

# MONTANA KAIMIN



## **MONTE UNMASKED**

**The many lives of the great grizzly**  
Story by Tye Brown



**6 Black Solidarity Summit**

**12 Just dance**

**14 New practice facility**



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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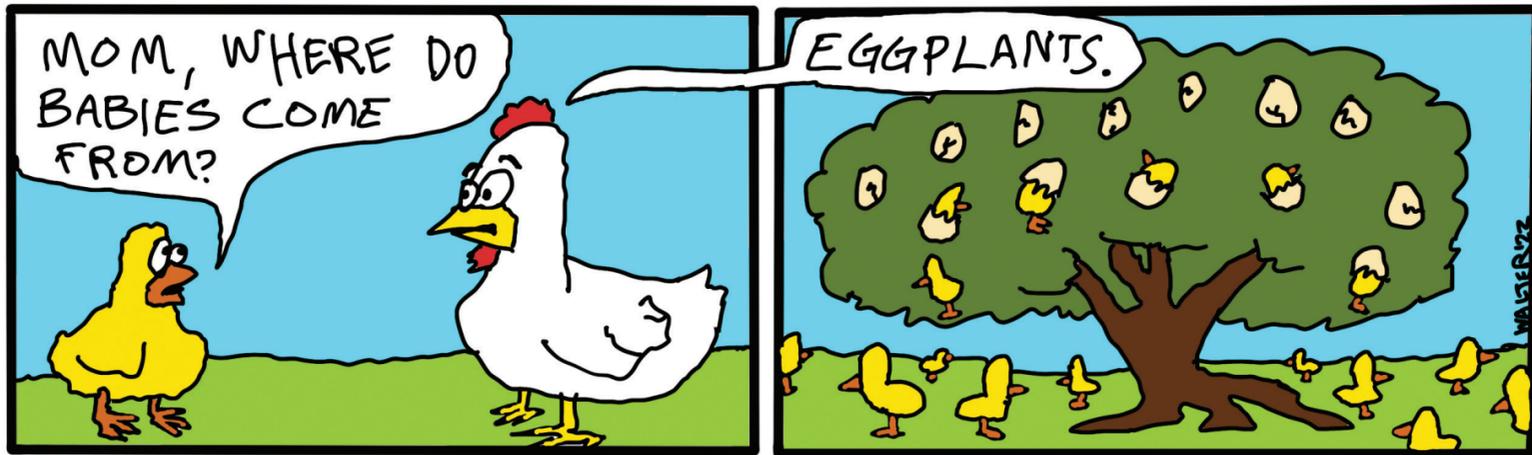


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THE GARAGE: SE 2 EP 6



WALTER MEDCRAFT | MONTANA KAIMIN

# Fly high, Lady Griz



Abby Anderson (11) of the Lady Griz cheers on teammate Sophia Stiles during starting lineup introductions at last Thursday's game against the Idaho Vandals at Dahlberg Arena. In nail-biting fashion, Montana came out on top of the Vandals with a 76-73 victory, with Anderson securing 10 points for the lady Griz. SHANNA MADISON | UM ATHLETICS

# Common courtesy post-COVID: Stick on a mask when you're sick

On Feb. 14, Montana State University rescinded its mask mandate. A day later, the University of Montana announced in an email to students that it was hoping to end its mask mandate "very soon," according to previous Kaimin reporting. Montana hasn't even had a mask mandate since Feb. 12, 2021, thanks to an executive order from Gov. Greg Gianforte. But as UM looks to loosen its mask policy, the Kaimin wants to urge students to keep masking up when they're sick, close contacts or otherwise concerned about their exposure to COVID-19. As we slowly enter into this post-pandemic world, maybe some of the mitigation efforts we've used can stick. Over the last year at UM, campus policy has kept us — namely, those of us who have autoimmune disorders and other health problems — safe by continuing a mask requirement. If nowhere else, campus has been a safe zone for COVID-19 during the last year. But things are changing with COVID-19 and how it's handled. Countries in Europe have already started saying COVID-19 will be treated like the flu going forward, doing away with a number of their precautions from the last two years. Canada, too, has begun lifting COVID-19 restrictions in many of its provinces. And in the U.S., where policies aren't uniform from state to state, some blue-leaning states like New Jersey and New York are announcing ends to their restrictions from the last two years. Now more than ever, it feels like we're hitting the point where the world is reverting back to its pre-pandemic procedures. So, in a community like Missoula where masks can't be required, and in a state like

Montana where masks aren't required, it was only a matter of time before schools started following suit. This doesn't mean people don't still have a right to be concerned. When mask mandates went away from the Great Falls Public Schools just last month, COVID-19 case numbers rose so quickly the schools had to shut down to get them back under control, according to U.S. News & World Report. This never happened when masks were required. Granted, this was at a time when omicron was sweeping the nation, and that variant already appears to be past its peak, with 73% of Americans having immunity to it now, according to the Associated Press. Still, even as mask mandates go away and the world starts to feel normal again, the sacrifices we've made and the concerns of those around us over the last two years shouldn't be forgotten. That's why we're calling on you, UM students, to continue masking when you're sick, and to keep following safety protocols for COVID-19 even if masks go away. Plenty of other countries do this regularly, and have since the SARS outbreak of 2002. People in Japan wear masks regularly, both to protect against air pollution and as common courtesy when they're sick. These measures are routine in other places and they can be the norm on our campus too. If we've learned anything in these last two years, it's that our actions impact others in ways we might not even realize, and that wearing a piece of cloth over our face isn't that horrible — especially if it means we can continue living life normally and keep those around us safe.

Like it? Hate it? Have a different opinion? email us your opinions at [editor@montanakaimin.com](mailto:editor@montanakaimin.com)

# THE PRESIDENT'S LECTURE SERIES

## AN EVENING WITH Ross Douthat

### "How Reaganism Became Trumpism"

Ross Douthat joined The New York Times as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. His column appears every Tuesday and Sunday. Previously, he was a senior editor at The Atlantic. He is the co-author, with Reihan Salam, of "Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream" (2008). He is the author, most recently, of "The Deep Places: A Memoir of Illness and Discovery" (2021). His other books include "The Decadent Society" (2020), "To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism" (2018), "Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics" (2012) and "Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class" (2005). He is the film critic for National Review.

This lecture is sponsored by the Project on American Democracy and Citizenship.

7 p.m. | Wed., March 2

In-person at the Dennison Theatre or via Zoom Register at [umt.edu/president](http://umt.edu/president) to receive the Zoom link.



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA FREE AND OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY. Sign language interpretation will be provided for this event.

## SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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:

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

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# Briefs: LGBTQ+ court case, wolf kills, omicron immunity

**GRIFFEN SMITH**  
griffen.smith@umontana.edu

**THIRTY PERCENT OF MT STUDENT LOANS ELIGIBLE FOR REFINANCING**

College graduates in public services have new opportunities for financial relief after federal officials opened up more eligibility to debt refinancing. The U.S. Department of Education announced last week those who previously weren't enrolled, not eligible in the past and currently work for a non-profit can now re-apply for loan credit or defer payments if needed. Some estimates show this option for paying back student loans, which could be faster and less expensive, would be available to 30% of Montana graduates, a report from Student Loan Hero said. Eligibility includes working for a government agency, like teachers and firefighters, and those who work at a registered non-profit. The programs would pay off loans in 10 years as long as the recipient stays in the non-profit sector.

