

FROM HELENA TO

MILAN

STORY BY JACKSON MAILEY

The journey of Konnor Ralph, a self-taught Olympian freestyle skier from Helena.



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APRIL 9, 2026 | VOLUME 128 | ISSUE NO. 24

MONTANA KAIMIN



The Montana Kaimin is a weekly independent student newspaper at the University of Montana. The Kaimin office and the University of Montana are located on land originally inhabited by the Salish People. Kaimin is a derivative of a Salish language word, "Qe'ymin," that is pronounced kay-MEEN and means "book," "message" or "paper that brings news."

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POLITICAL CARTOON



BARRETT
2026

DETECTIVE SQUIRREL: SE 3 EP 11



BARRETT CLEMENT | CARTOONIST @FUNNYFERRETSTUDIOS

BARRETT

Take the summer concert series full throttle

With increasing regularity, bigger and bigger musical acts find their way to Missoula, whether it's at one of Logjam's many venues or the University of Montana's Adams Center.

This year, the University of Montana announced Post Malone and Jelly Roll's BIG ASS Stadium Tour Part 2 as its next show in its summer concert series.

Last year, Shania Twain lit up Washington-Grizzly Stadium in a rainbow of colors. But one year in particular stands out as the concert series' best: the triple threat lineup in 2024 of Pearl Jam, Tyler Childers and P!NK.

The concerts, which occurred within less than a week of each other, hit the UM campus in a wash of music of all genres. The 2000s pop of P!NK, the country of Tyler Childers and the rock of Pearl Jam became the soundtrack for the end of summer and the start of the fall semester.

NonStop Local estimated the economic impact of these concerts was around \$12-\$15 million in revenue. According to UM estimates, the concerts brought in \$3 million for the region, including hotels, food and shopping by tourists and concertgoers.

But on a personal level, the whirlwind of music created a sense of togetherness that Missoula doesn't often experience. Everyone came together for a week of performances each with its own unique sound and look. It was a moment for Missoulians and University of Montana students to steal one more brief gasp of summer before jumping back into work and school.

While the concert series continues, there's no set structure. It seems built around the shows it can book, and while that's not unusual for a small town like Missoula, the summer concert series deserves to go full throttle.

With the Zootown Festival embarking on its second year, the University of Montana's stadium is no longer the biggest venue in town, and soaring concert ticket prices are only going to drive that competition higher.

Music fans can expect to pay anywhere from \$200-\$400 for a general admission ticket to Post Malone, though some tickets on reseller sites carried an astronomical \$3,000 price tag, or they can spend around \$300 for a general admission ticket to see an entire lineup of artists at the Zootown

Festival, including The Chicks and The Lumineers.

UM should consider leaning into a festival-style lineup at the end of the summer, just like it did in 2024. A week of bring-the-house-down concerts, big names with potential deals for buying tickets to all three shows.

Held consistently at the end of August, the summer concert series could transform from the occasional concert to a premiere music event that nobody will want to miss.

- Elle Daniel, editor-in-chief
Like it? Hate it? Let us know.
Email us your opinions at
elle.daniel@umontana.edu

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

	1							2
4		3						1
7	6					3		
		5	4					
					1	9		8
6					8		5	1
					6	7	9	
8	9							4
		4			5			

Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

7	5	3	2	4	8	9	1	6
8	9	4	1	6	7	2	3	5
2	1	6	5	3	9	4	7	8
9	8	1	4	7	6	3	5	2
6	3	7	8	5	2	1	4	9
4	2	5	3	9	1	8	6	7
3	7	2	6	8	4	5	9	1
5	6	8	9	1	3	7	2	4
1	4	9	7	2	5	6	8	3

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Mules on the Oval



Forest Service packer Robin Connell, left, walks a mule across campus while packer John Leader, right, watches on March 31.

JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN

In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR
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DOWNTOWN SHOOTING ENDS WITH TWO ARRESTS

A shooting in downtown Missoula prompted the Missoula Police Department to arrest two individuals early Sunday morning.

Officers responded to a report of gunfire just after 2 a.m. in the downtown area, according to Missoula Current. Shortly after, a man with a gunshot wound and bullet strikes to his car arrived at the Missoula Police Department.

The scene of the shooting was deemed to be the 200 block of Ryman Street, where multiple casings were discovered, according to a press release.

“Patrol officers later located another involved male in the 200 block of Woody Street,” the Missoula Police Department said. “A vehicle associated with the incident was nearby, and a handgun was recovered as part of the investigation.”

Of the two men arrested, one was transported to St. Patrick Hospital for treatment, while the other was taken to police headquarters to be questioned.

“Based on information gathered during the investigation, shots were fired in a busy downtown area with uninvolved pedestrians in the immediate vicinity, which contributed to the criminal endangerment charges,” the department stated.

Ultimately, both 33-year-old Laurent Mugondozi and 36-year-old Anthony Brodie were charged with attempted homicide and criminal endangerment. Mugondozi also received a DUI charge, which was his third offence.

This event is the second downtown shooting since early December, when a 27-year-old man was arrested after another Ryman Street shooting.

EASTER EGG DROP FEATURES HELICOPTER

Hundreds gathered in Missoula on Sunday to participate in an Easter egg drop event, which featured a helicopter releasing more than 10,000 eggs from the sky.

The event was held by the Christian Life Center, where a pilot from St. Ignatius flew the helicopter while dressed as the Easter bunny, according to KPAX.

“The helicopter was amazing,” one child said.

The Christian Life Center has been hosting this event annually for the past three years, with lead pastors Heath and Kim McCoy presiding over it.

In addition to the egg drop, the occasion featured petting animals and food trucks. Organizers also noted more than 60 volunteers who helped with the event.

“I just had an idea one day, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if we had a helicopter [that] dropped Easter eggs?’” Heath McCoy said. “If we can bring joy and happiness on the heart on a beautiful sunny day Easter weekend, man that’s the heart of what we want to do.”

It only took a matter of minutes for the eggs to be collected, and some children were quick to share eggs with those who had fewer.

“I had a lot of eggs and some kids had zero, so I gave them five or six eggs,” another child said.

COCAINE SEIZED BY AUTHORITIES AT CANADIAN BORDER

Almost 191 pounds of suspected cocaine were reportedly seized by officers with the Canada Border Services Agency during a traffic stop at the Coumts port of entry at the Montana border in southern Alberta.

Authorities claim that the seizure took place on Feb. 15 when officers inspected a commercial truck transporting produce to Calgary. Officers found 70 bricks of suspected cocaine while searching the truck’s cab.

The driver was promptly arrested and turned over to the Canadian mounted police along with the drugs.

Officials have said that the seizure is part of an ongoing effort to prevent illegal drugs from entering Canada. The agency also noted that the Coumts crossing has revealed several large drug runs in recent months, with over 2,200 pounds of narcotics seized in late 2025.

Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree said that this bust showcased the importance of collaboration between agencies.



This week on the Kaimin Cast ...

The Oval is a literary magazine written, edited and published by students. Students of all majors can submit writing or artwork in the spring semester to be considered for publication.

