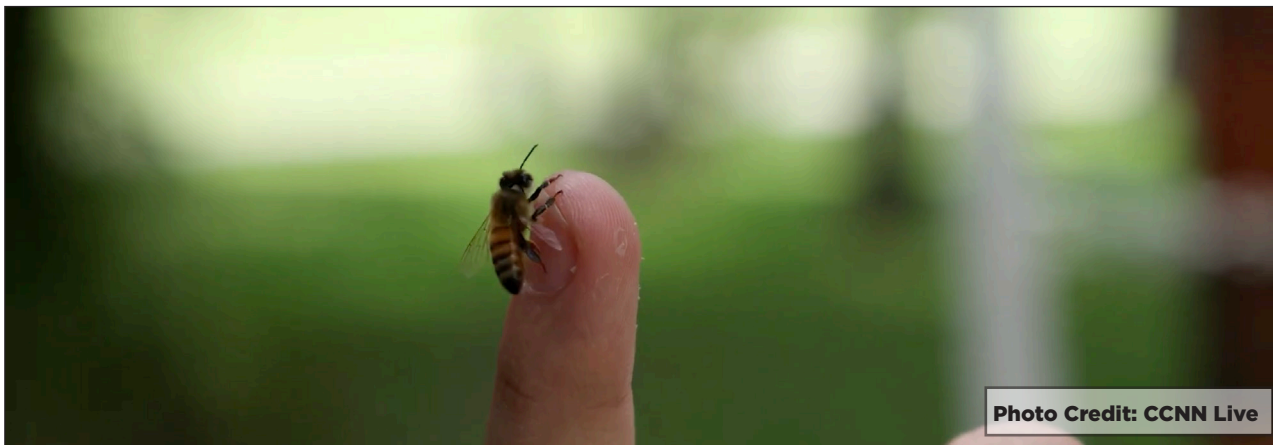
Miami is filled with life, but none of it is possible without those who keep it flourishing. And for one family they’re dedicated to protecting our pollinators through their backyard hives, while running the business “Mom’s Honey.”

“As a beekeeper, we’re maintaining the health of a hive,” said owner William Shaw.

William took on the responsibility of caring for the bees while Jan focused on producing and selling the honey. The two began learning the process together, with some of their earliest experiences happening side by side.

“We’ve done some removals together. We have done a lot of stuff like that. You know, the very first time of opening the hive, that was the two of us together,” said William’s mother, Janet Luykx.

As the business developed, their roles became clearer. William continued working directly with the



A honeybee rests on a fingertip in the backyard of William Shaw and Janet Luykx, who keep hives to protect local pollinators and run their business, Mom’s Honey.

bees, while Jan took over the honey production and sales. Their different responsibilities allowed each of them to contribute something of their own while still working toward the same goal.

But for William, the work is about more than simply taking care of the bees. Spending time outdoors and working with the hives has become something he genuinely enjoys. The business gives him an opportunity to step away from everything else and focus on something he finds calming.

“First of all, I like it... I’m at peace...,” said Shaw.

What started with William walking onto the patio in a white beekeeper suit has grown into a business built around more than honeycomb. For Jan and William, Mom’s Honey has become another way to strengthen their relationship, with each depending on the other to keep the business moving forward.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do without her,” said Shaw.

Two Artists, Two Canvases, One Unbreakable Bond at the Columbus Art Expo

By Eason Brohee

Every year, Christopher Columbus High School’s Art Expo provides students with the opportunity to showcase the work they have created throughout the school year. For seniors Ezequiel Bartra and Blake Borroto, last year’s expo became more than a final assignment; it became a way to commemorate their time together in the art studio and leave behind a representation of the friendship they developed at Columbus.

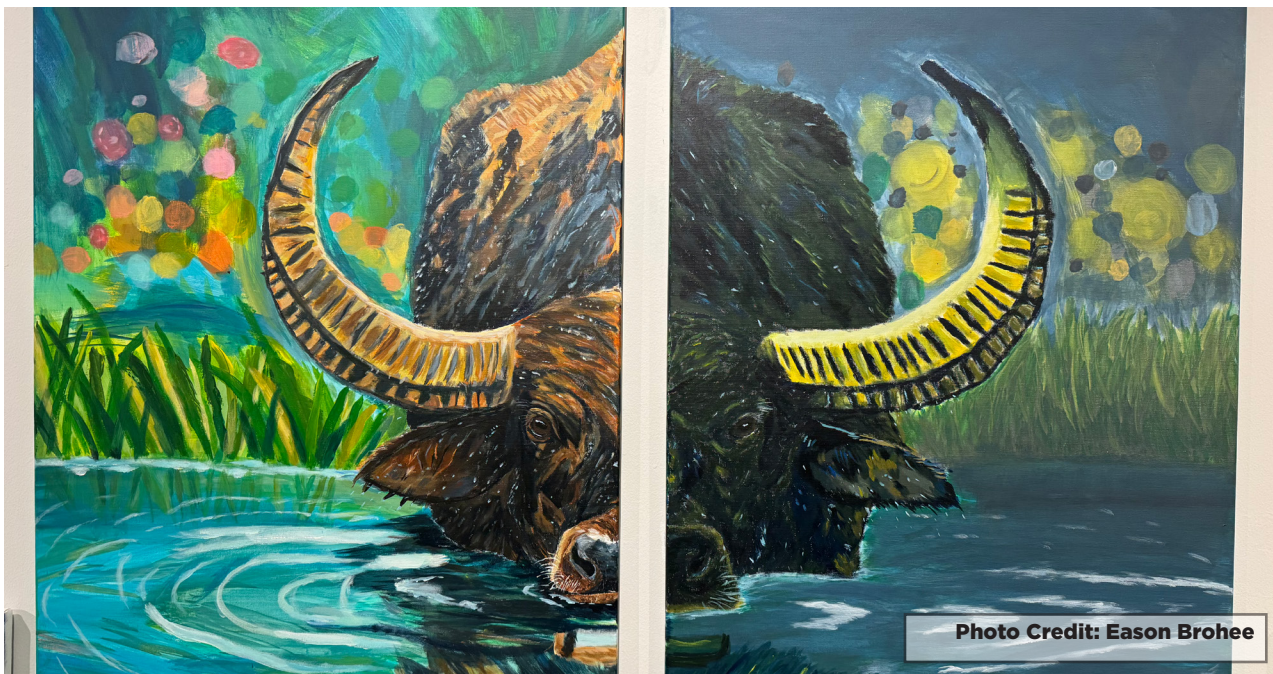
“It’s something that we decided to do to also represent ourselves,” said Blake Borroto.

The final project involved a split water buffalo painting, with each student creating one half in their own artistic style. The two canvases were then combined to form a single piece. The concept was straightforward: to create something that represented their individual identities while also showcasing their collaborative growth.

“It’s our last project in this art class in our history at Columbus; we wanted to go out with a bang,” said Borroto.

They described collaborating creatively and using art as an escape from the outside world. Their relationship has developed in a unique space of paint, sweat, and a year of dedication. The water buffalo serves as a physical representation of their growing bond. This connection became an integral part of the painting, transforming two separate canvases into one final memory of their time in the studio.

“We both have, like, this escape from the rest of the world,” said Ezequiel Bartra.



The final project as displayed in the Christopher Columbus High School Art Gallery.

The teacher, Mr. Gomez, played a significant role in the students’ artistic journey. He observed their individual styles as well as their collaborative efforts. The students described the process as starting with brainstorming ideas and incorporating Mr. Gomez’s feedback before ultimately deciding on the water buffalo theme. They chose to use the two largest canvases available in class and combined them to create a centerpiece that stood out in the gallery.

“I think it’s a great piece, one of the best pieces in the gallery,” said Gabriel Gomez.

end of a chapter, but the painting provided them with something to carry forward. They discussed their families and futures while working on the project, making the finished piece a reminder of more than just their time in art class.

The water buffalo now serves as a snapshot of their years at Columbus—two artists, two styles, and one friendship captured in a single final piece.

“Once we’re painting, it’s just like he said: time flies,” said Bartra.

For Ezequiel and Blake, the Art Expo marked the

Columbus Defeats No. 1 Bishop Gorman in 33-28 Thriller

5-star University of Miami commit A'Mir Sears caught two touchdown passes and recorded three interceptions as Columbus survived a furious fourth-quarter comeback.