**REPORT: 73% OF AMERICANS IMMUNE TOOMICRON**

After the worst outbreak of the coronavirus since the onset of the pandemic, scientists are seeing more people immune to omicron, an explanation for the swift drop of COVID-19 cases in late February, the Associated Press reported. The Institute for Health Metrics, which models future trends with viruses, estimated 73% of Americans are immune to the omicron variant, either through vaccination or contracting the disease itself. The Washington-based research group

projected 80% of the country will be immune by early March, a close goal to what scientists call "herd immunity," when enough of the population can reject the virus to slow caseloads and deaths. Scientists at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health estimated about three out of four people in the United States will have been infected by omicron by the end of the surge. In Montana, roughly 54% of eligible people have been vaccinated, compared to the national level of 81%, according to CDC data. Montana has recorded a total of 261,000 COVID-19 cases and 3,105 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

**PART OF STATE HITS WOLF-KILL CAPACITY**

Hunters must remove traps and stop killing gray wolves in southwest Montana after the region hit a state quota. The order comes as an effort to defend the wolves from overkilling. Some 82 wolves have been killed in Montana's hunting region 3, which encompasses Helena to the edge of Yellowstone National Park. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks ended the season Feb. 17 after the new maximum filled quickly from hunters flooding areas near protected wolf populations. At least 21 wolves from Yellowstone Park have been killed by hunters this year, including an entire nine-unit pack in January. While the animals are protected in the park, it is legal to shoot and trap wolves just outside of its border. Federal officials first removed wolves from the endangered species list in 2011, allowing states to regulate hunting of the animal. In 2021, the Montana State

Legislature passed laws allowing an expansion to wolf hunting. Nationwide, a federal judge reprotected the wolves in 45 states last week, but not Montana, Idaho or Wyoming. Montana's seasonal wolf kill list stood at 230 as of Feb. 21.

**ACLU RESPONDS TO AG OFFICE OVER LGBTQ+ CASE**

The American Civil Liberties Union of Montana filed an amicus brief Feb. 21 rallying against attempts from Montana's attorney general to nullify a ruling that dropped the sex-offender status for a man who engaged in same-sex activity. The amicus brief, a document submitted by a third party to a public lawsuit, comes as the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals will hear a case from Missoula that upheld a man's request to clear his name from Montana's sex offender registry. "Menges v. Knudsen," originally heard by Judge Dana Christensen in Missoula, centered around a 1990s charge against Randall Menges, 45, who had consensual sex with two 16-year-old boys as an 18-year-old in Idaho. He was charged under Idaho's Crime Against Nature statute. The statute made Montana required he register as a sex offender when he returned to the state. Christensen's 2021 ruling allowed Menges to unenroll from the registry in Montana. After Menges' victory, Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen filed an appeal, arguing that Idaho has yet to remove him from its state sex offender list, and that he should keep the title until his original crime is expunged. The Idaho Crimes Against Nature law is currently still in effect.

# Blotter

**CHRISTINE COMPTON**  
christine.compton@umontana.edu

**SATURDAY 2/12: POST-WORKOUT LOW**  
A student returned from her Recreation Center workout to find her car scraped up by another car in Lot Z by the Adams Center. With no camera footage or signs of transfer damage, UMPD closed the case with no suspects.

**SATURDAY 2/12: ALLEGED GUNMAN**  
At 5:30 p.m. UMPD helped close Kim Williams Nature Trail after someone reported a dangerous individual to 911. The caller said they saw a hallucinating man with a rifle wandering the Clark Fork River. The trail was reopened after Missoula Police swept the area. The gunman wasn't found.

**SATURDAY 2/12: PARTY ON THE ROOFTOP**  
UMPD caught three students on the roof of the Food Zoo at 11:14 p.m. after a witness saw them. Officers arrived just in time to watch the three scurry down the southeast wall near the Lomasson parking lot. The students weren't aiming to steal or damage anything, UMPD said, but they still took home charges for trespassing on University property. Kids these days...

**SUNDAY 2/13: STICKY FINGERS**  
A student's iPhone was stolen from his room in Jesse Hall after he left his door open for an hour. Apparently, the student doesn't have any sworn enemies or leads, so UMPD closed the case without any suspects. Fun fact: It can be hard to catch thefts within the residence halls because cameras aren't allowed in some hallways. Lock your doors, people. Trust no one.

**TUESDAY 2/15: SPOKEN SMOKER SMACKDOWN**  
A UM Golf Course employee walked into a verbal battle after catching someone smoking a cigarette behind the Iron Griz, which is not allowed on UM property. After exchanging a few choice words, UMPD arrived and issued a firm warning to the smoker.

**TUESDAY 2/15: U.C. INJURY**  
A student was found passed out in vomit in the University Center restroom at 11 a.m. UMPD suspected the student hit their head inside the restroom and threw up because of the trauma. UMPD sent the student to the hospital shortly after a bystander called 911. The status of the student is unknown.

**WEDNESDAY 2/16: LACK OF CARJACK**  
A joyrider tried to enter someone else's car at Lewis and Clark Village. A friendly neighbor watched them struggle with the handle — ultimately failing — and decided to leave a note once the would-be carjacker left. Even though the car wasn't damaged or stolen, just trying to take it is considered attempted trespassing. Once again, no camera footage means UMPD has no suspects.

**WEDNESDAY 2/16: CAUGHT WITH NOTHING**  
Someone called the cops on two girls in the Turner Hall parking lot at 10:30 p.m., accusing them of hotboxing their car. When UMPD arrived, no signs of intoxication or marijuana were found, and the students were let off with a warning. They must have looked particularly menacing in their clean, innocent car.

## The Weekly Crossword by Margie E. Burke

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14				15				16				
17				18				19				
20				21				22				
23								24				
25	26			27			28			29	30	31
32			33				34			35		
36							37			38		
39				40	41			42	43			
44				45				46			47	
48								49			50	
51	52	53					54				55	56
57							58			59		
60							61			62		
63							64			65		

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- ACROSS**
- 1 Word before "mark" or "row"
  - 5 "Waterloo" singers
  - 9 Come clean
  - 14 Exceptional
  - 15 Tankard filler
  - 16 Rob Petrie's wife
  - 17 Fizzy drink
  - 18 Piano player's aid
  - 20 Beanie
  - 22 Truthful
  - 23 Saloon seat
  - 24 Smallest pup
  - 25 Stroller rider
  - 27 Kindle, as passions
  - 29 Bird call
  - 32 To-do list item
  - 34 Sidewalk cafe sight
  - 36 Picnic spoiler
  - 37 Cleopatra biter
  - 38 Throw, as dice
  - 39 Refuses to budge
  - 42 Underhanded sort
  - 44 Electrifying swimmer
  - 45 Cricket's cousin
  - 47 USN rank
  - 48 Give a new look to
  - 49 Sign after Pisces
  - 51 Laundromat fixture
  - 54 Despicable
  - 57 Commotion
  - 59 Mauna Loa output
  - 60 Airport arriver
  - 61 Surface measure
  - 62 Declare firmly
  - 63 Andrea Bocelli, for one
  - 64 Cry of pain
  - 65 Cover at a KOA
  - 25 Far from wordy
  - 26 Speak pompously
  - 28 Full of passion
  - 29 Stubble-free cut
  - 30 Type of wrench
  - 31 Places for murals
  - 33 In \_\_\_ case
  - 35 MLB stat
  - 37 One for the road
  - 40 Bitty biter, slangily
  - 41 California ball-player
  - 42 Bug, in a way
  - 43 "Tide" anagram
  - 46 Weedy ryegrass
  - 48 Safari sight
  - 50 Elaborate display
  - 51 Broke down, in a way
  - 52 Wheel shaft
  - 53 Car radio feature
  - 54 Are in the past?
  - 55 Divisible by two
  - 56 Bullseye hitter
  - 58 Mom's month

**Answers to Previous Crossword:**

M	A	N	O	R	C	A	R	P	A	M	E	X
E	L	O	P	E	A	X	E	L	B	A	L	E
M	A	D	A	M	M	E	S	A	L	L	I	A
O	N	E	R	O	U	S	P	I	M	E	N	T
			T	U	B	C	O	N	E	S	E	X
A	D	S	N	O	C	O	N	T	E	S	T	
M	A	N	A	T	A	R	M	S	T	E	R	M
I	D	O	L	T	E	P	I	D	N	E	A	T
D	O	W	S	E	D	E	V	A	S	T	A	T
			C	O	M	P	E	T	E	N	T	M
V	I	A	M	A	N	E	D	I	P			
I	M	P	L	A	N	T	C	Y	N	I	C	A
C	A	P	E	A	I	D	E	G	A	U	G	E
A	G	E	S	M	A	I	D	E	N	S	U	E
R	E	D	S	A	L	E	E	R	O	P	E	R

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM



CLARISE LARSON  
clarise.larson@umontana.edu

MAKAYLA O'NEIL | MONTANA KAIMIN

Here at good ol' UM we are lucky to have our trusty Monte the bear. Our king can really do it all, and looks fine as hell while doing it too ... wait ... I mean. Anyway, though UM may be able to show pride in our school mascot, not everyone can say the same. Which mascot are you? Let's ask the stars.

