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The sporting life

By Laurie Kaiser

Most college athletes leave their glory days behind once they earn the sheepskin that qualifies them for a professional career and success far from field or court.

But for many, the same commitment that once translated to athletic prowess finds new sporting expression in adult life. For some it might be a career in the field of sports; for others it means fulfillment as weekend warrior, go-to concession stand helper, or Little League coach.

Hard to pick from among all our alums who serve in the world of athletic endeavor, but we introduce you here to seven, near and far. Their ages range from 25 to 89, but what connects them – beyond their St. Norbert stories – is a deep enthusiasm for their chosen sports.

The assistant coach

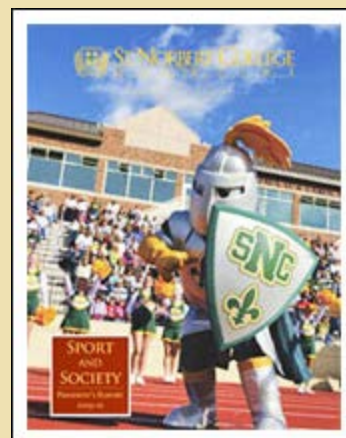
When **Kate Geenen '89** gives pointers to the women on St. Norbert's softball team as assistant coach, she brings experience derived both from the softball field and from her profession as sports administrator.

At St. Norbert, Geenen played shortstop for the softball team, was a member of the basketball team and, in 2005, was inducted into the St. Norbert College Hall of Fame. After graduation, Geenen worked for seven years as the minor league administrator for the Milwaukee Brewers.

She credits her fluency in Spanish and familiarity with the game for landing her the position. "I worked with some great people," she says, "and especially enjoyed being able to help players in their native language."



Among her many volunteer activities, assistant women's softball coach Kate Geenen '89 helps raise money for the team by working the concession stand at Green Knight athletic events.



Look here for web-only content that expands on topics presented in the current St. Norbert College Magazine.



[Fight song gets new lyrics](#)

Music professors **Michael Rosewall** and **Linda Cook** help us "Raise our voices to the Green and Gold" with renewed spirit.



[A matter of opinion](#)

Find out what readers are thinking about their college magazine.



[Fan Reaction to the Favre-Packer Split](#)

Master's candidate **Peter Weiss** explores the connections between fandom and identity.



[Sports Rights Fees](#)

Carl Vogel '79 speaks on the financial engine of sports.



[A legend at St. Norbert](#)

Bart Starr and Forrest Gregg recall the Vince Lombardi years on campus in the new book, "A Championship Team."

Apart from her coaching role, she now extends her love of the game by volunteering her time to two special leagues. She serves on the board of the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers and is on the steering committee that helped found the Miracle League of the Fox Valley, a baseball league for children with physical and/or mental disabilities.

Geenen runs every day, coaches her two children's sports teams and is a Packers season ticket-holder. When offered the Green Knight coaching position six years ago, Geenen eagerly accepted. It provides the chance to combine two loves: St. Norbert and sports. And, the job allows a nice work-life balance.

"It's great being back on campus, and I'm grateful to **Tim Bald** [athletics director] and **JoAnn Krueger** [softball coach] for the opportunity," she says. "My kids love having 15 older sisters."

More than anything, Geenen sees sports as a way to give back. "I feel extremely blessed to be in the position I am in. I love being back at St. Norbert," she says. "Our Norbertines are right on when they encourage us to lead a life characterized by faith and a commitment to one another."

Geenen remembers how much discipline was required to play sports while also juggling term papers and exams. She tries to help her players find that same balance.

"It's all about being a student first," she says. "Our students pretty much understand that they won't be playing sports professionally. They work hard in the classroom because they will have a meaningful professional career. They work hard on the field because they love the game."

Looking back, Geenen says her greatest decision was to major in Spanish and take advantage of the study abroad program, which taught her the importance of being open to differences. "I realized that everybody has something to offer and that we can learn from everyone," she says.

That perspective comes in handy in coaching, too. "Maybe a girl isn't a quick base runner, but she has a great arm," she says. "Each ... brings something special to the table; they have some pretty amazing gifts and talents."



