

# THE MAN BEHIND NO. 24

Q&A WITH CHARLOTTE MEN'S BASKETBALL  
FORWARD IGOR MILIČIĆ JR.

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Vol. 35, Issue 15  
Jan. 24, 2023  
NINERTIMES.COM

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Charlotte sophomore forward Igor Miličić Jr.  
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chian State on Dec. 2, 2022.

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## NEWS

CROWN COMMONS RENOVATION SET TO START APRIL 1, P. 3

CATS BUS DRIVERS THREATEN TO GO ON STRIKE, P. 3

UNC CHARLOTTE HOSTS THE NINER NATION OPEN 2023  
SPEEDCUBING COMPETITION, P. 4

UNC CHARLOTTE STUDENTS HELP MANAGE FLOODPLAINS IN LO-  
CAL COMMUNITY, P. 5

UNC CHARLOTTE SUPPORTS RED CROSS THROUGH  
14TH ANNUAL BLOOD DRIVE, P. 5

## OPINION

UNC CHARLOTTE RESIDENTS MUST STILL REMAIN CAUTIOUS  
DESPITE CHARLOTTE'S EXISTING SAFETY PROTOCOLS, P. 6

ATHLETES MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE DESPITE PRIVILEGE, P. 7

SPRING BREAK SHOULD BE SCHEDULED LATER IN THE YEAR, P. 7

ROMANTICIZING MINORS' SEX AND DRUG USE IN MEDIA  
IS HARMFUL, P. 8

## PHOTOS

CHARLOTTE HOSTS THE WINTER STUDENT ORGS SHOWCASE, P. 9

## SPORTS

A RECAP OF CHARLOTTE FOOTBALL EARLY SIGNING DAY, P. 10

THE MAN BEHIND NO. 24: A Q&A WITH CHARLOTTE MEN'S  
BASKETBALL FORWARD IGOR MILIČIĆ JR., P. 11

CHARLOTTE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL FORWARD MYA MCGRAW IS  
LEADING TEAM WITH BIG PERSONALITY, P. 12

## GAMES, P. 13

## ARTS & CULTURE

GOLDEN OWL TAVERN'S PARTICIPATION IN QUEEN'S FEAST, P. 14

DEAR NINER TIMES: HOW DO I SURVIVE BEING A COMMUTER  
STUDENT?, P. 14

TV REVIEW: A FIRST LOOK AT HBO'S 'THE LAST OF US', P. 15

A GUIDE TO SPECIALTY COFFEE IN CHARLOTTE, P. 15

## PHOTOS

CHARLOTTE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. WKU, P. 16



# Crown Commons renovation set to start April 1

by Kathleen Cochran  
Asst. News Editor

UNC Charlotte's Dining Services will renovate Crown Commons and temporarily relocate it to Upper Prospector starting April 1, 2023.

The Crown Commons renovation is planned to make it a more open and bright area for students to eat and hang out.

Upper Prospector will be closed from March 24 to April 1 for Dining Services to become a temporary Crown Commons for students and faculty. The restaurants currently in Upper Prospector, such as Salsaritas and Sushi by Gusto, will close for renovation and reopen at the beginning of the fall 2023 semester.

*"We had tried when we were going through the bid process for Crown Commons to fit it into like a May 1 through the end of summer, and they said there's no way we can do this big of a project in that type of window."*

**Jody Thompson**  
Director of Auxiliary Services

"We had tried when we were going through the bid process for Crown Commons to fit it into May 1 through the end of summer, and they said there's no way we can do this big of a project in that type of window," Jody Thompson, director of Auxiliary Services said. "So that's why we had to back it up a little, knowing that we want to ensure that we're open for the fall.

"Crown Commons is getting a complete space lift," Thompson said. "When you get to the top of the stairs, it's very closed off, and you see those two doorways. We're going to open up that whole space, so you will be able to stand in the rotunda and see back through to the back patio. We want to make it as much of an open-concept space as possible."

They will also add an express lane for students with meal swipes to walk right through and swipe their cards. They will also turn the big island area with the salad bar and pizza stations into two smaller islands off the side to maintain an open-concept feel.

Dining Services has also decided to extend the indoor dining area by removing the outdoor patio. This will allow more seating options, such as high tops or smaller tables. The tables will also have outlets for students to plug in and study.

"[The renovation] will have a to-go program where they can get pizza and burger items from the grill that are going to be on mobile ordering. I frequently hear 'bring back Crown to-go' because they love that. Also, we're expanding the sauté station in Crown so that it's more open for students to customize their dishes," Cynthia Torrence, director of dining services at Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services, said.

Upper Prospector will be converted into a



Rendering of the renovated Crown Commons | Courtesy of Auxiliary Services

temporary Crown Commons. Pizza will be where Mamma Leone's currently is, the sauté station where Salsaritas is, the grill station in place of Bojangles and putting the Crown-style deli where Sushi with Gusto is. The regular salad bar in the area will also connect to the Upper Prospector and the Gold Room.

Dining Services is in the process of setting up a Virtual Reality (VR) experience for people to walk through and experience the new Crown Commons design. The VR headset will be set up in the Popp Martin Student Union and inside Crown Commons for students and faculty.

## CATS bus drivers threaten to go on strike

by Jackson Martin  
Asst. Copy Editor

On Jan. 7, Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) bus drivers voted to go on strike. However, the strike will not occur until at least 30 days after the union's notice. This means strikes could begin as soon as Feb. 6.

If the drivers go on strike, CATS will have to suspend most bus routes, leaving riders without a mode of transportation. Many Charlotte students and faculty rely on CATS to reach campus.

UNC Charlotte students with the all-access

transit pass can ride CATS transportation for free, as tuition includes the charge for the pass.

The dispute prompting the strike is between the local bus driver's union, SMART Union, and third-party management company, RATP Dev. The strike is protesting three rejected labor contracts regarding pay, health insurance and safety.

"CATS wants the community to know that RATP Dev and SMART Union are continuing to negotiate the terms of their agreement in good faith," CATS shared in a Facebook

post. "CATS remains supportive without participating in the process."

CATS Paratransit, light rail operators and vanpool services will not participate in the strike because they are not union employees.

CATS is unaware of when the potential strike may begin and how many bus drivers will participate. However, in the event of a strike, CATS will prioritize securing a route for healthcare employees and businesses with high ridership.

CATS promises to communicate in real-

time as staffing changes may occur. CATS encourages those who rely on their bus routes to stay updated by visiting [ridetransit.org](https://ridetransit.org), their social media accounts (@ridecats) and the CATS-Pass app. The Niner Times will provide updates with alternative routes to campus in the event of a strike.

# UNC Charlotte hosts the Niner Nation Open 2023 speedcubing competition

by Allyson Parsi  
Staff Writer

The World Cube Association (WCA) held a speedcubing competition in the Popp Martin Student Union on Jan. 15.