**PISCES (FEB. 19–MARCH 20):** You're the blood-drop mascot that hangs out at large blood drive events. It's fun because a lot of people pass out when they look at you and nobody stops you from eating as many of those little snacks they hand out as you like.

**ARIES (MARCH 21–APRIL 19):** You're the type of mascot that knows the moves to every cheer routine and does it with cheerleaders regularly, including when the team hits the splits. You know you can't do splits without being in terrible pain the next day, but you still do it nine out of 10 games. #yolo

**TAURUS (APRIL 20–MAY 20):** There's no greater feeling of power than intentionally picking fights with 8-year-olds while dressed as Chuck E. Cheese because the parents can't get that mad at you even though they're paying your bills lol.

**GEMINI (MAY 21–JUNE 20):** Your costume is perpetually smiling, but behind the mask, you're literally having a full-on breakdown. Listen, depression is real — but so are bills.

**CANCER (JUNE 21–JULY 22):** You're a butterfly mascot that gives out free hugs and your phone number to anyone who "just needs someone to talk to." We love you <3

**LEO (JULY 23–AUG. 22):** You're a furry. **VIRGO (AUG. 23–SEP. 22):** Each and every time you take off that giant bee-head it is doubly disinfected and sprayed with your "special" perfume because even though it's just your germs and stank in there, you literally can't stand it.

**LIBRA (SEP. 23–OCT. 22):** POV: You just received your rejection letter after auditioning to be a character at Disneyland. Stay strong and don't worry — KBGA always needs a lobster.

**SCORPIO (OCT. 23–NOV. 21):** You're a goddamn snake. Oh, wait ... yeah you did a decent job being the tiger for your high school though 8/10 can't complain. #rawrXD

**SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22–DEC. 22):** The company you work for can't afford a blow-up noodle guy so you're outside the building in a morph suit making \$9.25 an hour pretending to be a fucking noodle. You're lowkey kinda having fun though ngl.

**CAPRICORN (DEC. 23–JAN. 19):** You're trying your best to get people excited, but it's hard when your school still has an extremely racist mascot it refuses to change because it's tRaDiTiOn ... \*cough\* Chicago Black Hawks \*cough\*

**AQUARIUS (JAN. 20–FEB. 18):** Monte got you DOWN bad for some of that güd güd, but you're too sHy :( So, instead of approaching him, you comment on all UM social media he appears in with hopes the person under the mask DMs you. Keep dreaming sweetie!

## ‘For Us, By Us’: Students discuss Black experience at solidarity summit

CHRISTINE COMPTON

christine.compton@umontana.edu

UM’s Black Solidarity Summit returned to the University Center last weekend to celebrate Black excellence, history and student experiences, but student leaders on campus said more action needs to be taken to support people of color at the University.

The Black Student Union, a student group that advocates for Black student and faculty needs, hosted the three-day event. The yearly summit unites representatives from across the northeast to address racial discrimination, paralleled by sharing Black success across different campuses.

Unlike past years, this year’s summit was entirely planned by the BSU, highlighted by the summit’s 2022 tagline: “For Us, By Us.”

The event began with dinner and an open mic night Feb. 19. Guests could share poetry and mingle between white cloth-covered tables decorated with red, gold and silver lanterns.

On Feb. 20, the summit centered on Black success and struggle. Some presentations had Black and non-Black guests separate to tackle different views of Black culture. Other presentations, such as a talk titled “Drag and Drop Technology - How to Enter the Tech Space,” elevated successful Black Missoulians and examples of workplace challenges. The summit closed Feb. 21 with inspirational speeches and an emphasis on progress.

Nonso Maxwell Obieyisi, a BSU member, said the meeting was long overdue. America’s nationwide racial epiphany has impacted UM’s Black community since the last in-person summit, held in February 2020, Obieyisi said.

George Floyd’s death and the pandemic called attention to long-held struggles of BIPOC, and the online 2021 summit prevented the in-depth conversations the BSU was looking for.

“The whole issue with George Floyd didn’t start in 2020. It’s been going on,” Obieyisi said. “But that kicked off worldwide attention.”

With so many eyes on BIPOC issues, Obieyisi said the BSU planned for this year’s summit to be a bang. BSU President Abby Watson repurposed months of planning originally made for the 2021 summit, which was held virtually. Obieyisi remembered pushing for more tables, saying he’d rather have extra room than leave anyone out of the conversation.

Obieyisi stressed the importance of the summit for Black students. By hearing the stories of those within their community, people feel less alone, Obieyisi said.

Obieyisi recalled one semester he spent living on campus in 2018 as the only Black student in Aber Hall. He remembered searching for fellow people of color in his classes and realizing he was alone.

It wasn’t until he discovered the BSU that he felt seen in Missoula. Obieyisi saw the summit as a chance to give that feeling to other Black students who need it.

“This is an opportunity to be ourselves, to celebrate, to be together, because togetherness is something not often available to us on-campus,” Obieyisi said.

Togetherness can be a relief for Black students, Obieyisi explained. In their day-to-day lives, minority people can be exhausted by microaggressions, inopportunities and a general lack of understanding from majority peers.

The process of explaining even basic aspects of their experiences — like hair or accents — can drain people. Sometimes it’s nice to be around people who just get it, Obieyisi said.

“It’s easier to talk about it with them because they can relate to you,” Obieyisi said.

It was a sentiment echoed throughout the summit. Faduma Omar, a second-year graduate student in the school of pharmacy, said she has felt alone at times. She said she remembers her white peers doubting her work despite being one of the top students in her class.

“I’m the only Black person in my department,” Omar said. “I just feel like I have to work twice as hard as my counterparts and my classmates to show that I’m deserving of being there.”

Some students said this lack of under-



Nnamdi Kanaga, 26, wrote and directed “The Hail Mary,” led by an all-Black cast. It aired at the fifth annual Black Solidarity Summit at the University of Montana on Feb. 19. The film is about a war veteran moving back to Montana to make amends with his son. RIDLEY HUDSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

standing leads to inaction on campus. UM graduate Ajaysia Hill said she’s deeply frustrated when UM sends apology emails instead of taking action.

She’s especially furious with UM’s lack of action against Clayton Looney, a UM professor who was discovered repeatedly using the n-word in text messages and on camera. Looney used the slur while speaking about East Africans, Muslims and his biracial daughter, among others, according to Hill and social media platforms.

Other texts to his wife provided by Hill showed Looney expressing fear for his daughter becoming too dark and Ethiopian-looking. In the following text conversation, Looney reassured his wife that she and her family don’t look Ethiopian, stating he’s colorblind to those differences.

During a student panel at the summit,

Hill played a video showing Looney calling his daughter a slur.

“Did you guys hear that? It’s him — Clayton Looney, the professor from the business school, this esteemed professor from the business school — saying the n-word,” Hill said to a silent audience.

When Hill got the video from a friend, she thought there was no way UM administration could ignore her. She showed the video to the dean and associate dean of the business school and noted their shocked expressions. She was told the evidence would go up the chain and be investigated.

“That was last year,” Hill said. “And I was like, maybe something is going to happen. Well, they told me I wouldn’t be allowed to know anything that happened with the investigation, and after that I



was told absolutely nothing.”

Hill said she later learned UM deemed the slur use a “non-workplace issue.” Looney told the Daily Montanan in October he enrolled in sensitivity training. No disciplinary action was taken.

Balking and disappointed with the lack of action, Hill reached out to a popular TikTok user to spread the word about Looney’s behavior. After the video gained traction over social media, Hill gathered fellow students to appear at the Associated Students of the University of Montana’s public comment on Feb. 16.

“Me being a Black person wasn’t enough. My email wasn’t enough for them to say ‘Hey, this is an issue,’” Hill said. “But Wednesday, when we spoke at public comment in front of ASUM Senate, they were listening.”

Hill said she finds the inaction hypocritical. She referenced a public statement from President Seth Bodnar.

“You can’t uphold his legacy if you’re allowing this kind of behavior on campus,” Hill said.

Obieyisi said listening is the most essential step non-Black people can take to support the Black community. When non-Black people stop to listen with empathy, effective action can be taken that helps everyone. Obieyisi said much of UM’s current support is only done to save face.