By Oscar Pinto

Christopher Columbus High School's varsity football team entered Saturday's national showcase with something to prove and left with a significant victory in the early season. Behind a standout two-way performance from 5-star University of Miami commit A'Mir Sears and a passing showcase by quarterback Kai Moore, the Explorers defeated national powerhouse Bishop Gorman, 33-28, on Aug. 29, 2026.

Columbus faced a Bishop Gorman team that had just defeated St. John Bosco and was ranked as the top team in the country. Despite entering the game as the underdog, the Explorers built a 20-point advantage and held on after Bishop Gorman made a late push.

Moore first connected with running back Cecil Smith for a 47-yard touchdown reception following a screen pass. After that play, Sears recorded his first interception, and then Moore found Sears for two touchdown passes, allowing Columbus to open a 20-0 lead.

From the opening possession, Columbus appeared more prepared, physical, and comfortable than its nationally ranked opponent.

Bishop Gorman settled into the game late in the second quarter. Quarterback Ace Amina threw two touchdown passes, including a 74-yard pass to Michael Blackmond as time expired, allowing the Gaels to enter halftime trailing 23-15.

With Columbus leading 23-15, Sears intercepted Amina for the second time. Moore later connected with Tony Brown III for a 28-yard touchdown, and Columbus recovered a fumble on the following kick-off. Matteo Miller's field goal extended the Explorers' advantage to 33-15.

Bishop Gorman refused to back down. The Gaels scored two late touchdowns and recovered an onside kick, cutting Columbus' 18-point lead to five. Suddenly, a game that appeared finished had become a fight to the final possession.

Columbus secured the victory when Fernando Suarez-Solis recovered Bishop Gorman's final on-side-kick attempt.

Sears was the defining player of the afternoon. His two touchdown receptions helped Columbus establish its early lead, while his three interceptions repeatedly halted Bishop Gorman's momentum.

Moore delivered one of his strongest performanc-



ATH A'Mir Sears and QB Kai Moore celebrate following their first touchdown connection of the 33-28 win versus Bishop Gorman on Aug. 29, 2026 at St. Thomas Aquinas stadium.

es as an Explorer, throwing four touchdown passes and remaining composed against Bishop Gorman's talented defense.

Columbus looks ahead to its next opponent: the newly crowned U.S. number one team, St. Thomas Aquinas. The team will face them on Friday at 7 p.m. at St. Thomas Aquinas.

Photo Credit: @maxcarr_ccnnlive

More Than the Beautiful Game: Safety Takes Center Stage at Miami's FIFA Fan Festival

By Oscar Pinto



The "TOPGLIDER" soccer ball rests next to the World Cup trophy

Thousands of fans from around the world have gathered at Bayfront Park to celebrate the world's biggest sporting event. But beyond the goals, celebrations and national pride is another story that often goes unnoticed: the work being done to help keep everyone safe.

The FIFA Fan Festival has turned Miami into a global hub where supporters from around the world come together to watch matches, enjoy live entertainment and experience diverse cultures.

With crowds reaching into the tens of thousands each day, public safety has become a major focus of the event.

Walking through the festival, one thing quickly becomes apparent: Miami Police officers maintain a visible presence throughout the venue. From the entrance gates to the viewing areas, officers patrol

the grounds, direct pedestrian traffic and respond to the needs of attendees.

"Security was great and my family and I felt safe the entire time," said Patricio Zaldivar, junior at Columbus who attended for the Mexico-England match,

Security begins before fans even enter the festival. Guests pass through security screening, and bags may be inspected before admission.

According to FIFA's published security procedures, all guests and personal belongings are subject to inspection before entering the Fan Festival. FIFA says these measures are intended to help create a safe environment while allowing thousands of fans to enjoy the event.

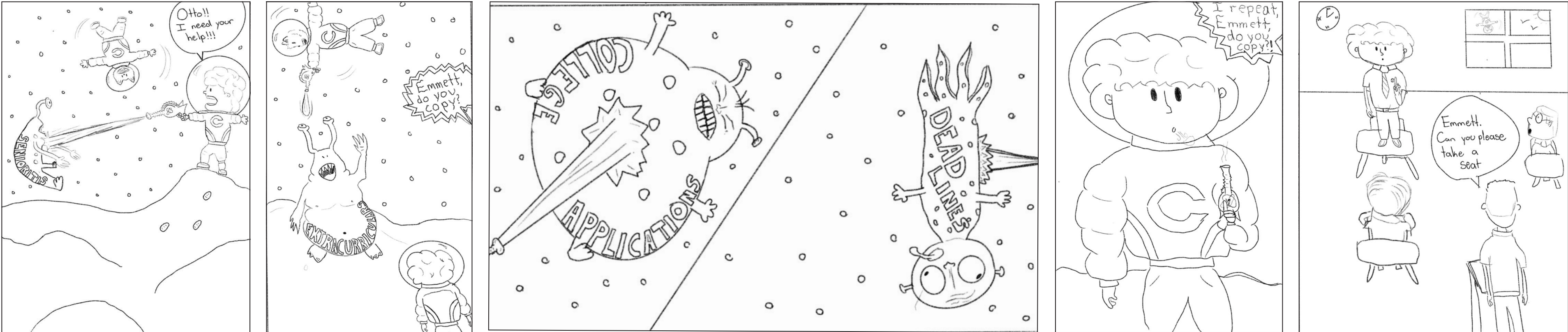
The effort extends well beyond the festival gates. Federal, state and local agencies have worked together to support security operations throughout the event, with resources including aerial surveillance and marine patrols around the venue.

Hosting an international event of this scale is no small task. The FIFA Fan Festival welcomes visitors from every corner of the globe, each bringing different languages, traditions and cultures. According to event officials, preparing for an event of this size requires months of planning and coordination among multiple agencies.

As Miami continues to host major international sporting events, security operations remain a key part of the overall experience. While fans gather to celebrate the matches on the field, law enforcement agencies continue working behind the scenes to help keep the event running safely.

Otto and Emmett

By Allan Tompkins



No Class, No Cushion: FHSAA’s New Open Division Raises the Stakes for Columbus

By Oscar Pinto

The FHSAA’s new Open Division will bring Florida’s highest-ranked teams together, potentially reshaping the postseason path for Columbus athletics.

For years, Christopher Columbus football has chased state championships through a class-based playoff bracket. This season, being one of Florida’s best could send the Explorers down an entirely different path.

And for Columbus, that possibility is more than hypothetical.

The Explorers are currently 3-1 and ranked No. 3 in Florida in MaxPreps’ Sept. 16 rankings, putting them in the conversation for a new championship format that could pit the state’s strongest programs against one another regardless of classification.

Beginning with the 2026-27 school year, the Florida High School Athletic Association will debut its Open Division, featuring the eight highest-ranked teams in 11 team sports. Those sports include football, girls volleyball, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, flag football and boys and girls lacrosse.

For football, the eight teams will be selected using MaxPreps rankings at the conclusion of the regular season. In the other Open Division sports, teams will qualify through the FHSAA Power Rankings by MaxPreps following district tournaments.

Once selected, the eight teams will be divided into two four-team pools. Seeds 1, 4, 5 and 8 will compete in one pool, while seeds 2, 3, 6 and 7 will compete in the other. The top two teams from each pool will advance to a four-team, single-elimination tournament for the Open Division state championship.

Few schools have more reason to pay attention than Columbus.

The Explorers have won 27 team state championships, with basketball, soccer and volleyball adding titles in 2026 alone. Columbus football’s current No. 3 state ranking makes the impact of the new system especially immediate.

For defensive tackle Tavares Vicks, the possibility of facing Florida’s strongest programs is part of the appeal.

“The Open Division is honestly a win for Florida high school sports because it puts all the super-stacked teams into their own playoff bracket,” Vicks said.

Under the old format, Columbus’ postseason path was largely shaped by classification. Under the Open Division, remaining among Florida’s top eight could instead put the Explorers in a pool with other highly ranked programs before they could even reach a state semifinal.

That creates excitement, but not every Columbus athlete sees the change the same way.

Baseball pitcher Eduardo Ortea believes the format could eliminate some of the progression that comes from facing different levels of competition throughout a traditional postseason.

