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Jan. 9, 2024

**Men's basketball upsets No. 17
Florida Atlantic University for
their first AAC win**

MORE ON PAGE 8

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The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

The Niner Times aims to provide accurate and fair news to the UNC Charlotte community. We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students. We publish written, photo and video content online (ninertimes.com), on social media and through our weekly email newsletter (sent every Tuesday at 9:30 am). We also produce a supplemental bi-weekly (every other week) in-print newspaper that hits stands on Tuesdays.

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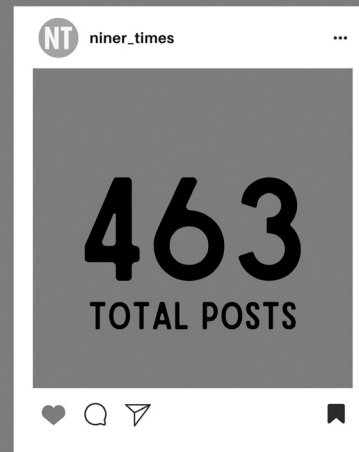
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Engineering North Carolina's future

Learn about the initiative for teaching and research in Charlotte's College of Engineering and College of Computing and Informatics

Ilysia Pitzer | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte will implement the Engineering North Carolina's Future initiative proposed by the N.C. General Assembly aims to increase the number of engineers and computer scientists to meet the demands of new companies and organizations in N.C.

"[The purpose] is to provide more opportunities, educational type of opportunities, for students as well as to increase the number of engineers, computer scientists and data scientists that we graduate," said the dean of the William State Lee College of Engineering, Rob Keynton.

The initiative intends to shape Charlotte's College of Engineering and College of Computing and Informatics by expanding the number of students in the programs. Charlotte hired more faculty and staff to deliver the curriculum effectively. The initiative's first phase comprises managing class sizes and mentoring students to achieve successful career goals.

According to Inside UNC Charlotte, to help

this initiative, the William States Lee College of Engineering introduced assistant professors Shawn Chen and Mahmoud Dinar and associate professor Qiang Zhu in mechanical engineering. The College of Computing and Informatics introduced professor Marco Viera and assistant professors Hongfei Xue and Li Yang in computer science and assistant professors Tao Wang and Jian Xiang in software and information systems.

"In particular, bioengineering is something that a lot of people have been interested in at UNC Charlotte, but we don't have a separate department. So, we're looking to hire more faculty in that space and look to see if we're able to eventually transition that into a department," said Keynton.

"It also provides new opportunities for computing and informatics as they are doing a heavier push towards AI and so they've been able to expand their number of faculty doing artificial intelligence."

In the engineering program, the Battery

Complexity, Autonomous Vehicle and Electrification Research Center (BATT CAVE) provides engineering students with research opportunities to create the next generation of batteries and learn how to make autonomous vehicles.

Charlotte received grants for the various stages of the initiative. \$30 million was allocated to expand Burson Hall for more collaboration with the faculty of computing and informatics, engineering and data science. In Burson, there are plans for a global Super Fab Lab, the third in the United States, to train the students for their futures in the workforce.

"We'll be having a research space that has both faculty from the different colleges. For the student experiences, we're working to bring together some of the student success programs into a common area so that we can share the best practices and get the students to see the multidisciplinary type of education and/or training," said Keynton.

Additionally, Charlotte invested \$10 million from the initiative for the William States Lee College of Engineering and College of Computing and Informatics programs into the Industrial Solutions Laboratory on campus to support senior capstone projects.

"We have about 80% of our senior capstone projects funded by industries. They provide a mentor from the industry to work on the teams. This state-of-the-art facility enables our students to be able to make the different devices and systems that they have to make for our industry partners," said Keynton.

Although subject to change, the initiative's completion is set for early 2027.

"This is truly a wonderful opportunity for us. We are so pleased that our legislators have decided to make this type of investment in UNC Charlotte in order to help us grow the number of engineers we graduate, the number of computer scientists and data scientists to be able to meet our partners' needs," said Keynton.

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Takeaways from UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees Dec. 7 meeting

Kathleen Cochrane | News Editor

UNC Charlotte held its Board of Trustees meeting on Dec. 7, 2023, for board members and committees to propose and talk about any changes or additions that they think are necessary for the betterment of the University.

The Board of Trustees comprises 13 members who meet 4-5 times an academic year to propose and pass any changes to the University. Eight members are elected to four-year terms by the UNC Board of Governors, the North Carolina General Assembly appoints four members and the last member is the student body president, who serves for one year as an ex officio member.

The following topics are some of the key takeaways that were discussed at the Dec. 7 meeting.

Tuition and fees changes

The Tuition and Fees Advisory Board and the Board of Trustees reviewed and adjusted the University's tuition and where our fees go. When comparing Charlotte to peer institutes, the Board said Charlotte needs to be in the bottom quartile for undergraduate resident students and the third or higher quartile for non-resident undergraduate students.

Charlotte's undergraduate resident tuition and fees rate is currently \$7,214, while North Carolina State University is the highest peer institute with a tuition and fees rate of \$8,895. Charlotte's undergraduate non-resident tuition and fees rate is \$21,338, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is the highest of the peer institutions with a tuition and fees rate of \$39,092.

With that in mind, the Board recommended a 3.2% tuition increase to undergraduate non-residents (currently \$18,474), graduate residents (currently \$4,467) and graduate non-residents (currently \$19,036).

They also proposed increasing school-based tuition by concentration to the College of Computing and Informatics and the College of Health and Human Services.

This will cause the Master of Science programs in computing science, cyber security and information technology, as well as graduate certificate programs in the college, to increase to \$4,800. The Master of Science in Bioinformatics and the graduate certificate in bioinformatics technology will increase to \$3,240.

Within the College of Health and Human Services, an epidemiology Ph.D. will be added with a tuition of \$1,800, and a master's in social work will be added with a \$540 tuition. A master's in public health will raise to \$720.

The boards also advised reallocating where the mandatory fees go with a \$20 increase towards athletics' \$824 rate and a \$25 decrease in debt service fees' \$25 rate.

Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs Rich Amon and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Kevin Bailey proposed a 2.0% increase to Housing and Residence Life semester rent rates and a 7.4% increase to the cost of meal plans. According to Bailey and Amon, both of these recommendations are to keep Charlotte in line with peer institutions and to accommodate the increased expenses of providing these services.

New construction updates

Amon and Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Management Rich Steele proposed new construction updates to two residence halls.

The first plan is an upgrade to Hawthorne Hall with a \$17.7 million budget. Hawthorne is home to first-year students and the Engineering Learning Community. The building was built in 1981 and has a facility condition index of 0.58, which means it is in very poor condition and needs significant repairs.

The renovation will replace mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems and remodel and update bathrooms and kitchens.

The second construction proposal was to demolish Stanford Hall with a \$8.3 million budget. Sanford was built in 1969 and has a facility condition index of 0.63, which means it is in critical condition and needs immediate repairs, or the repairs may be beyond saving.

Mosley Architects determined in 2018 that remodeling Stanford would cost more than the benefits, so the University built Phase XVI. Now that Phase XVI is near completion, the University needs to receive final authorization from the UNC Board of Governors and approval from the State Property Office and Council of State to demolish Stanford.

Amon and Steele also proposed construction updates to other University buildings, such as Burson and Upper Prospector.

Burson's proposed renovation and expansion

has a \$55.9 million budget from the SCIF-appropriated funds.