The Niner Nation Open 2023 competition was open to any competitors who registered between the dates of Nov. 15-17, 2022.

The competition had five cube events: the 3x3x3 cube, the 2x2x2, the 4x4x4, the Clock cube and the Square-1 cubes. The 3x3x3 cube competition was the main event.

The Clock is a two-sided puzzle, each with nine clocks that need to all be facing 12:00 to be solved.

The Square-1 is a three-layer cube that contains kite and triangle-shaped pieces, so it can change shape as it is twisted. It is solved by having uniform color and being cube-shaped.

## Breaking down the competition

Competitors checked into their events at 8 a.m., and the first round for the 3x3x3 cube started at 8:45 a.m. The top 48 fastest times advanced to the 3x3x3 second round.

The 2x2x2, the 4x4x4, the Clock and the Square-1 cube events were separated into two rounds. The 3x3x3 cube event was divided into three rounds.

The 16 fastest times from the first 2x2x2 and 4x4x4 rounds and the second round of the 3x3x3 cube advanced to the finals.

The top 12 fastest times in the Clock cube and Square-1 cube first rounds would advance to the final round for those events.

Each round was separated into three groups organized by speed.

## Regulating and judging in the WCA

Cady Shields, lead delegate for the event, said, “People that are typically the same speed get the same scrambles to their cubes. They will have the same randomness and luck to them.”

While actively competing in a round, competitors sat at a table with a judge next to them who would write down the time it took for them to solve the cube once they were done. Competitors have 15 seconds to inspect the cube before solving it.

Each competitor had five attempts to solve the cube for that round, and after the last solve, their five times were averaged to calculate their official score.

When it was their turn to compete, their cube was placed on their table under a box until they were ready to inspect it. After being solved, the cube was placed in the box with the competitor’s scorecard and re-scrambled.

Judges for the event, who would monitor competitors and write down times, were also other competitors.

“We’re all unpaid volunteers. Everyone needs to judge; we can’t make the competition run just with some of us,” said Shields.

Five delegates at the event would be called over to competing tables if anything happened that needed the WCA rules to be judged.

“We have the regulations memorized. If there’s a timer malfunction or a judge did something wrong, the other delegates and I are called over to assess this situation,” said Shields.

## The cubing club

UNC Charlotte’s Niner Speedcubing Club helped organize this event.

First-year student Aaron Clark said he found the competition through the cubing club at UNC Charlotte.

“The cubing club here sent out an announcement in their Discord that they would be holding a competition. I

have been cubing since the fourth grade and go to competitions to see my times improve,” said Clark.

“Registration for this event filled up in 91 seconds when it opened, and we had a waitlist of over 130 people,” said Shields.

Anyone could register for the competition, not just Charlotte students.

“I live in Atlanta, Ga. I came to Charlotte for this competition,” said Owen Dove.

There were 80 competitors, some of whom were the organizers and delegates.



Niner Nation Open 2023 | Photo by Phillip Smith

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# UNC Charlotte students help manage floodplains in local community

by Benjamin Greenzaid  
Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte students volunteered with Charlotte Mecklenburg Storm Water Services on Jan. 14 to manage a floodplain in Huntersville, N.C. The event lasted from 8:30 a.m.-12 p.m.

In this particular floodplain located in a local neighborhood, there were 1500 trees that the volunteers needed to tend to, most having been planted in 2014.

Volunteers pruned the older trees, cleared weeds from the base of younger trees, and took tree tubes away from the established trees.

A floodplain is a flat piece of land next to a river or stream. These floodplains are prone to flooding in extreme storms, and managing this land is vital to ensuring less damage is done to people and property. This also helps to combat deforestation and prevent increasing climate change temperatures.

Xavier Gomez, a fourth-year student who works with UNC Charlotte's Serve Team, helped organize Charlotte's involvement in this floodplain management event. "All volunteer activities are worthwhile, but

environmental ones, especially since climate change is such a big issue of our generation," Gomez said.

Ten Charlotte students volunteered for this event, although according to Ken Friday, an environmental specialist with Charlotte Mecklenburg Storm Water Services, 46 volunteers came to this occasion in total.

Volunteers consisted of families, students from local schools and Charlotte students.

Friday said of the turnout for this specific volunteer opportunity, "It was fantastic for this event to get this many people out on a Saturday morning in 35-degree weather."

Gabrielle Haley, a fourth-year student with the Charlotte volunteers, said, "I like volunteering in my community and different



Courtesy of Ken Friday

ways to do so. I had never done this before and wanted to see what it was like. I enjoyed this event and would do it again."

According to Friday, events like this often occur throughout Charlotte, and opportunities can be found on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services site.

# UNC Charlotte supports Red Cross through 14th annual blood drive

by Benjamin Greenzaid  
Staff Writer

The 14th annual Red Cross blood drive was held on Wednesday, Jan. 18, in the Popp Martin Student Union.

Over 51 appointments were made, and 68 walk-ins came to donate.

Keith Wassum, the organizer of "49ers for Life" blood drives, said, "The goal was 43 donors, so we had a very good turnout. We had 40 appointment slots open, and those were filled quickly, had to open up 20 more."

"49ers4Life" is a UNC Charlotte campaign focused on giving back to the community through blood drives with the Red Cross. Many organizations, including the Student Government Association and Auxillary

Services, contribute to it. These blood drives happen twice a year, one in January and another in March. The campaign, whose slogan is "Do you bleed 49 green?" has been active since 2009.

The blood drive had a lot of participants, including the student body and staff. Some donate frequently, but it was others' first time.

Sharon Horinka, a staff member in University Advancement, said, "It is important to donate. My dad is a veteran, and he donated when he was in the service. He passed that down to me, and it is important to me to donate."

First-time donor Natalie Schmitz, a first-year student said, "I'm in pre-nursing, this is what I want to do, and I thought, 'why not?'"

This drive accepted whole blood. It takes about an hour, and donations are given to trauma patients and people undergoing surgery. Whole blood is the most flexible donation since parts of the blood can be extracted for other needs.

In the winter, The Red Cross faces a blood shortage beyond what the organization can handle.

Terrance Graham, a Red Cross worker who oversaw the event, said, "There's a need. There's been a need for a long, long time. Every two seconds, someone needs blood for cancer, sickle cell or blood loss."

There may be an additional blood drive in

March, as previous years saw a decrease in donors around that time. In 2021, there was a 62% decrease in college and high school donors. In 2022, at the March blood drive, the workers still collected only 238 pints when the goal was 250.

Second-year student Jachimike Ihekwe says, "It's for a good cause, and it feels good. You're aiding people."