“We lose the chance to build momentum against varied competition,” Ortea said.

His sport could face the same situation as football. Baseball is one of the 11 sports included in the Open Division, although its qualifiers will be determined after district tournament play rather than at the end of the regular season.

That difference in opinion highlights the biggest question surrounding the new format: Is earning a spot among Florida’s eight best teams a reward, or does it create an even more difficult path to a championship?

Columbus basketball may provide one of the clearest examples.

The Explorers have won five consecutive FHSAA state championships from 2022 through 2026, a streak that made Columbus the first Miami-Dade boys basketball program to win five straight state titles. The program also won the 2025 Chipotle Nationals championship.

Now, a program accustomed to competing for championships could potentially find itself playing Florida’s other highest-ranked teams before reaching the final.

That is exactly what makes the Open Division



Photo Credit: Daniel Boza

Jamari Kennedy walks in the rain on the field during a game this season.

different.

Traditional FHSAA championships separate teams by classification. The Open Division crosses those boundaries, creating what the FHSAA describes as a “premier competitive pathway” for the state’s highest-performing programs while keeping the traditional state championship system in place for the remaining classifications.

For Columbus, the debate is no longer simply theoretical. Football and Basketball are already positioned near the top of the rankings, while programs such as, lacrosse, baseball and soccer have recent histories of competing at the state level.

The rankings will change, and no football team will officially earn an Open Division spot until the regular season ends. But if Columbus remains among Florida’s top eight, the Explorers could become part of the first group to find out exactly what winning in the Open Division requires.

For senior Jan Carlo Hernandez, competing against stronger opponents would only add meaning to the result.

“I feel that championships are earned and deserved by playing the best,” Hernandez said.



Photo Credit: Benjamin Alayo

“Discipline and structure is above everything else. Building a culture within the program starts with the weight room,” Thompson said.

Impact

Although the school year is just beginning and very few sports teams have competed, Coach Thompson’s energy and influence are already evident throughout the athletic program. Damien Harvey, a freshman, shared his thoughts on Thompson’s effect on his mindset:

“A lot of coaches, they won’t want you to lift as much weight as you could, but Coach Thompson pushes you to a point where, “You can do this weight. You can try and do this weight. You will be able to do this weight,” said senior varsity football defensive lineman Damien Harvey.

Members of various athletic teams, including cross country runner Liam Gatcliffe, have observed the influence of Thompson. Thompson has inspired team members to approach weightlifting sessions with increased determination and confidence in their ability to lift heavier each week while maintain-

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Coach Kerry Thompson Brings Experience and Dedication to Columbus Athletics

ing proper technique.

Dave Dunn, Columbus varsity football head coach, called Thompson a “taskmaster, [an] attention to detail type strength and conditioning coach.”

Working Toward Success

It does not matter if the athlete is a linebacker striving to gain more muscle, a cross-country runner refining leg strength for race day, a sprinter gaining explosiveness, or a baseball player working on arm strength; Coach Kerry Thompson is willing to train teams with intensity and structure, fostering accountability and a distinct culture.

More importantly, the coach provides athletes with something they say holds more weight than muscle: a sense of leadership and discipline that is retained after the buzzer sounds, the whistle is blown, and the weights are reracked.

“Strength and conditioning is what I do. But people are what God put me on the planet to connect with, and help them figure out life, give them great advice. I think that’s my purpose. And I get to walk



Courtesy of @maximusthetrainer

in that every day and I couldn’t be more grateful for it,” Thompson said.

NFL vs. Injuries

By Matthew Alvarez

Injuries have already become one of the defining storylines of this season. Throughout the first three weeks of this NFL campaign, injuries have plagued the rosters of numerous teams. These complications have forced coaches and their teams to adjust, while the sidelined players work their way to prior health. The next-man-up mentality is being tested early. Some of these setbacks have been manageable for the organizations, while others devastating. Although injuries are an unavoidable part of professional football, losing key players can create major challenges for NFL teams throughout the season, but as Philadelphia Eagles coach Kevin Stefanski stated, “This is the NFL. You can never predict what is coming.”

Who?

The injury bug has hit both stars and key depth pieces. Miami Dolphins running back and hometown hero, Devon Achane suffered a season-ending ACL injury on Sunday versus the Kansas City Chiefs. “My heart breaks for the guy,” Dolphins head coach Jeff Haffley said Monday. Achane was not the only player to suffer a season-ending ACL injury in Week 3. New York Giants edge rusher Brian Burns also tore his ACL, creating another big loss on the opposite side of the ball.

The quarterback position has not been immune to the league’s early season injuries. Washington Commanders quarterback Jaden Daniels dislocated his left elbow in a week 2 matchup against the Cowboys. The injury is especially concerning because it occurred in the same elbow Daniels injured last season. Additionally, Chicago Bears quarterback Caleb Williams strained his hamstring while playing the Vikings in Week 2. He’s expected back on the field in a couple of weeks.

The injury list also includes several of the league’s most prominent wide receivers. Puka Nacua from the Los Angeles Rams and Houston Texans’ Nico Collins both suffered minor injuries in Week 1, and have been sidelined since. Their status for week 4 is questionable.

Why?

There are many potential factors that have contributed to the increase in early injuries this season. One possible factor is the limited amount of playing time many starters receive during the preseason. That critical part of the year helps the players adapt to the usual workload required during the season. Additionally, the continuous integration of turf fields seems to have had a negative impact on players, potentially leading to an increase in ACL injuries. The hard surface does not provide the natural shock



Photo Credit: Carl Juste/Miami Herald/TNS

absorption that natural grass allows. This not only causes football cleats to get stuck in the grass, but triggers severe stress on joints and bones.

Fantasy Football

Fantasy football managers have been extremely busy this season, especially on the waiver wire. In the past 3 weeks, the injuries of high ADP players have caused many trades and new additions to fantasy rosters. Managers have had to resort to starting their stars’ backups, such as Ollie Gordon from the Miami Dolphins and Marcus Mariota from Washington Commanders. These players provide a safe output when their starters are sidelined.

All in all, the injury “apocalypse” in the NFL has already had a major impact on the success of various teams. This will likely continue throughout the rest of the 2026/27 campaign, but the response from these teams will be the deciding factor of their future.

On his philosophy inside the weight room:

Explorers Dominate in Preseason Shutout vs Miramar After the Annual Alumni Tailgate

By Mark Tanner

In its preseason matchup against Miramar on August 13th, the Explorers dominated on both sides of the ball, earning a 21-0 shutout win.

Before kickoff, Columbus alumni returned to campus for a tailgate, where they came together to reconnect and support their alma mater. Food trucks and sponsor tents filled the area as alumni and fans prepared for the game. CCNN Live was also out there with its third annual Live Ship Gameday edition (similar to ESPN's College Gameday) setup, covering the excitement surrounding this game.

The tailgate gave alumni the chance to return to the place where their own Friday night football memories were made.

“The beauty of history reliving itself all over again. It’s incredible how we come here, participating in the tailgate, running into our old classmates and teammates. It’s incredible how you feel when you walk onto the campus,” said Columbus alum Juan Pablo Silva ’83.

“One of my favorite memories of football games here was when we were the 1st team to play Belen. We ended up winning 21-7. I will never forget that game, it was crazy,” said Juan Gonzalez ’07

As the tailgate ended, fans made their way towards the bleachers and the attention shifted to the



Kai Moore takes a snap during Thursday's preseason matchup vs Miramar.

field.

Columbus put up 21 points on the board while its defense locked up Miramar and kept them off the scoreboard. One of the biggest stars of the night was five-star University of Miami commit A'Mir Sears.

Sears made an impact on both offense and defense, showing his two-way skills as both a WR and CB. On offense, he scored a receiving touchdown. But his biggest impact wasn't just on one side of the ball. Defensively, Sears recorded two sacks and

multiple tackles, making life difficult for the Miramar offense. His performance showed exactly why he is one of our biggest playmakers this season.

However, the night was not only about Sears.

The Columbus defense put together a stellar performance from beginning to end. The unit consistently made stops and prevented Miramar from getting close to the red zone.

“I feel like we came together as a team to work together to dominate, but there are things we still need to work on,” Trenten Miller, freshman varsity running back said.