Those interested in helping the publication process can take part in the class in the spring, where they will decide on submissions to publish and help the literary magazine come to life.

The Oval is an opportunity that can be a stepping stone for the careers of those in the class creating it, as well as those who get their work submitted.

“Once we have all the submissions, we have our boards. We have fiction, visual art, poetry and non-fiction. And then the boards, which are made up of several people each, will read every single work that we get and take the time to consider them,” said Dante Terrio, The Oval’s treasurer this semester.

To learn more about UM’s literary magazine, check out our latest podcast, “The Oval: A stepping stone,” by heading to our website at montanakaimin.com.

- Chaytan Reid,
audio reporter



New Kaimin Cast
episode out this
week. Stay tuned.
Scan for the latest



IRAN REJECTS CEASEFIRE, AMERICA THREATENS ADDITIONAL STRIKES

Iran rejected a proposed 45-day ceasefire on Monday, saying it wants a permanent end to the war instead.

The U.S. has ramped up threats toward Iran in an attempt to reopen the strait of Hormuz, according to The Associated Press. “Today will be the largest volume of strikes since day one,” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said. “Tomorrow, even more than today.”

Officials in Tehran communicated their response through Pakistan, which has been a key mediator in the conflict. The response included proposals for reconstruction and lifting sanctions.

“We only accept an end of the war with guarantees that we won’t be attacked again,” said Mojtaba Ferdousi Pour, head of Iran’s diplomatic mission in Cairo. He said that Iran’s trust in President Donald Trump has been damaged by the two previous bombings that took place during earlier negotiations.

ARTEMIS II CREW BREAKS DISTANCE RECORD

The Artemis II mission crew broke the record for farthest distance that humanity has ever traveled from Earth on Monday.

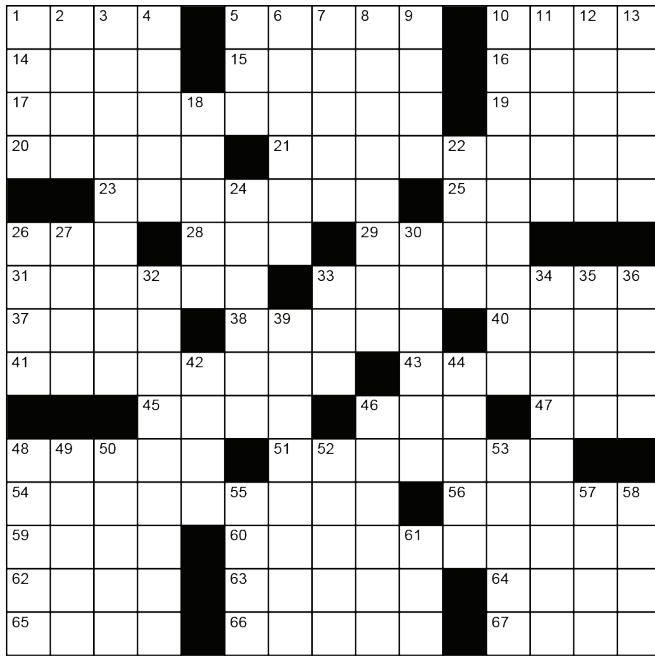
The historic event happened at 1:57 p.m. Eastern Time when NASA astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, as well as Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen, surpassed 248,655 miles from Earth, according to CBS. The previous record was set in 1970 by the crew of the Apollo 13 mission.

Hansen communicated a message from the crew as they broke the record.

“From the cabin of Integrity, as we surpass the farthest distance humans have ever traveled from planet Earth, we do so honoring the extraordinary efforts and feats of our predecessors in human space exploration,” he said. “We will continue our journey even farther into space before Mother Earth pulls us back into everything that we hold dear.”

Hansen then issued a statement to scientists and astronauts of the future.

“We challenge this generation and the next to make sure this record is not long-lived,” he said.



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ACROSS

- 1 Budget rival
- 5 Come to pass
- 10 "Bugonia" actress Stone
- 14 Landlord's due
- 15 The largest is blue
- 16 Swedish auto
- 17 Oscar-winning Bogart film
- 19 Three on stage
- 20 Snail trail
- 21 Blended-family member
- 23 Late music producer Phil
- 25 Car dealer's offering
- 26 Boozer
- 28 Adversary
- 29 Somewhat
- 31 Hines or Ladd
- 33 Idealistic ones
- 37 Indigenous Japanese
- 38 Tight-fisted type
- 40 First Nations group
- 41 Inspire to act
- 43 Hardly cheery
- 45 Simone of jazz
- 46 Govt. agent
- 47 "Is that ___?"
- 48 Moroccan capital
- 51 Author Elmore
- 54 Believer who rejects the Trinity
- 56 German poet
- 59 Skimpy skirt
- 60 Like some eggs
- 62 Twofold offer, briefly
- 63 Listlessness
- 64 Plumber's job

- 65 Shakespearean "shortly"
- 66 Desirable quality
- 67 Improve, as skills

DOWN

- 1 Rainbows, e.g.
- 2 Calf meat
- 3 Hard to brush off
- 4 Kind of pad
- 5 A pal to Pooh
- 6 Pure
- 7 Long poem part
- 8 Develop sores
- 9 Gather from the fields
- 10 Field for beauty pros
- 11 Opera's Callas
- 12 Stamps and sends
- 13 It may be humble
- 18 Like many a wrestler
- 22 Film segment
- 24 Actress Olivia of "The Crown"

- 26 Defraud
- 27 Buckeye State
- 30 Accused murderer of 1892
- 32 Cause of destruction
- 33 Exploit
- 34 Plated mammal
- 35 1964 Oscar winner Patricia
- 36 Auction off
- 39 Naples natives
- 42 'La Dolce ___' (Fellini film)
- 44 Boise locale
- 46 Cheese dish
- 48 Cuban dance
- 49 Negatively charged particle
- 50 Game played in a hall
- 52 Makes wages
- 53 Clinton Labor secretary Robert
- 55 Perlman of "Cheers"
- 57 Light gas
- 58 Leg up
- 61 Drill insert

Answers to Previous Crossword:



Sock-o-scope

IZZY SLAUGHTER | ARTS & CULTURE REPORTER
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You know what they say, socks are the windows to the soul! Am I right? Everyone has a sock preference, even if that means no socks at all. Socks say a lot about someone. So, what do your socks say about you?

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Aries, you definitely got some knee high, multicolor socks with some funny word on the side. You think of socks as the interesting part of the outfit, so much so that you sleep in them, which is kind of evil. But I'll forgive you this time. I can't help but admire the consistency.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): Taurus, you don't have a care in the world about socks. You just wear them and there isn't much more to it. The one exception for you is if the socks in question are a gift from a loved one, in that case, they will be a prized possession of yours. So sentimental!

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): Gemini, where to start with you and that duality you carry? You prefer your socks colorful. You have such a bright essence that shows through your sock priorities! I bet you've got one for every color of the rainbow.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): You are a treat to be around, Cancer, and you always have some creative socks to bring to the table. Perhaps some bright green ones with tongues on them, or maybe one short and one long. You know how to shake it up. This lightness in your attitude allows you to stay positive with just about any sock situation!