Beyond the apologetic letters, Obieyisi said it is unfair that UM depends on Black students and the BSU to address the darker parts of discrimination.

Following George Floyd’s death in 2020, the BSU experienced a huge wave of momentum. Obieyisi said BSU social media constantly received messages asking it to address different issues or put on more events.

While the support was appreciated, it felt intensely overwhelming, and the BSU had to turn down many of the requests. Obieyisi said he felt frustrated that people of color were expected to do the emotional labor of educating others.

“We’re human beings first. We’re students second,” Obieyisi said. “We have to make sure we’re good before we take on more.”

While Obieyisi respects organizations such as the Diversity Advisory Council, he said they cherry-pick topics within oppression to face. He noticed the council members are a majority white and he said they focus on gender-inclusive bathrooms instead of heavier challenges like racism within residence halls.

“If you’re going to do stuff about diversity, speak about everything,” Obieyisi said.

The event ended on Feb. 20 with a closing speech. Speakers encouraged Black students to seek support when needed and know they aren’t alone on campus. For non-Black students, Obieyisi implored them to act.

“If you know in your heart that something is not right, speak on it,” Obieyisi said. “Listening is key, but action also makes it effective.”

LEFT: The fifth annual Black Solidarity Summit took place in the University Center from Feb. 18 to 20. Speakers, discussions and trivia activities celebrated and taught the UM community about Black history.

BELOW: Paula Hurlock, a development specialist, was a guest speaker at the Black Solidarity Summit. Hurlock spoke about the holistic approach using healing herbs from Jamaica and later answered questions from students and other guests.

RIDLEY HUDSON | MONTANA KAIMIN



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# MONTE UNMASKED

The performers, the suit, the legacy

Story by Tye Brown

Monte stands ominously under a spotlight at Dahlberg Arena on Feb. 17 cheering on the Lady Griz. Generations of Montes have come and gone since the mascot's introduction in 1993. UM's staple bear has had many faces over the years, cheering on fellow Grizzlies at sporting events or academic gatherings.

NATE SANCHEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN

**F**EW INDIVIDUALS are as notable in Missoula as one certain grizzly bear, perpetually agrin, always wearing his headband and double zero jersey. Closely associated with hometown pride, but recognizable by fans from coast to coast, Monte has been the face of the University of Montana for nearly three decades.

A roguish wave maker. An innovative trend setter. A heavyweight Ursidae of mystery. A homegrown legend whose reputation precedes him, whose name at rival schools is synonymous with the chaos and consternation left in his wake.

Since Monte's introduction in 1993, he's undergone numerous personality shifts, displayed a plethora of talents and been tasked with countless responsibilities at UM. From

the clamorous sidelines at national championship games to center stage at children's birthday parties, he's donned many faces. Or rather, many have donned his.

The story of Monte is the story of a single life lived by several people, a lineage of anonymous celebrities, a legacy of high profile entertainers and athletes whose roots run deep in Missoula. Each has brought distinctive characteristics to the role, and each has left impressions on generations of Griz fans, all while concealed behind the iconic mask.

## FROM BEAR TO BEAR

In 2014, Lane Hamilton went from poring over psychology and Spanish textbooks and working as a gymnastics instructor to filling Monte's enormous shoes.

"The idea that it's special and it could be

anybody, that's part of the magic," Hamilton said.

Since his time as Monte ended in 2016, Hamilton still abides by the spirit of the mascot. After graduating, that spirit directed his hand and guided him on a pilgrimage deep into the Lone Star State. There, Hamilton performs at the Toyota Center in front of more than 18,000 people as Clutch the Rocket Bear, the mascot of the Houston Rockets. Clutch's classic move: Shaking his backside for the audience of thousands.

But as one of only 28 active mascots in the NBA, Hamilton is always looking for new ways to stand out. With offbeat costumes and a rotating body of props, Hamilton likes to play with the idiosyncrasies of his character, adding extra dimensions and keeping fans guessing.

"But people don't often expect to see the stunts I've done for years," he said. "As Monte,

you know, shooting half court shots on top of a 22-foot ladder, doing backflips off a ladder at center court, doing a handstand on a hoverboard across the whole court."

Hamilton executes these stunts with ease night after night, game after game, season after season. With 41 home matchups a year and an additional 150 to 200 appearances around the Houston area, his job is as physically demanding as the athletes he works alongside. But Hamilton has been training for it nearly his entire life.

His formative years were spent on balance beams and still rings, pommel horses and trampolines. At Roots Gymnastics and Dance, an unassuming building somewhat hidden off West Broadway in Missoula, Hamilton began to learn the art of the mascot long before he realized it.

## THE MONTE MACHINE

Bitterroot Gymnastics, now part of Roots Gymnastics and Dance, was founded in 1975 by Hamilton's parents, Marsha and Terry. With a family like his, Hamilton's path toward becoming the face of UM seemed fated.

Marsha, a track and field and gymnastics superstar, became one of the first women inducted into the Grizzly Hall of Fame in 1994. She died in 2021. Terry has coached gymnastics and dance for elementary school kids through college athletes for more than forty years. Though he no longer owns it, at 73, Terry still instructs at the studio.

For four and a half decades and across three owners, Bitterroot Gymnastics has consistently produced a host of world-class athletes. Some of its alumni have even gone on to compete in the Olympics, like 1998 gold medalist freestyle skier Eric Bergoust, and Darian Stevens, who competed in the 2022 Beijing Games in the same event.

But it's the unsung dynasty of Montes who have tumbled on the mats and dove into the foam pits of this gym that make it stand out. Since the start of the 21st century, the role of Monte has been passed down like a familial title among many of those who found a second home at Bitterroot Gymnastics.

David Stark, the current owner and a former student of Terry's, can list off seven different men with close ties to the gym who have taken up the mantle. Stark purchased the business in 2005 and has worked closely with many of them.

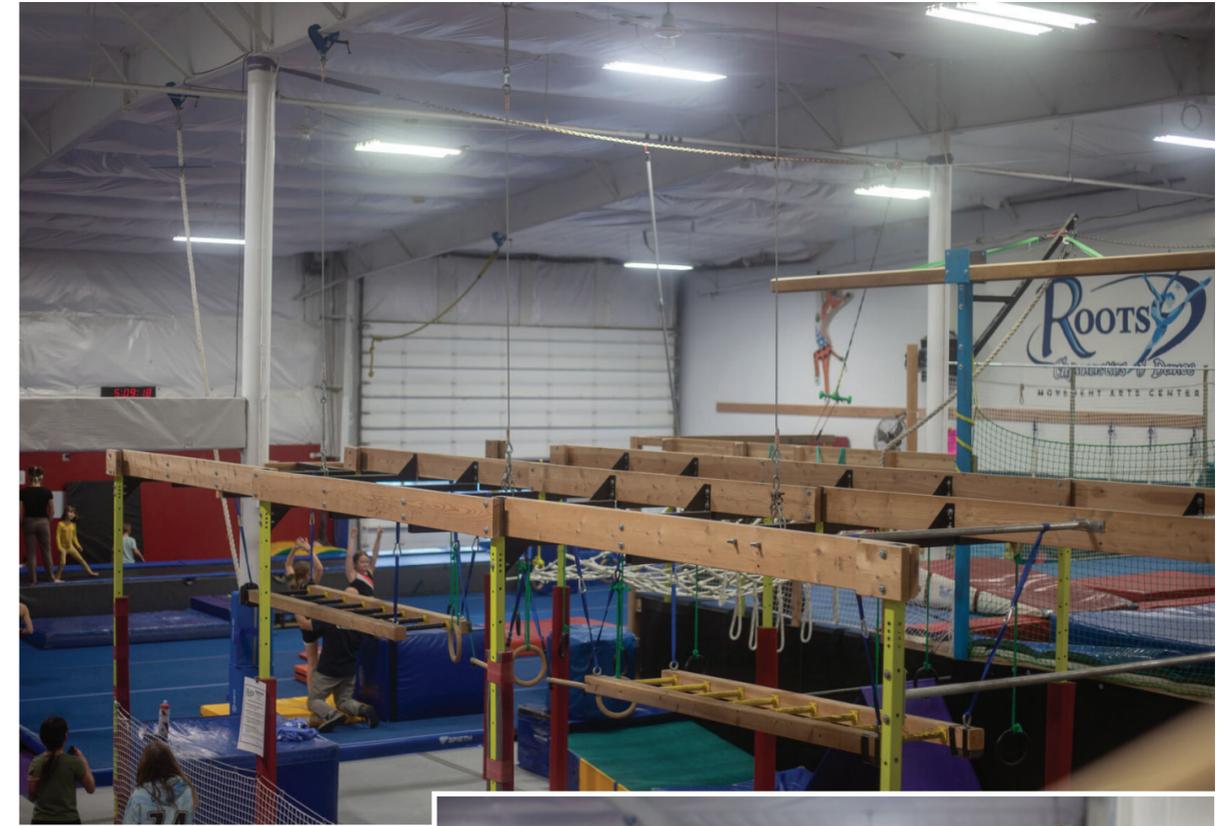
"A handful of these guys were with me since they were little on the boys competitive program," he said. "And then some of them were in our other types of programs, or else they were instructors."