The preseason victory gave fans an early look at what this year's Explorers could bring to the field: explosive players, a strong defense and a team not scared of making big plays on both sides of the ball.

“I am definitely excited for all our players, especially A'mir Sears comes to mind. I'm looking forward to a great season. I definitely want to see us go all the way to states and win,” said Robert Caminas ’98.

From the alumni tailgate before the game to Sears' dominant two-way performance and the defense's shutout, this football game brought together former and current Explorers to celebrate the beginning of another season. And if this opener was any indication, the Explorers are ready to turn some heads and make some noise this season.



Columbus running back Cecil Smith celebrates his early touchdown.

Faculty beat Juniors 25-23 in Homecoming Week Volleyball Match

By Matthew Leon

In the spirit of homecoming week, festivities are at an all-time high.

On Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2026, the juniors and faculty members faced off in an intense volleyball match. What began as a friendly matchup quickly turned into a back-and-forth scoring battle before the faculty ultimately secured a 25-23 victory.

As the game entered full swing, captains Dominic Muñecas and Mr. Rivero helped their teams engage in several long rallies.

The Juniors' early firepower came from the front-court tandem of Jake Moreno, Adrian Giner, Alejandro Galvez-Cuesta, and Dominic Muñecas. Galvez, Moreno, and Giner set up much of their scoring, allowing Muñecas to send quick strikes to the other side. In the backcourt, William Strauch, Ray Izquierdo, and Giankarlo Rodriguez made crucial saves.



Dominic Muñecas '28 striking the ball

Faculty beat Juniors 25-23 in Homecoming Week Volleyball Match

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For the Faculty, it was a true team effort. Everyone contributed to the game. In the frontcourt, Mr. Rivero stood out with a big block that set the tone early, while Coach Thompson, Br. Al, Mr. Campbell and Mr. Pace secured the middle areas, and Mr. Leon covered the backcourt. Additionally, Mrs. Anderson contributed a series of three to four serves that led to a scoring run for the teachers.

At one point, the Faculty led 17-11 due to errors by their opponents. The Juniors then scored seven straight points to establish an 18-17 lead. This stretch was characterized by a series of long rallies, close calls, and one or two instances of net touching.

The Faculty responded decisively, increasing the score to 22-19 following more mistakes by the Juniors. At its peak, the Faculty was up 24-23. A long



Faculty shaking hands postgame



Group picture postgame

rally, ending with a strike by Mr. Pace, led to another error by the Juniors.

Final score: 25-23.

“It was exciting to see the juniors battle it out with the faculty, but, unfortunately, we didn't win,” said junior Patricio Zaldivar.

After the intense match, there were feelings of camaraderie and sportsmanship. All participants, including the audience, enjoyed the event.

When asked who the MVP of this match was, Mr.

Rivero replied:

“All of them. Everybody. Faculty, students, everybody that came out. Everybody's a winner here.”

In the spirit of camaraderie, both teams delivered an engaging and competitive volleyball performance. However, this leaves the Class of 2028 with a gap to fill. Next year, as seniors, they will have their final opportunity to win.

Will they demonstrate their readiness next year?

UFC 331: Joshua Van Puts On A Show In L.A.

By Javier Albite

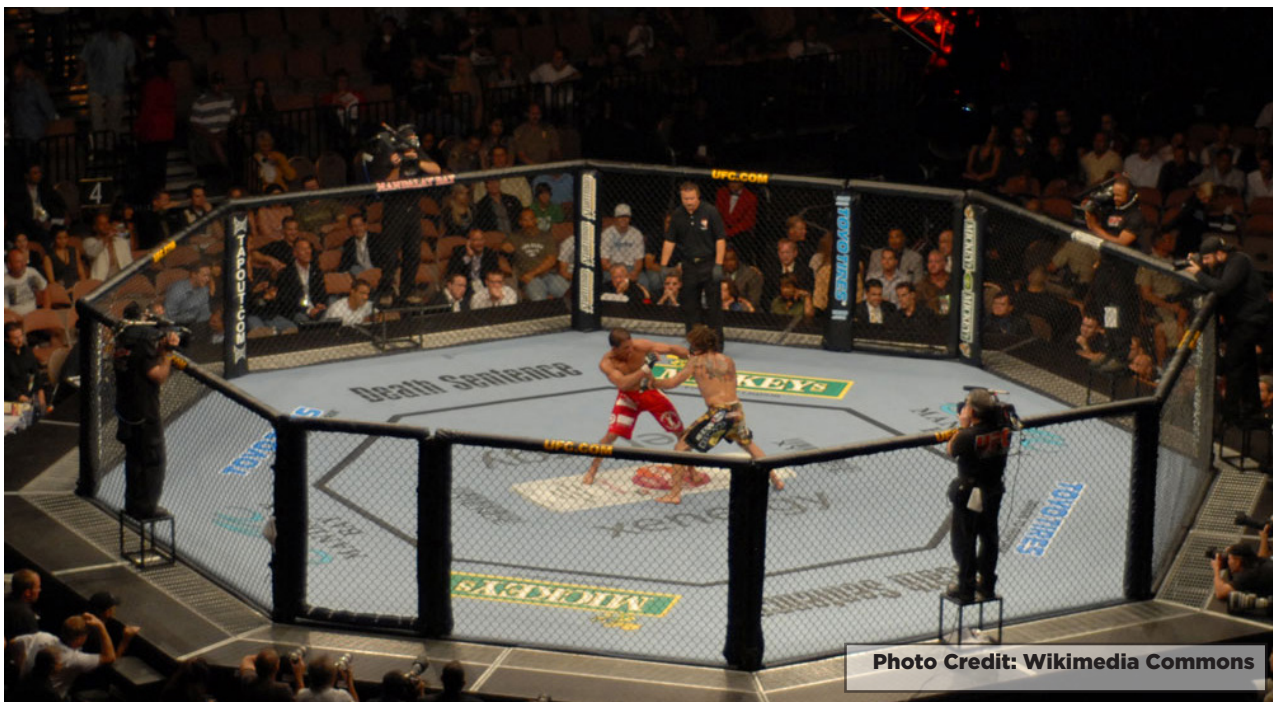
UFC 331 was this past Saturday at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California. Headlined by the highly anticipated rematch between champion Joshua Van and former champion Alexandre Pantoja, the West Coast showed out for its first event in years. The sold-out arena of nearly 19,500 people included celebrities like Avatar director James Cameron, socialite Kourtney Kardashian, comedian Martin Lawrence, and Red Hot Chili Peppers singer Anthony Kiedis, among others. UFC 331 is a new favorite for event of the year.

Background

Back in December 2025 at UFC 323 in Las Vegas, the young top contender Van faced veteran champion Pantoja after defeating the number-one contender in his division that June. Unfortunately, just 26 seconds in, Pantoja fell and awkwardly dislocated his elbow, stopping the fight and making Van the second-youngest champion in UFC history at just 24 years old. This led many fans to call him a fake champ, an insult he took personally. While Pantoja was out, Van came back 5 months later at UFC 328 to defend his title against top contender Tatsuro Taira. Van completely dominated Taira in an upset which many fans considered an early contender for Fight Of The Year. However, some still weren't satisfied, and he set out to prove everyone wrong when he called out Pantoja in the audience in New Jersey. The promotion set the rematch for September, and things got heated between the two very quickly when it came time for the press conference, where they shoved each other and were separated by Dana White. Top lightweight contender Arman Tsarukyan, who fought in the co-main event, also gained publicity for announcing he was adding streamer N3on to his corner, even walking out to his song “She Wanna Hang With An Indian”.

Main Card Results

- Alonzo Menifield (+210 underdog) def. Iwo Baranievski (-260 favorite) by Split Decision (light heavyweight bout)
- Menifield gets an upset win, giving rising contender Baranievski his first loss and getting his bone poked out of his finger in the process.
- Sean Sharaf (+875 underdog) def. Gable Steveson (-2000 favorite) by Round 1 KO (heavyweight bout)



A picture of the UFC Arena

Sharaf pulls off the biggest upset in UFC history and knocks out Olympic gold medalist and Jon Jones protégée Steveson in just 12 seconds.

