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BASKETBALL SEASON

Hoops are back at Hinkle! The Collegian has you covered with everything from new Dawgs to the return of a legend.

Read the special basketball issue on pages 2-5.

Basketball season previews





The women's basketball roster for this season only features three returners.

Photos by Darcy Leber.





Finley Bizjack is the only returning double-digit scorer for the Dawgs.

Photos by Jonathan Wang.

Women's basketball

New season brings fresh opportunities for the Bulldogs

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Entering head coach Austin Parkinson's fourth year in charge, the women's basketball team is coming off a season with several highs and lows. The Bulldogs set a single-season attendance record, posted an upset win against Indiana and sold out Hinkle for the first time in program history. However, the team failed to post a winning record for the fifth consecutive year and lost key players to the transfer portal.

Now with a retooled roster — featuring only three returners — and a renewed sense of urgency, the Bulldogs are aiming to flip the script. Defense has been a central part of this new beginning, and the Dawgs are making it known by wearing their "Defense Lives Here" practice jerseys.

Sophomore guard Lily Zeinstra feels the practice jerseys help instill the importance of an aspect the team is looking to incorporate more strongly in games.

"Coach P loves his defense," Zeinstra said. "I feel like that sometimes gets lost in people's minds; they're really concerned about scoring and performing offensively. But defense wins championships, and I think having that on our jersey is a daily reminder that it's important."

In these early practices, Parkinson pointed out junior guard Neveah Jackson's immediate impact on the court, along with redshirt sophomore forward Mallory Miller's shooting prowess on the floor.

"Miller has really been fun to watch," Parkinson said. "She can play on the perimeter for us, she shoots threes [and] she posts up. She's been really impressive. She's one that every day has just gotten better and better. I would say Jackson's been our best defensive player. She just flies around. She's really, really fast."

Looking back at last season, there were seven matchups that were lost by less than 10 points. Sophomore forward Gabby Wilke believes that the stronger defense and faster pace of play that the team has been working on in practice can create more successful endings in these close matchups, especially when the Bulldogs enter conference play.

"I think this team is really focused on defense and pace," Wilke said. "We want to play fast [because] the Big East is a very fast conference, and in order to be successful this year, we're gonna have to really emphasize defense. So I think [those] have been two of the biggest things that this team is gonna need to do and we've really emphasized [that] in practice."

The new roster brings fresh opportunities for the team, and Parkinson thinks this year's squad has a work ethic unlike any other.

"Because we were bringing so many new faces in, we were able to get complimentary parts, so we really didn't have two of the same [type of player]," Parkinson said. "The neat part is they're all kind of learning at the same speed. It's the hardest-working team I've coached in my entire career. Every day they've come in with an attitude [to] work and get better. Obviously, there's things that we have to dial back so we're on the same page, but it's a really fun group."

Especially with a fresh slate of faces, developing team chemistry is never an easy task. Although the coaches host team activities to aid that development, Parkinson has seen the team jell together on their own.

"It's been a real natural deal," Parkinson said. "We always do things as coaches, whether it's [going] to an [Indiana] Fever game, Back 9 [or] escape rooms. We were having a meeting this summer, and we were talking about, 'Hey, what's something else we ought to do?', and one of the coaches chimed in, 'They literally hang out as a team all the time.' I've coached for 16 years and there's years that that doesn't happen. They seem to be really close, and you can see it in our practice."

With a new focus in mind, Butler plans on taking the season one game at a time. However, there are a few matchups on its slate that stand out more than others.

"I think we look at every game the same way going into it," Wilke said. "We're gonna play hard every game. But I think two of the biggest ones that I'm excited for is the Indiana game at Indiana and UConn, [as someone who is] transferring into [the Big East]. Every team wants to play UConn."

The Indiana matchup — accompanied by a game against Columbia and a trip to Florida for the Fort Myers Tip-Off — is one of the three upcoming non-conference matchups against NCAA Tournament teams that will put the Bulldogs to the test.

With these challenging contests on the schedule, Parkinson knows early growing pains may be inevitable, but the long-term goal remains clear.

"We want to be playing our best basketball by conference [play]," Parkinson said. "As we get this group together, I think what we look like in November versus January versus February, it's a team that has a chance to just get better and better and better."

To prepare for those tougher matchups, the Bulldogs will ease into the season with an exhibition game against Taylor on Oct. 28 before tipping off with a Kid's Day matchup against Wright State on Nov. 3.

Men's basketball

New faces, depth will define the Dawgs

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Entering year four of head coach Thad Matta's second stint with Butler, the Bulldogs have failed to make the tournament in each campaign. After suffering two losing seasons in three years, it is no secret that his teams have fallen short during his second stint.

In fact, throughout Matta's 20 seasons as a college basketball head coach, each of his losing campaigns and three of his four under-20 wins have come in the last three years.

After going 18-15 in 2023-24, the Dawgs went 15-20 with a berth into the inaugural College Basketball Crown field, where they made it to the second round before losing to Boise State.

Junior guard Finley Bizjack is one of the few returning players from last year's team, and is the only double-digit scorer coming back from last season.

"[Whether it] be scoring, defending, rebounding, passing — whatever it is — I want to do what it takes to win," Bizjack said. "I want to play in the [NCAA] tournament, and I'm willing to do anything it takes … I've worked really hard this summer to make sure that I can bring that [contribution] and more [to the team]."

Other returning players include sophomore guard Evan Haywood, redshirt sophomore forward Jamie Kaiser Jr. — who was injured all of last season — and junior guard Ethan McComb, who was recently converted from a walk-on to a scholarship player before this season.

Having to reconstruct the roster essentially from scratch — losing 11 players to graduation and transfer portal — Matta knew he had to go out and recruit a completely different roster for this upcoming season. However, with NIL limitations, it has been a struggle in recent years to field a competitive roster.

"We knew we wanted to get some athletes, [and] we knew we wanted to try to find the right type of fit [for the team]," Matta said. "I think one of the biggest things — and nobody f—ing talks about it — is we've been dead last in NIL … There's been a change in that regard to hopefully give us a fighting chance, but we're still millions and millions of dollars behind teams in this league."

Despite the financial challenges in the current landscape of college basketball and athletics as a whole, Matta is confident this team can get Butler back on track.

"I'm excited about this season," Matta said. "We wanted to add size, not only at the center position, but [also] at the wings. We wanted to [add] at the guard position, and I think we've done that. Now, [we have to] continue to bring these guys along and build the cohesiveness that you talked about, and see what we make happen."

In total, Matta adds a total of five transfers consisting of graduate guards Jalen Jackson and Yame Butler, graduate forward Michael Ajayi, as well as two 6-foot-11 centers in senior Yohan Traore and junior Drayton Jones.

He also brings in a class of four first-years, headlined by four-star recruits Jack McCaffrey and Azavier "Stink" Robinson.

Butler's head man plans to lean on his deep roster to keep legs fresh and opponents on their toes.

"I think we're gonna play a lot of guys, 11 or 12," Matta said. "That's what I'm excited for as a coach, that hopefully we can just keep coming at you with fresh bodies and guys coming in and doing what they do."

The talent-filled team brings a well-rounded skill set that should allow the Dawgs to throw a variety of looks at opponents. While Butler hopes to keep teams guessing by mixing up its personnel, there are a few traits that the whole team shares.