# UNC Charlotte residents must still remain cautious despite Charlotte's existing safety protocols

by Ruhshona Soledjonova  
Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte's fall 2022 semester raised questions about campus safety and security with crimes on campus. As students settle in, some cannot help but fear for their safety, while others choose to trust the University.

Campus residents should feel safe due to Charlotte's extensive safety protocols, but they should also take precautions as a general safety rule. With instances such as the arrest of a trespasser at Popp Martin Student Union, it is important to understand how students may feel about campus safety going forward. Perspectives from different genders, age groups and time spent living on campus can affect students' knowledge of safety policies and their attitudes toward crime on campus.

Rania Abushakra, a Niner Times contributor in the class of 2024, is in her first semester at Holshouser Hall. She expressed that her first week in the dorms has been an adjustment but liberating. "So far, not too many concerns," Abushakra said.

After residing on campus for about a week, Abushakra fears that an open campus might mean more crime and harm for students and staff. "You can prevent the number of high crimes, but you cannot stop crime altogether," said Abushakra.

Students believe that the danger does not stem from a lack of security within our campus but rather from the effects of living in the largest metropolitan city in North Carolina, which is Charlotte. "People are smart and will find ways to commit crimes if they are determined," Abushakra said.

The campus is surrounded by support to guarantee protection, and when incidents inevitably occur, there is a system of security to handle it. "The safety issues come from living in a city, not from the campus or university itself," said Gwen Lapps, a first-year student and second-semester resident at Lynch Hall.

On-campus living also suggests safe roommates, residents and staff that are a part of the University. "My roommates were randomly assigned, but we get along well," said Lapps. Although it is impossible for residents to stick with their original roommates for long, students have opportunities to switch rooms and pull-in the roommates they wish to have.

A first-year resident at Lynch Hall, who wishes to remain unnamed, voiced his dorm experience as "comfortable without any safety violations." He said that with social media, students can stay connected about security issues with other students. Regarding public protests by outside organizations, the student said, "as long as they're not hurting anyone, I don't mind."

Members of Piedmont Patrol and CMPD recommended that students and faculty, whether living on or off campus, should be aware of their surroundings, travel with a buddy and help prevent others from harm by noticing red flags. You have to remember that college campuses may attract attention from unwanted guests. Being mindful of your environment and keeping the "see something, say something" mentality will prevent crime and unwelcome harm. Safety relies in the hands of not only the University but anyone that is affiliated with our campus. It takes a village to stop a problem, and as a collective, we can work towards the common goal of safety.

Students should feel safe on campus due to the University's security measures but remain cautious and aware of their surroundings. There are certain policies and restrictions that the University upholds for the safety of students and residents. Charlotte provides surveillance cameras, resident advisors and security guards in every dorm building, and an accessible Police and Public Safety Department. There are many safe zone locations scattered across campus to call for immediate help. The UNC Charlotte Clery Report of 2022 indicates resources to encourage safety precautions, such as downloading the "Live Safe" smartphone application.

For more information on campus safety, go to <https://police.charlotte.edu>.



Levine Residence Hall | Photo by Regan Mayall

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# Athletes must be held accountable despite privilege

by Bryson Foster  
Sports Editor

In our society, people look up to athletes and often feel they can do no wrong. Professional athletes are considered larger than life. This mindset is harmful and creates athlete privilege.

Athletes can get away with defrauding their followers or breaking laws, but because of their wealth and status, they can escape severe consequences.

If a civilian acted how some athletes do, they would face legal and societal consequences because they lack the prestige athletes carry.

Three main groups are at fault: fans, athletes and teams' upper management.

Fans allow athletes to act however they want because the team has to win a game. Fans create the divide because of the way they view professional athletes. Athletes are heroes for many. Kids want to be star players. Fans are happy watching sports and celebrate when their team succeeds in the final seconds.

Sadly, if a star player gets in legal trouble, we get angry at the systems made to protect our society. People excuse indecent behavior because "everybody makes mistakes," but the average civilian is not afforded the same treatment as athletes. The athlete has to play, or the team cannot win.

For example, more than two dozen women accused newly acquired Cleveland Browns Quarterback Deshaun Watson of sexual misconduct during massage sessions. The NFL gave Watson an 11-game suspension, a slap

on the wrist for violating its personal conduct policy. Watson said he was sorry for all he had done and put women through.

"I'm truly sorry to all of the women I have impacted in this situation," said Watson. "The decisions that I made in my life that put me in this position I would definitely like to have back, but I want to continue to move forward and grow and learn and show that I am a true person of character, and I am going to keep pushing forward."

Fans came to Watson's defense, donning jerseys and holding signs with the words "Free Watson" on them.

Before his first NFL game of the 2022 season in Houston, a fan took to social media wearing an egregious shirt while making light of the problematic situation.

Behavior like this shows that certain fans care

more about winning games than the character of the players representing their team. Athletes are also to blame for this mindset. They do wrong and apologize to appease the outraged public, which we eat up, and then forget about.

Olympian swimmer Ryan Lochte claimed he and three teammates were robbed at gunpoint while competing in Rio de Janeiro in 2014. The truth was that Lochte lied about the robbery after he vandalized a gas station bathroom.

During an interview with Good Morning America, Lochte said he took full responsibility. "I did lie about that one part, and I take full responsibility," Lochte said.

If ordinary citizens did this, they would be charged with a misdemeanor for lying to the police. However, the athlete got off due to his privilege.

The management of teams and companies

perpetuates athlete privilege. The FTX crypto collapse is a prime example of this. Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder of crypto superpower FTX, hired many high-profile athletes to promote the brand, making them global ambassadors.

Tom Brady, Stephen Curry and Naomi Osaka are among the athletes who peddled the brand to their followers. FTX was allegedly secretly moving customers' cash to an investment fund defrauding their users. A lawsuit was filed against the athletes involved with the company.

We need to hold those accountable, demand answers when they do wrong and make sure they right their iniquities and do not repeat them. This starts with athletes and team management.

When Atlanta Falcons Quarterback Michael Vick was arrested for dog fighting in 2007, he was sentenced to nearly two years. In 2015, Vick appeared before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, fighting to pass an animal rights bill. In another example, the University of Texas fired men's basketball Head Coach Chris Beard on Thursday, Jan. 5, after his arrest on domestic violence charges.

These actions go a long way toward creating a society that holds athletes and coaches accountable. If you would be appalled by your neighbor committing a crime, you should feel the same way about athletes. We have a long way to go, but it starts with putting aside athletes' fame to see them for who they are and pushing for accountability.



Jerry Richardson Stadium | Photo by Jacob Scannell

# Spring break should be scheduled later in the year

by Dezanii Lewis  
Community Editor

Spring break is when students can blow off steam after enduring rigorous midterm exams and various assignments. Unfortunately for UNC Charlotte students, spring break will be much earlier this year, which should not be the case.