- Patricio Pitbull (+210 underdog) def. Doo-ho Choi (-280 favorite) by Round 1 TKO (featherweight bout)

Pitbull follows the decades-long tradition of knocking out Koreans who are supposed to be rising contenders.

- Arman Tsarukyan (-305 favorite) def. Mauricio Ruffy (+245 underdog) by Round 1 KO (5-round lightweight bout)

Tsarukyan knocks Ruffy out cold with an elbow after N3on screamed it out from the corner, earning him Performance Of The Night.

- Joshua Van (-166 favorite) def. Alexandre Pantoja (+140 underdog) by Unanimous Decision (flyweight title fight)

Van proves his legitimacy in an absolute war with

Pantoja, earning Fight Of The Night and possibly Fight Of The Year.

What's Next?

- Alonzo Menifield has now proved his place in the top 15, and I think a matchup against Bogdan Guskov would be the best place to go from here.
- Sean Sharaf definitely put on a legendary performance, but I think he should face another unranked opponent like Robelis Despaigne to prove this wasn't a fluke.
- Patricio Pitbull should face someone like Youssef Zalal now that they're both in the same place of “possible contenders who keep losing big fights”.
- Arman Tsarukyan's most obvious next matchup is Justin Gaethje for the title, and that seems to be the direction the UFC is going in.
- Joshua Van is now a proven force at flyweight, and another volume striker like Manel Kape is honestly the only one way I see him being dethroned.

EDITORIAL-After the Bell

By Allan Tompkins

The work that keeps Columbus running doesn't end at 2:15 p.m., and the people doing it aren't asking to be thanked.

At 2:15, the once busy hallways of Columbus empty out in minutes. Backpacks zip, car doors slam, and the parking lot turns from a crowded, social scene to a deserted, quiet zone. Yet, in D16, the light is still on as Mr. Ortega patiently waits for students to come and ask for help with their calculus. In MBL22, Mr. Hermida sits quietly, grading students' history essays before he leaves. In C13, Mr. Chacon runs his Writing Lab to aid those who need that extra help with their homework.

According to the [RAND Corporation](#), in 2024, teachers reported working an average of 53 hours a week (about 9 extra hours a week) while also earning around \$18,000 less in annual pay compared to similar working adults. The [National Education Association](#) also reported that Florida actually ranked 50th among the states and D.C. for average teacher pay.

Statewide, and across the country, the numbers are bleak for teachers looking for jobs. Why then is Columbus able to boast such a strong academic program with such dedicated teachers? The answer may very well be the one thing that students hear the most at this school and often take for granted: brotherhood.

One thing that is unique to the culture in Columbus is how common it is for a student's teacher to be a Columbus alumnus. In my four years here, most of my teachers have been Columbus graduates. Oftentimes, when I ask teachers why they came back, they don't tell me it was because of the pay or the nice facilities but because of the effect that this school had on them.

It's one thing for a school to have been fun in one's formative years; it's another for it to have been such a binding experience that one can't help but



Photo Credit: Antonio Perez/Chicago Tribune/TNS
Art teacher Steve Vidal talks with students from Benito Juarez Academy in Chicago, as they work on their calaveras, (skulls, skeleton figures) during art class, Monday, Sept. 21, 2026.

come back to relive and create more memories at a place they love to call home. However, while teachers come to work at this school to be somewhere they're happy, that doesn't erase the loads of time and effort spent outside of the classroom that often goes unnoticed.

Loyalty is what brings them back, but it shouldn't be the reason no one counts the hours. For teachers like Ms. Rodriguez, who did not attend Columbus but is just as much a part of its community as its alumni, grading AP Psychology papers and tests can be a time-consuming process that is all done behind the scenes.

Part of the magic of Columbus is not seeing those moments and only experiencing the engaging and fun versions of teachers who pour their hearts out to educate their students. In my case, I have a long line of family members in the education field and hearing them explain all of the work they do without complaining has always confused me—but growing up, I've realized that it's simply founded on a principle of passion for this line of work.

For this exact reason, many argue that if teachers

are in education because they love what they do, then there shouldn't be a problem with the extra hours they spend. However, just because teachers independently choose to go the extra mile doesn't mean that extra mile should go unseen.

For a school like Columbus, where so much is done for students, the light that stays on in D16 after the bell has become so normal that we no longer see it as something extra; we simply expect it.

From the first day a boy steps into Columbus, he hears how brotherhood changes lives. Yet, if the brotherhood is real, it was never something just to be received but something to give back as well. The teachers who stay late will keep staying late.

So the next time the bell rings at 2:15, take a walk down the hallway. The cars will have emptied the parking lot and the classrooms will have fallen to a silence but somewhere, the light in a classroom will still be on. These teachers aren't asking for a banquet to thank them, and that is exactly why we should notice.



Photo Credit: CCNN Live
"Eason Brohee types on his laptop."

According to ZipDo.co, 65% of students involved in extracurricular activities report improved confidence and leadership skills as a direct result of their participation.

Competitive clubs are not stress-free and are definitely not easy resume padders. High school serves as a crucial training ground where students can practice handling real-world hardship and deadlines. When teenagers learn to navigate and manage that pressure, the long-term opportunities will outweigh the temporary strain that is to come, leaving

them better prepared for college, careers, and life.

"Leading in a club gives you real confidence. It proves you can handle pressure when it matters," Said senior Caden Artola

The pressure that they would amount to will make them into diamonds and be able to do anything in their way.

OPINION-Larping: A Term That Has Lost Its Meaning

By Diego Rodriguez Deshon

The original definition of the term LARP (live action role play) referred to adults engaging in an activity where they dressed up as fantasy characters and safely fought each other in large outdoor settings. Fast forward to today, and "larping" is now a term used to describe someone who is fake, performative or pretending to be something they are not.

Larping has evolved over time, especially on **TikTok**, where many people have incorrectly used and overused the term. In the beginning, calling someone a "larper" for pretending to have money seemed applicable, but now people use it to criticize others for being new to things and genuinely having fun exploring new interests.

A prime example occurred during the **World Cup**. Many people on TikTok were quick to accuse others of "larping" soccer when, in reality, many were being introduced to the sport in a new light and excited to explore the world of the sport.

"I believe the term 'larping' is being way too overused, especially during the World Cup. Just let people enjoy it," said senior **John Mora**.

In today's gaming community, many younger players are accused of being larpers, but in reality, they are just trying to have the same enjoyment of the game that older people had. For example, **Call**



Photo Credit: Silvia Flores/Fresno Bee/TNS
Fresno Bee columnist Carmen George, right, learns how to joust with Terras Wars larper, Quannah Martinez, 21, of Clovis, during some live action role playing on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2016 at Sierra Bicentennial Park in Clovis, Calif. The group meets in a Clovis park every Saturday to fight each other with foam weapons wearing medieval and super hero garb.

of Duty: Black Ops and Call of Duty: Black Ops II just came out on the **PS5**, and the ports have exploded in popularity, with longtime players returning for nostalgic playthroughs of Zombies and Multi-player maps.

However, people who never played the games but want to enjoy them still get picked on for not being born earlier and not being able to play the games when they originally came out.

"It's unfair that kids who haven't played Black Ops II but try it out and genuinely

have fun are being called larpers," said senior **Alexander Zamora**.

Larping should be minimized in today's society because many people overuse the term and accuse others of being fake in everything they do, especially during sporting events and when older games are brought to new platforms.

People should be allowed to enjoy what they are doing without others trying to make themselves feel better by putting them down.

A Brand New Day for Spider-Man — and \$2 Billion to Prove It

By Liam Gatcliffe

Since 2002, superhero fans have left cinemas in awe of the web-slinging New Yorker that the world has come to love as Spider-Man. Tobey Maguire starred for three films, Andrew Garfield for two, and lately, Tom Holland for the past decade. Holland first appeared in Captain America: Civil War (2016), and since then has established a standalone trilogy along with some other Avengers films. Debates have now begun over which of the three is the superior Spiderman, which intensified when all three actors appeared in Jon Watts's 2021 film Spider-Man: No Way Home. Holland may have solidified his legacy, however, with his fourth film that graced theaters on July 31st.

Where we left off...