Stark remains humble about his business. He doesn't believe in garnering prestige or recognition for his work. He thinks the sport speaks for itself, and the lessons learned from instructors and coaches is negligible compared to an athlete's willingness and drive to hone their ability.

"A lot of people put their kids in gymnastics, not necessarily to produce an Olympian," Stark said. "But if you were able to do a good amount of gymnastics at a young age — between strength, flexibility, body awareness — you go out and you can really do quite well at most other activities you put your head to."

## THE BEGINNING OF A DYNASTY

The legacy of Montes connected to Bitterroot Gymnastics began in 2001, when a young firebrand named Barry Anderson stepped into the costume. Goofy yet ambitious, Anderson reshaped Monte into something much larger than just a mascot. He was an inventive per-



former, but he was also an agitator.

His larger-than-life presence at sporting events often ran afoul with visiting teams, and his quirky hijinks thrust Monte into the national spotlight more than once. Until his tenure ended in 2004, Anderson was the unknown face behind one of the most preeminent college mascots in the country, winning the Capital One National Mascot of the Year in 2002 and 2004, and even briefly appearing beside Joe Montana in a Super Bowl halftime commercial.

Anderson said he always saw his role as that of a performer first.

"I'm not out there to be an athlete, there are people already doing that," he said. "That's your primary role, is to entertain."

A breakdancing theater major from Miles City, Montana, Anderson found his way to Bitterroot Gymnastics to further practice the skills he said he lacked when he assumed the role.

"I didn't really have the interest, nor did I have the ability to be one of those flippy guys. There's mascots that go out there and they do 15 handsprings, or they'll just sit there and do a backflip," he said. "Those were always very impressive, but it just wasn't me."

Anderson instead preferred to defy the long established expectations of the mascot game.

"I would have rather done something like —



ABOVE: Roots Gymnastics and Dance is home to gymnasts of all ages and skill with tumbling, dance and other disciplines taught and practiced for competitions around the country.

ASTON KINSELLA | MONTANA KAIMIN

BELOW: Terry Hamilton instructs a youth trampoline class in the Roots gym, Feb. 16. Hamilton started the gym in 1975 before a change of ownership in the early 2000's. He still teaches classes throughout the week.

ASTON KINSELLA | MONTANA KAIMIN

**RIGHT:** Monte finishes up his yoga stretches on the court of the Lady Griz vs. NAU basketball game Jan. 22.

**ASTON KINSELLA | MONTANA KAIMIN**

**BELOW:** David Stark assists Roots acro performance team member Abby Courtney during warm up drills. Stark coaches athletes of all ages and has been the owner of Roots Gymnastics Club since 2005.

**ASTON KINSELLA | MONTANA KAIMIN**



money, you're ripping the keys out," he said. "They were just livid that this mascot was wreaking havoc on their field."

Despite being de-costumed and forced to watch the rest of the game in street clothes, Anderson's antics only further endeared him to Griz fans. Other capers, often performed at the physical expense of unwitting participants, became a staple of his style. This stayed with him into his role as Benny the Bull, the mascot of the Chicago Bulls, for the next 12 years after graduating.

"Over time, you realize that the costume gives you the ability to do so much more than you could if you weren't in it," he said. "It's just a costume, and they forget that there's a person inside. But if you didn't have that costume on, even though you're doing the exact same things, you'd be arrested!"

## PASSING THE TORCH

Anderson's influence over Monte's character and the performance style of those who play the bear remained long after he stepped out of the costume for the final time.

"Talk about inspiration and motivation, Barry Anderson was a huge one for me," Hamilton said. It was Anderson who initially encouraged him to look for a position as an NBA mascot after retiring from the Bulls in 2016. "It was

just pure entertainment. He could have you in the palm of his hand. He could have you laugh and cry and cheer and anything in between."

Jim O'Day, former UM athletic director, recalled how Monte's image under Anderson forever changed the game for college mascots across the country.

"He took it from the standup kind of mascot we'd seen for so many years to one of real entertainment," O'Day said. "Barry was always somebody who was willing to push the envelope a little bit. It made other schools nervous about what he might do."

That stream of influence and inspiration was tapped into by Anderson's immediate successor, Ryan Dekmar. After spending his school years training in acrobatic theater and competitive gymnastics at Bitterroot, Dekmar took his long-practiced skills to UM in 2004.

Before college, Dekmar would take to the stage to perform in "The Nutcracker" every holiday season. This was where he met Anderson, who was dating one of the choreographers for the ballet.

Anderson had a direct hand in recruiting Dekmar to take over the role. Dekmar remembers being one of only a few individuals who remained silent and didn't take Monte's head off to catch a breath during tryouts.

"When we were performing and doing gymnastics and dancing and stuff, we weren't as winded as everybody else," he said. "I think that influenced a lot of their decision."

Walking in Anderson's footsteps, Dekmar strove to match the energy of his predecessor. In one instance during a basketball game at Montana State University's Brick Breeden Fieldhouse, Dekmar called on the rebellious spirit of the Monte Anderson had established. Channeling his creative and disruptive energy, Dekmar was responsible for getting Monte blacklisted from traveling to Bozeman.

During a break in the game, Dekmar climbed into the stands and fired on MSU's pep band with an arsenal of silly string, causing an uproar among the band and student section.

"I think they were looking for a reason to kick Monte out," Dekmar said. After that initial incident, Monte was told to stay on a certain end of the court for the remainder of the game and dial back the pranks.

But as MSU officials learned, a wild animal can be difficult to cage. Dekmar said he was boxed in under one of the basketball hoops to keep him off the court, but he escaped more than once and continued to cause a nuisance. He'd dance on the court during timeouts and clamber back into the stands to harass more fans.

"I would say 'harass,' but you know — interacting with fans," Dekmar said. "But Montana State fans at the time, they didn't appreciate Monte."

It remains an unwritten understanding to this day that neither Monte nor Champ, the Bobcats' mascot, travel between Montana schools.

Bill Lamberty, an assistant athletic director at MSU, recalled the incident.

"I think that the athletic directors just came to an agreement. Rather than trying to police the behavior of all those people that were representing the school, it was just as easy to just not have them travel," Lamberty said.

Lamberty denied that MSU put Monte in a "cage," saying that was an exaggeration. "I don't think we'd cage in a human person, whether he was in a bear costume or not."

## A NEW ELEMENT

When Dekmar's time as Monte came to an end, the torch was once again passed down within the Bitterroot Gymnastics family. In sticking with tradition, Dekmar helped oversee his replacement, and the mantle eventually fell to a quiet kid named Brian Blackler.

"Brian had the personality to go along with it and the drive to learn and to continue to develop," Dekmar continued. "That's why we chose him more than anything."

Under Blackler, along with co-Monte and fellow Bitterroot gymnast Trevor Pressler, the mascot program at UM saw another relatively short-lived but fondly remembered expansion: The introduction of Mo, Monte's pint-sized sidekick. Through seven years and two different performers, Mo helped shoulder some of Monte's ever-growing clout.

Mo's first iteration came in 2009, when Bitterroot alum Thomas Stevens (brother of Olympic skier Darian Stevens) wriggled into the diminutive costume as a fourth grader.

The idea for a smaller bear to accompany Monte originated with his mother, Christina, then the principal of a local middle school. She commissioned the costume and brought the idea to UM. Stevens said his mom was inspired directly by Lil' Benny, the miniature bull that sometimes followed Anderson on the court in Chicago.