At the halfway point in the semester, spring break gives students the refresher they may need to make it to the finish line of the marathon that is the spring semester.

Spring break is Feb. 27 to March 4 – about a week earlier than it was last year and only seven weeks after the semester started.

The consensus among several students was that the timing of the break would inhibit their ability to travel, as the weather may still be cold in certain areas.

"I wish it was at its normal time because I like to travel," said Jala Unterreiner, a fourth-year Charlotte student. "I also feel like the semester has just started by the end of February."

They are also concerned that it will limit their ability to spend time with friends from other universities, as it does not sync up with breaks from other schools. For example, UNC Chapel Hill's spring break is from March 13-17.

"Why is it so early?" said Maya Osaka, another Charlotte student. "Our spring break is a month earlier than [my friends']. I'd be curious to know why they pushed it so early because it also pushes midterms earlier, and I feel like we're not at the midpoint of the semester."

Matthew Caskey agreed that the timing of the break and midterms feels too early.

"It doesn't make sense to me," he said. "Spring [semester] is 17 weeks. So we have our midterms eight weeks in? It's stupid."

An email from the Office of the Registrar said, "Scheduled breaks are based on the University's term dates and are not related to CMS or public school schedules."

The statement from the registrar's office does not make sense, however. The spring 2023 semester started on Jan. 9, and spring 2022 began on Jan. 10. Both semesters started and ended within a day of each other, yet spring break is a week apart in each semester.

Jonathan Reece, the University Registrar, provided some insight regarding the dates.

"The Office of the Registrar develops and proposes the academic calendar five years

in advance, with input from various partner offices," he said. He also stated that spring break is determined by the spring half terms within the full spring semester.

This decision process does not include students. According to the current five-year plan, spring break 2023 will be the only time spring break is so early.

This is stressful for students, as spring break is the only mid-semester break. Reducing the possibility of traveling and seeing friends further adds to the problem. The University made spring break earlier, but it should not have. Since it greatly affects students and their plans, spring break should have remained in March instead of being so early.



# Romanticizing minors' sex and drug use in media is harmful

by Jessica Danesi  
Opinion Editor

The romanticization of teen sex and drug use in entertainment media for drama is damaging.

Many films and TV shows are centered around teen drama. Unfortunately, many of these frequently include scenes depicting sexual material and the use of drugs or alcohol. Two primary examples of this are in the shows “Euphoria” and “Élite,” which feature high-school students who face various obstacles, including relationship problems and addiction.

If addressed effectively, these themes are important to discuss. However, if these themes are used for dramatic effect, it negatively impacts young audiences.

Firstly, the sexualization of minors is problematic. Sex scenes are included in films because “sex sells.” It grabs attention and intrigues audiences. However, when it comes to underage characters, these scenes are cause for concern. Even though the actors themselves are adults, the concept of watching people meant to portray minors as being sexually active is disturbing. This is the case within the

show “Euphoria.”

Furthermore, “Euphoria” and similar shows depict hypersexuality as a form of sexual empowerment. For many, adolescence and young adulthood is the time to explore and learn more about oneself, including sexuality. However, it is damaging to normalize hypersexuality to younger audiences who are potentially unaware of the consequences of reckless sex.

Additionally, these sex scenes are often unrealistic, giving young viewers a false perception of what sex is like. Everything goes according to plan, and the actors look conventionally attractive. Everything is perfect, and nothing is awkward. In addition to the scenes being impractical, many do not demonstrate safe sex practices such as clear consent or contraceptives. With lacking sex education in the United States, these scenes leave young audiences unprepared and insecure.

Moreover, using drugs should not be glamorized.

In Netflix’s Spanish series “Élite,” nearly all protagonists use drugs on screen, including cocaine, molly and alcohol. The show depicts some characters struggling with addiction and the negative consequences that drug use can have. However, the series does more to show drug use as fun and promiscuous than raise awareness about addiction. “Euphoria” is also guilty of this. Even when drugs create problems for the characters, they are dramatic and intriguing for the plot; it never stops them from continuing to do drugs at the next party.

There are multiple ways that fictional media can portray topics such as romantic relationships and drug addiction without sensationalizing minors doing these activities. Portraying all teens as being hypersexual and recreationally using drugs is not a proper discussion of these subjects. Media does not need to have sex scenes to

represent teen romantic relationships. In addition, if a show claims to depict the harm of addiction, it should show the negative effects on users and their surroundings, not just utilize drug usage as a plot device.

Ultimately, romanticizing teen sex and drug use in media to create drama is detrimental. This is not to say that teenagers do not partake in these activities in real life – however, it should not be glorified. Sex scenes are not inherently inauspicious but are also not always necessary for entertainment. Equally important, recreational drug use should not be promoted to young viewers, especially without addressing adverse outcomes. Teen drama series and films should be more aware of their media’s impact on their audiences.



Characters who are minors in popular films and TV | All photos courtesy of IMDb



# UNC Charlotte hosts the Winter Student Organization Showcase on Jan. 10

Photos by Jacob Scannell

Student organizations gathered in the Barnhardt Student Activity Center to promote their goals and activities with attending students. The Office of Student Involvement

organized the event. Over 150 student organizations were present in addition to a variety of pop-up booths.





# A recap of Charlotte football early signing day

by Sam Perry  
Staff Writer

The holiday season was busy for Charlotte's new head football coach, Biff Poggi. He brought in 28 signees on early signing day on Dec. 21 and four additional signees during the holiday season.

The signing class consists of 16 defensive players, 15 offensive players and one special team player, with a heavy emphasis on the Maryland and Charlotte area.

## Offensive signings

A significant offensive focus for Poggi is being able to run the ball to the point that their opponents focus solely on the run game, which opens up the passing game. A significant emphasis is bringing bulk on the offensive line to build the running game.

Durell Robinson put Charlotte on the national stage when he announced his signing with the 49ers during the 2023 Under Armour All-American Game on ESPN turning down multiple Power 5 offers to become a 49er. Robinson at St. Frances Academy ran for 582 yards on 80

carries along with five touchdowns earning him the highest rating of any Charlotte recruit in program history.

Jai'Lun "The Ticket" Hampton is a 6-9 325-pound offensive lineman who helped lead Iowa Western Community College to a National Championship title during the 2022 season, blocking for an offense that averaged 354.8 yards per game. Hampton should help bolster the offensive line for the 49ers as they look to amp up the run game.

Jaden Bradley from Pitt and Jack Hestera, who attended the University of Colorado, will look to fill some significant holes left in the wide receiver room following the departure of Charlotte's three top wideouts with Victor Tucker graduating, Grant Dubose entering the NFL draft and Elijah Spencer departing in the transfer portal.