Haywood feels the Bulldogs' intelligence could be a weapon.

"Everybody's been [talking about] the athleticism, but I feel like an underrated part [of our team] is our chemistry and our IQ," Haywood said. "We have a lot of smart players. We have a lot of guys [who] didn't take long to pick up on the concepts that we did last year. We changed some concepts, but most of [them] stayed the same."

Armed with confidence and a new crop of high-level athletes, the Dawgs feel they are primed for an improved season. Exhibition games at home against Notre Dame and Indiana State will provide tune-up opportunities, but the Bulldogs' first true test will be Nov. 5 against Southern Indiana.

WBB schedule

- Oct. 28: Home game vs.Taylor (exhibition)
- Nov. 3: Home game vs.Wright State
- Nov. 7: Home game vs. Columbia
- Nov. 12: Home game vs. Central Michigan
- Nov. 16: Home game vs. Northern Kentucky
- Nov. 19: Away game vs. Indiana
- Nov. 23: Home game vs. Milwaukee
- Nov. 28: Away game vs. Dayton

MBB schedule

- Oct. 17: Home game vs. Notre Dame (exhibition)
- Oct. 29: Home game vs. Indiana State (exhibition)
- Nov. 5: Home game vs. Southern Indiana
- Nov. 8: Home game vs. IU Indy
- Nov. 11: Home game vs. Chicago State
- Nov. 15: Away game vs. SMU
- Nov. 21: Away game vs. South Carolina
- Nov. 23: Away game vs. Virginia

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Welcome to the team

Meeting the first-years of Butler basketball



Efeosa Oliogu: A 6'6" forward from Markham, ON

"I had the opportunity to grow up in Canada, live there, get the opportunity to play basketball [and] live a good life, so it was only right [to serve] my country."

"I'll describe myself as someone who can get downhill and can play. [I am a] very good shooter as well, [I have] good catch-and-shoot [ability]. Good all around, to be honest."



Anna Wypych: A 6'0" guard from Rockford, MI

"I definitely want [us] to make it to the [NCAA] tournament this year. Coming out on top of the Big East would be huge [as well]. "

"Off the court, [the biggest adjustment is] definitely being on my own and living on my own. On the court, I'd say defense."



Azavier Robinson: A 6'2" guard from Indianapolis, IN

"I played [basketball] because my brothers played it, and I looked up to them."

"[The nickname 'Stink'] came from my mother. She called me that when I was a kid, and it was a me and her thing."



Bryson Cardinal: A 6'7" forward from Westfield, IN

"I started playing basketball from the [first] day that I can remember. Both of my parents played in college, so from the beginning, I've always had a ball in my hands."

"Ultimately, I chose [36] because it was [my dad's] number, and I kind of want to carry on his legacy."

Photos by Darcy Leber and Alyson Swearingen.

Jackson Keith: A 6'5" forward from Durham, NC

"I normally wear number five, but five was taken. I was like, 'You know what? Maybe it's just something to start a new chapter with,' and then I wanted a really low number so zero kind of felt good for me."

"I'm just an intense guy. Whatever the coach wants me to do, that's what I do. I can make shots, I can get to the rim, I can play defense. I'm really physical, so I can guard one through four."



Jack McCaffery: A 6'9" forward from Iowa City, IA

"I felt the most comfortable here out of all of my offers. It was actually the only school I ended up visiting. Once I got here, it kind of felt like home."

"We all know that there's been a drought that we need to [end], we need to make it to the [NCAA] Tournament. So, I think that everyone's pretty unified in having that there. That's our team's main goal."



Addison Baxter: A 5'9" guard from Larwill, IN

"I definitely think I'm an attacker. Whether it's kicking [out], scoring or just getting movement, I think that's the best part of my game."

"I don't play it very often, but I do like Fortnite. [For a squad, I'm] one hundred percent [picking Mallory Miller]. [Caroline Dotsey] [because] I just know she's a gamer, and [Chloe Jeffers]."

Read the full stories on thebutlercollegian.com

What you need to know

Men's basketball vs. Notre Dame

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The Bulldogs return to the court for the 2025-26 season with a premier exhibition match against Notre Dame on Oct. 17 in Hinkle Fieldhouse.

This exhibition will give head coach Thad Matta a good sense of how he wants to handle the rotations for the season with a roster consisting of 11 new faces.

Here is what you need to know as the Bulldogs tip off the season against the Fighting Irish:

Who: Butler vs. Notre Dame
When: Oct. 17, 7:00 p.m.
Where: Hinkle Fieldhouse
How to watch: Fuego 92.7 FM

No need to overreact

While there will be plenty of new faces playing competitively for the first time in Hinkle, it is crucial not to overreact to a game that ultimately means nothing. The exhibition does not affect either team's record and will be treated as such.

"First and foremost, as the head coach, I've got to keep the big picture," Matta said. "I tell these guys every day that I'm coaching for March. So, October 17, yeah, it's a big night, but do we get better in that game? That's all I'm concerned about."

There will be a balance of first-years playing extended minutes, and just about every healthy player should see the court for both teams. Per Matta, graduate guard Jalen Jackson — who has been dealing with an ankle injury — is expected to play limited minutes while junior center Kevin Ndzie — who has been dealing with a hurt back — is the only player for the Dawgs who could miss the exhibition.

"With these games, it's a bit like an NBA-type exhibition," Matta said. "We want to play our best minutes, but we want to get the new guys out there too. We got to get them acclimated to the college games. It's a different game than high school. But also we got to look at the rotations and playing deep, who's playing well together and who's doing their job, and who's not doing their job. So having it as early as it is, I think, will be good for us."

Scouting the Fighting Irish

As for Notre Dame, the Irish are coming off a similarly disappointing season as the Dawgs, going 15-18.

With the Irish coming to Hinkle, it will be a homecoming for head coach Micah Shrewsberry, who was an assistant under former Butler head coach Brad Stevens from 2007-11. Additionally, Stevens' son, Brady, a redshirt first-year guard under Shrewsberry, will be playing in the house his dad built for the first time.

Notre Dame returns an impressive eight players from last year's team, including leading scorer junior guard Markus Burton — who poured in an ACC-best 21 points per game last season — as well as Shrewsberry's son, Braeden, a junior guard who averaged nearly 15 per game last year.

The Irish will also be debuting an impressive first-year class headlined by the 2025 nationally-ranked No. 18 recruit Jalen Haralson.

Expect a competitive game, with the combined nine first-years from both teams receiving plenty of playing time.



The Dawgs retooled with 11 new players on this year's roster.

Photo by Jonathan Wang.



Gordon Hayward was the leading scorer on Butler's first-ever Final Four team.
Photo courtesy of Bleacher Report.

Gordon Hayward rejoins Butler men's basketball in new role

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Gordon Hayward, a Butler Athletics Hall of Famer, was named Executive Basketball Advisor on Tuesday.

Hayward played two years at Butler and led the team to a national championship appearance in 2010. He went on to have a 14-year NBA career and was named to the 2017 All-Star team.

The new volunteer role encompasses scouting, recruitment and player development, as well as professional development with current student-athletes.

Head coach Thad Matta expanded on Hayward's responsibilities.

"He's not gonna be coaching or anything like that," Matta said. "But [he will help] with recruiting and bringing families in and [sharing] his story, why he chose Butler and all the success that he had during the time that he was here."

