

Q & A: Who's Behind the Scenes?

Jeff Webster knows a thing or two about injuries, he's the athletic trainer

by Kate Levdansky Petrikis
assistant sports editor

Jeff Webster, Penn State Behrend's head athletic trainer/lecturer, graduated from California University of P.A. in 1992 with a Master's of Science in athletic training. After graduating, he spent a year as a staff trainer at Erie Community College in Buffalo. While in Buffalo, he was fortunate enough to work as a staff trainer for the 1993 World University Games at the University of Buffalo and Buffalo State College.

Webster then upgraded to head trainer at Gannon University. He spent the next four years at Gannon, before moving on to his current position. He is currently in the middle of his fifth year at Behrend, and said he is very happy in his current position.

Beacon: What is the craziest/weirdest injury you have ever treated? How did that injury occur?

Webster: I can honestly say I have not yet had to deal with any weird or crazy injuries. That is to say, I consider pretty much all the injuries I've dealt with to be common injuries any athletic trainer would see during the course of their career. Maybe I've just been fortunate in that respect.

Beacon: If you got hurt, would you treat yourself?

Webster: If I did get hurt, I would care for myself provided I was capable of actually rendering

care to myself. I have cared for myself, at least for the minor nicks and bumps. Fortunately, nothing serious yet...knock on wood!

Beacon: If you had the choice to treat any athlete, who would it be and why?

Webster: Tough question. I don't think I can really name any one particular athlete. But I think the athlete I would most want to work with is someone who has a burning desire to return to their particular sport. Those type of athletes make the best patients, because they are easy to work with because they really want to get back to their previous form, and it is easy to motivate them to succeed.

Beacon: What was the most serious injury you have ever treated? How did that injury occur?

Webster: Early in my career, I had a hockey player who sustained a fractured C3 vertebrae in his neck during a game. We had to immobilize him on a spine board and send him to the hospital for further care. He sustained the injury when he was checked from behind by another player. The check forced him head first into the glass portion of the boards. After hitting the glass, he slid down the boards and hit his chin on the ledge formed where the boards and the glass meet.

Beacon: What professional sports team would you most like to work for? Why?

Webster: The professional team I would most like to work with would probably be the Buffalo Bills. Having grown up just outside Buffalo, I've been a life-long fan of the Bills, and professional football is my favorite sport.

Beacon: Have you ever treated anyone who became a professional sports athlete?

Webster: Actually yes. I worked with a football player at Gannon who eventually went on to play briefly with the New Orleans Saints. Also, I worked with a basketball player at Gannon, who is currently playing professionally in Germany. Both players spent time doing rehabilitation in the Athletic Training room during my tenure at Gannon.

Beacon: What do you think is the most dangerous sport to play? Why?

Webster: I think

football and hockey are the two most dangerous sports. Football, because of the size and speed of the players, as well as the nature of the game. By nature, I mean the way the game is played. High speed collisions are not only encouraged but expected. I also chose hockey because of the stationary boards and glass, the sharp skates, the frozen puck and the use of sticks.

Beacon: Do you think athletic trainers, as a whole, are underpaid?

Webster: As a whole, no. I think there are individual settings where salaries are lower (i.e. high schools, clinics, rural areas and private colleges). However, as a whole, I believe the athletic training profession is much better off from a salary standpoint, than it was when I started out 10+ years ago.

Beacon: What was the most gratifying recovery from an injury you have ever witnessed?

Webster: I worked with a football player who severely injured his knee during a game. He developed complications that evening and the next day, due to the injury. These complications nearly cost him his leg from the knee down. He was very fortunate that the doctors on his case saw symptoms that indicated he had an artery pinched in his knee joint. The artery became pinched in the joint when his knee was reduced (put back into place), after the injury. He sustained a torn posterior cruciate ligament and a torn lateral collateral ligament, in addition to the arterial damage. Today he has full function in his leg and participates fully in pretty much any activity he chooses.

Beacon: When someone gets injured, what are the first three things you do to access the injury?

Webster: The first three things I do when someone gets injured are pretty basic. I spend the vast majority (80-90 percent) of my initial on-field evaluation calming the injured athlete. In most cases, the injured athlete is agitated as a result of the injury. Second, I try to get a thorough, accurate history of the injury (what happened, how were they positioned, did they land on someone else, did someone else hit them, etc.). Finally, I evaluate the severity of the injury, and then I determine what course of treatment needs to be rendered.