The plan is to "modernize and expand to provide experiential, project-based, engineering labs, interactive classrooms, computational laboratories, student collaboration and project space, faculty offices, and specialized data visualization and simulation labs to support growing engineering programs for the College of Engineering and the College of Computing and Informatics."

Upper Prospector's renovation budget is \$11 million from the Dining Trust Fund. The proposed plan is to turn it into a third food hall with more seating and a reservable area for events. The current food options would be replaced with more desirable options.

New programs

Professor Tara Cavalline for the Department of Engineering Technology and Construction Management introduced the new Charlotte Aviation Innovation and Research Institute. Cavallini is the co-director of the Institute with Srinivas Pulugurtha.

Their mission is "to engage and empower industry and community stakeholders through an integrated set of innovative research, curricular, and outreach activities; and, to advance the robustness and resilience of the airport/aviation industry, and Charlotte region."

The Institute would allow a partnership between the Charlotte Douglas International Airport and the University to enable the students to engage in aviation programs and research. The airport can also use University resources.

Rich and Steele asked for ground lease approval to allow the United States Performance Center (USPC) to build a Bobsled Training Facility next to Area 49. The budget is \$6 million, which the USPC funds. USPC has operated in the Charlotte area since 2012 but relocated to UNC Charlotte's campus in 2022.

The facility would cover 2.79 acres and be a two-story building with storage and an observation deck. The construction would take one to two years to complete and, once finished, would be used by USPC and Charlotte students. This will be the second USPC facility on Charlotte's campus after Field 13A was renovated in September 2023 for the National Field Hockey Team.

U.S. Performance Center Bobsledding facility to be built over next 2 years

Sofia DiStefano | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte proposed a grounds lease to allow the United States Performance Center (USPC) to build a bobsled training facility on campus at the Board of Trustees meeting on December 7. The estimated budget for this project is \$6 million and will be funded through the USPC.

Britannica defines bobsledding as "the sport of sliding down an ice-covered natural or artificial incline on a four-runner sled, called a bobsled, bobsleigh, or bob, that carries either two or four persons."

The USPC is based in Charlotte, N.C., focusing on research-based athletic development, injury prevention, and overall health and wellness. David Koerner and Ike Belk co-founded the USPC. USPC has been in Charlotte for ten years, and its goal is to be the country's most significant Olympic training site.

According to the University, "USPC relocated its operations to UNC Charlotte's campus in 2022 and is leasing space to house its headquarters and serve as the residential training site for several National Governing Bodies of Sports (NGB), including USA Bobsled."

The training facility will be made available primarily for the USA Bobsled team. However, it may become available for students and athletes at Charlotte.

The approximate timeline set by the University for this project is two years, including the design phase. The planned location for the training facility is between 49th Acre Tailgate Park and the Light Rail.

According to the University, the land next to the 49th Acre is currently vacant and isn't involved in any development plans, so that is why it is being used for the bobsled facility; however, there is no connection between the two.

"The presence of the training facility is expected to have little impact on campus life. However, revenue will be generated from the USPC through agreements to use the facility, which will be used to enhance the campus. Additionally, the high-profile nature of an Olympic training facility will enhance the University's economic impact by attracting visitors, competitors and recognition to UNC Charlotte," stated the University.

CHECK THE NEXT ISSUE (1/23) FOR THE ANSWERS TO THIS WEEK'S CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU!

NINER TIMES SUDOKU

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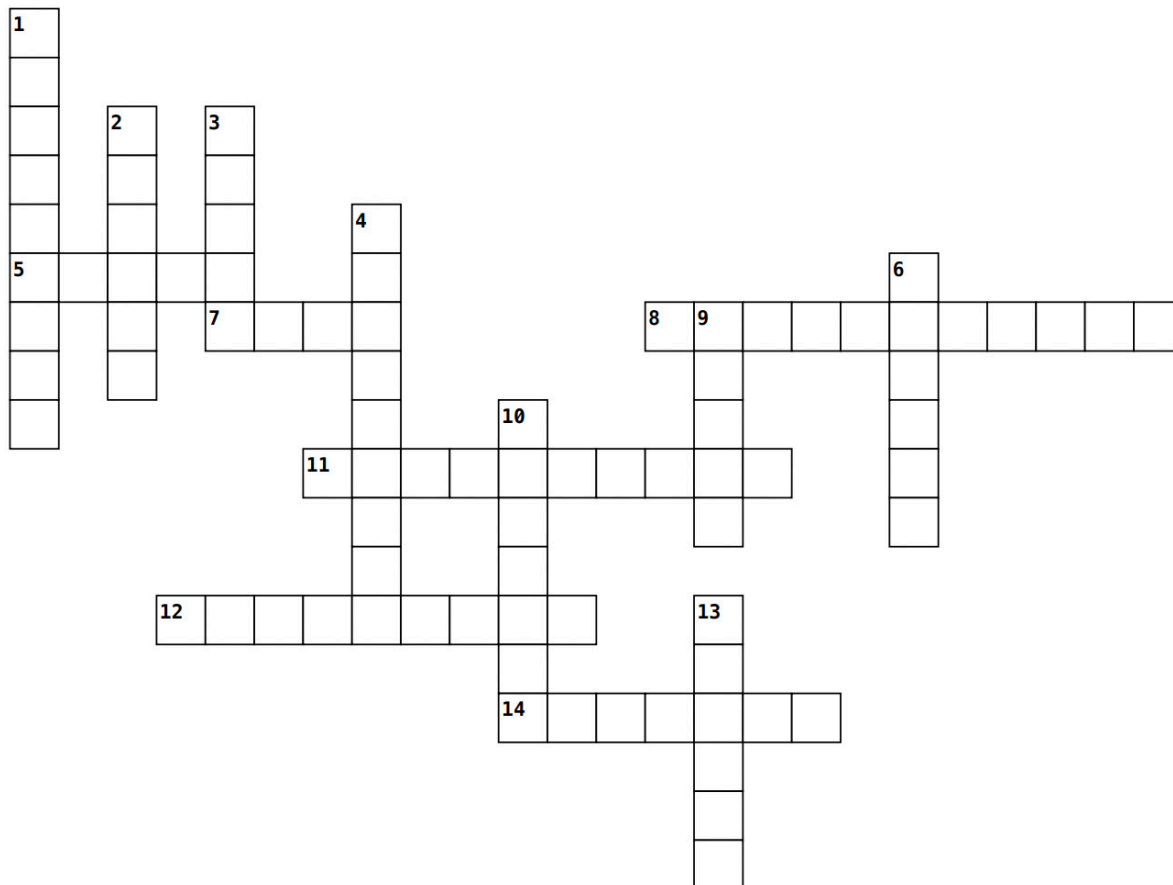
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DID YOU KNOW?

CLEOPATRA HAD A SPECIAL LIPSTICK MADE FOR HER, CONSISTING OF A CRUSHED MIXTURE OF ANTS AND DEEP RED CARMINE BEETLES.



NINER TIMES CROSSWORD

Across

- Annual art and culture event in Uptown Charlotte in the spring
- The mascot of Florida Atlantic University
- The new facility that is being built behind the 49th Acre
- Queen's Feast: Charlotte ___ Week
- Charlotte 49ers men's basketball reshirt junior guard
- American professional baseball team based in Los Angeles

Down

- Where the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe is from in North Carolina
- The quarterback for the Houston Texans
- Sushi with ___; dining option located in Upper Prospector
- The 'R' in HRL
- The last name of the Carolina Panthers' owner
- Simone Biles' husband
- The next residence hall that will be demolished and rennovated
- First name of the American singer, songwriter and producer known for her work with the band Fleetwood Mac

Crossword by Niner Times Editorial Board

Top 10 Charlotte Athletics moments of 2023

Sam Perry | Staff Writer

Charlotte Athletics had a very eventful 2023, with multiple programs lifting trophies and some stellar individual performances across the board. Here is a list condensed down to the top 10 moments from 2023.