In a press release, Hayward detailed why he decided to rejoin the Dawgs.

"There were a lot of people who were instrumental in my development on and off the court during my time at Butler, and I'm excited to give back to the program by helping today's Bulldogs in a similar way," Hayward stated. "I look forward to building relationships with the staff and our current and future Bulldogs in order to positively impact the program that I care deeply about."

Matta is excited about what Hayward will bring to the program.

"He's obviously an all-time great here and being retired, he's got free time on his hands," Matta said. "[It will be great] getting him around our players, they all aspire to go to where he's been. I'm excited to get him around and pick his brain, and most importantly, just have him around our guys."

Butler's vice president and director of athletics, Grant Leiendecker, was a teammate of Hayward's. He feels that Hayward's professional experience will be an asset when it comes to mentoring current players, as stated in the press release.

"We are thrilled to formally engage Gordon with Butler Basketball in this new role," Leiendecker stated. "[His] wealth of knowledge, combined with his deep connection to Butler, makes him uniquely positioned to have an immediate and meaningful impact on our program. His leadership, insight and passion for this place will be invaluable as we continue to build the future of Butler Basketball. This program owes Gordon a lot, and it's really meaningful that he is giving back to Butler Basketball once again, sharing his time and talents."

WBB schedule
Nov. 29: Away game vs.Georgia
Dec. 4: Away game vs.Seton Hall
Dec. 7: Away game vs. Marquette
Dec. 11: Home game vs. Indiana State
Dec. 14: Home game vs. Eastern Illinois
Dec. 19: Home game vs. Xavier
Dec. 28: Home game vs. Connecticut
Jan. 4: Away game vs. Creighton

MBB schedule
Nov. 28: Home game vs. Wright State
Dec. 2: Home game vs. Eastern Michigan
Dec. 6: Home game vs. Boise State
Dec. 13: Home game vs. Providence
Dec. 16: Away game vs. Connecticut
Dec. 20: Away game vs. Northwestern
Dec. 22: Home game vs. NJIT
Dec. 30: Away game vs. Creighton

A first for the team, but not for Falecia Porter

Meet the first general manager for women's basketball

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It was a 10-degree Christmas morning in Stonington, Connecticut when Falecia Porter, women's basketball general manager and director of player development, stepped outside into her driveway to find a gift that would pave the way for her future: a brand-new basketball hoop.

This gift was special for 10-year-old Porter, as it became her way of combating the restlessness she sometimes felt from being an only child.

"I started going stir crazy," Porter said. "So, I asked for this basketball hoop and started spending all my time in the driveway. From there, I grew up playing the game."

Porter played her way into college, starting out at UConn Avery Point and earning a scholarship to Shaw University. She transferred back to Avery Point for her senior year, but lost her eligibility and had to sit out due to NCAA transfer rules at the time.

After this abrupt ending to her playing career, Porter went on to finish her degree at Southern Connecticut State University, but quickly found her way back to the court by coaching local high schoolers at Stonington and Fitch.

"I think I fell in love with training others and helping grow the game," Porter said. "If you talk to anybody who's been an athlete, people have really good coaching experiences and really poor coaching experiences. I want to be part of the good. I want to make an impact on the next generation."

She extended this impact and passion by working alongside her husband, Keith Porter — whom she met through basketball — to create their own 3,000-square-foot facility to train and develop players of all ages and skill levels. This facility opened the door for the couple by becoming a place for the WNBA's Connecticut Sun to hold some of their youth programs and where professional stars like DiJonai Carrington went to train.

Through this initiative, Porter landed a front-office job with the Sun, where she worked to improve their youth programming and brand awareness across the state.

At this time, Porter was now coaching high schoolers, running a business and working for a WNBA team all at once.

"I was a business owner for five years, and that's a lot in and of itself," Porter said. "But I always wanted to stay involved in coaching in one way or another. When making the move here to Indy, that was probably the hardest thing to leave because of the relationships you get to build with the kids."

Just this year, Porter and her husband came to Indianapolis to take on new opportunities. Keith jumped into his current role as a player development coach for the Indiana Fever and Porter found her way to Butler.

Porter's general manager position is new for Butler women's basketball, but was implemented for the men's team two seasons ago. The title encompasses a variety of roles, from being a point of contact for NIL deals to working with players on and off the court to help build their brand.

Although the role is new, head coach Austin Parkinson notes that it is nothing out of the ordinary for Porter.

"When she was with [the] Connecticut Sun, she also had to wear a lot of different hats," Parkinson said. "It wasn't just one thing. So for her coming here, we felt that it would be beneficial to have someone with her background. Even before I hired her, I ran into like five different people that had major positive interactions with her, so I'm not surprised with how hard she's worked so far."

Porter's days with the team are now spent contacting about 10 companies per day, helping form deals that will benefit the athletes and working with the players on the court to provide extra coaching.

When observing Porter at work, sophomore guard Lily Zeinstra notes her attention to detail, as Porter helped get an NIL deal with Zeinstra's favorite hair tie brand, TIY.

"She saw me wearing these hair ties in practice and contacted the company to make a deal," Zeinstra said. "She went out of her way to reach out to them, which I think is super special."

Parkinson also expressed how Porter's experience working at a vast level of basketball environments has helped bring new ideas for the Bulldogs.



Falecia Porter joins the Bulldog staff after previously working with the WNBA's Connecticut Sun.
Photo courtesy of Darcy Leber.

"She gives a fresh perspective on things like 'Hey, we've done this before, what do you think?' or 'Well, this is what I see,'" Parkinson said. "I've really enjoyed – especially in our meetings when we're planning — the feedback that she's given and her energy."

Establishing a voice in important discussions for professional and collegiate basketball, Porter strives to remind herself of the beginnings in her childhood driveway that got her to where she is today – just her, a basketball and a hoop.

"I will be watching or just literally looking at a basketball and think, 'Wow, look how far this sport has taken me; [Keith and I] moved across the country for it," Porter said. "I just try to keep a level of gratitude all the time, but I should probably think back to those early years more when I was a 10-year-old just shooting around in my driveway and not letting myself go inside until I made a certain number of free throws."

Bulldog primed to bounce back

Jamie Kaiser Jr. returns from ankle injury with renewed ambition

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Jamie Kaiser Jr. — a Maryland transfer and former top-75 recruit — was primed for a breakout season when he arrived at Butler. That expectation disintegrated, though, after the then-sophomore forward went down with a preseason injury, ending his 2024-25 campaign before it began.

Kaiser suffered an ankle impingement, partially caused by overtraining.

"There was an extra bone in the back of my heel," Kaiser said. "I overused it, and then it snapped off. It was pretty painful, but once they took it out and I did my recovery, I was all good."

Initially, he did not grasp the severity of the injury. Anti-inflammatories were the first course of action, but they proved ineffective. After some painkilling shots were determined to be needed too often to be viable, Kaiser had to take the surgical route.

Head coach Thad Matta felt that the Bulldogs were heavily affected by losing the talented three-and-D player.

"That was detrimental to us last year," Matta said. "We were banking on him to play a huge role for us."

It was a disappointing loss for the team, but even tougher on Kaiser. The injury was the first major one of his career, so being forced to sit on the bench and out of the action was a new, unwelcome experience. Still, Kaiser made the most of it.