Anderson and the Stevens family remain close friends.

"He was never my Monte, but he would always visit. And he was the one that kind of coached me and helped me with Mo," Stevens said.

He recalled Anderson returning to Washington-Grizzly Stadium for homecoming games dressed as Benny.

"He would clown around with all of us," Stevens said. "He would teach us things and hang out with us, and we'd go to dinner with him. And he was like everyone's inspiration because he was, I mean, he really is one of the best mascots ever."

"He taught me — and I embraced this my whole career — to break the rules and ask for forgiveness. Don't ask for permission," Stevens continued. "If you start allowing the athletic department or the football people or whoever it may be to put rules on the mascots, then pretty soon you're going to be handcuffed." According to the Anderson philosophy of mascotting, Stevens said, if you constantly break

the rules, then the rules don't really exist.

Despite the highly classified identities of working Montes, that code of silence did not extend to the high-spirited elementary schooler. Sometime shortly after his run as Mo began, Stevens said he had to get his classmates off his tail by fitting his sister into the costume while they were both in the same room.

"[She] did a guest appearance at my school and I was sitting in the crowd, so that threw everybody off," he said. "And then they're like, 'Well, it can't be Thomas because he was at school.'"

While the Monte brand continued to grow, so did Stevens. He finally hung up the suit in 2016 as a freshman in high school, while working with Hamilton, Blackler's and Pressler's replacement.

Close friends outside of their shared mascot gig, Stevens and Hamilton appreciated being able to work together. But as a young high schooler struggling to be relatable to children half his age, Thomas Stevens began to test the limits of Mo's appropriateness. Monte's sidekick was deep in the throes of puberty, and some of that angst bled through the character.

"I started becoming [more of] a mascot, you know? Flirting with the cheerleaders, messing with people too much, that kind of thing," Stevens said. "Not to mention, I was getting a little bit too tall to be approachable for kids."

Since Hamilton's departure in 2016, the role of Monte continued to be passed down within Bitterroot Gymnastics, to be helmed by 10-year veteran of the studio, James Marek, that same year, and eventually on to then-competitive gymnast Cort Jensen. In the interest of preserving the mascot spirit, any Montes recruited after 2020 will not be named.

## SPIRIT OF A GRIZZLY

Anderson remembers frequently visiting an empty Washington-Grizzly Stadium in his downtime. He would sit in the rows, look down on the bare field and paint a mental picture of his next performance. He imagined the roar of the student section, the intensity of the environment on the turf.

"I did this in Chicago as well," he said. "I would just sit there, and it was quiet. I would look around, and I could visualize it, like a canvas."

For Anderson, and the Montes who followed him, the job was much more than a simple side gig in an already hectic life. It was life itself. The seeds of new routines germinated in their thoughts, and frequent in-town appearances ate up most of their days. It was the life of a single celebrity seen through different sets of eyes.

But a biography is not complete without an origin story. Though Anderson established Monte as a national name in the early 2000s, another performer first gave him life.

In 1993, Scott Stiegler was a fraternity brother with no intention of becoming the newest face of his school. Immediately before Monte, UM's mascot was Otto the Bear. Pre-

ceding that was a variety of corporate mascots.

A practiced gymnast, Stiegler was approached one day by a brother with a proposal — to become the beloved mascot.

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to become a different me," he said. "I was a quiet and shy person, I felt. I was more of a person who'd like to kind of be on the sidelines and watch. I thought this would be fun to do, because you could hide behind the mask and be anonymous."

The first Monte costume was a product of its time, a near prototype.

"It was extremely heavy and extremely hot. The head was only just a little headband, like a hardhat might have," Stiegler said. "One time the helmet went flying off in the middle of a game, so I knew I had to fix that. So I fabricated a bicycle helmet and got it to attach inside."

But in this haphazard suit, Stiegler helped breathe new life into University athletics. It was the beginning of the Dave Dickenson era — the Griz quarterback from 1993 to 1995 who led the team to a national championship, often considered one of the University's best — and UM was riding on a wave of pride. For many, the mascot represented something intangible. It symbolized a new identity for Montana, a character that fans could rally around, someone they could identify with.

"At one of the football games, there was a lady who came down to the rail, and she had her little baby in a little baby Monte suit," Stiegler remembered. "It took me a minute to realize that she was actually handing her baby to me."

The mother instructed Monte to take the child on a walk around the field and pretend the baby was his.

"I was blown away by it. I was humbled by it, and honored because it was not lost on me in that moment how much trust this lady had in me, in Monte," he said. "I have to look at it in a humble way. But I was able to do something for Monte and for the University that allowed people to hand him a baby."

Instantly, Stiegler realized that fans viewed Monte entirely differently than he imagined.

"I knew that I had to uphold a reputation from then on out, that Monte was important. And he had to stay that way. He had to be a good person, and he couldn't be untrustworthy."

Now the athletic director for Florence Public Schools, Stiegler reminisces on his days as the first full-time Monte. Every once in a while, he says, his students will hear a rumor about his past. He brushes them off, saying he doesn't know the famous mascot.

To him, the integrity of Monte's image in the public eye outweighs any other aspect of the character. A mythic figure, the face of generations of Grizzlies.

One life lived by many people.

# A TIMELINE OF MONTE



**1995, Scott Stiegler**

CONTRIBUTED | MANSFIELD LIBRARY ARCHIVE AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



**2005, Ryan Dekmar**

CONTRIBUTED | MANSFIELD LIBRARY ARCHIVE AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



**2009, Trevor Pressler and Thomas Stevens**

CONTRIBUTED | MISSOULIAN, KURT WILSON



**2015, Lane Hamilton**

CONTRIBUTED | UM ATHLETICS



**2019, Cort Jensen**

CONTRIBUTED | UM ATHLETICS

Not pictured: Brian Blackler, who took the helm of Monte in fall 2009, and James Marek, who was Monte from 2016-2019. Barry Anderson is not pictured in his years as Monte from 2001-2004, but is pictured as Chicago Bulls mascot Benny the Bull in the photo of Dekmar as Monte.

MCKENNA JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

# ACDA returns to the stage in its annual benefit dance concert

HALEY YARBOROUGH  
haleyyarborough@umontana.edu

Two University of Montana dance students face each other, a tennis net between them as they swing their rackets at empty air. Despite their skirts and shorts, these students aren't playing tennis — they're rehearsing for UM undergrad Isabella Kasper's choreographed piece "The Unexpected Movements of Tennis: Breaking the College Expectation to Conform Through Dance."

After a two-year pandemic hiatus, UM's annual American College Dance Association Concert returned to the stage with two late-night performances on Feb. 18. The concert featured a compilation of original dances choreographed by UM students, faculty and guest artist Ishmael Houston-Jones. The show raised funds for UM dance students to perform in Eugene, Oregon, and showcase fresh dance works in front of a live audience.

"Normally I could direct a live performance like this in my sleep," said Heidi Eggert, the producer of the concert. "But it's been two years, the knowledge the students carried with them pre-pandemic, they don't have that anymore."

Despite the challenges of moving from the camera back to the stage, dancers said they were excited to perform in front of a crowd again.

Kasper said performing in front of a live audience was particularly important for her piece, which uses tennis as a metaphor for the spoken and unspoken norms people are expected to conform to both in sports and academia. Kasper, who is double majoring in dance and psychology, said she likes to experiment with movement and somatic-based therapy through dance. For this piece specifically, she focused on subconscious hand movements when people talk.

"I like challenging myself as a dancer to break the mold," Kasper said. "In sport and academia there's a set of standards you're supposed to uphold and I wanted to break those standards."

Some of the performances break standards through improvisation. This includes pieces by award-winning choreographer Houston-Jones, who is a guest-artist resident funded by the School of Theatre and Dance's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative, and by the ASUM dance club. Houston-Jones is drawn to collabora-

tions as a way to move beyond boundaries.

While the concert featured a series of these collaborative dances, it also included solo work by UM undergrads. Julia Duarte — a sophomore undergrad from Brazil majoring in dance and art — decided to dance solo for the choreographed piece "Still I Rise."

Duarte, who has been dancing since she was 3 years old, said this was not her first solo dance, but she was excited for the performance, especially because she got to perform in front of a live audience.