Honorable mention: Lena Elkins throws Charlotte softball's No. 16 no-hitter

On Feb. 17 against St. John's University, the battery of pitcher Lena Elkins and catcher Bailey Vannoy threw a no-hitter with eight strikeouts while walking only four batters.

Charlotte pulled off the 1-0 historic victory after only two hits of their own, with one being a solo home run by Ella Chancey, helping Elkins take home the historic win in her second career start.

10. Dazia Lawrence named to Team USA in the FIBA 3x3 U23 World Cup

Charlotte women's basketball guard Dazia Lawrence provided Charlotte with international notoriety as she represented the United States in the FIBA 3x3 U23 World Cup, where she was the leading scorer in the team's first win against Austria.

Overall, she got to prove herself across the globe and bring back a wonderful experience to the program, which has been helpful in the team's growth as they have begun play in the American Athletic Conference (AAC) 2-0 as of Jan. 6.

9. Nick Scudder named AAC Men's Cross Country Runner of the Year

Nick Scudder has proven to be one of the top athletes in Charlotte sports history, and his success was recognized in his first season in the AAC, where he was named the Men's Cross Country Runner of the Year after winning his third individual conference championship.

This individual award was a testament to his accomplishments and place in the 49ers program history.

8. Cam Fisher's record-setting home run tear

Outfielder Cam Fisher significantly impacted Charlotte baseball in 2023, so heavily that the Houston Astros drafted him. He was the talk of college baseball due to his incredible home run-hitting capabilities.

From the end of the regular season through most of the Conference USA (C-USA) tournament, he hit seven home runs in six games to give him a record-setting 30 home runs in a single season while tying the program record for career home runs with 48.

7. Charlotte volleyball's Sophie Whalen collects her 1,000th career dig

Libero Sophie Whalen with Charlotte volleyball opened up the season with a strong performance and reached a career milestone of 1,000 career digs.

On the weekend where she had 61 digs, Whalen earned the Charlotte Invitational Most Valuable Player, leading the Niners to a 3-0 start to the season with wins over Coastal Carolina University, Charleston Southern University and Elon University.

6. Women's soccer 5-0 victory over the ECU Pirates in the first round of the AAC Tournament

Charlotte women's soccer made a statement win over rival East Carolina University 5-0 in the opening round of the AAC tournament.

The win was backed by stellar performances from Macey Bader, who had a brace, and Payton Patrick, who had two assists in the game.

5. Charlotte football's comeback win 33-26 over Tulsa in overtime

49ers football found their second AAC win of the year when quarterback Trexler Ivey led a standout comeback win after being down 17-0 at halftime, scoring on a 70-yard drive in less than a minute, leading to the game going into overtime.

The offense scored a touchdown in overtime, and defensive back Dontae Balfour intercepted Tulsa's pass to clinch the big overtime victory on the road.

4. Charlotte softball run ruling UAB 11-3 to secure first C-USA championship

Charlotte softball clinched the C-USA regular season championship title after run-ruling the University of Alabama at Birmingham Blazers 11-3 on the final day of the season.

After going down 2-0 in the opening frame, Charlotte won their first outright regular season championship after having to split their Atlantic 10 title in 2006. The win was big for Head Coach Ashley Chastain, as she is building something special with the program as they gear up for the move to the AAC in 2024.

3. Charlotte men's basketball wins the College Basketball Invitational (CBI)

Charlotte men's basketball was one of the three Division One teams to end the season hoisting a trophy as they won the CBI championship.

They were led by Aly Khalifa's 20-point performance in his final game with the program before transferring to Brigham Young University. The

program grew from the experience of winning in the playoff atmosphere as they hoisted the trophy down in Daytona Beach after outlasting the Eastern Kentucky University Colonels 71-68.

2. Men's soccer earns first AAC tournament championship victory

Charlotte men's soccer defeated the No. 2 Southern Methodist University Mustangs 2-1, ending their postseason woes of recent seasons.

Ian Pilcher scored the game's first goal in the 23rd minute, and Brandon Morales gave Charlotte a 2-1 lead in the 55th minute to secure the tournament championship.

1. Charlotte Baseball Wins C-USA Tournament Championship

Charlotte baseball, who had struggled in conference tournaments in the past, overcame the odds after falling to Louisiana Tech University in the tournament's first game. The 49ers went on to win five games in four days to claim their first C-USA Tournament Championship during their final season in the conference.

They marched to a tournament win of 5-2 over Dallas Baptist University, lifting the trophy and punching their ticket to the NCAA regionals.



Charlotte baseball infielder Austin Knight (14) aims to throw an out against Dallas Baptist University in the Conference-USA Tournament Championship. | Chris Crews/Niner Times File Photo

Charlotte men's basketball upsets No. 17 Florida Atlantic University 70-68 on home court for their first win in the AAC

Itza Ochoa | Sports Editor

The Charlotte men's basketball team knocked off the No. 17 Florida Atlantic University Owls 70-68 in Halton Arena on Jan. 6. The victory secured the 49ers' first-ever win in the American Athletic Conference (AAC) after being a part of Conference USA for the past 10 years.

This is the first time Charlotte has defeated a ranked team since 2013, after taking down No. 13 University of Michigan 63-61 on the road, and the first time in Halton Arena since 2010 after the 49ers overcame No. 15 Temple University 74-64.

"I'm just super excited for the guys, for the school, for the program," said Head Coach Aaron Fearn. "To get a top-25 win is massive, and it's been a work in progress since we took the program over six years ago."

With the win, the 49ers improve to a 7-7 overall record and move 1-1 in AAC play.

Explosive first half

Charlotte took off with a 9-0 lead in the first five minutes of the game. A trio of layups by Isaiah Folkes, Dishon Jackson and Dean Reiber helped the 49ers, followed by a three-pointer from Nik Graves.

After the Owls missed their first seven shot attempts, guard Nick Boyd made their first bucket in the sixth minute but was responded with another three-pointer from Graves.

Leading 12-3 seven minutes into the game, Charlotte's Jackson slammed the ball through the rim to secure an 11-point lead. Forward Giancarlo Rosado went to the line for the Owls, making 1-2 free throws to only cut the lead to 14-4.

Following more points in the paint, a behind-the-arc shot by Charlotte's guard Daylen Berry had the 49ers leading 19-4 less than nine minutes into the game. The 49ers were ahead multiple times by 15 points in the first half, which was the largest lead in the half.

The Owls picked up momentum to cut down the 49ers lead 23-14 but fouled Charlotte's forward Igor Miličić Jr. on a triple. After making all three of his free throws, Reiber turned a steal into a three-pointer to expand the 49ers lead once again 29-14.

After shooting 45% from behind the arc and

55% from the field, the 49ers entered halftime leading 41-26.

Owls attempt a comeback

Despite Miličić opening up the second half and expanding the 49ers lead 43-26, the Owls drew back from the deficit, going on two 8-0 runs of their own throughout the half.

After multiple threes and layups, the Owls used their first run to cut the 49ers' lead down to nine, 49-40. Boyd secured a layup in the paint for the Owls to trail 49-42 with 12 minutes left.