Vernon Biever '48

The photographer

For more than 65 years, **Vernon Biever '48** captured the spectacular wins and heartbreaking losses of the Green Bay Packers with a 35mm Nikon, as official team photographer. The 87-year-old covered the first 35 Super Bowl games, worked at Lambeau and traveled with the Pack to their away

games.

Biever started his college career in 1941, but left to serve in the Army during World War II. As part of the 100th Infantry Division, he fought in

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Read the backstory on our favorite new Green Knight.

[A sporting success](#)

Images from the opening season of the brand-new Donald J. Schneider Stadium.

["Sundays in Manila"](#)

A chapter of Philippines encounters from the new travel memoir by **Robert Boyer** (English, Emeritus).

[Alumni Award Winners 2010](#)

Read more on the life and works of this year's honorees.



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France and Germany.

After the war ended, Biever earned a degree in business and returned to his native Port Washington to help his dad with his retail business. Photography, however, remained his first passion.

He contacted the Packers, for whom he had done some photography work during college. "I told them I'd do it for nothing if I could get field passes," he says. "They said the price was right."

Although he was paid later, it wasn't much, he says. He supplemented his income with contract jobs with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, public relations agencies and book publishers.

His photographs have graced more than 100 books, including the National Football League's "Lombardi." Biever's photos also will be featured this fall in the Broadway play of the same name.

Biever's son John is a staff photographer for Sports Illustrated, while son Jim has taken his father's spot as Packers photographer. "My eyesight is not so good anymore," the elder Biever says.

As he spent so many years with the players, he became friends with many of them, including legend Bart Starr and former quarterback Brett Favre. "My son and I took Brett's wedding pictures. He's still a good friend."



Matt Panure '07

The hopeful

From April through October, **Matt Panure '07** travels to stock-car racetracks across the Midwest – not as a spectator but as an announcer, a role he has played since high school.

Panure compares the job to that of circus ringleader. Along with calling the races in a play-by-play fashion, he

tries to keep the audience entertained between races. The tracks he works are shorter than the 2.5-mile ones to be found in the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing. "The action is a lot tighter," he says. "While NASCAR has one race in three hours, we'll have 10 to 15."

The son of a former racecar driver, Panure got his first job in the pits as a 14-year-old, and he hopes to eventually make it as an announcer in professional racing or another sport. Currently, he does some announcing for St. Norbert's football and basketball games. Also, he picks up public relations work to fill in the gaps.

Panure can spend as many as 20 hours on the road in one weekend. But he loves it. Most of his friends are involved with racing. "We're a different breed of people," he says.

The equipment manager

When **Richard Romanski '52** was a kid growing up in Milwaukee, he used to hitchhike to Chicago just to

see the Bears play football. He loved football then, but could never have foreseen that he would spend his career outfitting a professional team.



Alumni director Todd Danen '77 with Richard Romanski '52

For the past 47 years Romanski has gotten to live that dream as the equipment manager for the Oakland Raiders, a job he works part-time today, along with his son Bob. "I buy everything for the coaches, everything it takes to make a team work," he says.

At St. Norbert, Romanski played quarterback and proudly recalls the year the Green Knights were undefeated – 1950. At the time, he says, St. Norbert was the only Catholic school in the nation to hold that claim. He went on to play and coach football in the U.S. Army.

The Raiders invited him to join them in 1963, initially as a scout. However, Romanski says his eyesight wasn't good enough, so he was offered the equipment manager position. It's a job that requires long hours, but has been gratifying.

Getting to know the players has been the biggest perk, he says. "Years ago, there was always something going on – bowling or playing pool or ping-pong," he says. "They don't go out together like they used to."



Abbey Sutherland '04

The coach

It has been a whirlwind trip for **Abbey Sutherland '04** – from playing in Division III volleyball to heading a Division I team at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

Sutherland initially went to USM to earn a graduate degree, with the plan to teach high school Spanish.

Along the way, she kept getting promoted within the volleyball ranks. Starting as a graduate assistant, she was named assistant coach, and then in May, head coach of the Golden Eagles women's volleyball team.