Spider-Man: Brand New Day picks up right where No Way Home finishes. As the only solution to saving the world from incoming universes and their evils, Peter Parker pleads with Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) to cast a spell in which every human being forgets who he is. Reluctantly, Strange does so, and every memory of someone who knew and loved Peter Parker was erased. Peter's girlfriend, MJ (Zendaya), and his best friend, Ned (Jacob Batalon), go off to MIT while Peter fully submerges into the Spider-Man identity with no one else on Earth who loves him.

New York's streets have been cleaned up, and Spider-Man is lauded as a hero. Nobody knows who lies under the mask, but the masked hero is reaching his mental breaking point. New evils arise, and Peter must face the hard truths of his humanity.

Historic Success

Brand New Day has enjoyed massive success at the box office, crossing the \$2 billion global mark in merely 17 days. This is a historical milestone, as only Avengers: Endgame (2019) reaches this achievement in fewer (11) days. In fact, BND has already grossed more than all superhero movies released in 2025 altogether.

Tom Holland has also catapulted himself into conversations with some of the greatest and highest-grossing actors of all time. A participant in Endgame as well, Holland and his wife Zendaya are starring in Christopher Nolan's new film epic, The Odyssey. Clearly, films with this power couple are turning movie theaters into frenzy zones on weekends.



Photo Credit: Sony Pictures/TNS
Tom Holland stars as Spider-Man in "Spider-Man: Brand New Day."

Returns and changes to the crew

Destin Daniel Cretton took the reins from Jon Watts as director of this fourth installment in Holland's movies, who had previously helped produce the preceding trilogy. However, writers Chris McKenna & Erik Sommers remained on set to help produce their fourth Spidey film, showing some true continuity across the past decade of the Peter Parker story.

Regarding the cast, Stranger Things star Sadie Sink joins the MCU in an undisclosed role (I won't spoil it for you!). Jon Bernthal reprises his role as Frank Castle (from Punisher), as does Florence Pugh in her oftentimes comedic role of Yelena Belova.

"As someone who always loved Spider-Man as a kid and has read the comics, I can tell you that Brand New Day is indisputably the greatest representation of Spider-Man I've ever seen. The comic-accurate suit, the quips, comedy, and relatable personal struggles was perfectly executed and is exactly what Spider-Man was made to represent. I can't wait to see what the future brings for Tom Holland's Spider-Man," said Anthony Ortega '28.

My Thoughts

I've already seen BND twice in theaters, and once during an IMAX screening. I'm giving it a solid 3.5/5 rating. I truly enjoyed the film. It was fun, engaging, relatable, and had a truly fantastic soundtrack (Tame Impala, Bad Bunny, and more).

I believed, however, that the vulnerability and humane grief that Peter Parker goes through as a young guy in his 20s is the most remarkable takeaway. Of course, BND had its fights, explosions, and combat. The movie felt more grounded than the others, though. It explored more serious topics, fostering deeper emotional connection to Peter Parker himself, the guy behind the mask that nobody knows.

As a sentimental superhero fan, I confess that No Way Home was my favorite of the Holland movies, with its Tobey/Andrew collaboration and the high stakes involved. BND is still a fantastic film, and gives 2026 cinemas its Barbenheimer moment in collaboration with The Odyssey.

Whether this will be your first Marvel film or you've been a fanatic since the days of Iron Man, I guarantee that you will leave a BND screening at your local theater and realize that the two and a half hour experience was worth every penny!

Pressure Is the Price of Growth: Why Competitive Clubs Are Worth the Stress

By Diego Rodriguez Deshon

The debate surrounding high school extracurriculars often hinges on a single question: Do competitive clubs create more stress or more opportunity for teenagers?

Critics frequently highlight packed schedules, intense expectations, and tight deadlines, arguing that these environments cause more harm than good, especially through anxiety and burnout. However, viewing stress strictly as a negative factor ignores a fundamental reality: meaningful opportunity rarely exists without pressure.

"Late nights are tough, but learning to manage stress now builds character. Pressure is just part of the process," Said senior **Eduardo Gutierrez**

Participating in extracurriculars whether a competitive club or a sport mentally prepares students for real-world pressure far better than relying solely on textbook assignments. Stepping outside of routine academics shapes character and sets individuals apart from the crowd.

The tangible benefits of competitive extracurriculars offer a strong counterargument. According to Gitnux.org, students who refrain from participating in extracurricular activities hold an average GPA of approximately 2.4. In contrast, students who stay involved maintain an average GPA of 3.0 and boast a 15% higher chance of attending college.

"Clubs force you to manage your time. When you stop procrastinating, your grades actually stay higher," Said senior **Ryan Bernal**

Beyond academic measures, the personal development gained in these settings is significant.

Beyond the Walls: Why Attack on Titan Stands Above the Rest

By Mark Tanner

Attack on Titan, an anime series about humans fighting monsters—or is it?

There are giant walls. There are enormous Titans. There are soldiers flying through the air with swords attached to their waists. There are cities being destroyed and people hopelessly trying to survive.

But that's only the beginning.

As the story moves on, Attack on Titan turns from a survival story into a story about freedom, war, hatred, revenge, and discrimination. What makes this anime so impressive is not just what happens, but how it prepares the audience for what is to come.

Some scenes that you would overlook can become some of the most important moments in the entire series. A line of dialogue, a background design, or a character's decision can contain information that will not make sense until tens of episodes later.

This is why Attack on Titan deserves to be considered the best anime of all time.

It starts with a simple story

The story begins with humanity living behind three 50-meter-high walls: Maria, Rose, and Sina. For 100 years, people inside the walls believe they are the last humans alive. Outside the walls are Titans—giant humanoid creatures that eat humans.

The main character, Eren Yeager, grows up in the Shiganshina District with his childhood friends Mikasa Ackerman and Armin Arlert. Eren believes that as long as humanity is in the walls, they are no better than cattle. He dreams of seeing the world outside.

A massive Titan called the Colossal Titan suddenly appears and breaks through the outer wall. A second Titan, the Armored Titan, destroys another section of the defenses. Titans enter the city, and Eren watches as his mother dies while he and Mikasa escape thanks to a soldier named Hannes.

From that moment, Eren makes one promise: he will destroy every Titan.

At this point, we have a clear understanding of the story. Humans are the victims, Titans are the monsters, and Eren is the hero who will save humanity.

The Twist That Changes Everything

Eventually, the audience learns that the people living inside the walls are not all of humanity. They are only Eldians living on the island of Paradis.

Across the ocean is a nation called Marley, which has spent generations teaching their people that Eldians are dangerous descendants of an ancient empire. Some Eldians live in Marley and are discriminated against and forced to live in restricted areas. Marley also uses certain Eldians as weapons by transforming them into Titans.

Suddenly, the Titans aren't simply monsters.

They are people.

The people Eren thought were his enemies have their own history, fears, and reasons for fighting.

The series does a complete 180 from its opening seasons. The conflict isn't just humanity vs. Titans; it turns into Eldians vs. Marleyans. This progression is one of the reasons why the series is so powerful.

Foreshadowing

If there is one thing Attack on Titan does better than anyone else, it's foreshadowing. The show constantly gives the audience information without explaining why it matters.

One of the earliest examples can be found in the name of the very first episode: "To You, in 2,000 Years." Normally, I wouldn't think much about a title, but after learning about Ymir Fritz, the Founding Titan, the Paths, and the connection between every Eldian, the title becomes much more significant. From the very first episode, the show was hinting at

a connection between the past, present, and future.

Another example is when Eren wakes up from his dream in the first episode.

Eren wakes up crying after seeing something he can't comprehend. The audience has no idea what he saw, and we never hear about it again until one of the last episodes. After learning about the Attack Titan's abilities and Eren's connection to memories across time, the opening scene makes a lot more sense.

The Basement

For several seasons, one question hangs over the entire series: What is in Eren's dad's basement?

In the first episode, Grisha Yeager tells Eren he will take him into the basement when he comes back from work; unfortunately, after the Titans invade, he dies. The basement becomes a symbol for the entire mystery of the story. The belief is that reaching it will reveal the truth about the Titans. When Eren and the Scouts finally reach it, they find photographs. For a second, it seems very anticlimactic; instead, it proves that humanity exists beyond the walls.

The basement doesn't just answer a question; it is the exact point at which the story changes from just humanity vs. Titans.