With a stronger Owl defense, Charlotte faced an offensive slump, struggling to find an opening. A dunk by Jackson and a layup by guard Lu'Cye Patterson put the 49ers up before Boyd hit another three for the Owls to cut the lead back down to five, 53-48.

After facing multiple fouls, the Owls took advantage of the charity stripe to see the first tie of the game at 53 a piece with six minutes left. Two good free throws from Graves and a jumper from Patterson secured another four-point lead for the 49ers, 57-53, but would be the largest lead for the rest of the game.

Boyd went back to the line for the Owls, and guard Alijah Martin followed through with a lineup to secure the Owls' first lead of the game, 59-57, with four minutes remaining and a timeout.

Securing the victory

Graves tied the game back up for Charlotte at 59 a piece after making both of his free throws. With two minutes left and the game on the line, Miličić rallied through with a dunk on top of a defender to bring the score to 61-59.

After back-and-forth fouls, Patterson hit a three to put the 49ers up 66-63 with one minute remaining. Guard Johnell Davis answered back for the Owls with a three of his own to tie the game at 68 with 13 seconds left on the clock.

Down to the wire, a foul on the Owls drew Patterson back to the line and made both attempts to score the last points of the game and put the 49ers up 70-68.

With two seconds remaining, Boyd missed the final three-pointer to win the game for the Owls, resulting in a victory for the Charlotte 49ers.



Charlotte men's basketball forward Igor Miličić Jr. (24) defender in a matchup versus Florida Atlantic University on Jan. 6 in Halton Arena. | Dan Rice/ Niner Times



Stars of the game

Patterson led the 49ers with 16 points, four assists and three rebounds, while Miličić added 13 points, five rebounds, two assists, a steal and a block. Graves finished with 10 points of his own for the 49ers with four assists, while Jackson had a game-high nine rebounds, eight points, three blocks and two assists.

Davis led the Owls with 20 points, four rebounds, two assists and a steal, while Boyd had a season-high 19-point game.

Things to note

Charlotte held the nation's leader in field goal percentage, Vladislav Goldin, from 74% to 43% from the field in the matchup. Goldin was held to six points after previously recording 21 points against Florida Gulf Coast University on Dec. 30, 2023.

The 49ers snapped a two-game losing streak in their regular season but improved to a 6-1 record at home in Halton Arena.

The Saturday matchup during winter break for the University was the second-most attended game all season for Charlotte, with a reported audience of 3,785.



(Top) Charlotte men's basketball center Dishon Jackson (1) celebrates the 70-68 victory over No. 17 Florida Atlantic University on Dec. 6. | Dan Rice/Niner Times (Below left) Charlotte men's basketball forwards Robert Braswell IV (20) and Igor Miličić Jr. (24) | Dan Rice/Niner Times (Below right) Charlotte men's basketball guard Isaiah Folkes (5) | Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Column: 2023 Carolina Panthers is one of the worst in franchise history

Jared Feinberg | Staff Writer

The 2023 Carolina Panthers can be seen as one of the worst in franchise history. With just two wins on their resume ahead of the team's season finale, this season is far from what was expected before the start of the season with a new-look offense, a rookie quarterback and an experienced coaching staff.

High expectations led to incredible disappointment

Entering the 2023-2024 NFL season, the Panthers were seen as a team on the come-up. They had traded up for the first overall selection in the NFL Draft to take talented University of Alabama quarterback Bryce Young, giving up their 2024 first-round pick and wide receiver D.J. Moore to the Chicago Bears in the move. The Panthers also put together what was supposed to be one of the better coaching staffs in the league, led by former Indianapolis Colts Head Coach Frank Reich.

General manager Scott Fitterer believed and verbalized publicly that the team was a quarterback away from being a playoff contender in a weak NFC South division. Combined, these moves and statements led to high expectations and optimism as the season's first week approached.

Fast forward to the start of the new year, and Carolina has the worst record in the league with no first-round selection. Its offense is one of the worst in the league, as Young has struggled for most of the season. Despite occasional flashes, the offensive line has currently given up the most sacks (59) for a No. 1 draft selection since David Carr's rookie year (76). Coach Reich was fired after just 11 games as the "all-star" coaching staff experiment concluded quickly.

It was a disappointing season for the Panthers that has fans pessimistic about the future of the franchise moving forward and others speculating what is to come for the ailing team.

Reich's firing was a necessary move in a season of ugliness

Team owner David Tepper hired Reich as the team's first offensive-focused head coach. He experienced occasional success before being fired by the Colts halfway through the 2022 sea-

son. With a coaching staff comprised of several well-known coaches such as Jim Caldwell, Ejiro Evero and Thomas Brown, it was believed that Reich would be the perfect coach for a rookie quarterback to develop under.

The result turned to Reich being fired for the second year in a row. Carolina's offense failed to hit over 27 points more than once during Reich's short tenure. The blocking scheme did not cater to the style of play the offensive line had been used to and struggled mightily throughout the season.

Reich's play-calling was also inconsistent. He tried to help his lowly offense by allowing offensive coordinator Brown to handle the play-calling duties, only to take them back after just three games. Game management and situational football were issues throughout the season, even following Reich's firing.

Reich was not the main issue for the team's lack of success in 2023-2024. Though he was a part of the team's flaws, his firing was a necessity for Carolina to begin their search for a similar style of coaching that catered to the modern offenses of the NFL.

Young's up-and-down rookie season

Young entered the NFL with high expectations, which is not new for any No. 1 overall selection. He won the 2021 Heisman Trophy at The University of Alabama and nearly won the National Championship that same season.

At just 5-foot-10, 204 pounds, Young is an outlier at quarterback, and there are still concerns today about his long-term durability. What made him special was not just his elite football intelligence and high-level accuracy as a quarterback but his ability to create plays and passing windows out-of-structure thanks to his twitchiness in and out of the pocket. Young had rare poise and pocket awareness for a college quarterback.

The former Crimson Tide quarterback flashed his unique skill set in each game this season. However, he struggled in what was a hapless rookie campaign, throwing for nearly 2,800 yards and 11 touchdowns to 10 interceptions. Young's group of skill players and offensive line play was below average and has been a catalyst for his downfalls this season, though

Young was not immune to escaping the pocket early, forcing errant passes, or missing wide-open receivers.

Yet, Young's 312-yard, two-touchdown performance in a home loss to the Green Bay Packers on Christmas Eve displayed a glimpse of what the rookie quarterback can be in just-average surroundings. Some have argued that this game supplanted himself as Carolina franchise quarterback for the foreseeable future, giving hope to a lowly fanbase and organization.

David Tepper's inexcusable behavior could affect the team's future success

The 2023 Panthers have unveiled a side of Tepper that has given himself and his organization a bad look. The former hedge fund manager is at a crossroads following his second failed head coach hiring and rumors of a potentially toxic work environment within the team's walls.

Tepper's actions show an impatient owner and his pursuit of the winning culture that was promised when he first bought the Panthers in 2018. That impatience has led to him micro-managing aspects of the football operations that are not needed. The Panthers owner's actions have also spoken louder than a simple expletive yelled out in front of the media following Reich's final game.

On New Year's Eve, Tepper was videotaped throwing a drink at a fan in the crowd following the Panthers' 26-0 loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars. The NFL fined Tepper \$300,000 for his actions, and his statement through the team offered little to no apology. His behavior could scare away top head coach candidates from interviewing with the Panthers, affecting the potential roster reconstruction that is on the radar.