A significant sign that Poggi is changing the culture at Charlotte was when local quarterback prospect Carson Black from Nations Ford High School flipped his commitment from Memphis to Charlotte

on signing day, showing that the new regime will fight for the local players to stay home and play.

Below is the list of all offensive players signed:

- Andrew Adair OL (Liberty/James Madison)
- Johnathan Bass OL (Georgia State)
- Carson Black QB (Nations Ford H.S.)
- Jaden Bradley WR (Pittsburgh)
- Lacota Dippre TE (Lakeland H.S.)
- Austin Fontaine OL (Maryland)
- Ja'khi Green OL (Maryland)
- Jai'Lun Hampton OL (Iowa Western C.C.)
- Jack Hestera WR (Colorado)
- Terron Kellman RB (Northern Illinois)
- Dominick Kelley OL (Cuthbertson H.S.)
- Durell Robinson RB (Saint Frances Academy)
- Micah Sumpter OL (Knightsdale H.S.)
- Tyler Thomas OL (Kent State/Grambling)
- PJ Wilkins OL (Saint Frances Academy)

## Defensive signings

Poggi emphasized bringing in players to stop the run but also players that could prevent the deep ball. Poggi focused heavily on bringing in big guys in the front seven to win the line of scrimmage.

A key defensive signing has been Osita Ekwonu, a linebacker from Notre Dame who hails from Weddington, N.C., whose brother has been succeeding as a rookie offensive tackle for the Carolina Panthers this past season. He should help boost the defense's production and the team's popularity.

Katron Evans, a transfer from Jackson State who played for Deion Sanders, will bring his experience along with former high school teammate Jonathan Wallace, a transfer from Holmes Community College. They will help build up the interior defensive line to stop the run from being the bulk at the defensive tackle position.

Demon Clowney, a transfer from Ole Miss, and TJ Butler from Maryland are two edge rushers joining the 49ers roster. They should help fill the void left by longtime Charlotte edge rusher Watts who graduated as the career sack leader in program history.

Below is the list of all defensive players signed:

- Al-Ma'hi Ali DB (St. Francis University)
- Emmanuel Balogun DL (Marshall)
- TJ Butler Edge (Maryland)
- Demon Clowney Edge (Ole Miss)
- Colin Coates DL (Saint Frances Academy)
- Ephraim Deese DE (Forest Hills H.S.)
- Keoni Denny LB (Sumner H.S.)
- Osita Ekwonu LB (Notre Dame)
- Katron Evans DT (Jackson State)
- Dontez Fagan DB (Central Oklahoma/Independence C.C.)
- Kameron Howard DB (Saint Frances Academy)
- Tequan Latimore DB (Georgia Military)
- Breon Noel DB (St. Francis University)
- Malik Puryear DL (Wake Forest/Coahoma C.C.)
- Zion Shockley DT (Maryland)
- Jonathan Wallace DT (Holmes C.C.)

## Special teams

The 49ers brought in one special teams player to replace the graduated punter Bailey Rice.

Grant Gonya transferred in from John Carroll, where he was named a 2022 Second Team All-American and Second Team All-Region by D3Football.com while also being a two-time first-team All-Ohio Athletic Conference.



Charlotte football helmet | Photo by Chris Crews



# The man behind No. 24: A Q&A with Charlotte men's basketball forward Igor Miličić Jr.

by Bradley Tepper  
Staff Writer

Charlotte sophomore forward Igor Miličić Jr. is in the middle of his first year with the men's basketball team.

Miličić transferred to Charlotte after one year at the University of Virginia. The Croatian native played professionally in Germany before coming to play college basketball in the United States.

Miličić has played a pivotal role on the team, averaging nine points and five rebounds per game.

Miličić spoke to the Niner Times about his experience with the team and a little bit about life outside of basketball.

**Niner Times:** Being new this season with Charlotte, how has your time with the team been like so far?

**Miličić:** It's been the best time. I don't think I've ever been a part of a team that's this connected and that does everything together. We love being with each other, and we love practicing together. Regarding teammates, I think it's the best part about Charlotte.

**NT:** How has the transition from Virginia to Charlotte been?

**Miličić:** It was smooth. I know Coach [Ron] Sanchez has been with Coach [Tony] Bennett for a long time. They share a lot of their philosophy and how they like to run stuff. I've been doing well at learning that. Of course, the offense is a little bit different, and the tactics and the little details differ. I think I've adapted quickly, and I'm glad I went to Virginia in the past, as it has given me a smooth transition here.

**NT:** Where do you feel the team is at this point in the season?

**Miličić:** We're not nearly where we have to be. Still, we've played some good basketball, like at Davidson or against Appalachian State. I think we still have a lot to improve, and there are a lot of things that we can do better, especially on defense, that will help us to get to the next level and beat the top teams in our conference.

**NT:** What goes through your mind when you're out on the court with your

teammates?

**Miličić:** When you get on the court, everything slows down, and you're just in the game. I'm thinking about how to guard my man, what's the game plan, execute the plays and what to do to make coach happy.

**NT:** What teammates do you think you're closest with on the team?

**Miličić:** All of them. I'm close with the freshmen Rich (Rolf) and Nik (Graves). The guys that have been here for a while: Jackson (Threadgill), Aly (Khalifa) and Brice (Williams). I'm also close with the new guys Lu'Cye (Patterson), Montre' (Gipson) and Josh (Aldrich). You can name them all, and we are all very close.

**NT:** Who do you think is the funniest player on the team?

**Miličić:** Definitely me.

**NT:** What do you like most about Charlotte so far?

**Miličić:** Teammates are the greatest part about it all. The weather has been better than in Virginia, but it's the teammates and our chemistry with each other. Of course, the campus is beautiful, and the big city is great.

**NT:** What's your favorite thing about Head Coach Ron Sanchez?

**Miličić:** Just how consistent he is with us. He never expects us to do something we're not particularly good at, but he always expects consistency from us. If we do something well, he expects us to do it well. If we're not delivering, he'll push us to deliver.

**NT:** When you're not busy with



Igor Miličić Jr. (24) | Photo by Chris Crews

basketball or school, what do you like to do in your free time?

**Miličić:** I usually either sleep or hang out with my teammates.

**NT:** What is your favorite post-game meal?

**Miličić:** My favorite pre-game meal is Chipotle. Post-game, I would probably go for a steak. Medium rare, just for the record.

**NT:** Outside of Charlotte, what sports team or player are you the fan of the most?

**Miličić:** I've always been a fan of Kobe. I've found that the most similar to him is Jayson Tatum. I'm a big fan of his, and I've followed his career since my favorite team is the Boston Celtics.

**NT:** How has the transition been from Croatia to playing college basketball in the United States?

**Miličić:** It's funny because I played three years in Germany before I got to the US, but it was different. The rules are different, and the coaching is different. It took me

two to four months to fully adapt to how it's done here. Although in Germany, I had a great experience and opportunity to play.