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): Leo, you got your shit together. You have a vast sock collection consisting of specifics for hiking, skiing, running and a nice day-to-day work or school sock. This system has worked for you thus far and pairs well with your Type A personality.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): As a sophisticated and graceful Virgo you have strict patterns of sock wearing. You have special socks for your favorite

boots that are most likely cashmere, and I'm going to take a wild guess that you are the type to invest in some no-shows for those low riding shoes. You have proven to be reasonable and have strong gut instincts, so I trust that you know your socks.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): Libra, you're balanced as hell so I know you got matching socks everyday! You probably carefully place them in your shoes after you've picked out an outfit. I might even go so far as to say they have ruffles on them! Matching socks have always been a constant in your life, and if your socks are mismatched everyone knows something has gone terribly wrong!

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Scorpio, I fear you may be a little indecisive in the sock department, so you choose variety. You've got long ones, colorful ones and short flowery ones — talk about a sock drawer overflow! Keep that sock collection in check girl, it's bound to stress you out.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): Something tells me they are neon and very tall, Sagittarius, it's just a gut feeling! This comes from a place of boldness and your socks have it written all over them! You are confident and not afraid of bright fabric, keep it up dude! Not many people can pull off neon knee-highs.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Capricorn, you are a neurotic sock wearer. Socks dictate your whole day. If that toe seam is all out of whack that's how you know shits gonna hit the fan! This is your reminder to take some deep breaths and show your calm and intelligent self, even with a bunched sock.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): With your free spirit, Aquarius, I've got a sneaking suspicion that you don't have socks in those shoes. You're a chronic raw dogger! Hey, you've got to let them breathe man. You are so innovative that socks just aren't a priority. You are more focused on building up foot strength to walk around barefoot in the summer, which is much more practical!

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Pisces, you are a sucker for the fuzzy socks, man, and you rock it. It's helpful to feel cozy even on the hard days. Some might call the fuzzy socks a way of life. You've got such a big heart and the fuzziest of socks! These things create an inviting energy around you that people love.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

Presidential finalist visits University of Montana campus

COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER

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Jeremiah Shinn, the current interim president of Boise State University, visited the University of Montana on Monday and Tuesday.

The Office for the Commissioner of Higher Education announced Shinn as the finalist last Friday ahead of his scheduled visit.

Shinn participated in multiple public events during his visit, including an open forum on Monday, where he spoke to a crowd of over 150 and answered community questions. He said he feels kinship with UM because of his own background as a student.

“It resonates with my personal story. I was a first generation college student who went to school from a rural area on a Pell Grant, and had a work-study job,” he said. “I think that’s the story of many of the students that come to the University of Montana. I have an endless supply of energy for that work and for those students because I was one of them.”

Shinn addressed a wide array of questions from the public during the forum, including diversity issues, the value of R1 research status and visions for the future of UM.

At a later press conference, Shinn spoke about what he believes UM does well as a school, and how he views the future.

“I know that President Bodnar left the University in really good shape,” he said. “This university is on a tremendous trajectory and I think that all signs are pointing up.”

The Commissioner of Higher Education, Clayton Christian, spoke about the strength of Shinn’s application.

“Everyone on the [working] group just felt like his work in student affairs is what we’re about, ultimately,” Christian said. “He has a background serving students.”

Shinn first received his bachelor’s in natural science from Arkansas Tech University in 1999. He then earned a master’s from the University of Michigan in higher education in 2000.

Shinn received his Doctorate of Philosophy from Eastern Michigan University in educational leadership in 2016.



University of Montana presidential finalist Jeremiah Shinn addresses a crowd during a forum held in the University Center ballroom on April 6.

TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

Shinn has also worked in multiple universities in the past, primarily in positions geared toward students. That experience caught the attention of the Associated Students of the University of Montana president, Buddy Wilson.

“What stands out to me is that he comes from a student affairs background,” Wilson said.

From 2001 to 2005, Shinn worked at Eastern Michigan University, filling multiple roles for the school. He served as the coordinator of Greek affairs before becoming the assistant dean of students and finally working as a doctoral teaching fellow.

After his time at EMU, he worked at Indiana University in Bloomington as associate director of student activities from 2005 to 2010.

Shinn then began his time at Boise State University, where he served in multiple student-oriented roles,

including the director of the Student Involvement and Leadership Center, the assistant vice president for student life and the associate vice president for student affairs.

Shinn then transferred to Louisiana State University and was the vice president for student affairs from June 2019 to February 2023.

During his time at LSU, Shinn helped the institution gain over \$100 million in multiple budgets. He then transferred back to Boise State University.

Back at Boise State, Shinn served as vice president for student affairs and enrollment management from February 2023 to May 2025. During this time, he stewarded more than \$70 million in the student fee-funded, auxiliary and fundraised operating budgets.

In May 2025 he took over as interim president, the position he currently holds.

His work at Boise State is one of the reasons his application stood out among the others.

As interim president, he served on the Pac-12 Conference Board of Directors. In that time, Shinn directed and oversaw more than \$600 million in annual operating budgets.

“It says a lot about a person that they would spend time in a really difficult role and apply to continue doing it,” Wilson said.

UM spokesperson Dave Kuntz said there are other final candidates for the presidency.

“Right now Dr. Shinn is the only one who has been invited to campus,” Kuntz said.

According to the UM website page on the presidential search, the position will remain open until filled, meaning anyone can apply until a new president has been hired.

Women in Business club holds first annual symposium

SYDNEY MOATE | NEWS REPORTER

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BuzzBallz founder Merrilee Kick gave a keynote speech on starting a business at the first-ever University of Montana Women in Business symposium on March 27.

The Women in Business student club hosted the event with the University's College of Business in partnership with the UM Foundation.

The symposium's guest speakers were all graduates of UM. The event functioned as outreach for the club by connecting community and students, and drew all types of students, from freshmen to seniors. It was held in Downtown Missoula's historic Florence Building.

The Women in Business student club was started this year by undergraduate business students Maya Haugan and Brianna Shirley.

"This club was primarily founded off a gap in opportunity in the college," Haugan said, referring to a gap for female leaders in business that she saw as an unflashed area of growth at the University.

Haugan is the club's president, and Shirley is the vice president. The two women said they started planning the symposium before the club even had members.

"I'm incredibly proud of Bri and I and the College of Business for being able to put all this together," said Haugan, a 21-year-old junior from Bozeman studying finance and management.

The symposium's three guest speakers were Merrilee Kick and Sharilyn

Campbell, the senior vice president and chief financial officer of Sentara Health Plans, and Denise Grills, former vice president of product development for JD Edwards/Oracle Brand.

Suzanna Tilleman, the Dean of the College of Business, gave opening remarks, followed by a short speech from Haugan about her experience starting the club and its mission to empower women to make connections with peers and mentors.