Up next for the Carolina Panthers

This offseason looks to be one of the most crucial in the franchise's history as the team looks to surround their youthful quarterback with adequate surroundings to increase his odds of success.

In the foreseeable future, the search for the team's next head coach will officially begin as the organization looks for a new regime to lead them to the ultimate goal: a Super Bowl title.

ELT

CHARLOTTE 49ERS SCOREBOARD

RECENT GAMES

DEC. 23 - JAN. 7

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Dec. 29: Stetson 79, Charlotte 75

Jan. 2: SMU 66, Charlotte 54

Jan. 6: Charlotte 70, No. 17 Florida Atlantic 68

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Dec. 30: Charlotte 74, North Texas 64

Jan. 3: Charlotte 66, South Florida 61

Jan. 7: Charlotte 91, UAB 69

OVERALL STANDINGS

Men's basketball: 7-7, 1-1

Women's basketball: 10-5, 3-0

UPCOMING GAMES

Men's basketball:

Vs. Tulsa on Wednesday, Jan. 10 at 7 p.m.

Women's basketball:

@ Rice on Thursday, Jan. 11 at 8 p.m.

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for sports recaps, previews,
features and more

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The realities of living together changes the friendship versus roommate dynamic

Emsley Jackson | Contributor

This article and its findings are based on a survey done by the Niner Times.

Historically, roommates have fallen into one of three categories: meaningful connections, mortal enemies or people you live with once and never see again. But at the end of the day, roommates are not friends; they are roommates.

They are the people who share access to the same living space and have to coexist in that space somehow. The roommate relationship is complicated, and living with other people, especially for the first time, can bring out the extremes.

The Niner Times put out a survey to get feedback on the topic of roommate relationships.

Roughly 90% of people who responded to the survey said they think roommates can be friends. However, only 50% of respondents said they considered themselves friends with their roommates. The answer along the lines of “yes, but...” came up quite a bit.

“I think roommates can be friends; however, from my experience, it’s always a different relationship than ‘friendship.’ It’s almost as though we are siblings,” said a first-year student living on campus.

The dynamic between people who live together could be amazing, but things that are not usually considered in a friendship become important. Cleanliness, sleep habits, lifestyle choices and financial reliability are qualities that may become evident or cause problems. Friends-turned-roommates can lose everything over dishes that sat in the sink for too long or one too many arguments about that romantic partner that got the impression of ‘mi casa es tu casa.’

One of the questions on the survey asked respondents to explain the relationship between them and their roommates. The open-ended responses were polarized in terms of experiences.

Those close to their roommates raved about their connections.

“We are so similar, so we just instantly were able to click. Without my roommate, I don’t think I would have any friends on campus. We do everything together. She is now my best friend,” said another first-year student.

One fourth-year shared her not-so-peachy experience, saying, “My roommate was dirty and annoying both years.” Yikes.

Other responses were more neutral, explaining that their roommate situation was one of simple coexistence. This ranged from only chat-

ting when necessary to not speaking at all and just staying out of the way.

Regardless of being BFFs, sworn enemies or strangers, the roommate title remains a constant. That label trumps all because, at the end of the day, friend or faux, sharing the same living space is the base of the connection. The place someone calls home is the foundation that can affect everything else. Stress stemming from living situations can creep into the social and academic arenas.

According to Georgetown University’s Student Health Center, “One-third of college student[s] have problems with roommates, and the same number report having relationship difficul-

ties within a year. Roommate and relationship difficulties impact academics in 17% of students.”

This shows how common roommate relations can be impactful outside of the living environment. Energy, negative or positive, can extend far beyond the boundaries of a shared front door.

“Two of my roomies are chill, but we recently had the third roommate move out during finals season, and the anxiety from the whole situation was way too much to handle,” said another respondent. “I was literally walking around stressed all day long.”

This is not to say that roommates cannot be close or stay close. Many meaningful adult relationships come from college living situations.

But, it seems the friendship has to continue outside the living space and transfer into the ‘real world.’

A fourth-year student who no longer lives on campus shared a sweet sentiment about meeting her close friends through rooming together.

“My current situation started with us being strangers; therefore, we had no expectations,” they said. “But over a year and a half of living together, we have become each other’s main support system and best friends. We have meshed friend groups, hosted events for friends and family, gone on trips together and plan to continue living as roommate.”



Lauren Steventon/Niner Times

American tipping culture leaves servers underpaid and customers feeling guilty

Ruhshona Soledjonova | Opinion Editor

This past year has been eye-opening for customers and servers as tipping culture evolves. Restaurant workers and servers have seen a slow incline in wages since 2019 with the costs of inflation.

Yet the reliance on tips from a customer and incorporating the practice through other businesses is a distasteful way of cutting corners on workers' salaries and 'guilt-tripping' customers.

The history of tipping

Before diving into the heat of this growing debate, it is important to understand the background of tipping and its culture in America and other nations.

The practice of tipping in America has been turbulent since its birth in the 1840s. The most common issues that have yet to see significant changes include individual perspectives encountering social divides, the unfairness of customers and keeping workers' hourly rate low and expecting tips to cover the rest.

During the post-Civil War reconstruction period, restaurant owners and diners despised the practice because it allowed employers to exploit freed slaves and not pay them anything under the condition that customers would do so.

"It's the legacy of slavery that turned the tip in the United States from a bonus or extra on top of

a wage," said Saru Jayaraman, president of One Fair Wage to TIME Magazine.

Although earning tips originated outside of the U.S., its global impact and use have died down except in the U.S. Many other economically stable nations have progressed past systemic issues that have evolved from slavery, and tipping culture should be doing the same.

Statistics and facts

The transformation landscape of tipping draws concerns primarily from paying customers. Customers need a clear consensus on tipping etiquette and its structure.

According to a Pew Research study in November 2023, "Around two-in-ten Americans (21%) say it's more of a choice, while 29% say it's more of an obligation. The largest share (49%) say it depends on the situation, underscoring the lack of a single set of rules or expectations."

A recent surge of tipping through the iPad screens and pre-entered amounts has caused customers to experience serious 'tipping fatigue.'

According to Axios, 66% of Americans negatively view tipping, and 32% get annoyed about pre-entered tip screens.

Despite this, Americans are still generous tipppers, amongst others, because they know that workers do not get paid enough.

Food and beverage servers are not the masterminds behind tipping and do not control how much they get paid in many cases.

According to the North Carolina Department of Labor, the minimum wage for tipped workers is \$2.13 an hour.

Most customers today understand this fact and feel guilty if they receive average service but feel obligated to tip favorably.

Overbearing tipping culture

The confusing customs of tipping vary by each person's experience and what the individual thinks is appropriate. In many cultures, tipping is frowned upon because it is considered a favor or bribe for the server.

Aside from servers and bartenders, tipping is promoted in businesses like hair salons, tattoo parlors, taxi drivers, estheticians and vacation spots like hotels or valets. Many may say that Americans live in a tip-frenzy because the culture has become overbearing, and people will confront customers for leaving inadequate tips.

Because food and beverage industry workers are expected to receive the majority of their pay through tips, it is not shocking that they would be upset after receiving a bad tip. As a customer, it is hard to tell the server your reasoning behind a tip if it is not the highest suggested.

But what is the deciding factor of who gets tipped and who does not? There seems to be blurred lines regarding which workers of an establishment can receive tips.

What is more interesting is that nowadays, remote transactions in the food and beverage industries have taken over human-to-human interaction, but still, these kiosks leave a prompt or suggestion for tips.

Steps towards a clearer solution

The solution to this drawn-out problem can go one of two ways.