**NT:** What is your favorite thing that Croatia has that the United States doesn't?

**Miličić:** The rocky beaches. I'm not too fond of sandy beaches. Sand gets everywhere, and I don't like that.

**NT:** What is your favorite thing to do in the off-season?

**Miličić:** Playing for the national team, I was with the under-20 national team this past summer, and it was an excellent experience for me. Before that, I was with the men's team, and it's something else to represent your country and to play for them. It's great.

**NT:** What are your hopes for the rest of the season?

**Miličić:** Our goal is to reach our potential and reach the goals that we set up. We plan to do as well as we can in the conference and hopefully win it.

# Charlotte women’s basketball forward Mya McGraw is leading team with big personality

by Cedric Baker  
Contributor

Charlotte women’s basketball sophomore forward Mya McGraw has grown as a player and leader for the team.

On Dec. 31, 2022, McGraw recorded a career-high 17 points and nine rebounds in Charlotte’s 66-57 road win at Louisiana Tech. After the win, Head Coach Cara Consuegra said McGraw was vital to the team’s performance.

“Mya’s confidence after she missed a couple early was huge. We wanted to give her the ball as much as we could. She was tremendous. I hope we continue to gain confidence,” said Consuegra.

### Humble beginnings

Growing up in Gainesville, Fla.,



Mya McGraw (1) | Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

McGraw was around basketball at a young age as her dad coached, and her siblings played. McGraw said she intended to do something else with her life but ended up falling with the game.

“I’ve always had my mind set on the fact that I was gonna do something different to be the golden child, but I ended up loving basketball,” said McGraw.

McGraw’s basketball career started in middle school.

“I’ll never forget my seventh-grade year. I wanted to make the middle school team, but my coach ended up putting me on varsity, and I didn’t play, but I did get the experience. I went against some great competition in practice, and once it started paying off, I started having a love for the game,” said McGraw.

### Life off the court

Her sister and mom are the two most impactful people in her life. Her sister played at the collegiate level and could not finish her career, and McGraw has always wanted to pick up where she left off. As for her mother, she instilled a work ethic that has stuck with McGraw.

Teammate fifth-year guard Kameron Roach said McGraw is loud, goofy and energetic.

“Mya is a big leader for us on and off the court,” said Roach. “We love her big personality and the energy she brings on

the court and in the locker room.”

McGraw said her energy comes from her family environment.

“Everything is always loud. It’s always bright and fun, and I think that’s what’s most important, especially in the difficult times too,” said McGraw.

### On the court

Throughout the season, McGraw has seen more playing time going from six minutes in 2021-22 to 25 minutes in 2022-23. McGraw is becoming a significant role in the offense averaging 6.6 points and 6.1 rebounds while shooting 49.5% from the field.

With this increase, McGraw said she is still learning from her mistakes.

“I’m still young, and I’m still trying to have an important role and know how capable I am of things,” said McGraw. “As it continues, I think my mind has to stay focused as things have improved. I’ve been double-teamed and triple-teamed. That is one of the most frustrating things, but I must keep my mind together.”

McGraw said that chemistry is a big part of the puzzle and wants that for her team. Charlotte is a relatively new team, and there are still pieces to be worked on.

“What’ll be most important for us is to understand that we all are different. When we get on the court, I think it’ll be essential for our team to have chemistry and understand each other, and that starts with understanding each other outside of basketball,” said McGraw.

### Next up

McGraw and the 49ers will be back in action on Thursday, Jan. 26, when they finish a three-game series at home against the Rice Owls. Tipoff is set for 6 p.m. inside Halton Arena and will be available to stream on ESPN+.

## CLT CHARLOTTE 49ERS SCOREBOARD

### RECENT GAMES

JAN. 8 - JAN. 22

#### MEN’S BASKETBALL

Jan. 14:

Charlotte 72 , UTSA 54

Jan. 16:

UTEP 60, Charlotte 58

Jan. 19:

Middle Tennessee 62, Charlotte 58

Jan. 21:

Charlotte 75, WKU 71

#### WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

Jan. 14:

UTSA 64 , Charlotte 59

Jan. 16:

UTEP 68, Charlotte 60

Jan. 19:

Middle Tennessee 65, Charlotte 41

Jan. 21:

Charlotte 72, WKU 65

### OVERALL STANDINGS

Men’s Basketball: 13-7, 4-5;  
No. 7 in Conference USA

Women’s Basketball: 8-10, 4-5;  
No. 8 in Conference USA

### UPCOMING GAMES

Men’s Basketball:

@ Rice on Thursday, Jan. 26 at 8 p.m.

Women’s Basketball:

Vs. Rice on Thursday, Jan 26 at 6 p.m.

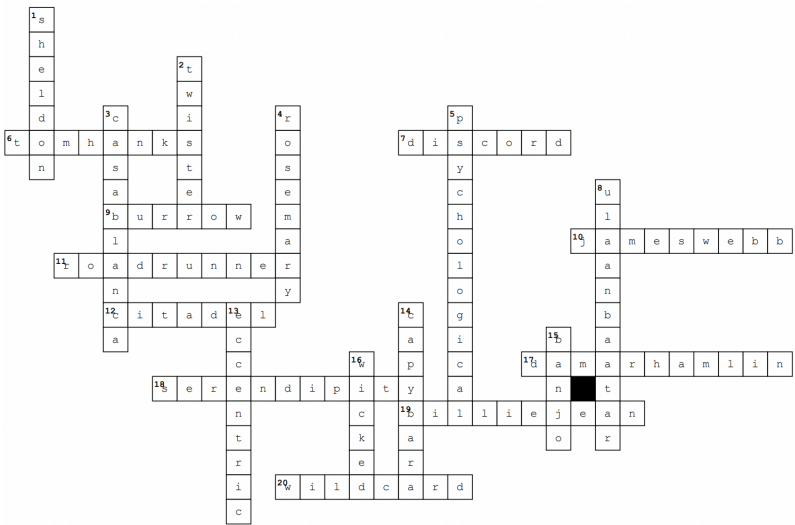


CHECK THE NEXT ISSUE (2/7) FOR THE ANSWERS TO THIS WEEK'S CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU!