"It was terrible," Kaiser said. "But I had a great perspective. I knew that once I got back, I was going to have so much time to get better, and I was also going to be able to see the game from a different lens. I was able to watch practice every single day and study a lot more film. I think overall, it actually helped me."

A positive attitude helped Kaiser, but a strong work ethic is what really made his recovery count, and his teammates took notice.

Sophomore guard Evan Haywood can personally attest to the redshirt sophomore's daily grind.

"He's one of the hardest workers I've ever been around," Haywood said. "He's [in Hinkle] late at night, shooting 400 to 500 free throws. His recovery has been great."

That hard work had to start slowly, as Kaiser was in a boot and mostly confined to his room for the first week. After that, the boot stayed on, accompanied by a knee scooter to help him get to classes. For the first couple of months post-surgery, rest and recovery was the recipe to healing, which was a tough ask for a Division I athlete.

"I'm a very energetic person, so sitting in one place for a long time just sucks," Kaiser said. "I had to find things to keep my mind occupied besides homework and watching practice."

However, once he was able to return to practice, Kaiser made his presence felt, bringing energy and effort to Hinkle Fieldhouse every day. He routinely leads the pack during end-of-practice sprints, finishing first numerous times.

Matta credits him with making a strong impact on the team without ever checking into a game.

"Last year, when he came back to practice and started to go live [in] late January, he made us better," Matta said. "He came in, he competed, he went at [Jahmyl Telfort] every day, and that was big for us."

Playing such an active role in practice proved to be a big help for Kaiser. As a transfer, he was still learning Butler's system, figuring out his teammates and even continuing to adjust to college basketball, having played only one year. That extra time to observe allowed for increased understanding of the ebbs and flows of a season.

"Sitting out and watching and seeing the highs [and] lows, I think that's helped him right now," Matta said. "He's shooting the ball at a great clip, he defends [and] he's doing a great job of rebounding for us. And Jamie is a great kid. He wants to do well [individually], but he wants to win also."

Now fully healthy, Kaiser has his sights set on being an impact player for the Dawgs this season. His desire to contribute is clear to those around him.

"I can tell that he's hungry to make a statement for himself because he can be an all-conference player 1,000 percent," Haywood said. "I believe in him and I think that he's gonna help us win a lot of games."

Kaiser's breakout bid may have simply been delayed, not destroyed. Feeling good in mind and body, he is ready to put his stamp on the Dawgs upcoming season.

"I feel like I'm in the best shape I've ever been in my life," Kaiser said. "I'm a lot faster, a lot stronger and [more] athletic than I've ever been. I'm just excited to see what it looks like when I start playing."



Jamie Kaiser Jr. will take the court this season for the first time since transferring from Maryland.
Photo courtesy of Butler Athletics.

WBB schedule

Jan. 7:	Jan. 10:	Jan. 14:	Jan. 18:	Jan. 21:	Jan. 25:	Feb. 1:	Feb. 4:
Home game vs.Georgetown	Away game vs.St. John's	Home game vs. Providence	Away game vs. Villanova	Home game vs. DePaul	Home game vs. Marquette	Away game vs. Xavier	Home game vs. Villanova

MBB schedule

Jan. 3:	Jan. 6:	Jan. 14:	Jan. 17:	Jan. 20:	Jan. 23:	Jan. 28:	Jan. 31:
Home game vs. Villanova	Home game vs. St. John's	Away game vs. Xavier	Away game vs. Seton Hall	Home game vs. DePaul	Home game vs. Marquette	Away game vs. St. John's	Home game vs. Georgetown

Hinkle Fieldhouse installs new video board ahead of basketball season

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Butler has installed a new central video board as part of a plethora of Hinkle Fieldhouse upgrades. These new additions include new ribbon boards and scoreboard above Dawg Pound, new scorers tables, vomitory displays at the 300 level, a matte finish on the court and even 19-inch video screens in each of the restrooms throughout the fieldhouse.

These efforts are spearheaded by athletic director Grant Leiendecker through Butler's new partnership with PlayFly Sports in efforts to increase fan engagement and marketability.

PlayFly, which is a multimedia rights company, works with schools all over the country to manage all the digital signage in the arena, radio, social media and any other potential ad-generating spaces on behalf of the school.

With Leiendecker's goal of creating a better fan experience, Butler's PlayFly general manager, Kyle James, is able to follow his lead and bring the ideas to life.

"Grant [Leiendecker] has a goal to have the best atmosphere in college basketball," James said. "We're going to create a unique fan experience with the new assets, but also drive new revenue through those opportunities. We have some very premium spots right behind the basket, so when the point guard is dribbling up the floor, that camera angle is going to right at the static, massive premium spot. From an advertiser standpoint, that is as good as it gets."

In addition to generating ad-revenue, Leiendecker hopes to improve the overall fan engagement and game day experience in Hinkle with the changes.

"Part of our arrangement with [PlayFly] is they're helping to fund the renovations here," Leiendecker said. "Our previous video boards were installed over 10 years ago before we even had air conditioning in the building. They were built to be outdoors, lower definition, and technology has evolved so much that a new product will allow us to do more creative things on game day. [I'm] really excited about what it's going to do not just for our fan experience, [but] the student athlete experience."

The additional revenue generated from these new ad-spaces will be able to be put back into athletics as Butler claws to stay competitive in the ever-changing NIL world of college basketball and athletics.

From a player's perspective, the new upgrades add to the allure of Hinkle.

"It's awesome," first-year men's basketball forward Bryson Cardinal said. "We haven't practiced here in about a month, and you kind of forget what it used to look like because it's so great. It kind of brings a little bit more life in here."



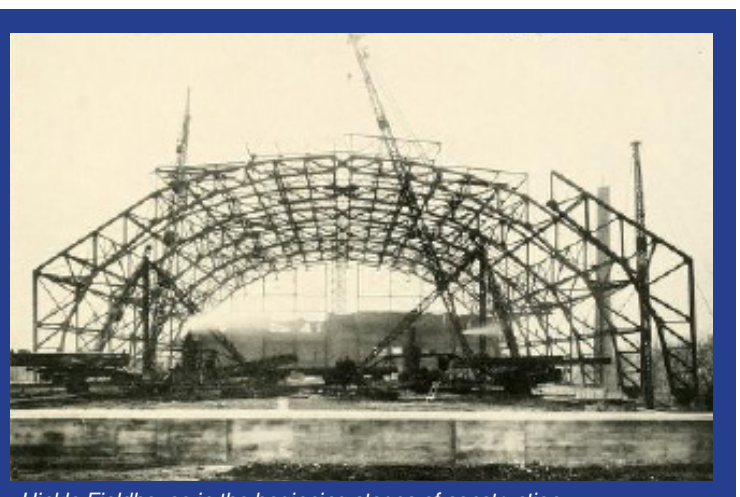
Hinkle Fieldhouse installed over 2,700 square feet of LED video board in preparation for the upcoming basketball season.
Photo by Samantha Noga.

Historic Hinkle: A look into the fieldhouse's beginnings

A word from "The Drift" yearbook in 1929:

"After-dinner speakers galore, at one sort of banquet and another, as well as ***Collegian*** *editorial writers, have been prophesying and discussing what Butler 'will do when it gets out to Fairview.'*

And now, at last, the long wait is over. *The new era is here. With a stadium that is about as good as any in America, with* ***a fieldhouse that has few equals anywhere****, and with a coaching staff that knows how to turn out teams,* ***Butler has become one of the leading athletic schools of the country."***



Hinkle Fieldhouse in the beginning stages of construction.
Photo courtesy of The Drift (1929).