Every week, the Beacon will engage in a little "ask and respond" with someone who doesn't make the headlines.



PHOTO BY MIKE BELLO / BEHREND BEACON
Jeff Webster would love to some day be the athletic trainer for his favorite team, the Buffalo Bills, the town where he grew up.

This week's senior athletic profile

Matt Heidecker: Engineer, former catcher plays through the pain



PHOTO BY MIKE BELLO / BEHREND BEACON
Matt Heidecker played soccer all four years at Mercyhurst Prep before deciding track and field was the path he wanted to take.

by Kate Levdansky Petrikis
assistant sports editor

Matt Heidecker, a senior cross country/track and field athlete at Behrend, played soccer and baseball at Mercyhurst Prep High School. He played soccer for four years and received two varsity letters.

He played baseball for two years as a catcher but decided that his knees did not like the squatting. Heidecker did gain something from baseball, though - a unique nickname given to him from his coach. He called him Rube.

"I used to catch, and had trouble throwing the ball back to the pitcher. I had no problem throwing it down to second base, but always had trouble throwing to the pitcher," said Heidecker.

In "Major League II", the catcher's name is Rube, and he could not throw the ball back to the pitcher, either.

After he gave up baseball, Heidecker decided to run track his senior year at Mercyhurst.

"I chose to run because I wanted to beat the local rival (Cathedral Prep) in at least one sport," said Heidecker.

He did it. Heidecker ran the 1600 and 3200 meter runs that year. He broke the Mercyhurst 1600 record with a time of 4:36, and his best 3200 time was 10:15. In the second half of the season, he ran with a stress fracture in his foot, yet he still broke many school records.

"The pain was tough to deal with," said Heidecker. "I thought I had bursitis, and did not even know I had the stress fracture until after the season. About four meets into the year, I started to experience bad heel pain and thought it was a bone spur or bursitis. It progressed to the point where the heel was painful to the touch and I limped when I had tight shoes on. I think the worst was prom night with the tight shoes."

At Behrend, Heidecker ran cross country his freshman and senior years and track all four years. He runs the 1500 for the team.

"It isn't a glory position, and not many people like to run distance events,

but that is where my niche is," said Heidecker.

Practices are from 4-6 p.m., but if someone has a class conflict, they can usually find a group that has the same conflict and work out together.

"It is hard to get motivated unless you have someone there to push you daily," said Heidecker. "To prepare for each meet, I sit and reflect quietly. A lot of guys want to listen to music or get pumped up. I find it much better to just sit and relax and focus on what I have to do to succeed. Track is more of an individual sport, but I love to support other runners while [they] perform."

Heidecker said his coaches at Behrend have taught him tolerance in all he does. He said they also taught him that hard work eventually pays off, even if at first it does not seem like it will.

"Having the same coach for cross country and track provides continuity and the ability to get to know the coach," said Heidecker. "The coach also knows how to personally train you and make you the best athlete possible. In having the same coach, they can get your tendencies tracked and keep you motivated better. I would have to say it is an advantage."

Heidecker also holds two part-time jobs at Behrend. He works for professor Dr. Paul Koch as an assistant, where he mainly runs analyses on existing industrial problems, troubleshoots current industrial problems, and helps with overall organization. He is also a teacher's assistant for sophomores in their plastics labs. Heidecker's biggest influence is Dr. Koch.

"He has helped me in many ways, so many that I could never know where to start thanking him," said Heidecker. "I would say that he has made the biggest impact on me personally since I have come to Behrend."

"I am not sure how I manage my time. I guess you could say that I am dedicated to what I do, and find happiness while I am busy," he said.

But in his spare time, although it is rare, Heidecker said he likes to go to Pittsburgh Steelers games because he is a passionate fan.

So, what were Heidecker's thoughts on the Steelers recent loss?

"Well, let's just say that I think the best team will be watching the Super Bowl," said Heidecker. "The special teams did them in. I have a feeling that a lot of bandwagon people will start saying that it was Kordell this and Kordell that, and if they do, they should stop and think that he got them there on his back, solely. I do not plan on reading about it for a while because that was a traumatic loss."