Reiner and Bertholdt

One of the most shocking moments of the season is when Reiner casually reveals that he is the Armored Titan and Bertholdt is the Colossal Titan. There isn't a dramatic transformation sequence. Reiner simply tells Eren. The crazy part is that the show had already given clues about their identities.

Reiner and Bertholdt show little to no knowledge about the Titans and the world outside the walls. Their behavior becomes more suspicious when re-watching earlier seasons because now the audience knows what they were hiding.

What's even more impressive is how Reiner's mental state becomes part of the foreshadowing. He begins struggling to separate his identity as a soldier inside the walls from his identity as a Warrior from Marley. What originally looks like strange behavior becomes evidence of his psychological conflict.

What's Hiding in The Background?

Sometimes the foreshadowing isn't even in the dialogue. One example is that you can see grown Eren in some of the scenes from season one. The series repeatedly places important details in front of you without making them the center of the shot. We also later learn that the Titan who kills Eren's mom was commanded by Eren to kill her instead of Bertholdt.

Eren's father, Grisha, seems mysterious and vague from the beginning. His secrecy surrounding the basement seems weird. Then the audience eventually learns about his life in Marley, his first wife Dina, his relationship with Zeke, the Eldian Restorationists, and how he received the Attack Titan. This is the special quality of Attack on Titan: the story doesn't always give you new information. Sometimes it gives old information a new meaning.

Eren was Foreshadowing His Own Ending

Early Eren is easy to understand. He wants freedom; he hates Titans; he wants to protect his friends. Later, he becomes much more complicated.

He learns that the future is already visible to him through the Attack Titan's ability to access memories. He discovers that his actions helped influence his father's decisions in the past. Eventually, the line between cause and effect becomes incredibly blurred. Eren is now the reason the story happened.

One of the biggest examples is Eren convincing his dad to kill the Reiss family. Earlier in the show, we think Grisha acted all on his own, but later we discover Eren's future memories influenced him.

The angry kid from the first episode eventually

becomes someone capable of doing terrible things because he believes they are necessary to achieve freedom for his friends and his people. The tragedy is that Eren spends his entire childhood wanting freedom, only to become a slave to it.

The Opening Songs

Even the opening songs contain clues. The series' openings and endings often contain imagery involving characters, Titans, the Founding Titan, the Paths, walls, bloodlines, and the outside world. An example of this is in the second opening, when Hange stares at a Titan head-on through a cracked window, which makes it look like she is missing an eye; later on, Hange does lose one eye due to the Colossal Titan's explosion.

The ending sequences are especially interesting because they sometimes contain images connected to historical events and characters that the audience has not fully learned about yet. It's almost like you've known everything since the beginning, but you just didn't know what to do with the information.

The Birds

Throughout the show, there are countless shots of just birds flying in the sky. These birds are a representation of freedom, especially because Eren dreams about being free beyond the walls.

The symbolism becomes more meaningful after the ending, when we learn that freedom is one of the central questions surrounding Eren. Eren wants to be free from the walls. Then he wants freedom from Marley. Then he wants freedom from the cycle of war. Eventually, his pursuit of freedom causes him to take away freedom from countless other people. The show asks the question: can anyone truly be free if they are always bound to fate?

Side Characters Big Stories

Attack on Titan really stands out because of its characters.

Levi is not just the strongest soldier. His story is about loss, the weight of responsibility, and having the will to go on while everyone around you doesn't make it.

Armin is not simply the smart character. He struggles with his toughness and whether he really deserves the power and responsibility he is given.

Mikasa's relationship with Eren becomes connected to questions about love, loyalty, and what you would do if saving the person you love means never being able to see them again.

Reiner is not simply a villain. He was a teenager who was manipulated into becoming a weapon and is dealing with two personas: the weapon from Marley and the soldier from Paradis.

Zeke believes that his euthanasia plan was really the best option to end the suffering of his people.

Gabi starts off almost like Eren, someone who is willing to do anything to save their people, but she later learns that Eldians are not what Marley says they are, and she is forced to question her beliefs.

Nobody is simply "good" or "bad."

Who Is The Villain?

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Attack on Titan is that there really is no wrong or right side.

At first, the Titans are the enemy.

Then the Warriors from Marley are the enemy.

Then Marley becomes more complicated as we learn that they were just taught to hate Eldians.

Then Eren himself becomes someone the audience has to question, as he killed 80% of humanity.

Instead, the series shows how hatred can survive for generations, and the cycle of war is never-ending.

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Beyond the Walls: Why Attack on Titan Stands Above the Rest

Attack on Titan doesn't excuse the terrible things characters do. Instead, it asks the audience to understand why people do them.

Why It has Such an Impact

The biggest reason why Attack on Titan stays with people is because it leaves you with questions when the episodes end that have no easy answers.

What does freedom actually mean?

Should people answer for the sins of their ancestors?

And perhaps the most important question:

How far would you go to protect the people you care about?

The series forces you to think about war from multiple different points of view. It shows how the victims from one point of view are really causing so much harm to the other side. It shows how propaganda can influence children. It shows how fear can

lead to hatred and how hatred can lead to violence.

The Writing

Attack on Titan animation is incredible. Its action is peak. Its music can elevate a scene, making you feel it on a deeper level. Even though these little things are part of why AoT is amazing, it's not the main piece. The real achievement is the writing.

Attack on Titan trusts its audience enough to hide answers in plain sight. It allows characters to change in ways that are sometimes uncomfortable. It makes viewers question who they want to support. And when the story ends, it encourages people to look back at the show and realize what was in front of them all along.

A great show entertains you.

A great show makes you care about the characters.

But the greatest show makes you want to come back and experience it again just to see what you



Attack on Titan promo poster

missed the first time.

That is what Attack on Titan does.

The Strokes' Reality Awaits Review: A Bold Step Beyond Garage Rock

By Allan Tompkins

25 years after the release of their debut album, the band known for having redefined the garage rock genre at the turn of the century has given their fans yet another challenge to embrace in the controversial yet addictive sound of Reality Awaits.

Despite the mixed opinions that frontman Julian Casablancas has received for his creative decisions with the album, Reality Awaits acts as an undeniable next step in transitioning The Strokes from a raw, minimalist rock band to an amalgamation of indie rock and synth-pop that complement each other like bread and butter.

Their gradual introduction of synthesizers into songs like Welcome to Japan in 2013 and At The Door in 2020 has evolved into Casablancas' unapolgetic usage of AutoTune in almost every song on the new album—a choice that has many fans divided. Whether the blame for this feature is on Daft Punk for having introduced AutoTune to Casablancas in 2013 with the catchy tune of Instant Crush or on Julian for heavily integrating the software in his experimental rock group known as The Voidz, one thing is certain: Reality Awaits succeeds in doing what The Strokes do best—redefining the way people view music.

Produced by Rick Rubin, the same man responsible for The Strokes' Grammy-winning album The New Abnormal in 2020, Reality Awaits is an 18-track album stuffed into nine employing such abrupt changes in almost every one of their melodies that it leaves you wondering if you liked the song at all.

In **Liar's Remorse**, the rather melancholic mood of the song almost reaches a point of redundancy just as the final 30 seconds roll in, which feature an off-kilter harmonic guitar outro that effortlessly leads into the dubby sound of **The Fruits of Conquest** which opens with Casablancas' signature falsettos. Similarly, midway through the groovy song that is **Lonely in the Future**, The Strokes bridge their largely guitar-based tune into one dominated by synths and AutoTune, making the song feel like a rollercoaster where you can anticipate the drop and are that much more excited because of it.

Lyrically, the band largely remains at its roots with multiple songs exploring love and relationships such as **Falling out of Love**, the second of their two teasers released prior to the album which features heavy AutoTune and a distinct heartbreak ballad that seems to have come from a page of The Voidz's book with a twist of The Strokes' personalizations. In the album's closer, **Tyrants of the Mellow Moon**, Julian speaks on the band's age and legacy with the opening line "So we go for one more ride/ and that's okay 'cause I did my time/ but now I wait for another chance/ when I will take everything I can."



The Strokes' new album is titled "Reality Awaits."

At a point where The Strokes are now qualifiable into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, fans who have been loyal for years along with newfound teenagers taking a liking to the seemingly canon event that is The Strokes both look at the band's next moves very carefully—a reality that unfortunately results in the type of disappointment that many fans expecting the same old stuff repackaged into new names experienced with Reality Awaits.