Kick, who has a bachelor's in business, economics and computer science from UM, delivered the keynote speech. She spoke about getting started in computer science, having a family, working 100 hours a week, living abroad, bouncing around careers, going through hard times, then creating BuzzBallz and starting her own company. She told the audience what they need to start a business, including fight, drive and creativity.

She spoke bluntly and honestly to the audience, saying, "Some of you are not going to make it, but some of you will."

She talked about the ways in which a business must evolve to survive and included her experience of BuzzBallz making hand sanitizer during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was sold to hospitals, airports and police stations, and setting up daycare for employees whose kids were out of school. Kick encouraged the students to think outside the box.

She encouraged the audience to treat employees with kindness, make mistakes and be a boss who sets an example.

Kick concluded her speech saying, "Good luck, you guys, you're the future and we're relying on you."



Merrilee Kick, founder of BuzzBallz, talks at the inaugural Women in Business Symposium held at the Florence Building in downtown Missoula on March 27. WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

Kick sold BuzzBallz in 2024 and is now the CEO of GourmetLand, a start-up food and beverage company. She lives in Texas but came out to Montana to speak at the conference because she said she strongly believes in good education, and loves Montana.

In 2024, Kick donated \$30 million to build the Merrilee Alexander Kick College of Business and Entrepreneurship at the Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas.

She said she believes in giving money to the universities that need it the most, not just the big name schools.

"Education is the key to freedom," Kick said, quoting Nelson Mandela.

According to Tilleman, the symposium was funded by Marilyn Prideaux Porter, who was a longtime supporter of the College of Business. Toward the end of her life, she endowed the Ben Prideaux Scholarship, named in honor of her father. She gave a one-time gift to launch the Women in Business club, as well as a career development fund, which helped 22 students go on business tours in Portland over spring break, including some of the students in the club. Her donation funded the symposium.

Club Vice President Brianna Shirley, from Woodinville, Washington, said she feels that the symposium was a tremendous success and exceeded all expectations.

"The symposium provided a meaningful opportunity for the club to grow both in student membership and community engagement," Shirley said. "We were blown away by the level of attendance and are incredibly grateful to everyone who participated."

Shirley, a third-year student graduating this May with dual management information system and marketing degrees, said the club is excited to keep building on its momentum, including hosting more events, such as its upcoming Sip & Social Networking Event on April 20 from 5-7 p.m.

The club plans to carry on with its Monday evening professional development workshops. A goal moving forward is to expand its reach beyond the College of Business. Shirley said she believes the club's opportunities and community should be accessible to all students.

The club hopes to host another Women in Business Symposium next year, along with additional events.

"With continued support and engagement, we're confident we can build on this year's success," Shirley said. "We're committed to learning from this experience, refining our approach, and continuously improving the opportunities we provide."

PRESIDENT'S LECTURE SERIES PRESENTS

The 2026 Dean Stone Lecture & Democracy Summit Keynote Event

AN EVENING WITH JAD ABUMRAD

7:30 P.M. MONDAY, APRIL 13

University Center Ballroom

THIS EVENT IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY.
ASL interpretation will be provided for this event.

FROM HELENA TO MILAN

How Konnor Ralph, a self-taught Olympian freestyle skier who grew up in Helena, made it all the way to the top.

STORY BY JACKSON MAILEY

Konnor Ralph, a 23-year-old freestyle skier from Libby, sat on the chairlift at his last International Ski and Snowboard Federation, or FIS, World Cup event in Laax, Switzerland.

He watched the results of the event come in. He had high placement throughout the ski season so far, second at Steamboat and fourth in Aspen, Colorado. All he needed to do was stay consistent. Then, as his opponent fell on his run, Ralph realized what it meant.

Originally practicing at the Great Divide Ski resort in Montana, he was on his way to the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Olympics.

“I was just pretty stunned,” Konnor said. “I was like, ‘It’s real, it’s happening, a goal from 15 years ago is coming true.’”

Konnor’s parents, who are both named Chris Ralph, had bought tickets a year prior to the Olympics just in case he qualified. “It was surreal,” Mrs. Ralph said. “We’re on the flight and we’re like, ‘What, we’re really going to the Olympics?’”

His aunt, Laura Burley, who

Konnor stayed with in California for a year to train at 13 years old, got out of her chair in a work meeting and cheered when she heard the news.

“Everyone around me kinda knew, so everybody celebrated,” Burley said.

At the Olympics, Konnor qualified for both of his events. He placed ninth in Slopestyle, an event filled with different types of rails and jumps, and fifth in Big Air, an event with just one big jump.

Konnor’s journey to make the Olympics was filled with sacrifices, moving around the country and determination. It was a dream he had ever since he was making YouTube highlight reels at the Great Divide, his home ski resort in Lewis and Clark County.

THE YOUNGER YEARS

Konnor was born in Libby, and before he and his older brother, Brendon Ralph, could even ski, he was put on his mother’s back while his parents skied at Turner Mountain ski resort in Lincoln County. Even though the brothers couldn’t ski, they still loved going fast.



Konnor, left in the backwards hat, stands with his friends that he grew up skiing with in 2017. PROVIDED BY GRANT LAMBRECHT



Konnor Ralph, left, and Alex Hall, right, watch the Big Air event at the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics. CONTRIBUTED | ISAMI KIYOOKA

“When they were in the backpacks, if I stopped because my legs were burning, they kicked me, like, ‘Keep going, keep going!’” Mrs. Ralph said.

When Konnor was 3 years old, he and his family moved to Helena. His home mountain became Great Divide, a 30-minute drive from Helena. The ski resort has five chairlifts and is filled with black diamond and blue runs, making it a more intermediate resort. Nonetheless, Konnor was put on skis at 3 years old and started skiing with his family.

“There was something about the feelings of skiing that I couldn’t replicate anywhere else,” Konnor said.

At 5 years old, Konnor and his brother found their passion for skiing in the park: An area for freestyle skiers and snowboarders that allows for tricks and jumps. He then started skiing without his parents at 8 years old.

“We’d see him at lunch and at the end of the day,” Mrs. Ralph said. “They were fascinated by it because it hadn’t been something that they’d seen until we moved

to Helena, and they fell in love with it.”

Great Divide’s park has one chairlift called Meadow Mountain, and four different park areas. Konnor’s favorite part of Great Divide’s park is the amount of time you can lap it, along with other aspects of the resort.

“You can ski [the park] more than anywhere, so that boosts the scale a lot, the features and jumps are a little small, but for learning stuff, they’re perfect,” Konnor said.

Konnor and his brother played

hockey as well. His mom said that the boys would go to hockey practice in the morning, and after, they would change into their ski clothes in the locker room and go skiing in the afternoon. Yet, when Konnor and his brother started to compete in youth events, they had to make a choice between the two.

“Both quickly said, ‘We’ll quit hockey and do this thing,’” Mrs. Ralph said.

FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Konnor skied at the park with a group of older friends that “took him in.”

He didn’t have a coach at Great Divide, he was self-taught. He and the group would watch YouTube videos, trying to replicate the tricks they saw. They also made some of their own highlights on YouTube.