"When a dance is built for the camera, it's different than when you're doing a dance built for the stage," Duarte said. "In front of a camera, it feels weird, because your dance isn't made for that medium."

Other dancers chose to channel their excitement through dances centered on positivity and authenticity.

"Good Egg," a piece choreographed by senior B.A. candidate Georgia Littig, focuses on freeing people from presenting a perfect persona and migrating toward ingenuity in the human experience. The piece features two eggs made of chicken wire, draped with canvas and painted and speckled to appear more realistic. Littig and her partner, Karter Bernhard, start the show by emerging from the eggs — an action Littig said is representative of coming into the world.

"It's about this place where we can prepare ourselves mentally and physically before our exposure to the outside world," Littig said. "And the narrative of surrounding yourself with people, then learning, compromising, and then, ultimately ending."



**LEFT:** Julia Duarte, a sophomore undergrad from Brazil majoring in dance and art, rehearses her solo choreography piece to "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou. Her performance is a celebration of diversity and represents the strength and beauty in Black women.

**BELOW:** Rebecca White, left, and Hannah Dusek were among the student performers in the piece "In My Perfect World," choreographed by guest artist and award-winning choreographer Ishmael Houston-Jones ahead of a benefit concert on Feb. 18. The School of Theatre and Dance will take Houston-Jones's choreography to the Adjudicated Concert of the American College Dance Association.

MADDIE CRANDALL | MONTANA KAIMIN

# The mysterious disappearance of two UC fish: What Koi-d have happened?

NANCY BESTON  
nb158522@umontana.umt.edu

Three koi fish, collectively known as a gasp, were placed in the University Center pond on Monday, Feb. 7. In the gasp, two of the fish were white and one was orange. The next day, only one fish, the orange Costello, remained.

The other two, Strawberry Shortcake and Roi the Koi, were nowhere to be found.

Anna Hatcher, UC Gardens Manager and fish keeper, tore apart the pond Wednesday looking for the fish. She said she assumed they were hiding. She moved rocks, including the one on top of the filter, which resulted in the Griz Card Center being sprayed with water along with ripping her pants in the process.

Still, only one fish was in the pond.

There are three theories on the two missing fish's disappearance, according to Hatcher.

Theory number one:

"Legitimately the pond could be a portal to another universe," Hatcher said. "So maybe they were set free into another fish world."

The pond has been recently emptied, and there appears to be a bottom to it, but who knows, maybe the portal only opens for white koi fish. Although the bottom seemed to exist, some pretty cryptic things have happened at UM.

Another question to consider is how the alleged portal came into existence. Maybe a magician? Unfortunately, UM is not Hogwarts, nor is it a confirmed school of magic. But in all honesty, even if UM was a school of magic, it probably would have made budget cuts to that program.

Theory number two:

"Someone, some kids, some college punk stole them, or maybe unbeknownst to me, someone who has beef with the gardens," Hatcher said. "Maybe they were trying to sabotage, because weirdly enough last week, when I was about to get the fish, the pond broke, and someone had turned all my valves off, and water wasn't coming out. There was a lot of fishy behavior."

In the past, the UC has had issues with people stealing plants and other items from its grounds. The complexities of a plot to steal a plant versus a live fish are

slightly different, but a student could quickly jump from plant theft to fish nabbing. Imagine some kid taking an oversized Hydro Flask and scooping up a fish friend. Hydro Flasks can have many uses, including holding water, coffee, vodka — or in this theory — a fish.

This theory wouldn't be the first fish-centric crime in the UC.

"I remember the event well. I do not remember the date, likely in the '90s," former garden manager Kelly Chadwick said. "I don't think it was one frat. I think it was an event with all the frats on the third floor of the UC. I didn't really see the event but was told they were swallowing goldfish. Later, I saw over 50 tiny goldfish that had been dumped into the pond."

If students can sneak 50 fish in, who is to say that one couldn't sneak one or two fish out?

Theory number three:

"Costello ate the other two fish," Hatcher said. "When you think of a koi fish, I do not think of cannibals. I think of them as like an urban herbivore, they just eat pond scum. So that was not something I was anticipating at all."

When differently sized koi fish are placed within a pond, sometimes the bigger fish will take bites of the smaller ones, eating them alive. Costello was donated to UC gardens. But Hatcher was afraid he might get lonely, so she bought the two other fish separately at a PetSmart. The three fish were placed in the pond on the same day.

Though many koi are able to share the 130-gallon pond at the UC, it seems Costello may have ruined his chances for future friends to splash around with. Is he guilty of cannibalism? We may never know.

Costello was contacted for an interview, but did not respond in time for publication.

Hatcher asks that students still show Costello respect, no matter if he's guilty or not, by not adding in any other fish friends, food or coins his pond.

Unfortunately, no theory has been confirmed on Strawberry Shortcake's and Roi the Koi's disappearance. If anyone has any information to verify the above theories, please contact UC Gardens at (406) 243-2466. Don't be koi; help bring the UC fish friends home.



NANCY BESTON | MONTANA KAIMIN

# Not just hot air: Coaches think new inflatable facility will blow athletics away

CHRISTINE COMPTON  
christine.compton@umontana.edu

The University of Montana athletics department expects a new, one-of-a-kind indoor athletics facility to be completed by 2023, but it all depends on raising a hefty \$7.2 million from private donors.

UM is getting close, said Dan Ingram, associate athletic director for development. For student athletes, the indoor practice facility could be a breath of fresh air compared to the limited practice times and expensive snow clearing UM has grappled with during the wintertime.

The idea for an indoor facility floated around UM athletics for years. It will be the first inflatable facility in the Big Sky Conference — entirely funded by private donors, so no UM tuition or taxes will be spent.

Placed in the Riverbowl Field, a grassy zone near the Adams Center, the titanic new facility would provide a dry, warm refuge for all student athletes. The facility would take up 110,000 square feet, housing a permanent 100-yard synthetic football field, sprint lanes for track and training areas, and long jump pits, pole vault bars and javelin throwing fields for field events.

A permanent lobby would be installed to house restrooms and storage. Above it all would be an inflatable structure that would encase the grounds during winter months.

“Because much of the facility will be synthetic, time won’t need to be spent watering, moving or painting lines,” said Kent Haslam, director of UM athletics. “In the past during the cold and snowy months all of that space was unusable. This facility now changes that.”

The indoor space is an essential move, said Tucker Sargent, head coach of the men’s lacrosse team at UM.

He and his team currently rely on renting access to Washington-Grizzly Stadium to practice for the spring season. However, time slots can be slim, and sometimes the team is forced to play on lands like Dornblaser Field at the corner of Higgins and South Avenue.

Those fields can be hard to maintain, Sargent said. The uneven ground — combined with snowy elements that lock up joints and slow attention — makes injuries common.

The inability to find a decent space meant the team had fewer than four quality, full-field practices before its first match. This can put the athletes at a major disadvantage when playing against warm-weathered opponents, Sargent explained.

“We lost our first game less because of our talent and more because of our experience as a group,” Sargent said.

Melanie Meuchel, head coach of the UM softball team, agreed that opportunities to practice make a huge difference.

The softball team often begins its season mid February — when snow usually still lines the ground. The team can try to clear the Grizzly Softball Field in time for a practice, but weather can keep the team indoors where it can’t practice certain skills, Meuchel explained.

Meuchel remembered a few years ago when the softball team first touched a full field fewer than two hours before its first game.

“There’s so many variations that go on in a game, like distance and height and playing off of a fence,” Meuchel said. “We never try to use it as a reason or an excuse by any means, but it is a hindrance.”

For a team sport, this can be a major obstacle. Camaraderie is built through experience, and players motivate themselves to play their best when they can see their growth, Meuchel said.

The indoor facility will be a game changer in elevating student athletes across campus and in the Missoula community, Meuchel said.

“We are ecstatic,” Meuchel said. “I’m so thankful for the donors and the administration that have worked so hard to be able to get these resources for the student athletes. As a coach, I’m very grateful that this is a dream coming true for so many people.”

Sargent explained that UM lacks some athletic infrastructure compared to other universities. He knows some of his players were offered scholarships at institutions with better athletic programs, but they elected to come to UM for the education. While he’s proud to have them, he knows not all student athletes will think the same way.