NINER TIMES SUDOKU

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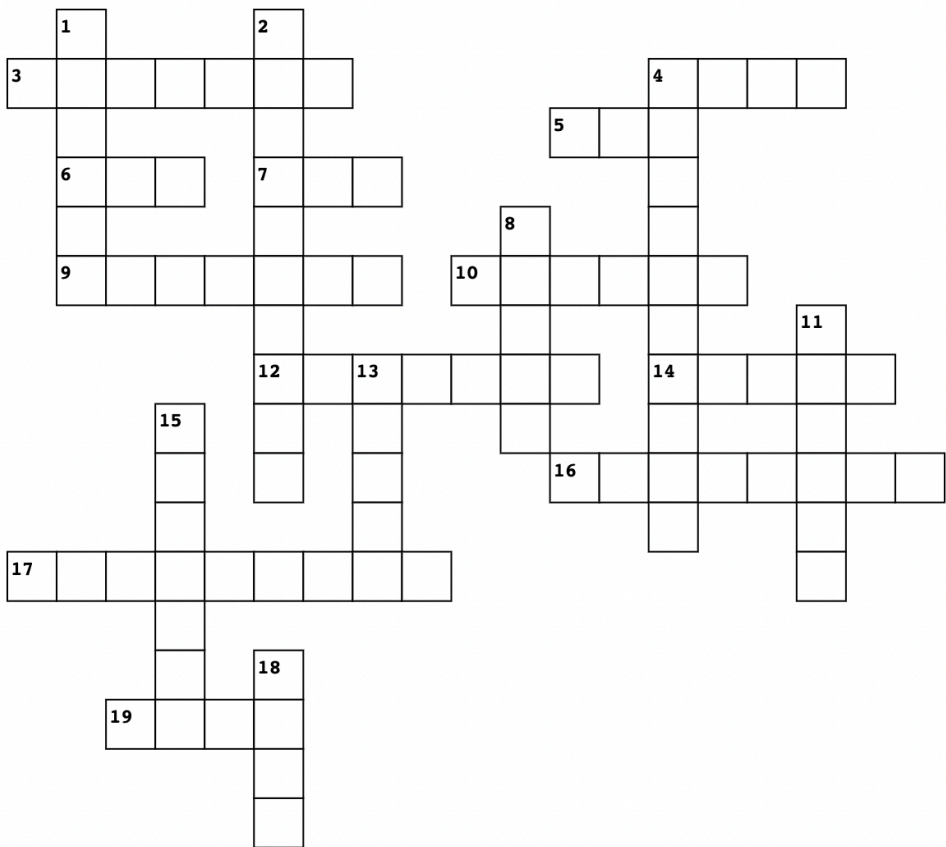
1/10 ISSUE ANSWERS



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8	7	2	9	4	6	3	1	5
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DID YOU KNOW?

COMET C/2022 E3 IS PREDICATED BE VISIBLE WITH THE NAKED EYE STARTING FEB. 1. THIS COMET LIKELY PASSED BY EARTH OVER 10,000 YEARS AGO.



NINER TIMES CROSSWORD

Down

- 1. Last name of actor in “The Last of Us” series
- 2. Building that will temporarily hold the UNC Charlotte North Village dining hall
- 4. Who is buried in Van Landingham Glen in the UNC Charlotte Botanical Garden
- 8. Asian country that does not celebrate the Lunar New Year
- 11. How many Chinese zodiac animals are there
- 13. How many phases does the moon have
- 15. Charlotte is the \_\_\_\_ cheese capital of the world
- 18. Name of the light rail connecting UNC Charlotte to Uptown Charlotte

Across

- 3. One of the two months the Lunar New Year falls on
- 4. The second full moon in a single month is called a(n) \_\_\_\_ moon
- 5. The Charlotte metropolitan area is the largest in the U.S without a(n) \_\_\_\_
- 6. Zodiac animal that Vietnam will be celebrating in 2023
- 7. How many colors are on a Rubik's cube
- 9. Chinese objects released on during the Lunar New Year
- 10. 2023 is the year of the \_\_\_\_
- 12. Day of the week that the Niner Times print edition releases
- 14. UNC Charlotte dining hall being shut down for renovations in 2023
- 16. How often is there a different Chinese zodiac animal celebrated
- 17. Charlotte's nickname
- 19. Company that makes the “The Last of Us” game series and TV show



# Golden Owl Tavern's participation in Queen's Feast

by Bethany Ivan  
Arts & Culture Editor

Queen's Feast Charlotte Restaurant Week kicked off on Jan. 20, with 87 restaurants in and around Charlotte offering three-course dining deals for customers to enjoy. Some of these participating restaurants can be found near the University City areas, such as the Golden Owl Tavern.

Aijah Dawson has been the sous chef at the Golden Owl Tavern since the restaurant opened in 2021. Her responsibilities include building up her team, providing guests with meals and experiences and "helping her executive chef develop new stuff on the menu," Dawson said.

"I strongly believe in creating an experience for them when guests come to eat, not just saying, 'Oh, I just ate some food,'" Dawson said.

"I want them to come back and say, 'Well, I ate food, and I was able to look out for the service,' and for me to go out and speak to them. So they're like, 'Oh my God, the chef came to the table and talked to me today!' So,

making people want to come back to have an unforgettable experience," Dawson said.

There are many things Dawson looks forward to during Charlotte Restaurant Week, especially regarding their Queen's Feast menu.

"We didn't take items on our menu and put them on Queen's Feast," Dawson said.

"We have pan-seared scallops with pea-mint purée; that's not on the menu. So, we took the things and bumped them up a little bit. So it's not like the stuff you can regularly get off our menu," said Dawson. "It is us showcasing skills. I'm excited for our guests to experience something different from what we usually offer."

Dawson continued to talk about the pan-seared scallops from their restaurant week menu. It is a dish that she is excited to make for Queen's Feast. She also praised her executive chef, who created pea-mint purée with the scallops and said it is "to die for."

Dawson also raved about the dessert choices on the menu, specifically the chocolate molten

cake, made by their pastry chef, John Bayer.

"He made it for me, and I can eat at least five of these. It's so good. He made a homemade caramel sauce with homemade chocolate lava cake and homemade ganache in the middle," said Dawson.

Lastly, Dawson expressed more of her enthusiasm for the Golden Owl Tavern

**"We are getting the opportunity to showcase our skills, and I'm more overly excited about getting them to showcase what they can do and giving them the opportunity to show everyone."**

*Aijah Dawson  
Golden Owl Tavern Sous Chef*

and their participation in the event. She was thrilled about guests discovering the restaurant's location and concluded that she always wanted to make a lasting experience for their customers.

"We're excited to be a part of Queen's Feast. We love getting the community, the University and everyone engaged to come out and experience us. Queen's Feast is very popular in Charlotte. Because we hear a lot of, 'This restaurant was here' because we're so hidden in the hotel," said Dawson. "So it gives them an opportunity to come to try us and come try us again when it's not restaurant week."

She also expresses how she wants her team to display their talent and expertise.

"We are getting the opportunity to showcase our skills, and I'm more overly excited about getting them to showcase what they can do and giving them the opportunity to show everyone," said Dawson.