“When we were skiing together, we were just constantly encouraging each other to try new tricks,” said Grant Lambrecht, a friend of Konnor’s who grew up skiing with him.

Lambrecht still remembers all the times he and the group, including Konnor, practiced their skills at the park.

“He was always the young kid hanging out with the older kids and as we got into high school we could drive to parties,” Lambrecht said. “I have a video of him shotgunning a Mountain Dew and then complaining about getting a stomach ache right after.”

Konnor and his friends would train outside of Great Divide as well. They used PVC pipes and made rails at MacDonalD Pass, a mountain pass 15 miles outside of Helena.

When they weren’t on the pass or skiing, the group of friends trained their flips on the trampoline in Konnor’s backyard. They also built a drop-in ramp that they could climb up and ski down with Astroturf. They would then put rails at the end of the ramp to work on their skills.

“They would have different rails and different pipes they would ski on,” Mrs. Ralph said. “It was definitely one of the big activities after school.”

“I was just pretty stunned, I was like, ‘It’s real, it’s happening, a goal from 15 years ago is coming true.’”

- Konnor Ralph

Konnor got his first real look at competition through a local tour made by volunteers called Smokin’ Aces. According to the founder of the tour, Billy Marcial, the goal was to get kids into freestyle skiing in Montana.

“Our main goal was to give young kids this platform where they’re going to compete on a regional level,” Marcial said.

The Smokin’ Aces tour consisted of freestyle events at ski resorts like the Great Divide, Big Sky and Whitefish Ski Resort in Montana, along with Schweitzer

ski resort in northern Idaho. Konnor and his friends would pack up and drive to each of these events to compete against each other.

“That was like my entire favorite part of my childhood,” Lambracht said. “We did them all together and we carpooled together.”

Through Smokin’ Aces, Konnor was able to compete in freestyle skiing while being self-taught. Marcial noticed Konnor’s growth as the events went on, and soon Konnor started to finish constantly on the podium.

“Something clicked inside of him, whether it was his passion or his drive or whatever it was,” Marcial said.

Through all this competing with Smokin’ Aces, Konnor was winning. He and his family then started going to different, more official, United States of America Ski and Snowboard Association youth events in northern Idaho, eastern Washington and Montana.

His family looked to the next step with Konnor. So, at 13 years old, he packed up and moved to Truckee, California, with his aunt to get coaching.

“It was very hard for a mom to have her child leave, because you don’t expect 13-year-olds to go to college, which is what he did,” Mrs. Ralph said.

CROSSING STATE LINES

When Konnor moved to Truckee, California, with his aunt, Burley, she had a 2-year-old daughter and wasn’t used to raising a teenager. But Burley commended Konnor’s maturity

when he moved in.

“I can’t fully imagine what it felt like for him, being that young and away from his house and his family,” Burley said. “But he really did carry it with incredible strength.”

Since Burley and her husband were both working, Konnor took the local bus to school and coordinated rides to and from practices.

“He lived a pretty grown-up life,” Burley said.

Konnor fit into an “older brother role” in the time he spent there, taking care of Burley’s 2-year-old, Anna Stabel.

“She’s 11 now, but they still have a really close relationship and it’s pretty sweet,” Burley said.

However, there were times when Burley and Konnor would disagree. Whenever Burley would try to get Konnor to eat healthy foods, all 13-year-old Konnor wanted was junk food.

“We always laugh because he was like ‘Aunt Laura, you’re just always making me eat kale and green juice shots,’” Burley said.

In Truckee, he joined the Olympic Valley Freestyle Freeride Team, where he got training from coaches. With the team, he got to train at Palisades Tahoe, a ski resort with 36 chairlifts and almost 4,000 acres of terrain park. Now with coaching, he was able to get better at technical skills.

“That’s when I learned a lot of the proper mechanics for these tricks and learned a lot of the basics,” Konnor said.

Throughout this training, Konnor skied with some of the best young freestyle skiers in America. However, even though he thought of Burley as his “second mom,” his family was still over 900 miles away.

“There were nights where I would just be so homesick and



Konnor Ralph competes at the 2026 Winter Olympics Slopestyle event. CONTRIBUTED | ISAMI KIYOOKA

miss my brother and my family,” Konnor said. “I just love skiing so much that I was willing to leave home.”

Even though he left his home and his friends at 13, Konnor still found fun wherever he could. According to Burley, whenever Truckee would get a lot of snow, he would do backflips off their two-story house into the snow.

“He was just constantly finding fun, pushing himself and having a blast doing it,” Burley said.

CLIMBING THE RANKS

After seven months in Truckee with his aunt, Konnor was invited to join Wy’East Academy, a college preparatory school in Sandy, Oregon, for athletes in outdoor sports like skiing for high school. The school, outside of two Mt. Hood ski resorts, meant another move for Konnor at 14.

“It’s so cool,” Konnor said. “You get to do school and ski really good terrain all day.”

The academy also gave Konnor a four-year scholarship. Every summer, though, Konnor would go back home to Helena and train at the Great Divide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Konnor had to go back home, but he would still ski.

“I went up to Great Divide, and



Konnor Ralph at 14 after winning his age group at the U.S. Ski and Snowboard national championships in 2017. CONTRIBUTED | CHRIS RALPH

I was just hiking to some of the rails they have with some friends and still skiing, but not training necessarily, just having fun,” Konnor said.

After high school, Konnor continued to train at Wy’East and eventually made the U.S. Stifel Freeski Team at 18 years old in 2021.

However, Konnor started to struggle between 2021 to 2022 on the team. He started seeing skiing more as a “job” and started burning out. He pushed through — and started to see the fun in training again. He got his first podium World Cup finish in Tignes, France, in 2024.

“I really took a step back almost and just tried to focus on smaller things some days like the more enjoyable stuff, that reignited the fire,” Konnor said.

In the 2024-2025 World Cup season he earned the Most Improved award from his teammates and staff. Then in 2026, he headed for Milano Cortina.

A DREAM FULFILLED

“I got off the plane super jet-lagged, and I think I spent five or six hours just trying on clothes for the opening ceremony and closing ceremony,” Konnor said.

All the designer merchandise would have to wait, though, because Konnor would have to qualify for the final of both events if he even wanted a shot at medals.

“We both were more nervous during the qualifiers than the finals because we wanted him to get in,” Mr. Ralph said.

The freestyle events took place at a ski resort in Livigno, three hours from Milan.

In the qualifiers, 30 people compete and only the top 12 scores make it into the final event. The first competition he competed in was Slopestyle, an event where the rider can do any combination of tricks they want with different types of rails at the top and two jumps at the end. The skiers received the best score out of two attempts. In Konnor’s case, he placed 10th with a score of 68.91 out of 100, qualifying him for finals.



Konnor Ralph celebrates after he lands his trick in a Winter Olympics big air event on February 17. CONTRIBUTED | ISAMI KIYOOKA

The next was Big Air, an event where the skier goes off a jump and does their best trick. The skier gets three runs and takes the two best scores and combines them with a maximum score of 200. Konnor qualified in 12th place, 1.75 points ahead of the 13th place finisher.