“There’s a lot of kids who want to play in a controlled environment,” Sargent said. “If we have access to that and showcase that to potential students, that’s a huge recruiting draw.”

Lacrosse, other club sports and community organizations will be able to rent space from the facility during weekends and off hours. The rental fees will go towards maintenance, making the facility completely privately funded.

“Griz Nation runs deep, and the positive response to this project that will help all of our student athletes has been amazing,” Ingram said.

Ingram said UM athletics expects to hit its financial goal within the next few months. He and his team have made contact with potential donors that could get the project over the finish line. The majority of donations come from Griz alumni across the nation.



UM Athletics will be adding an indoor training facility on the fields on the north end of campus. The University announced it expects it to be operational by 2023. NATE SANCHEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN



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# In up-and-down season, Lady Griz look to finish strong

MAX DUPRAS  
max.dupras@umconnect.umt.edu

The University of Montana women’s basketball team is onto its final five games before the Big Sky Conference Tournament, and with COVID-19 issues and the threat of injury to one of its top guards, the team’s approach for the end of the season is just to survive.

The Lady Griz’s tumultuous three-game road trip from Cedar City, Utah, to Cheney, Washington, was nothing short of a road bump for the team. Redemption has been the goal since losing to Idaho State on Feb. 5, and the challenges continue to mount.

“We need to play the right way with everything the coaches implement, but just bringing that grit and determination. Not just getting caught on our heels, but being the aggressors and being the attackers and playing for no other reason than you just want to win,” senior forward Kylie Frohlich said.

The start of 2022 looked promising. A loss on New Year’s Day against a middle-of-the-conference team, Weber State, led into a three-game win streak that would go unbroken until a road matchup against the Lady Griz’s rivals, Montana State.

One MSU pummeling later, the long haul began as UM’s games that were postponed due to COVID-19 were rescheduled into a six-game slate over the course of only 12 days.

A conference bright spot for UM was its five-point win against Southern Utah, a sign that life came back after its home loss against Idaho State. A victory against the former top-of-the-conference Utah wouldn’t seize enough momentum for the Lady Griz, who lost in a heartbreaker to Northern Arizona University three days later.

After a five-point first quarter, the Grizzlies were looking to take out the Lumberjacks in Flagstaff. A last-second layup by NAU’s Khariara Rasheed would be the downfall of Montana’s comeback.

“I told them that the 39 minutes and whatever seconds before, that is why we end up losing a game. Not that 0.8 seconds,” Coach Brian Holsinger said.

The final COVID-19 rescheduled game against Eastern Washington started off with early mistakes as the Grizzlies would only amass nine points each in the first and second quarters. A 22-point comeback in the fourth quarter became a hearty effort, but ended as another loss.

After wins against Idaho at home and Portland State on Saturday, the team is left with a five-game stretch that could dig it out

of a hole.

Once in sixth place, the season has been a miracle at points. A buzzer-beater from Sophia Stiles against Weber State became the highlight of this season. Now Montana is 9-6 in conference play, with three of those losses coming in the last six games.

“I think tough times test your character,” Holsinger said. “I talk about culture and I talk about having character and being who you are. It’s easy when things are going well, but when things aren’t and you lose a really tough one at NAU and then you just don’t play well at all, you figure out who you are.”

The final five games of this season also include a rematch against the Bobcats and the Thunderbirds in Missoula.

The end of February is the test before playoffs and a hopeful redemption track for a once-elated team.

“Mood can be a roller coaster sometimes and I think lately we’ve been a little more up and down than we need to be instead of consistent,” Frohlich said. “Especially rounding off to the end of the season, you want to go up from here.”

Even with some tough breaks, the season is not a wash. After two wins against bottom-of-the-conference teams, the Griz now sit at fourth seed in the Big Sky.

After an injury to senior guard Sammy Fatkin, rotational minutes were up for grabs.

“We miss her,” Holsinger said. “She’s our leading scorer in the conference. She has an aggressive nature to her that’s unique to our team.”

The minutes have fluctuated, but a bright future is emerging among this team.

Freshman guard Haley Huard is easing her way into a full-time starting role as the next to lead the charge. Freshman forward Dani Bartsch is making her name as a scrap-



ABOVE: Montana’s Nyah Morris-Nelson, left, and Kyndall Keller, right, in action on the court as the Lady Griz face off against the Idaho Vandals at Dahlberg Arena on Feb. 16.

RIGHT: The Lady Griz bench celebrates and cheers on its teammates during a conference match against Idaho.

NATE SANCHEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN

py forward learning under the watch of consistent starter and senior Abby Anderson.

Sophomore guard Kyndall Keller is coming off of a strong performance against Idaho, where she made 16 points.

Holsinger is hoping to build a culture in Missoula, and his key is to be patient and let the bricks place themselves.

“We’re going to battle and we’re going to fight and these kids all have the right mindset,” Holsinger said. “I think we’re going to encourage them to have the right mindset. And that is when things get tough, what do

you do?”

“We do have that talent but we just need to be that team that’s gonna be so fierce and aggressive that we’ll come away with it without a question,” Frohlich said.

The Lady Griz was scheduled to take on Idaho in Moscow on Feb. 21 before returning for the final home game stretch against Southern Utah and Montana State. The Big Sky Tournament starts on March 7 in Boise, Idaho, and if the Lady Griz is top five in the conference, a bye in the tournament will be awarded.

# Dance, baby, dance! XOXO

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY SHANNA MADISON  
shanna.madison@umconnect.umt.edu

Gathered under the glimmering glow of a disco ball, lovers from around the Garden City packed into the Badlander Complex last Thursday for KBGA and the Heartaches' inaugural Love Sick Ball.

Hosted by Missoula's college radio station, the Valentine's Day after-party featured live music, drinks, dancing and tons of raffle prizes. KBGA partnered with 12 different local businesses including the Board of Missoula, Bernice's Bakery and Clyde Coffee to give away baskets full of goodies.

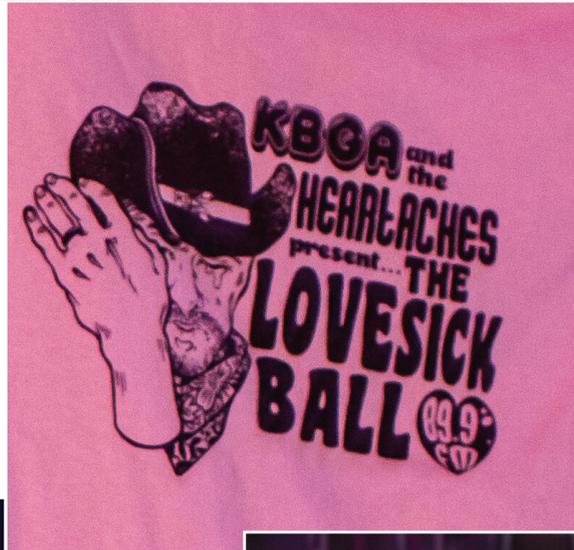
The entertainment and musical lineup for the evening did not disappoint. Guests got to dance to rhythms and beats by local bands Tuskers, Cosmic Sans, Sugar Colt and Transcendental Express.

Leading up to the event and serving as promotion for the ball, KBGA hosted a special Valentine's Day broadcast, asking members of the community to share embarrassing or funny tales of their love lives.

Traditionally, KBGA's big fundraiser for the year is its annual Radiothon, a week-long celebration with multiple events each day with donations going toward studio improvements, equipment and operation costs.

This year, the station opted for a Radiothon rebrand, with COVID-19 having created event planning difficulties in the last few years.

The event raised over \$500 from entrance donations. The station is already planning for next year's ball to share the love once again.



**TOP LEFT:** There was plenty of energy to go around at KBGA's Love Sick Ball. The fully packed Badlander dance floor was beating and vibing.

**TOP RIGHT:** The Badlander Complex was decked out in Valentine's Day decor to set the mood.

**MIDDLE LEFT:** Merchandise included custom Lovesick Ball T-shirts. The design was created by University of Montana student Dagny Walton after the station hosted a T-shirt design contest.

**MIDDLE RIGHT:** Lovers and dancers grooved the night away to rhythms from local bands Tuskers, Cosmic Sans, Sugar Colt and Transcendental Express on the Badlander dance floor.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Cole Grant from Transcendental Express rocks the stage during the gig. The band was the third to perform at the ball.