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Athletics

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Special Olympics athlete and global ambassador Lauren Miller addresses the Blue Demons at a service initiative.

Heartfelt Connection

The Blue Demons team up with Special Olympics

As Blue Demons from every sport gathered last September in McGrath-Phillips Arena for the Wintrust Blankets Chicago service initiative for the children of the St. Vincent de Paul Center, they were greeted by a very special guest: Special Olympian and global ambassador Lauren Miller.

The 19-year-old Miller showed off her fingernails done up in DePaul's school colors. She talked about winning a gold medal in figure skating at her first competition, the Illinois Winter Games.

"I started skating when I was five years old," said Miller, who also competes in swimming and track and field. "My brother played on a hockey team in Evanston, and the coach used to pick me up and skate around with me. I fell in love with skating. When I skate, I feel free and I am proud of myself."

Miller expressed her sense of pride in representing so many other Special Olympians as a global ambassador. "I feel really committed about what I am doing," she said. "I could never see Special Olympics not being a part of

my life, and it has inspired me to help others.

"The most important thing of all is to help everyone else speak up and break down the stereotypes of people with disabilities. This is so important to me. It makes me feel like I am capable. I know I will do everything I can to get what I want."

DePaul student-athletes have been invited to become involved in various activities and events leading up to and including the Special Olympics 50th anniversary celebration taking place July 17–22. In addition, student-athletes will volunteer at various Special Olympics events throughout the year.

Highlights of the July games include the Unified (soccer) Cup July 17–20 at Toyota Park, the Eternal Flame of Hope ceremony on July 20 at Soldier Field, a signature music concert on July 21 at the United Center and the Global Day of Inclusion on July 21 at Soldier Field and the Museum Campus. The inclusion festivities will feature sports clinics, sports celebrities and current Special Olympians, along with athletes from the inaugural 1968 Special Olympics in Chicago.

A final word from Miller sums up the importance of the Special Olympics experience: "My message to DePaul's student-athletes is that becoming involved means a whole lot to me and everyone else—all the other Special Olympic athletes, the volunteers and the charities that work with us. I'd like to tell them that it will become a really big part of their lives. It will be one of the most rewarding things they have ever done."

Former DePaul Star Plotkin Heads Men's Soccer

Mark Plotkin (BUS '10) has been named the new head coach of the DePaul men's soccer program. Plotkin played on the Blue Demons soccer team as an undergraduate and most recently was associate head coach at Colgate University in Hamilton, N.Y. Plotkin also served DePaul as an assistant coach in 2012 and 2013.

Athletics Director **Jean Lenti Ponsetto (EDU '78)** said, "Mark's leadership was instrumental in fostering an environment that led Colgate to Patriot League championships and going deep into this year's NCAA men's soccer championship with its most recent Sweet 16 appearance. Mark's work ethic, positive energy and overall philosophy

of developing the total person is well-aligned with the DePaul athletics mission."

During his playing career (2006–09), Plotkin helped the Blue Demons to four consecutive appearances in the BIG EAST championship tournament, including semifinal appearances in 2007 and 2008. Plotkin was a driving force behind DePaul winning the BIG EAST Red Division title and earning the program its first appearance in the NCAA tournament in 2007. He finished his career tied for fifth all-time in games started, with 74.

Plotkin was thankful for being given the opportunity to coach at his alma mater. He said, "I'm looking forward to giving these student-athletes the best overall experience and putting this program in a position to compete for BIG EAST championships and NCAA tournament appearances on a consistent basis."

Marie Zidek Tapped as Volleyball Head Coach

Former Blue Demon Assistant Coach Marie Zidek has been named head coach of the DePaul volleyball program. Zidek has been an assistant coach at the University of San Diego for the last four seasons and helped the

program to four consecutive NCAA tournament appearances.

“We’re pleased to have Marie Zidek rejoin DePaul athletics as our head volleyball coach,” said Athletics Director **Jean Lenti Ponsetto (EDU ’78)**.



Marie Zidek

“She has had an amazing career as an assistant coach in the West Coast Conference, the Pac-12, the BIG EAST and the Mid-America Conference (MAC), capped off with four straight NCAA appearances and Top 25 rankings at San Diego. Hailing from the South Side, Marie understands DePaul’s value to the city of Chicago.”

Zidek was an assistant coach in Lincoln Park from 2010 to 2012 and was on the staff at Buffalo for one season before moving to San Diego in 2014.

Four-time NCAA tournament qualifier San Diego ranked as high as fifth in the nation during the 2016 campaign. As an assistant coach, Zidek tutored two West Coast Conference (WCC) Players of the Year, six

All-WCC team members and two All-WCC freshman team honorees. San Diego won the WCC title this past season, and senior setter Kristen Gengenbacher was named a third team All-American.

Zidek was named a 30 Under 30 Award winner by the American Volleyball Coaches Association and has served as a conference representative and publications director for assistant coaches in the BIG EAST, MAC and WCC.

She graduated from Northern Illinois in 2006 with a kinesiology degree and completed a master’s degree in exercise and sports science at Oregon State University in 2010. Zidek is also a certified strength and conditioning coach.

■ Lenti Racks Up 1,300th

Win On Feb. 17, 2018, the Blue Demons softball team defeated Presbyterian 1-0 at the Cougar Classic in Mt. Pleasant, S.C. The win represented Coach **Eugene Lenti’s (EDU ’80)** 1,300th career victory. He is now the fifth winningest coach in NCAA softball history and fourth among active coaches. “This is a great accomplishment that reflects on the efforts of our players and coaches over the years believing in themselves and playing hard day in and day out,” Lenti said. ■ **Bruno Wins No. 700** **Doug Bruno (LAS ’73, MA ’88)** notched his 700th victory as the DePaul women’s basketball coach. DePaul Athletics commemorated his 32-year Hall of Fame career with a special pregame presentation in late February. The memorable win came

in early February as the Blue Demons bested Butler 86-68 at the historic Hinkle Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. Bruno’s team followed its coach’s lead and went on to make a little history of its own two weeks later by winning a fifth consecutive BIG EAST regular-season title, a first in program history. ■ **In the Spotlight** Soccer standout Elizabeth Endy was named CoSIDA Academic All-American, while her teammates Alexa Ben and Franny Cerny were All-Region and All-BIG EAST First Team. Ben was selected by the Chicago Red Stars pro soccer team in the National Women’s Soccer League Draft. Men’s basketball players Eli Cain and Marin Maric and Amarah Coleman of women’s basketball each reached the 1,000-point milestone in their careers. Women’s basketball teammates Kelly Campbell and Mart’e



Eugene Lenti

Grays made the All-BIG EAST First Team, and Lauren Prochaska won the BIG EAST Sportsmanship Award. After pitching a no-hitter against Northern Colorado’s softball team on Feb. 11, Missy Zoch was named Louisville/NFCA DI National Pitcher of the Week. That same week, Zoch was also named the BIG EAST Pitcher of the Week.