Rather than tiptoeing around raising wages, addressing minimum wage is the first step, which seems the hardest but can be done by electing representatives who acknowledge and want to advocate for this issue.

The second step in this process is implementing a service fee or gratuity that some restaurants do for a certain size party. This way, servers can get paid for their service without customer bias and be less reliant on customer feedback through tips.

Additionally, tip pooling can also help encourage a safer and less competitive economic environment where servers work together to receive profitable outcomes.

January Playlist

Wholesome Side Character



Ruhshona Soledjonova | Opinion Editor

While holding onto New Year's resolutions and the beginning of the spring 2024 semester, music is the answer to calm nerves and get excited for a prosperous year. The saying 'new year, new me' or 'main character energy' can become redundant. This playlist channels a more mellow approach to conquering the year while still having fun.

These songs are from various decades and can be used as a hype-up while getting ready or walking to class vibe in the frosty and bitter weather. Songs like Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff" and Lana Del Rey's "Chemtrails Over the Country Club" exude themes of reaching one's potential and genuine contentment with life, an odd yet familiar feeling among the motions of January.

When sports fandom turns violent its effects can harm society

Bryson Foster | Outreach Coordinator

Content Warning: This story mentions violence and death caused by sports fandom

Fandom makes sports a beloved enterprise. Fans wear the jerseys of the team they declare their allegiance to and defend their team to the death. This fandom has a lot of positives, but when it turns negative, it can harm society and community members.

When sports fandom turns bad, it can result in smack talk, fighting and, in severe cases, death. Many wonder if the facet of sport is too dangerous and if there is a solution to the violence.

What leads to sports fandom?

For many, the love of sport comes from competition. From a young age, people are put into youth leagues and build their identities around sports. Sports teach valuable life lessons, such as selflessness and working with others. The love for a team or club is passed down from family members and is cultivated through bonding experiences.

One of the main reasons sports enamor people is because it gives fans a sense of purpose, and when a team wins, it creates fulfillment.

For all the great reasons people get into sports, it can turn negative as the performance of one's

team can lead to anxiety, stress and aggression. The result of one's team in a game can affect emotions and create self-esteem issues.

In modern sports, fandom is a positive facet of society, but violence can engulf a fan when it becomes an obsession.

When fandom turns violent

Two groups are responsible for fandom turning violent: the fans and the teams.

Fans are responsible for the violence through multiple actions. The first is 'smack' talk, which is fine in moderation but is often taken too far, leading to fights and, in some cases, death. 'Smack' talk is poking fun at other fans and staking a claim that a respective team is better than another.

This 'smack' talking has gone overboard, leading to fights between fans during NFL games. Punches are thrown, and the escapism of sports leads to life-changing mistakes. It is just a game, but sports fandom forces people into defending a team.

These fights have bled over into the National Basketball Association (NBA) before. On Nov. 19, 2004, one of the NBA's biggest scandals happened in the waning moments of a game between the Indiana Pacers and Detroit Pistons. This event would be labeled the "Malice at the

Palace," which started with an altercation between Pacers forward Ron Artest and Pistons' center Ben Wallace.

A fan threw a cup at Artest, leading to a brawl between players and fans. The fight occurred in the stands, and the game fell into chaos. Both groups were to blame for the incident, showing the heat of sport can jeopardize individuals' health.

Fighting is one thing, but fandom has led to bodily harm toward animals and humans alike. The most recent instance of this fan behavior occurred in December 2023.

The Oklahoma State University Cowboys and the University of Texas at Austin Longhorns were preparing to face in the Big 12 championship game in Dallas. To show their dedication to the Cowboys, the FarmHouse Fraternity decided to slaughter a Longhorn, the Texas mascot, writing expletives on the carcass and leaving it in the front yard of their fraternity house.

This obsession led to a senseless case of animal abuse, and instead of harming the opposing Texas team, it hurt the fraternity's image. The fraternity made a statement apologizing for the incident, but no charges have been filed as the investigation is ongoing.

The rivalry between Major League Baseball franchises has always been intense but has primarily been heated between the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Francisco Giants.

In 2013, a Dodgers fan, Jonathan Denver, crossed paths with Michael Montgomery, who stabbed Denver to death. The stabbing was because Denver was rooting for the Dodgers, a different team than Montgomery's, the Giants.

Sport is not bigger than a person's life, and Dodgers stadium has been a hotbed for crime. This shows fandom can go too far. Violence over team performance is egregious and should not be allowed.

Many teams must be held responsible for fans' actions, but they are not.

In college football, the rivalry between the Ohio State University Buckeyes and the University of Michigan Wolverines has always been fierce.

After a Big Ten Conference phone call in 2020, Michigan Head Coach Jim Harbaugh and Ohio State Head Coach Ryan Day were scrutinized. Harbaugh made an unfounded accusation that Day's team was violating NCAA rules. This led to Day proudly proclaiming that the Buckeyes would "hang 100 points" on the Wolverines.

This added fuel to the fire and made fans take a personal stake in an incident they knew nothing about.

The NFL has seen many coaches and owners rile up fans before games.

Before a game for the Cincinnati Bengals against the Minnesota Vikings on Dec. 16, 2023, Bengals Head Coach Zac Taylor told fans to "drink one more drink, rush in the stadium, and be as loud as you can humanly, be when Minnesota's offense is out there and help our guys."

This might have been lighthearted, but it encourages fans to forget etiquette and show their most obnoxious side.

Owners' behavior has also been in the spotlight. From former Washington Commanders owner Dan Snyder choosing to sue a 72-year-old fan and winning \$66,000 to Carolina Panthers owner David Tepper throwing a drink on Jacksonville Jaguars fans, this behavior is unacceptable.

These owners set an example for their team; if they do not act cautiously, the fans will not either.

Action must be taken

There is one question that needs to be answered: how do we put an end to fandom turning violent? There may not be a concrete answer, and many may say it is just a part of the fan experience, but that is a cop-out.

Fines are one of the significant ways that we can hold athletes, coaches and owners accountable for their actions. Tepper was fined \$300,000 for his drink-tossing scandal, but many say that is a slap on the wrist. After all, these professionals get paid astronomical amounts of money, which may be unfair to fine fans in the same way.

Legal action could be a better way to hold fans accountable. However, this needs to be made specific, as 'smack' talk should not be penalized if it is done acceptably. If fights break out, that is when legal action should kick in, but that might leave us at square one.

It is as easy as remembering that sport is just a game; the beauty is that it breaks human barriers.

It is okay not to like a rival team, but remembering that everybody, regardless of allegiance, is a person who deserves to have the best fan experience possible is crucial. Checking personal behavior can lead to a better tomorrow for sports watchers and breed that love in the next generation.



University of Texas fans cheering at the 2008 game against Baylor University. | Courtesy of Dan Morales/Flickr

Fashion trends to look out for in 2024

Brooke Black | Contributor

With the new year coming in headstrong, say goodbye to some pieces in your wardrobes and invite in some fun, new styles.

2024 will be a year of new expression, tying in fashion pieces from former decades like the '80s and '90s. We will see a continuation of current trends like '90s grunge and coquette, but there will be newer trends that might stick around even longer for 2024. Prepare to see a fresh rendition of '80s fashion come into full play in many different aspects.

Colored tights

Celebrities everywhere are making us all jealous we were not '80s prom queens rocking colored tights everywhere, whether that be to the grocery store or on the runway. Everyone from Aubrey Plaza to Gigi Hadid is rocking colored tights, some sheer and lacy, and others so vibrant they are straight out of an '80s aerobics class. These are a bold closet choice for the streets and a fun choice for your next night out in 2024.