Then came the finals. Konnor placed ninth in the Slopestyle with a 69.40. In Big Air, he placed fifth overall and landed a trick he had never done in competition on his last jump, a 2160, meaning six full rotations in the air.

“I was pretty scared for that one,” Konnor said. “I really hadn’t trained it much at all, so I was just hoping that it would work.”

Konnor placed ninth overall in Slopestyle and fifth overall in Big Air.

SKIING FULL CIRCLE

Konnor couldn’t have gotten to the Olympics without help from back home. His parents set up fundraisers for his plane tickets, housing and meals that had to be paid for beforehand.

“It was amazing, people donated from all over the state of Montana, and we had huge auctions, silent auctions, live auctions, it was just amazing,” Mrs. Ralph said.

While at the Olympics, Konnor saw the watch parties during his events. Set up by Great Divide ski resort, people stayed up as late as 2 a.m. to watch him. A screen set up for him allowed him to see all the people watching him back home in Helena. It gave him a little extra boost of confidence.

“It definitely made me more motivated to put on a show and do my best for all the people in Helena that supported me over the years,” Konnor said.

He also made sure to bring the support back to Helena. Every Christmas, Konnor comes back to Helena and does freestyle skiing events at Great Divide as a way to give back. He also provides all the prizes for the winner and awards for all the other competitors.

After the Olympics, Konnor competed at other World Cup events and has just finished up his 2025-2026 season with the Stifel U.S. Ski Team.

The Kaimin's spring fashion guide

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PHOTOS BY TORI KUEHL



Spring has sprung early this year, and March showers bring April fashion swaps. With warmer weather on the way, here are a few trends you can use to level up your wardrobe with everyday finds from the thrift store.

STRIPES FOR SPRING

If you're looking for a creative way to add a little something-something to your everyday outfits, a striped button-down can go a long way. Instead of the same hoodie you've been throwing on for months, try a button-down over your t-shirt of choice.

A fitting button-down with jeans or a skirt and a funky belt can be a fun and creative outfit you can wear to coffee with your friends or to school.

If you're looking for a more fun and breezy way to wear it, grab your scissors or a hair tie and crop it.

SUPPORT FOR SHORTS

Menswear can sometimes seem like it doesn't have as much versatility. Yes, jorts have been in and out for a few seasons. Good news: Showing your shins is in this spring! However, it's usually denim. Pinstripes, paisleys, or any kind of patterned jorts are a fun way to take a plain outfit and make it look more creative. You can pair it with a pocket chain or a corresponding bandana, and you've got a cool new fit on your hands.

PANTS, BUT MAKE IT EXTRA

You might have a pair of pants or a shirt in the back of your closet that, for whatever reason, you just don't wear, because you either can't find something to wear it to or anything to style it with. Adding some lace or some embroidery to the neckline, around the waistband, or on the cuffs can be a great way to give new life to a piece of clothing that is otherwise collecting wrinkles.

SHORT BUT NOT TOO SHORT

Okay, maybe jorts aren't your style. Have you considered an in-between? The early 2000s is here to stay, and capris are a trendy way to stay temperate. With the weather being the way it is right now, you could have jeans on for your 9 a.m. and be cold, but by 2 p.m. you're sweating in them.



Capris are pants that only go to the top of your knee and serve as the perfect middle ground for our current climate. Call that the perfect pant!

ACTIVELY ON TREND

Recently, workout clothes have been black, monochromatic, with maybe some white piping here and there. Say goodbye to Alo's boring matching sets and hello to old Paris Hilton tracksuit pants. Y2K colorful athleisure is making a comeback. Think low-waisted sweatpants in brown, pink, or green. Fun colored athletic shorts. Cut-off vibrant graphic tees. Fold over leggings with colorful waist bands paired with a thick headband, and you're ready to serve Jessica Alba.

OLDER BROTHER SWAG

Y2K also brought us the wonderful aesthetics of "cybersigilism," which is making its way back. Picture edgy, sweeping graphics. Picture your best friend's cool older brother in high school and it'll fit the bill. Harley-Davidson logos, very busy skull graphic tees, pocket chains and beanies are all staples

of this look. You can wear these with baggy jeans or long sleeves under a short-sleeve shirt on a colder day. It's the perfect fit if you want to look like you came straight from band practice or are on your way to the skatepark.

NO FIT COMPLETE WITHOUT THEM

Every outfit looks better when you have the proper accessories to put with it.

It can be hard to find the right belt to put with your pants, so sometimes you have to

think outside the box. Neck ties or colorful scarves are a cheap and creative way to add something extra to your look. Have fun with the colors or how you choose to tie them around your waist.

Bangles are a must this spring. Less is more? No such thing! This season, the bigger the bracelet, the better. You can stack them on your wrists and pair them with matching rings. If people can't hear you coming from down the hall, then you're not wearing enough bangles.

Vera Bradley-style bags are soft and colorful bags with fun patterns, and can be found at most thrift stores.

If you like a simpler style of purse, then any kind of large satchel with

lots of pockets is your way to go. It should look like you could fit as much stuff in there as Mary Poppins.

Lastly, sunglasses will soon become a necessity for all of us. Forget about your plain black pair you've been wearing forever.

Look for any pair with colorful lenses, or big chunky ones you can pair with your bigger bag and bracelets.



The MMAC's 'Reassessing Aden Arnold' shows off local modernist leader

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The latest exhibit at the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, "Reassessing Aden Arnold," explores the former art professor's impact on Montana's modernist art, his work as a professor as well as his artistic practice — and the museum is encouraging its attendants to engage with Arnold's work in a new way.

The exhibit starts with some sketches of the human form, charcoal, simple. Continuing farther in, one comes across detailed paintings of faces, with careful backgrounds and a slight impressionistic touch. Later on, a variety of artistic styles can be found: watercolor scenes defined by a few thick strokes and abstract oil paintings and sketches of sweeping murals.

With a few other works of art sprinkled in, the majority of the exhibit was created by a former professor of the University. Arnold taught as an art professor from 1939 until 1969, with a few stints of work as the chair of the Fine Arts Department. He died in 1973.

According to Rafael Chacón, the director of the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, this exhibit intended to engage with three major themes surrounding Arnold's work: Firstly, that he was a "significant modernist artist," and secondly, that he was an educator at the University of Montana.

"The third part of the story is he did this, all these achievements as a closeted queer person," Chacón said. "He did that in a context in which it was illegal to be queer, to be open about it. Being open about his sexuality was not an option for him."

Regardless of the art style, a repeated artistic theme for Arnold was the male form. Especially toward the end of his life, in the four years after his retirement and before his death, his work takes an abstract approach with "arguably homoerotic content," according to a sign at the MMAC.

"As a person who taught art, I love the fact that it shows in his paintings," said Debra Pollard, a former art teacher herself. "How hard he worked to learn all the techniques, the different media, the different artists he shared."