Threads of tradition: The fashion game behind the game

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Sticking with the Swoosh

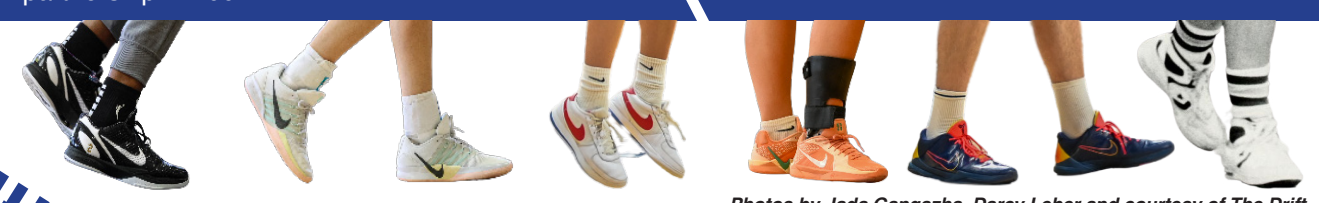
At the beginning of this school year, Butler Athletics announced its multi-year contract extension with Nike. This partnership with Nike began with only the basketball teams in the 1990s and expanded into a department-wide partnership in 2007.

Sneaker show off

WBB: Nike Sabrina 2 "Activate"

MBB: Caitlin Clark's Nike Kobe V Potro

Throwback: Converse shoes, owned by Nike, used to be worn by the basketball teams.



Photos by Jada Gangazha, Darcy Leber and courtesy of The Drift.

Court culture

An avid fashion studier and designer herself, professor of theatre Wendy Meaden emphasized the influence that culture has on sports fashion:

Basketball shorts become looser-fit throughout the years.
Photos courtesy of The Drift.



"In the mid to late 20th century, up through the 80s, and until we got into the 90s, clothes were pretty well-fit. They started to loosen up in the 90s, which is a reference to popular styles in hip hop, rap and the strength of our diverse culture. ***So, the fashion in the general population definitely influences what we think is cool in sports."***

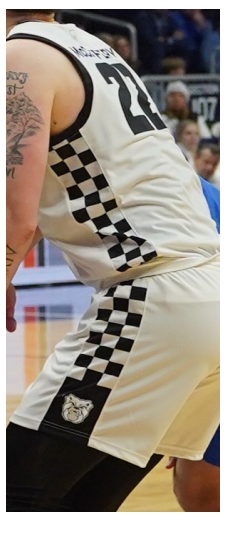
Fresh fonts and cool colors

Fast facts and players' favorites:



Photos by Jonathan Wang and Jada Gangazha.

"With sports uniforms, usually you have a light and a dark for a home and away team. This comes from when home teams were more likely to be close to a washing machine. It was just easier to launder stuff. So, the home team wore white because they were closer."
- Wendy Meaden, professor of theatre and costume designer



"I love the little race-day uniforms that we had last year. The Little checkers. I think that's my favorite. I'm a big race guy. I love the Indy 500, so I think that's my favorite."
- First-year forward Bryson Cardinal

"I feel like a lot of people like our script font white uniforms. That was something we put a lot of thought into."
- Women's basketball head coach Austin Parkinson



"I think it is really fun that we have a pink practice jersey. Coach Parkinson really pushed for that. Always on Wednesday practices, we wear pink in honor of 'Mean Girls.'"
- Sophomore guard Lily Zeinstra

WBB schedule

Feb. 7:	Feb. 10:	Feb. 14:	Feb. 18:	Feb. 21:	Feb. 25:	March 1:
Away game vs. Connecticut	Away game vs. St. John's	Home game vs. Providence	Away game vs. Villanova	Home game vs. DePaul	Home game vs. Marquette	Home game vs. Seton Hall

MBB schedule

Feb. 4:	Feb. 7:	Feb. 11:	Feb. 15:	Feb. 18:	Feb. 21:	Feb. 25:	March 4:	March 7:
Away game vs. Providence	Away game vs. Marquette	Home game vs. Connecticut	Home game vs. Seton Hall	Away game vs. Georgetown	Home game vs. Xavier	Away game vs. Villanova	Home game vs. Creighton	Away game vs. DePaul

CaPS expands career resources with 24/7 support

New resources provide support to students and alumni

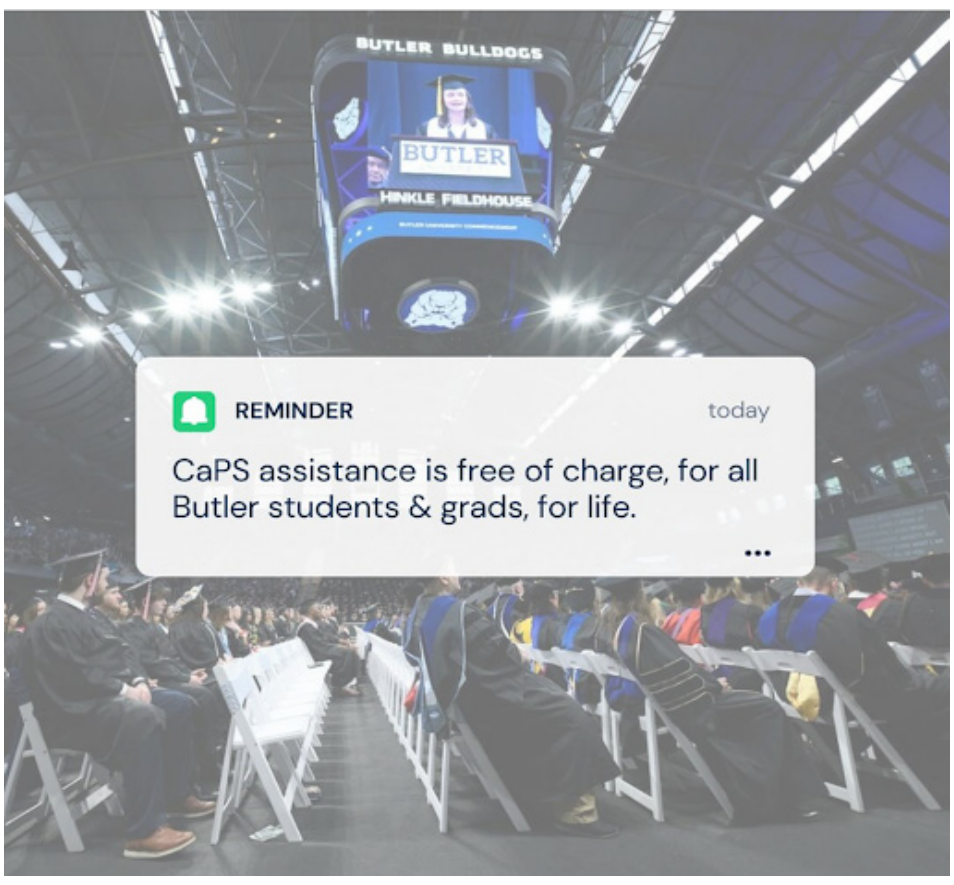
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Butler University's Career and Professional Success (CaPS) office is expanding its career support with new 24/7 online tools, offering students and alumni access to resume help, interview practice and job search resources at any time of day.