Pinstripes

Sticking with the '80s, 2024 will invite pinstripes back into your wardrobe for work and fun. Pinstripes are coming back into style, not necessarily Wall Street-esque like you might be thinking, but more so as a fun pant or top print for work or a girl's gossip dinner. Pinstripes will be dressed down in 2024, which I do not think anyone is complaining about.

Monochrome

Dressing monochrome is not new, but it will be more popular than ever in 2024, especially with colored tights coming back into style. Got a cute red dress for dinner? Perfect, pair it with sheer red tights, a red heel and your favorite red purse. You are ready to get a burger, and your outfit could not flow any better. 2024 will be about simple ways to elevate your style without breaking the bank or your mental health stressing for an outfit. Going monochrome is the easiest route for a quick and easy outfit.

Pops of color

Adding a pop of color to a boring outfit has never been a secret to anyone, but with brands like Steve Madden and ASOS making so many bags and shoes in vibrant colors, it is a perfect addition to a bland outfit. An all-white outfit calls for a hot pink shoe or a neon green bag. In

2024, we are straying away from being a fly on the wall and are striving to stand out.

Bows

As I am sure it is no shock to any college student, bows are back in style in full force. Now a thing left in the past for little girls, bows are something women are using to embrace their femininity. Bows can be chic, fun, coquette and even grunge. They are versatile. Whether in your hair or on your bedspread, they are everywhere and can be inexpensive. Have an old sweater you want to vamp up? Take a roll of ribbon and add some bows to it. Others will stop you on your

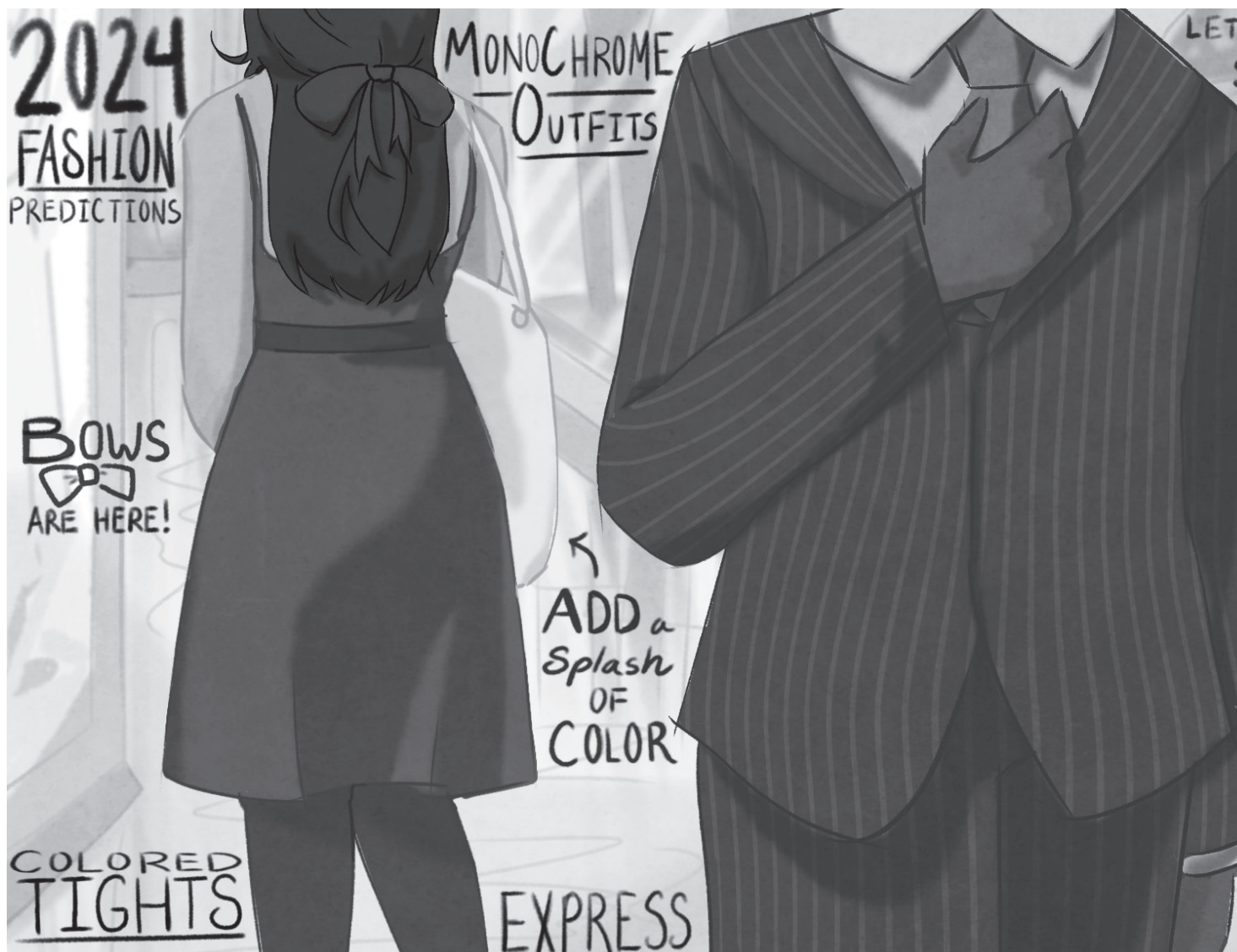
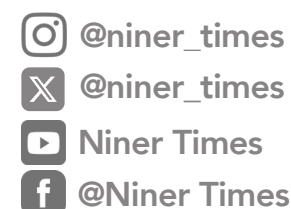
way to class, asking where it is from. Bows may be the way to have the most unique fashion statement from a D.I.Y., all the while hitting the nail on the head with recent trends.

Large bags

'Out with the old, and in with the new' as Sharpay Evans would say, because we are saying goodbye to small purses in 2024. Women and men have places to be and things to keep a hold of, and the small bags are simply not cutting it anymore. With bold statements like pops of color comes the bold statement of a large bag. Pair your monochrome outfit with colored tights and

bows with the large bag of your dreams so you can tackle the day without worrying about needing something from home.

FOLLOW OUR SOCIALS!



Maya Hutagalung/Niner Times

Amya Morningbird Richardson leads the Native American Student Association in celebrating indigenous culture

Lily Kate Witcher | Contributor

Third-year student Amya Morningbird Richardson has been a part of the Native American Student Association (NASA) since starting at UNC Charlotte in 2021. She now serves as the student organization's president, informing interested people about Indigenous culture and traditions.

Richardson is a member of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe of Hollister, N.C. She brings experience from a youth empowerment background to her current position in NASA.

"When I was in high school, I reestablished my tribe's youth council," said Richardson. "I joined the executive board [of NASA] last year. Our president graduated, and our vice president transferred, so I was the next person who was willing to take on being the president."

One thing that Richardson would like for people to know about her culture is that the Native people are still here.

"We're a surviving people," said Richardson. "A lot of times, history kind of portrays Indigenous people as a thing of the past, but we're very much alive."

As president, Richardson plans meetings and events for the organization along with the other executive board members. There is no set structure for the meetings, but meetings have included activities such as movie nights and educational presentations.

"We watched the series 'Reservation Dogs' all the way through," said Richardson. "It's one of the first TV series to feature an Indigenous cast and Indigenous stories and to be entertaining and fun. A lot of times when Native people do get that representation, it's the sad parts of Native history which are important to document, but it was really cool to see things that we could relate to currently happening on screen."