In his personal spare time, Heidecker said he has a unique relationship with his granddad.

"We are a lot alike, and he is still active in his 80's," he said. "We play golf and goof off when we are around each other, which is a lot of fun."

Heidecker said his two strongest characteristics are his strong will and work ethic.

"I would say my personality is one, but I am a little abrasive to some people yet, and I am working on that," said Heidecker. "I realized you can not change overnight."

If this sounds similar to Muhammed Ali, then you are right. Ali happens to be Heidecker's role model.

"I met Muhammed Ali when he came to Erie for a rally for Ron DiNicola, a Democratic candidate for local office," said Heidecker. "'Boom Boom' Mancini was also there in support, so I got to meet two great people in one day."

"We all went downtown and were gathered as a team when Ali got off his caravan and met the public. He spoke very briefly and then came to the crowd and shook hands and signed autographs."

"I had my hooded worn up sweatshirt autographed by him, but simply being in his presence was amazing. I really admire him for all he did for this country, and not just as an athlete. I went back and read a lot about his life and have become educated on his past. To see him at the Atlanta games, and to watch the movie that just came out about him, have been awesome," said Heidecker.

Heidecker is majoring in Plastics Engineering Technology because he enjoys the challenge.

"I have learned so many amazing things," he said. "Now, I can say, wow, I know how that works or that is how they make that. Simple, but interesting."

After graduation, Heidecker plans to attend graduate school and attain a doctorate degree. He plans to go to Penn State for Materials Science and Engineering, The University of Akron or USM for Polymer Science, or Notre Dame for Chemical Engineering.

Although he may be leaving, Heidecker sees a bright future for the cross country/track and field teams.

"Every year the talent gets deeper and deeper at Behrend, and I think we will be great this year," said Heidecker. "Our coach, Dave Cooper, brings a lot of experience from Union City, and should help us attain the goal of being one of the best programs in the region."

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of our games so we can contend for the championship, and that's our goal."

In front of 220 fans at the Junker Center Wednesday, the Lions found their winning touch against Bradford, 52-44. The win, although much closer than the 30-point margin Behrend had against Bradford in December, gave the Lions a confidence booster heading into the next two road games.

Behrend jumped out to an early 7-0 lead, and after several six-point leads, the Lions finished the half up 23-21. Behrend began the second half on a 17-7 run, capped by Mozdy's 3-pointer at 11:43.

The Lions struggled for the next 10 minutes, sinking only one field goal as Bradford (6-13, 3-5) got as close as two. Weigold broke the streak with a 3-pointer with less than two minutes

left in the game, and the Lions then sank 5-of-6 free throws in the final minute to pull out the win.

Costanzo led all scorers with 19 points while Phillips added 10 points and nine rebounds and is currently at 1,443 points. Weigold and Mozdy each had eight points, and along with Charnock, the starting five scored all by two of Behrend's total points. The Lions shot 35.3 percent from the floor while Bradford made 34.6 percent of its shots.

The Lions play Frostburg on Saturday and Lake Erie on Wednesday before returning home against La Roche on Feb. 9. Behrend will look to make the most out of the few remaining games.

"We just hope to have a successful last couple of games," said Weigold. "We want to continue to get better

with each practice and game. We want to learn that all the hard work pays off, and make the last games the best of the season, because, for some of us, these are our last times to play."

With only five games left in the season, and with the conference tighter than Britney Spears' shirt, the Lions know even one little mistake could cost them a chance to host the tournament Feb. 20-23. For some players, the three weeks until the tournament seem like three months.

"We have a big rivalry with them and they have gotten the best of us twice," said Costanzo. "We need to take care of business now with the rest of the conference, so we see them in the AMCC championship game. The next time around will be a different story. We look forward to a rematch."



PHOTO BY JEFF HANKEY / BEHREND BEACON

Junior Amanda Mauser dribbles around her Pitt-Bradford opponent on Wednesday. The Lions defeated Bradford 52-40 to improve to 6-2 in the AMCC. With a loss by Altoona on Wednesday that dropped its record to 6-2, the Lions have a chance to host the conference tournament. If the Lions win their last four games, and Altoona loses just one game, then Behrend will host the tournament. Should both teams win out, then Altoona would hold it because Behrend has lost twice to them.