Queen's Feast will run through Jan. 29. The Golden Owl Tavern is located on the second floor of the Marriott Hotel by UNC Charlotte's Campus. In addition to the restaurant's participation in Queen's Feast, they will also host a wide variety of live music featuring local musicians.

## DEAR NINER TIMES, How do I survive being a commuter student?

by Annie Turk  
Staff Writer

Sometimes being a commuter at UNC Charlotte can be like a full-time job. Finding parking, getting stuck in traffic or not making it to class on time can be frustrating. It can also make getting involved trickier. However, there are several ways to make the most out of traveling to school.

### 1. Plan ahead

A big part of commuting is planning your time out. Some may have a longer commute than others, so leaving your house twice as early as your typical commute time is best. For example, if you live 30 minutes away, leave an hour before class starts. Nine times out of 10, you will arrive on campus early, but leaving home earlier than usual will save you when there may be unexpected traffic, and maybe you got stuck behind a slow school bus or even have trouble finding parking. If you get to campus early, use that time to study, review your notes for class or watch TikTok on your phone.

### 2. Get involved

Since you are not as likely to be on campus as frequently as others, it is essential to stay involved to reap the full benefits of the Niner Nation community. One way to accommodate things like extracurriculars into your schedule is to find clubs that meet on the same days you plan to be on campus. Getting involved on the days you will be on campus will save you an extra drive and help you connect to the community. Check out resources like the Niner Times, Campus Activities Board, Niner Engage and the library's website to find out about upcoming events on campus.

### 3. Keep extra things in your car

When you are spending a significant amount of time on campus without the possibility of being able to run home quickly and grab something, you must have all the things you may need with you. Keeping snacks, deodorant, a change of clothes and even a blanket in the car will help you be more prepared and comfortable on campus. Plus, you can always make a friend when someone needs something like a makeup remover wipe, and you have one on hand.

While being a commuter student can be challenging, it is rewarding and allows you to enjoy both home and college life simultaneously.



Dishes from the Golden Owl Tavern | Courtesy of Golden Owl Tavern



# TV review: A first look at HBO's 'The Last of Us'

by Cat Beck  
Asst. Arts & Culture Editor

Based on the 2013 action-adventure game by the same name, HBO's "The Last of Us" follows Joel Miller, a troubled survivor of an apocalyptic fungal outbreak, and Ellie, a 14-year-old girl who may be the key to ending the infection. HBO released the first episode on Jan. 15, and it is a promising start to this adaptation of a beloved game.

The acting is a notable strength of "The Last of Us." Pedro Pascal is a perfect choice for Joel and a compelling protagonist from the beginning. A sympathetic look into his past balances his weary toughness. Pascal's co-star Bella Ramsey brings a fiery energy to the character of Ellie, and I look forward to seeing more of her in the rest of the season. The two characters are simultaneously likable and flawed, and their interactions will be interesting to watch.

Episode one clocks in at one hour and 20 minutes. While the runtime is long, the pacing works. Much exposition fits into this episode, which unfolds in an engaging way. During the first portion of the episode, the audience meets Joel and his daughter, Sarah, and we watch the

beginning of the fungal outbreak that turns much of the population into bloodthirsty zombies.

After the background is established, there is a 20-year time skip before the show's main plot begins. By that point, the outbreak survivors have learned to adapt to a new way of life. A military dictatorship controls several quarantine zones throughout the country, and rigid systems for keeping the infection from spreading have been secured. Meanwhile, a rebel organization, the Fireflies, seeks to take down the dictatorship and set a new order. Amidst the chaos, Joel finds himself entangled in a smuggling operation while he tries to find his missing brother.

Given the abundance of zombie apocalypse narratives, "The Last of Us" risks losing its sense of originality. As a result, the show will not be able to depend on its premise alone, and the characters and plot will have to make up for it. So far, the show is doing an excellent job at that.

New episodes of "The Last of Us" will release every Sunday. There will be nine episodes, and the season concludes in March.



'The Last of Us' | Courtesy of HBO

## A guide to specialty coffee in Charlotte

by Jackson Martin  
Asst. Copy Editor

Charlotte is home to many specialty coffee shops. While there are not many in University City, the LYNX Blue Line Station here at UNC Charlotte will give you a ride to many cafés in the Charlotte area. From iced vanilla lattes with oat milk to a cup of black coffee, these are some of the top specialty coffee shops in Charlotte.

### The Hobbyist (Villa Heights)

The Hobbyist is a fun café. Located off of 25th St., this café serves many specialty drinks, such as an espresso tonic or a black walnut latte. They also sell a wide variety of craft beer and wine if it is too late for coffee. The Hobbyist is at its best with friends. The Hobbyist is open from Monday-Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

### Undercurrent Coffee (Optimist Hall)

Undercurrent's cool tones and quality drinks make it an essential visit at Optimist Hall. While the shop is just a small vendor, Optimist Hall offers a wide variety of seating options that pro-

vide a cozy atmosphere to a local café. Light rail riders can reach Optimist Hall by getting off at the Parkwood Station on the LYNX Blue Line. Undercurrent also has a stand-alone location in Plaza Midwood for a more traditional café experience.

### Coco & the Director (Uptown Charlotte)

Coco & the Director is the essential coffee shop in Uptown Charlotte. Located on 100 W Trade St., the café is within walking distance from the Charlotte Transportation Center (CTC) stop on the LYNX Blue Line. This café has a beautiful interior, sporting a massive chalkboard wall and comfy seating alongside the stairway. Enjoy their delicious chai tea latte and grab a clever postcard on your way out. Coco & the Director is open Sunday-Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. They are open until 8 p.m. on Saturday.

### Smelly Cat Coffee (NoDa)

NoDa's resident coffee shop, Smelly Cat, has a strong reputation. While the café is small, it has a community-oriented atmosphere. Smelly

Cat is right off 36th St. Station on the LYNX Blue Line and is open from 6:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekdays and 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends.

### Not Just Coffee (Dilworth)

Not Just Coffee takes coffee seriously. Located off Park Road, this café offers finely dialed espresso and stunning latte art. They also have specialty drinks, such as the bhakti ginger chai or nitro cold brew. The Dilworth location is open on weekdays from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. Their coffee is also available at The Market at 7th St., Packard Place and Atherton Mill.

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# Charlotte women’s basketball vs. WKU

Photos by Jacob Scannell

Charlotte women’s basketball prevailed over Western Kentucky University (WKU) on Saturday, Jan. 21, 72-65, following a dominant second half. After being down two at halftime, Charlotte outscored WKU 47-38 in the second half to win for only the second time this month. Charlotte now snapped a three-game losing streak to move their record

to 8-10 overall and 4-5 in Conference USA(C-USA) play this season. The win was a team effort as eight players scored for Charlotte, including five players that reached double digits points.