Richardson often leads talking circles in NASA meetings. In the Native community, talking circles are formal affairs in which a talking piece is passed around, and the person holding it is given the space to share their opinions and ideas. While NASA's talking circles are often less formal, they are an important forum for members to share with the group.

"We also collaborate with other organizations pretty frequently, and we'll do a talking circle or a presentation about historical figures or important topics," said Richardson.

NASA is open to everyone on campus, not just Native American students.

"We always tell the people that are coming to bring a roommate or bring a friend because NASA is super small," said Richardson. "The Native population on campus is small as is, and most of us have to work off-campus jobs to be here in college, so we don't really have time to come to a 7 p.m. meeting. So we always have open doors to anyone who wants to peek their head in or anything like that."

Richardson's favorite memory from her time in NASA was a workshop from the 2023-2024 academic year, where she taught attendees how to make corn necklaces. This year, fellow NASA members picked her as head lady dancer for NASA's second annual Powwow.

Although Richardson is honored to be the president of NASA, she says it can also be a little

scary at times to be the face of the organization.

"It's a lot of responsibility, but to me, it's worth it because of the community that NASA is able to bring together," said Richardson. "I grew up in a tribal community, and coming to college all the way up here was kind of a culture shock. So NASA is able to give me my tribal community away from home. The organization and the people in it are very close, and it means a lot to me to have them."

NASA serves as an organization to honor all Native American heritage on Charlotte's campus, so members come from varying tribes and backgrounds.

"Most of the people in NASA currently are from Eastern Woodland tribes, so tribes on the East Coast and more Southern areas," said Richardson. "We've learned that we have so many different ways of doing and saying things and differ-

ent tribal communities. There are a lot of things that can be shared amongst us and a lot of things that could be learned. Everything that we do is a learning experience for us. So we always just ask for input where it's applicable, and we also give out the precautionary warning that everything that we talk about can vary by tribe and region."

Outside of her role in NASA, Richardson is also involved in other activities in Charlotte. She is pursuing a double major in political science and international studies with a concentration in peace, conflict and identity. She is part of the judicial branch of the Student Government Association, a resident advisor in Greek Village and the social media coordinator for the United Tribes of North Carolina, a professional conference held annually in North Carolina.



Amya Morningbird Richardson is a member of the Haliwa-Saponi tribe of Hollister, N.C. In the Native American Student Association's second annual Powwow, Richardson served as the head lady dancer. | Megan Bentley/Niner Times

A guide to Charlotte events during the spring semester

Maylis Pickering | Staff Writer

The Queen City has plenty of activities to add to your spring semester. Not only are there numerous sports games to watch, but there are fun festivals and performances you will not want to miss.

Splurge: Events worth the money

Queen's Feast: Charlotte Restaurant Week
Jan. 19-28 | All around Charlotte | \$30 to \$50

Queen's Feast is a great chance to try restaurants outside your normal dinner budget. Try the cuisines of many local restaurants.

'Mean Girls' the Musical
Feb. 13-18 | Belk Theater | \$30 to \$105

This iconic teen comedy has been adapted for the stage by Tina Fey — a combination sure to provide plenty of laughs.

Queen Charlotte Fair

April 13-23 | Charlotte Motor Speedway | Tickets \$12, parking \$5 (additional ride costs)

Get ready for two weeks of carnival games, live music and rides. The admissions ticket includes entertaining performances like a motorcycle wall of death and a pig and dog race.

Lovin' Life Music Fest

May 3-5 | First Ward Park | Start at \$269

Look forward to a festival where music is celebrated and there are plenty of activities to enjoy. Post Malone, Stevie Nicks and Noah Kahan are

the festival headliners at this new three-day festival and will perform along with many others.

Budget-friendly: Events with little to no cost

Charlotte Checkers \$1 Ticket Night
Jan. 16, 2024 | Bojangles Coliseum | \$1.05

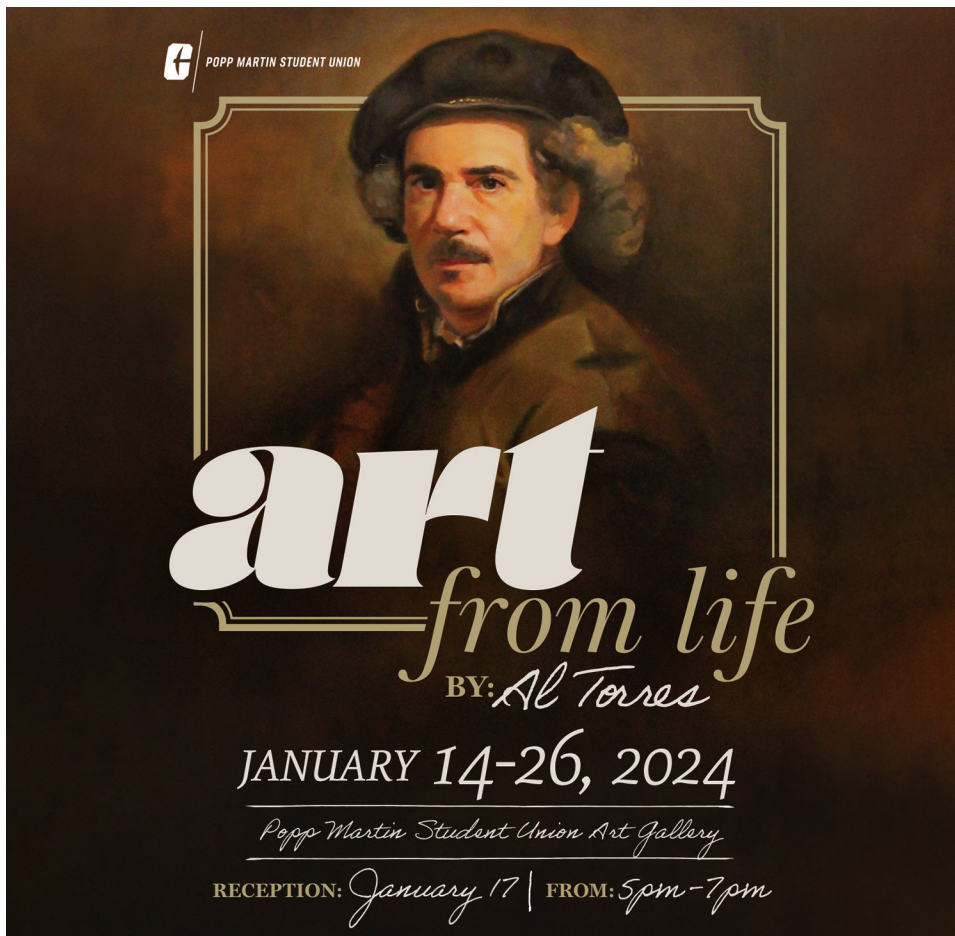
\$1 Ticket Night is the perfect time to check out the Charlotte Checkers, the city's minor-league ice hockey team. When purchasing tickets, make sure you select the filter "Ticket Promo Night."

Charlotte SHOUT!

March 31 - April 16 | Uptown Charlotte

This 17-day Uptown festival celebrates the Charlotte community through multiple forms, such as art, music, dancing, food, photography and poetry. Prices of most events and installations are free; food prices may vary.

There are so many events that go on each week in Charlotte. To find more cost-friendly activities, including times and places to get free food, check out Charlotte on the Cheap.



Maya Hutagalung/Niner Times