"Last year, we were 27-5 and regular-season Conference USA champions. The team had never done that before, so it was a groundbreaking year for us," Sutherland says.

The job has presented a cultural shift for the Wisconsin native. "I thought it was more of a culture shock coming to the Deep South than when I was in Spain," Sutherland laughs, adding that she has come to love the warm hospitality of Hattiesburg.

As a student, she put all her energy into volleyball, after academics, which was her priority. She aims to pass on that priority. "I want to make

sure that the No. 1 goal is to graduate and get a good education.” She adds that Southern Mississippi offers 12 women’s volleyball scholarships.

While the NCAA requires a 2.0 grade point average, Sutherland’s team has a goal of a 3.39 average. “Ideally, I’d like all of them to be there.” Last year the team received an American Volleyball Coaches Association Team Academic Award.

The lawyer

Marti Wronski '94 never set out to join the big leagues – of baseball, that is. But for the past seven years, Wronski has served as the vice president and legal counsel for the Milwaukee Brewers. She describes it as “incredible and fabulous,” and a dream job, yet one she wasn’t seeking when the Brewers came calling.



Marti Wronski '94

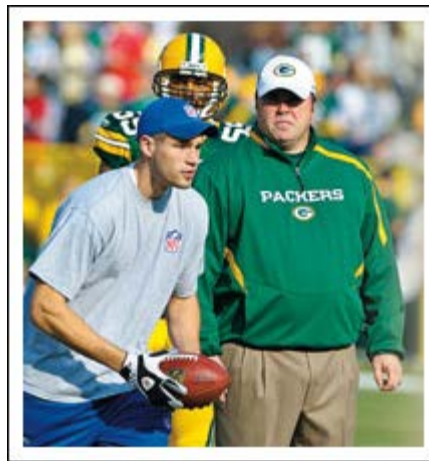
The valedictorian of her St. Norbert class, Wronski already had carved out an impressive career when she joined the Brewers in December 2003: first as a litigator in Foley & Lardner’s Milwaukee office and then as a professor of legal writing at Marquette University Law School. The storied baseball team asked her to fill in on an interim basis. “Initially, I took the role until they found someone to take the position on a full-time basis. I was very happy with my position at Marquette.”

Wronski is the highest-ranking woman and youngest vice president on the Brewers staff and, at 37, is one of the youngest general counsels in the major leagues. She handles everything from player contracts to sponsorship agreements to trademark issues. And, remarkably, she does all this while raising four young boys.

This is possible, she says, by working a flexible schedule, having a nanny, relying heavily on technology, having “modern-thinking” ownership and being lucky enough to have “the best husband on the planet” (who also happens to be a partner at her former firm, Foley & Lardner).

Wronski originally intended to go into broadcast journalism after working an internship at CNN in London and at WBAY-Green Bay as a college student, but ended up finding her true calling in law.

Likewise, she found a true love and appreciation for baseball – and the major leagues – after growing up a committed Packers fan. “I’m grateful for all those twists and turns,” she says. “I didn’t have a plan to do this. But a hard-fast plan is not always the way to go.”



Dan Zegers '11 (left) on the field with Green Bay Packers head coach Mike McCarthy.

The intern

With responsibilities to the Green Bay Packers' college scouting department and the team's head equipment manager, **Dan Zegers '11** has an internship experience any young cheesehead would envy.

"I basically do anything to assist as they prepare for the draft in April," says the business administration major. "The scouts really have a good idea of what players will fit in, not only in the spots needed on the team but also what players will bring good morale to the team. They really draft 'good' guys."

There is grunt work, too. Zegers does laundry, and loads the truck or sets up the locker room ahead of game day. At home games, he is on the sidelines as ball boy. "I am there to help out when someone needs assistance," he says. "It feels like I am helping in the big picture even if it is something small.

"The Packers have been very flexible and respectful to my college schedule. They give me all the hours that I can handle."

*It was with deep regret that we learned at press time of the death of **Vernon Biever '48**. Biever, who worked with us on this article, died Oct 14, 2010. Among the many who mourn his passing we, too, wish to honor him for his enduring contribution to the world of professional football.*

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