CaPS is open to all Butler students and alumni, regardless of major and offers free lifetime services. The office provides career advising, graduate school preparation and opportunities to connect with alumni and employers through networking events and workshops.

This fall, two major resources, Hiration and the Indeed Job Search Academy,were added to the CaPS resources. They are designed to make professional development more flexible and accessible. Students can log in with their Butler credentials to use the free services, which help with resumes, cover letters, interviews and job searches.

Gary Beaulieu, the senior director for career and professional success, detailed the purpose and specifics of the new additions to CaPS.



Butler CaPS goes above and beyond with resources for students and alumni.
Photo courtesy of Butler Careers.

"We know that students operate on a different schedule than we do," said Beaulieu. "We're not here at 11 o'clock at night when a student might be at home working on their resume. We want them to be able to have students get resources whenever it's time for them to utilize the services."

Hiration is an AI platform that allows users to upload a resume and job description to receive feedback on how well they match. The system offers guidance on cover letters, LinkedIn profiles and even provides virtual mock interviews that analyze posture, eye contact and tone.

"One of the most important things that I think [Hiration] has is its mock interview tool," Beaulieu said. "You can give it specific questions, you can put in questions that you want the tool to ask you, or you can put in what type of industry you are interested in."

The new Indeed Job Search Academy works in tandem with Hiration by helping students research companies, compare salaries and understand industry expectations. The platform provides workshops, career guides, and live or recorded webinars, along with tools for company reviews and salary insights.

"Indeed is a meta job search site, it has a huge amount of information," Beaulieu said. "The Job Search Academy breaks it down into different tools."

Beyond AI, CaPS has also updated its Professional Guide that helps students with their career journey. The comprehensive guide provides resources such as resume help, Curriculum Vitae instructions, cover letter templates and more.

Mike Thomas, the senior associate director for career and professional success and director of the career development program for the Lacy School of Business, explained more about CaPS specific 24/7 resources for students.

"Our entire guide to professional success was a physical booklet," Thomas said. "Now all of the pieces are apart and available online. There's grad school prep, there's a link to Hiration, how you handle references and some additional material."

Junior marketing major Grace Schwertfeger has firsthand experience using CaPS resources.

"What made me go to CaPS was the assistance I've received with my connection to my advisor in helping with my future," Schwertfeger said. "They have helped me prepare for my mock interview as well as locate where I should go for important business opportunities."

Butler CaPS plans to continue expanding its resources for students and alumni in order to help provide success for whatever that means for that student or alum.

"We're always looking for resources that we think are going to help students," Beaulieu said. "We continue investing in ourselves as well through professional development, to make sure that we know today's college students' needs."

CaPS is located in Dugan Hall 102 for all students and Jordan Hall 209 for liberal arts and sciences students. Appointments can be scheduled through Navigate or Handshake.

Research presented on censorship in children's literature

Disproportionate targeting leads to lack of representation for children in America

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The Desmond Tutu Peace Lab hosted a community conversation centered on censorship in children's literature on Oct. 10. The event consisted of a research summary, conducted on banned and challenged children's books, followed by a Q&A discussion.

Brooke Harris Garad, an assistant professor of education, and Hank Fleetwood, a senior political science major and Peace Lab intern, shared their findings from a joint research project. They were also assisted by Butler alumna Grace Erickson.

Literature censorship involves the banning and challenging of certain books. When books are banned, they are removed from the shelves of libraries, bookstores and classrooms.

Harris Garad shared concerns about the social dynamics behind book banning. Debates and discussions revolving around free speech and expression have recently risen in the United States.

"We're in a very interesting sociopolitical time," Harris Garad said. "I would argue we're really negotiating this idea of what free speech means and this idea that we all have the ability to censor others when they speak about things that we don't like."

During the event, Harris Garad and Fleetwood dissected a multitude of children's books and presented three: "And Tango Makes Three", "Something Happened in Our Town" and "Julián is a Mermaid". All three books, though very subtly, have been found to challenge traditional American values like respect for authority and heteronormativity, among others. They also found that marginalized and minority communities are disproportionately targeted in book bannings.

"When you're banning books — oftentimes these books feature characters of color or LGBTQ+ characters," Fleetwood said. "When kids do not see themselves in what they're reading, then they feel less comfortable with their own identities."

Harris Garad's background as an educator allowed her to corroborate the consequences of book banning. She also shared her perspective as a parent. She spoke about her daughter's fourth-grade class, which includes two students who identify as LGBTQ+.

"There's a decrease in empathy, which I think is a key component of peace in the world," Harris Garad said. "There is [also] the risk of children not feeling comfortable in their own skin, and I think that's really a sad reality and a responsibility of educators to help children feel seen, heard, and valued."

Hannah Moser, a junior English education major, had prior experience with censorship and banned books during high school, but was unsure how that could relate to children's literature.

"As a future educator, [I] would want to make sure my [students] are represented in the literature I have in my classroom," Moser said. "I would love to be able to include diverse texts and texts that represent them as people into my curriculum and their learning."

From the perspective of a professor, Harris Garad wants to ensure that education students like Moser are well-equipped for professional struggles they might face relating to book banning and freedom of speech.

"I feel, as a professor in the college of education, that I have a responsibility to prepare students for some of the challenges they might face in their profession — the idea of having children's literature in their classrooms [that] can bring them under fire from their leadership or from the parents of these children in their classroom," Harris Garad said. "I think it's important that they know some of the history and just some of the ways to navigate how they can support their kids and also keep their jobs."

Harris Garad, Fleetwood and Moser all expressed that bringing publicity and awareness to the history and effects of book banning are crucial to helping stop it.

Fleetwood noted that book banning often backfires and sales of the books skyrocket thanks to increased media coverage, which helps to fight censorship.

"What we've seen is that when a book is challenged, and it comes up in the news, that's really a financial boost, and it drives interest for that book," Fleetwood said.

Fleetwood encouraged combating censorship by showing up to public hearings for book bannings and expressing disagreement.

Protesting the banning of books, alongside advocating for literature that represents a wide range of students in classrooms will help promote overall education and could encourage students to read books that reflect their lives and stories.



Brooke Harris Garad and Hank Fleetwood presented their research and sponsored a community conversation on censorship in children's literature.
Photo by Alyson Swearingen.

‘Peacemaker’ packs a punch

The future of James Gunn’s DCU

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The Peacemaker himself cannot believe his own success.

Photo courtesy of JoBlo.

In 2021, James Gunn wrote and directed “The Suicide Squad”, and it was praised as everything David Ayer’s “Suicide Squad” in 2016 should have been. Now, Gunn is the co-CEO of DC Studios with Peter Safran and has spearheaded the new DC Universe (DCU)’s first three projects.

The second season of “Peacemaker” is the DCU’s latest installment, and it is nowhere near the wholesome hope-fest that “Superman” was — “Peacemaker” has a hard TV-MA rating with the nudity, language and gore to prove it. The show also did not pull punches with its world-building. The concept of the multiverse is not only introduced incredibly early, but serves as a focal point for the plot.

Katie Baumgartner, a junior environmental studies and computer science double major, appreciates Gunn’s ability to bring more obscure characters into the limelight.