Perhaps The Strokes will never truly be able to escape the gripping jaws of nostalgia that their music has instilled on everyone which is why an album like Reality Awaits is a blatant example of the band sticking to their guns and attempting to, once again, reimagine a genre that they themselves helped lay the foundation for. The future doesn't wait for nostalgia—and neither do The Strokes.

The Psycho Cleaner

By Lucas Rauseo

On a dark, albeit not stormy, night, a van is tearing down the street and into the suburbs of a town named Lil' Willow. At first glance, one might assume that this van is traveling way too fast, but they would likely hold their breath once they saw who was driving it: Dave Marley Davidson, also known as the PSYCHO CLEANER!

"Who is The Psycho Cleaner," you may ask? Well, dear reader, let's travel back to the origins of Dave. He was originally born in a quaint farmhouse with loving, supportive parents. He had food, water, animals, pretty much everything a lad like him would need. Alas, there were a few gaping flaws: The dust blew everywhere, the mud splashed and oozed all over the walls, the grime was never-ending, and the dirt, the dirt, THE DIRT!! His parents didn't mind it at all, but to Dave, it was a nightmare. One that he could never wake from. From that moment on, Dave's madness gave birth to something new, determination. A determination to rid all that is dirty, dusty, and grimy from this world. Thus, he took up the brush, armed himself with a spray bottle, and became the legendary Psycho Cleaner, eternal foe of dirt kind.

Finally, Dave arrived at where he was called. He rang the doorbell, and a young man answered the door.

"Oh! You must be the cleaner we called!" said the man.

"What's your name again? Just to get familiar."

"Dave," he replied through a somewhat grit-toothed smile.

A young woman appeared beside the man and said, "Well, it's nice to meet you, Mr. Dave! You see, our basement needs a serious cleaning, and our neighbors told us to call you! We'll be back at 9:00! Good luck!"

Just like that, they drove off, leaving Dave to his work. Right away, he noticed that the house was nice. Very nice.

"This place isn't bad, actually," Dave thought to himself as he headed down. "Hopefully their basement is just as - **DEAR GOD!!**"

Unfortunately for Dave, the basement was covered in grime, and it seemingly hadn't been cleaned in months.

"WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED HERE?!" Dave cried out, utterly terrified by this landfill of a basement.

Dave knew he had his work cut out for himself, so he got his tools and started to clean, scrubbing down every nook and cranny and leaving no spot uncleaned.

About halfway through Dave's cleaning, a haunting chuckle echoed through the basement. Dave was understandably put on edge by this.

"Who's there?!" he shouted into the darkness.

Suddenly, what appeared to be a sentient patch of grime appeared before our horrified hero.

"Ahh... So THIS is the fabled Psycho Cleaner! I've heard many stories about you," said the Grime Ghoul. "However, this is where all your stories end! As you shall PERISH before my grimy clutches!"

Suddenly, as the Grime Ghoul cackled before him, it all came back to Dave, those endless nights, dirt and soot everywhere, dust always in his face, the true horror of it all. Suddenly, Dave let out a blood-curdling screech as he tore out his brush and bottle and prepared for a fight to the death. The battle was legendary, one to be heralded for generations to come, a battle so nerve-wracking, so



Psycho Cleaner cover art parodied from Doom.

intense, and so hair-raising that it could stop one's heart.

A battle in which the Psycho Cleaner was victorious.

"Oh, what a night!" the woman exclaimed to her fiancé as they walked back into their house.

"You said it, baby," the man replied. "Hopefully that Dave guy is done with the cleaning."

They made their way downstairs to find the basement utterly spotless, and Dave in the middle panting like he survived a war.

"By God, it's simply immaculate! Thank you so, so much, Mr. Dave!" the woman said to him, and Dave only responded with an aggressive nod.

The man gave Dave his payment and bid him farewell. As Dave rocketed away in his van, he knew that this was all in a day's work for the Psycho Cleaner.

The Bright Side of The Cove

By Francisco Celorio



[CAPTION NEEDED]

A long time ago, just down the streams of El Junque in Puerto Rico, lay a little cove nestled between sunny shores and muddy mangroves. And in this little cove lived some of the happiest creatures that you will ever meet, the Coquí. They would jump, dance, and play along the beautiful shores of their perfect home. And as nightfall approached, something magical would happen. The water would radiate with a bioluminescent gleam, and all the Coquí would gather around and cry out into the night all the things they love about their island home. But soon would come a day when the sky grew dark and the waters raced. And with this sudden storm, came someone new. They were tall, dark, and bumpy. Their very footsteps shook the ground beneath them. And when they opened their mouth, out came a terrible, rumbling below.

"I am Toad! This is my cove now!" croaked the beast, as it towered over the Coquí.

The Coquí all ran away in terror, except for one. This brave little Coquí knew what she was doing, and chose to keep a close eye on this new arrival. As it turns out, even with all of the cove in his power, he was unhappy. Instead of simply gloating about his new property, Toad just spat out everything he hated about it.

"This water is too murky! This mud is too sticky! The sand is too gritty! I am afraid that you all don't know how to take care of something as important

as this," the Toad croaked. "Straighten your back! Get that mud off of yourself! You all are a disgrace!" the Toad spat, as the Coquí worked endlessly to tend to his needs.

However, soon our brave little Coquí realized something. Their new supreme leader was suffering from a strange condition; he was lonely. Every night the Coquí were quieted, while the Toad climbed to the highest point in the cove and cried out into the night. It sounded sad and painful, as if he was calling out to a long-lost part of himself.

Eventually, the nights were empty. There was no song or celebration, only Toad's isolated cries. That is, until someone stepped up. The little Coquí made a drastic move. She climbed up, slowly approached, and sat herself down right next to the towering beast.

"What would you want?", the Toad aggressively snapped at her. "I noticed that you were alone, no one should be alone on the island, what's troubling you?"

"Well, long before the storm, my friend and I would frolic on the mountain by the stream, chasing and playing the whole day through. And at night, we would sit and listen to hear all of you sing. Then one day, the storm came

through, taking me from her, and sending me down the stream all the way here. I've never been the same since. And I thought that I could call out to her, but I kept you quiet because the memories of our nights together were too painful.", said the Toad, his voice breaking.

"Well, if you hate the cove so much, could we at least try and help you get used to it?"

From then on, Toad truly changed. He learned to live on the bright side of life and love his newfound home. But then one night, Toad decided to sing with the Coquí. The mix of joyful and somber sounds resonated and echoed throughout the island, creating what sounded like a breathtaking euphony. And to everyone's surprise, someone answered. It was the one who Toad called out to all of those lonesome nights.

And so all of the Coquí, and Toad, climbed up the mountain and through dense rainforests to bid their new friend goodbye. The Toad, tearing up, had one final goodbye to give. To the person who never gave up on him, who saw the good in him, a true friend, the brave little Coquí.

As they climbed back down the mountain, they sang the sweet and somber song that brought them all together to a brighter side, their home.

Imagine a World - Song

By Juan-Pablo Pina

Imagine a world, an ancient sea
Where creatures swam is now prairie.
Reptiles in the air and birds with teeth,
Giant swimming lizards, sharks lurking underneath.
Prehistoric animals to blow your mind,
Swordfish and sailfish and all other kinds.
Flying pterodactyls and turtles abound.
The diversity of life can be found all around.

We're on the rolling prairie, now a sea of grass,
Once an open waterway in the distant past.
The earth is everchanging ... we may need to swim again;
Now we're just trying to adapt to the world we're living in.

Delicate sea lilies and giant clams,
Huge filter-feeding fish eating what they can.
Ammonites and squids, swimming in the sea
The hunters become hunted, and then they have to flee.
This body of water, teeming with life,
So thick with living beings you can cut it with a knife.
They sink to the silty bottom, forever there entombed
Until they are discovered and hung up in a room.

We're on the rolling prairie, now a sea of grass,
Once an open waterway in the distant past.
The earth is ever-changing... we may need to swim again;
Now we're just trying to adapt to the world we're living in.



A giant mural, on display at the Keystone Gallery north of Scott City, Kansas, depicting the area as it was in the Cretaceous

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