Pollard has enjoyed her work as a

docent, or lecturer, at the MMAC for around 15 years. She works in a variety of artistic mediums, including painting, drawing, print-making, watercolor, acrylic, mixed media, wet and dry felting and card making.

She put her educational skills to use during a special event for fellow docents of the museum, utilizing the extra time the group got before the museum officially opened.

Each docent was given a pencil and a clipboard on which a few pieces of copy paper were held. Starting with the section showing off Arnold's charcoal figures and painted portraits, Pollard explained what each person was meant to do.

They would need to identify a small section of a drawing that particularly spoke to them. Once chosen, the individual would attempt to replicate their favorite part: the folds of a neck, the shading of a woman's eyes, the leg of a standing man.

"It's taking the ocean and just bringing it down to a smaller piece to work on," Pollard said.

Leading the others in some of their drawings, Pollard gave a few tips. Eyeballs should be about one eyeball apart from each other, the middle line of the lips curves in a snake-like fashion rather than going straight across.

Even while drawing, and certainly while walking around, the group laughed and chatted like old friends. Discussions about what the background of a certain piece was meant to entail made active conversation.

While looking at a piece early on in the exhibit, a painting of a woman holding a flower, the six spoke over one another excitedly. They looked out the window to compare the mountainous background and collaborated to decide the exact identity of the flower in the work.

Once they were mostly finished with their in-depth discussion, everyone split off to stand or sit in front of their chosen piece.

"Everyone looked more carefully at the work if they were drawing part of it," Pollard said. "A lot of us noticed things that [we hadn't before.] We had passed that work and looked at that work and missed little, wonderful tidbits in it."

Chacón said that he hoped visitors are able to learn about an "amazing biography"

while being able to view the arc of modern art over time. Even more importantly, he hopes visitors are able to connect with the MMAC, a state-owned collection of works.

"I hope that students, in particular, understand that this is their resource," Chacón said. "This collection belongs to them."

"Reassessing Aden Arnold" will continue its exhibition at the Montana Museum of Art and Culture through May 30. On April 9, from 5:50-7 p.m., the MMAC will host a public panel discussion on Aden Arnold's life in its lobby.



An Aden Arnold art exhibit on display at the Montana Museum of Art and Culture on the University of Montana campus on April 1. **TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN**



A group views an Aden Arnold art exhibit at the Montana Museum of Art and Culture on the University of Montana campus on April 1. **TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

It's time to hit the rodeo



The UM rodeo team speeds into the arena on opening night of the final college rodeo at Missoula Fairgrounds in 2023. BRIDGET LYNN PACK | MONTANA KAIMIN ARCHIVE

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At the University of Montana, there is a dedicated group of students who use rodeo traditions to compete at the collegiate level.

Rodeo is an equestrian sport that developed in the 19th century. The name is of South American origin, and means "roundup."

The sport has developed immensely, specifically at the college level where athletes are members of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association. UM competes in the Big Sky region, which involves a lot of traveling for the team. The team has a big rodeo coming up May 1 and 2 at the Missoula County Fairgrounds.

"We normally travel a few hundred miles for each rodeo, early morning late at night, just depends," said Maryah Winn, a freshman business student from Great Falls. "We haul our own trailers and take care of our own horses, traveling consecutive weekends. We like to arrive the day before the rodeo if possible, so our horses can settle in and rest."

The students must pay for their own transportation to these competitions as well as their entry fee in order to participate. The University of Montana's team has students that compete in a wide variety of events.

Rodeo competitions are divided by gender, with some events being offered only for men or only for women. The women have three major events to compete in.

Barrel racing is strictly a women's event within rodeo.

Nicole Davidson, a communications major from Canterbury, Connecticut, said, "Barrel racing is a timed event. There are three barrels out in the arena and it's timed by an electric eye that's set before the first and second barrel."

The rider forms a cloverleaf pattern when circling the barrels. The winner is determined from the fastest time, so precision is key.

When training, "It's a lot of repetition and a lot of drill work," Davidson said. "Just trying to keep them shaped up and honest in their run so we don't hit barrels, 'cause a hit barrel is basically as good as a no time."

Another women's event is breakaway roping. "It's the fastest event in rodeo and it's just a single person event," said Lacey Lawrence, a pharmacy student from Jordan, Montana. "It's just you and your horse and then we rope calves. There's a rope attached to our saddle horn, so when we rope the neck of the calf and everything comes tight, the rope pops off and that's when the time stops."

The event typically lasts around three seconds with the rider and their horse starting in a box. The calf gets a head start. A rope is in front of the box to ensure the rider doesn't break the field of play before they are allowed.

If they break the barrier, a 10-second penalty is added. If the competitor misses the catch, a no time will be the result.

Both men and women compete in team roping, but are still separated by gender. Kayton French, an accounting major from Stevensville, described the event. "It's the only team event in rodeo. There's a header that goes out and ropes the steer on the head and turns it and then the heeler comes around the corner and ropes legs. And then that's what gives you the time and of course, fastest time wins."

Both the athletes are in a box. The header is on the left, the heeler is on the right and a chute in the middle holds the steer. There are a couple of athletes on the team that will go back-and-forth between both positions, header and heeler, but many prefer one or the other.

The partnerships tend to remain the same throughout the rodeo season, so those two people can grow together.

"It's silly because in rodeo there aren't super specific ways that everything has to be done," French said. "Like there are set rules, but it's not like everybody does the same thing the same way."

Most of the men compete in team roping or tie down roping.

Tie down involves roping a calf while on the rider's horse then getting off and tying any of its three legs with a much shorter rope. Once the athlete puts their hands up the time stops. Just like the other events, the calf gets a head start, and if the rider breaks the box too early the athlete gets a 10-second penalty.

There is one man on the team, Travis Hunter, that competes in rough stock events such as bareback riding and bull riding. Most people are familiar with these events as they are considered the classic professional rodeo events.

These two events feature a rider on the back of a horse or bull who must stay on for eight seconds while only using one hand to hold on. The score is determined based on both the animal's agility and how well the rider performs.

"Rodeo is a competitive sport that anyone can enjoy," Winn said. "Watching the passion of young college athletes and fierce high level competition. It's hard core, adrenaline-rushing and entertaining, keeps you on the edge of your seat and is a fun family event."

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Griz softball is heating up

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As Big Sky Conference play begins, a team that has had a long history of struggle is now looking better than ever.

The Griz softball team started off conference play with four straight wins for the first time in program history, sweeping Portland State University, then defeating the University of Northern Colorado 10-0 in the series opener.

While the Griz dropped the next two games to Northern Colorado, the 4-2 record through six games is tied for the best start in program history, and puts the Griz tied for first in the conference.

Second-year head coach Stef Ewing said that one of the reasons the Griz have been playing so well is that the team is relaxed.

“Our shoulders aren’t up by our ears anymore,” Ewing said. “They’re just going out and playing, and we’ve been preaching that all year, and you can just see a difference in them.”

Ewing said that the team believes that they can win.

“They believe that they’re going to get it done,” she said. “People are coming through up and down the order, and they’re just owning their moment. We talk about it all the time to own your moment, and they’re doing a great job of it.”