“DC doesn’t have many outrageously popular characters — there are just a [few] main ones,” Baumgartner said. “Bringing in side characters like Peacemaker and other more obscure superheroes is a really good idea, because it helps expand [the world].”

Though “Superman” acted as the DCU’s theatrical debut, Gunn’s new superhero franchise started quieter with “Creature Commandos”, an animated show on HBO Max. “Creature Commandos” is essentially a third Suicide Squad installment, as it follows a group of misfit monsters working for the government to earn time off their prison sentences. Between this, Marvel’s “Guardians of the Galaxy” and “Peacemaker”, Gunn’s love for found families and hopeful stories is apparent.

Gunn’s self-referential approach has raised questions about what is considered canon to the DCU. Fans are eager to know how much of the original DC Extended Universe — often referred to as the Snyderverse after “Man of Steel” director Zack Snyder — is part of the new timeline.

First-year journalism major Natalia Collazo expressed that starting completely fresh and ignoring the Snyderverse would only have made the DCU more confusing.

“Starting to read comics is kind of messy,” Collazo said. “There isn’t an exact ‘start here, end here’ thing — you just jump in the middle and go about it. For movie adaptations [as well], it’s difficult sometimes to know where to start. If [Gunn] already has some of Snyder’s work, he can integrate that into his universe pretty smoothly. It makes his job a little easier, and it gives the viewers some continuity.”

Gunn has confirmed through various outlets that certain parts of the Snyderverse are also part of the new timeline, though they are mostly his own projects. The “Peacemaker” recap at the top of the second season showed that the entirety of the first one happened in the DCU, except that the Justice League’s cameo at the very end was replaced by the Justice Gang, David Corenswet’s Superman and Milly Alcock’s Supergirl.

Does this mean that all of the dialogue in the first season applies to the DCU? The titular character — portrayed by John Cena — directly mentions specific events of “The Suicide Squad”, such as his duel with Bloodsport — portrayed by Idris Elba.

The second season does confirm that at least the basic plot of “The Suicide Squad” happened; a task force of criminals was deployed to the fictional country of Corto Maltese and fought Starro the Conqueror, and Peacemaker killed Rick Flag, Jr. — portrayed by Joel Kinnaman. However, it is unclear if the DCU’s version of events had the same team or if those characters will be played by the same people.

Looking forward, the DCU is set to have a series of Chapters similar to the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s Phases. Chapter One: Gods and Monsters is set to, among other things, introduce DC’s main trinity of heroes: Batman, Wonder Woman and Superman, the latter of which is already well-established.

Junior criminology-psychology major Savannah Sacino hopes Robert Pattinson of “The Batman” will become the DCU’s Dark Knight.

“I’m really sad [and] don’t think that [will] be the case, but I think that [Pattinson’s] Batman and the new Superman would go really well together,” Sacino said. “I think it’s perfect having a super dark, gritty detective Batman with a super bright and happy Superman. Both [versions] are pretty true to the comics, and I just love ‘The Batman’, so I would love for that to be in the DCU.”

Gunn and “The Batman” writer-director Matt Reeves have vehemently denied that Pattinson’s Batman will appear in the DCU. Though some have speculated that “Clayface” — the body horror movie releasing in 2026 — would connect the DCU and “The Batman”, the film seems firmly set only in the DCU. The best fans can hope for is a multiversal crossover.

Collazo expressed that the divergence of genres and tones across “Superman”, “Peacemaker” and “Clayface” is healthy for a burgeoning franchise.

“Superhero movies [should not be] a genre, and right now they are,” Collazo said. “There can be stories about heroes that dive into different themes and that are unique. [The DCU] should be a collection of movies that are so vastly different but connected through the core of DC. [‘Clayface’] won’t just be another superhero movie, it will be a [horror] movie about — in this case — a supervillain.”

There is a lot in store for Gunn’s DCU, and Chapter One has only just begun. Gunn remains vigilant in keeping fans informed on social media while holding his cards close to his chest, never revealing more than he wishes. There is no telling just what he has planned or just how expansive his world will be.

“Peacemaker” is available to stream on HBO Max.

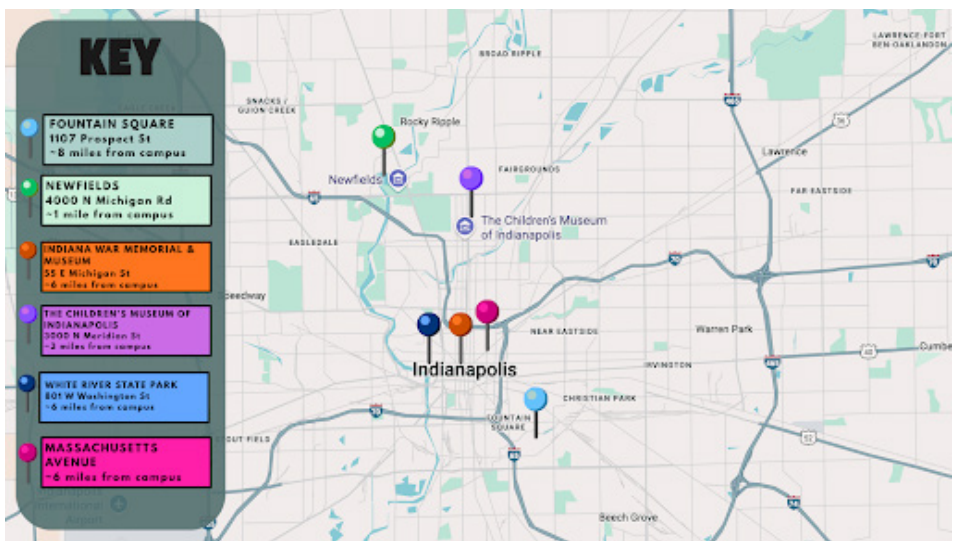
Dawg houses away from home

Places to show family from out of state

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Between Homecoming, Family Weekend and sporting events, Butler students always have opportunities for family to visit from out of town. However, Butler is not a large campus. After touring the dorms, dining halls, academic buildings and athletic complexes, there is not much else to see.

Luckily, the Indianapolis area is full of unique sites and attractions to keep family visits interesting. Butler students weighed in on some of their favorite places to showcase.



Some of the most interesting places to see in Indy are just a bike ride away.

Graphic by Maddy Broderick.

Fountain Square

Fountain Square is a lively downtown neighborhood with plenty to see and do. After recognition as one of Indianapolis’s six cultural districts in 1999, the area surrounding the Lady Spray Fountain has been revitalized with shops, restaurants and entertainment. The Fountain Square Theater building alone is home to a hotel, restaurants, a rooftop garden and duckpin bowling alleys. The area is also connected to the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, making the site very easy to include in a multiple-stop trip.

Newfields

All 152 acres of Newfields are packed with interesting things to see. The grounds include the Indianapolis Museum of Art, an expansive gallery containing over 500,000 works. The gardens make for a beautiful walking trail, and Harvest Nights add a multitude of spooky decorations to experience at night.

Indiana War Memorial

The Indiana War Memorial serves as a tribute to the Hoosiers who risked everything to fight for the United States. The main floor of the building contains a list of every Indiana citizen who served in the First and Second World Wars, Korea and Vietnam.

Kyle Insignares, a senior finance and entrepreneurship and innovation double major, said this site was a must-see, especially for families with ties to the military.