Ewing said that with the Griz being a young team, it takes a while to learn how to own the moment, but the team figured it out just at the right time.

“No better time than during Big Sky play to figure it out,” she said.

Two players that stepped up for the Griz in a big way are sophomores Grace Lopez and Carah Sweet, who were named Big Sky Co-player and Pitcher of the Week, respectively, following the Portland State series.

Lopez had missed the previous series against Seattle University, but went six-for-seven against Portland State, as well as collecting 12 total bases.

“She’s putting up video game numbers,” Ewing said. “Doesn’t matter where they throw her, she’s hitting it. She’s hitting for power, she’s hitting for



Montana plays against Northern Colorado at the Grizzly Softball Field in Missoula on April 4.

CONTRIBUTED | CORAL SCOLES-COBURN

average, she’s seeing the ball so well. I always say when a hitter’s hitting well, it’s a beach ball, and for her it’s bigger than a beach ball, it’s a freaking hot air balloon.”

For Lopez, winning the award felt great, but she said the feeling only lasts for a bit.

“The feeling’s kind of surreal, but you live with it for one day,” Lopez said.

“You just have to reset and hope to get it the next week, but if not, then you just keep working. Put your head down and grind.”

Even though she missed the Seattle series, Lopez said she was still able to stay focused and ready because of her coaches and teammates.

She added that her teammates have been a big part of her success this year.

“It’s just a game at the end of the day,” Lopez said. “[I’m] having fun, trusting my teammates, knowing that they’re gonna have my back, I’m gonna have their back at the end of the day.”

Sweet became UM’s first Big Sky Pitcher of the Week since 2022, going

3-0 with a 0.82 Earned Run Average over four games. She also posted Montana’s first complete-game shutout against a Division I opponent in over two years.

While her season started off slowly, Sweet has become one of UM’s best pitchers over the last few weeks, which she said was due to the work she has put in.

“Hard work over the fall and then into the winter, then just kind of working through my stuff in the bullpen,” she said. “There’s been lots of ups and downs, but in the end it’s definitely paid off.”

Ewing also said that Sweet has put in a bunch of time this season.

“She’s really worked on her craft in the bullpen, really solidified her change up,” Ewing said. “Her curveball was working magic the other day. I mean even Maddie [Tarrant], who catches her, was like ‘It’s moving like crazy.’”

Another big part of Montana’s season has been power. The Griz have already hit more home runs than the previous three years with still more than a quarter of the season remaining.

The reason why is very simple, according to Ewing.

“Work, work, work, work, work, work,” she said. “We hit every single day, and we just tweak little things here, little things there. I tell them all the time to swing like you’ve never missed. I think they’re also doing a really good job of not overswinging. They’re not trying to force it.”

For the Griz to keep on winning, Ewing said the team needs to stay in the moment.

“Stay pitch to pitch, and whatever happened the pitch before, we got to let it go,” she said. “Continue to move forward and be where our feet are and stay relentless, and like Journey said, ‘Don’t stop believing,’ because we can do it.”

The Griz are on the road for the next couple of weeks, playing California State University Sacramento this weekend followed by the University of Utah and Weber State University next week, before finishing off the regular season with a home series against Idaho State University.

SPORTS BRIEFS

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CASHING OUT?

Money Williams, who led the Big Sky Conference in scoring, has announced he is entering the transfer portal.

Williams posted his decision on Instagram with the message “Griz nation will always hold a special place in my heart. That said, I have decided to enter my name in the transfer portal to explore my options.”

Williams averaged 4.7 assists, 4.3 rebounds and 20.6 points per game this season.

One of the highlight reel moments that took place this year was Williams scoring a career-high 40 points in one game during the Grizzlies’ 95-89 victory over Northern Colorado during the Starch Madness tournament.

Williams has until April 21, the day the portal closes, to transfer to another school or return to Montana for his senior year.

MONTANA PRO DAY

Fifteen former Montana Grizzly football players participated in the annual Griz Pro Day, an event that allows the athletes to show their strength, speed and agility to National Football League scouts.

One of the participants was former Montana wide receiver Michael Wortham.

He pushed 37.5 inches in the vertical jump and a 6.75-second three-cone drill time, the second-fastest time among receivers.

During his time at Montana after transferring from Eastern Washington, Wortham broke the record for all-purpose yards.

“I’m just blessed to be here. It’s a great opportunity to come out here with these guys. Each and every day we train is for this moment and to get it done at the highest level in front of scouts. It’s an amazing journey, and I’m just thankful to be out here with these guys and to put up numbers for scouts,” Wortham said.

According to Pro Football Focus, Wortham is the second highest rated receiver in the 2026 draft class.

The NFL draft will take place from Thursday, April 23 with the first round of the draft to Saturday, April 25.



SURFING THE BIG SKY

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Frantic breaths escape surfers and kayakers as arms and paddles break into the water, fighting to escape the frigid rush of the Clark Fork River. One after another, the whitewater swallows them, making room for the next person.

Brennan's Wave, which runs next to Caras Park in downtown Missoula, is frequented by surfers and whitewater kayakers, who enjoy high water levels brought by the spring thaw. The wave was artificially made in 2002 and is named after kayaker Brennan Guth, a philosophy major at the University of Montana who passed away in Chile the same year.

Later updates improved the wave and access, such as the Clark Fork River Restoration and Access Project, which completed construction this January, and included a set of steps to the water upriver from the wave to be used by surfers and kayakers who wanted to drift downstream into the wave.

With temperatures increasing, the community surrounding Brennan's Wave is returning to enjoy the higher water levels once again.

Despite the cold water temperatures, Elijah Kempf, a junior at UM's College of

Forestry and Conservation from Bozeman, rides Brennan's Wave almost every day.

"Community is a big part of my life, and — oh, there goes Leo," Kempf said as an inflatable purple kayak failed to catch the wave. "It's always important to have people around you that support you, and something like Brennan's Wave is a good catalyst for that. A lot of like-minded people with different personalities and lots of character, being able to come down here, procrastinate homework, skip class, come after class, it means a lot to me."

Kempf squinted against the sun as it began to dip behind the mountains, illuminating the Clark Fork in a bright golden light. That evening, a group of kayakers rode the wave simultaneously, jostling each other and laughing as they spun around backwards, showing off to one another on the cool Friday night.

On Saturday, the temperature reached the 60s as a crowd gathered to watch a larger group of surfers and kayakers cool off in the water, including Dylan Snyder, who chose to celebrate his 35th birthday on the wave, carving to and fro across the roiling face of the water.

"It's introduced me to so many different people I probably would have never met who are now lifelong friends," Snyder said. "It's such a good group of weirdos."



ABOVE: Elijah Kempf, 20, a junior at UM's forestry college from Bozeman, rides Brennan's Wave on April 3.

RIGHT: Allie Leber watches a surfer on Brennan's wave on April 4.

BELOW: Onlookers watch as Dylan Snyder surfs Brennan's Wave on April 4.