“Being in the military myself, [the monument] is a very inspiring place,” Insignares said. “It’s great to be able to share that inspiration with my family.”

The building also contains a free museum that features an AH-1 Cobra Attack Helicopter and a gallery of artifacts related to the USS Indianapolis.

The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis

For those with younger siblings, the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis has plenty to do for all ages, including the Riley Children’s Health Sports Legends Experience.

Sophomore psychology-sociology major Ku Slider discussed why the museum should not be overlooked.

“It might seem strange [to visit] because we’re adults, but the fact that it’s the largest children’s museum in the world makes it worth a visit,” Slider said. “One of my close friends even told me it’s his favorite place in the world.”

White River State Park

The White River State Park is perfect for more outdoorsy relatives and is connected to the beautiful 4.5-mile White River Trail. The location offers a great place to walk or bike, and offers easy access to Victory Field, the Indianapolis Zoo and the NCAA Hall of Champions.

The park is also the site of the Indiana State Museum, allowing visitors to experience the city’s history and greenery in one place.

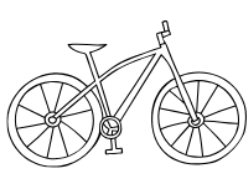
Massachusetts Avenue

This downtown area fosters an environment of safety and family fun, with plenty of options for food and entertainment. Mass Ave is also an Indianapolis Cultural Trail stop, making it very easy to incorporate into a day trip.

Michael Overbeck, a senior finance and marketing double major, discussed why he enjoys bringing his family to this area.

“I feel like the combination of historical architecture and modern businesses highlights the best of what the city has to offer,” Overbeck said. “It truly seems like there is never a dull moment whenever I visit.”

Overall, the city of Indianapolis offers a multitude of locations and experiences to make family visits more interesting. Family weekend is all about spending time with loved ones and sharing the college experience. A vibrant and lively surrounding area is an essential part of any college campus, and the city of Indianapolis is an A-class example.



Wednesday, October 15, 2025

When we conserve our national parks, we conserve America

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Since the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 as the first U.S. national park, many presidents across all political ideologies implemented policies and laws to protect and preserve public land for generations to come.

From former President Theodore Roosevelt's Antiquities Act of 1906 to former President Jimmy Carter's Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, presidents have the privilege and moral obligation to conserve America's natural resources.

But President Trump simply does not care about protecting and preserving public land, seeing that his administration has cut over $260 million in federal funding since his second inauguration, thanks to the "One Big Beautiful Bill".

The National Park Service (NPS) is a bureau in the U.S. Department of the Interior, and is responsible for overseeing 433 overall sites — including the 63 national parks — across 85 million acres of land. Since January 2025, the NPS has lost 24% of its workforce due to the Trump administration's so-called cost-cutting initiatives through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

Patrick Doorhy, a sophomore theatre and marketing double major, visited six national parks this summer and noted issues within the parks.

"I noticed some of the bathrooms were disgusting, just absolutely filthy," Doorhy said. "It was also hard to get a hold of a ranger if you needed help or recommendations."

Massive staff shortages leave parks vulnerable to maintenance issues and neglect. Without an adequate number of park rangers, custodians, laborers, public safety officers and scientists, parks do not have the resources to fully flourish as a positive environment for wildlife and visitors.

Despite recent staff shortages, the NPS has a 76% approval rating, making it the highest approved federal agency, topping even NASA and USPS. Yet, its $3.58 billion annual budget is a meager one-fifteenth of one percent of the 2025 national budget.

The Trump administration plans to slash another third of that budget — over $1 billion — in 2026.

Not only is President Trump responsible for the financial nightmare national parks are now in, but he also signed an executive order that forces the NPS to remove any signs and exhibits from national parks and monuments that promote a "corrosive ideology," including the well-known "Scourged Back" portrait — which depicts a formerly enslaved man's back, covered with whipping scars, used by abolitionists in the Civil War era.

Emmy Norton, a sophomore anthropology and history major, explained the cultural significance of national parks.

"There is a lot of underlying history and historical events that happened [at national parks]," Norton said. "Especially rich history that is non-colonial and dates back to before settlers arrived. If we start to destroy that, it can get lost, and people won't understand where these national parks came from and why we have them."

The whitewashing and censoring of history has become an epidemic in American politics, with conservatives initiating a culture war in school curriculum and beyond in a desperate attempt to imitate President Trump.

It's obvious the current administration cannot grasp the deeper understanding of the cultural, conservational and educational impact of national parks, let alone their massive economic revenue and employment. The proof is in the numbers, but they choose to turn the other cheek.

In 2024, NPS brought in $56.3 billion in economic output, as well as supported over 340,000 jobs internally and externally.

As of publication on Oct. 15, the U.S. government has been shut down for two weeks. Many federal workers are bringing home a blank paycheck, including NPS employees. Per the NPS Contingency Plan, trails remain open, but limited staff are on site.

"At parks without accessible areas, the NPS will not operate parks during the [shutdown,]" NPS said. " … No visitor services will be provided. The NPS will not issue permits, conduct interpretive or educational programs, collect trash, operate or provide restrooms, maintain roads and walkways (including plowing and ice melting) or provide visitor information."

People from all walks of life travel to national parks to experience the undeniable beauty of America — attracting over 330 million visitors annually. My advice for those who have the power to influence the NPS budget: go experience it for yourself, and see what you're actively neglecting and abusing.

"What you do is to keep it for your children, your children's children, and for all who come after you, as the one great sight which every American . . . should see." — Theodore Roosevelt, Presidential Address at the Grand Canyon, 1903.



National parks begin to feel the budget cuts in park operations.

Graphic by Anna Gritzenbach.

'The Life of a Showgirl' and the death of authenticity

Let's work it out on the remix

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Over the past decade, billionaire pop icon Taylor Swift has come to symbolize the apex of modern musical success. But can such a level of cultural and economic dominance be attained without sacrificing individualism or succumbing to hyper-commercialization?

Her latest release, "The Life of a Showgirl", offers me little reassurance in this ponderance.

When the album dropped on Oct. 3, the reception was notably more negative than her usual releases. Swift's work has often been unfairly dissected under a gendered microscope, with double standards and personal attacks clouding fair engagement with her artistry. That being said, there is also, of course, completely valid criticism, particularly of "Life of a Showgirl", like, for example, that it's largely devoid of emotional nuance.

Senior psychology major Emily Farkas has been a lifelong fan of Swift; in the wake of her new album, Farkas is grappling with disappointment.

"The person who wrote 'Teardrops on My Guitar' and 'White Horse' can't be the same person who wrote this album," Farkas said. "I view ['The Life of a Showgirl'] as almost egotistical. It seems like she doesn't think she has to try anymore … I'm getting second-hand embarrassment."

The album's lyrics — once Swift's most reliably praised strength — are being widely ridiculed online. With lines like, "Did you girlboss too close to the sun?" and "I'm not a bad bitch and this isn't savage," audiences get caught in a kind of tonal vertigo.

And then there's the major contention: "Actually Romantic", a thinly veiled diss track purportedly aimed at pop provocateur Charli xcx.

In June 2024, Charli xcx released "BRAT", an album that swiftly transcended the boundaries of pop music to become a cultural touchstone, particularly resonant among young people. Among its standout tracks is "Sympathy is a knife", a song that delicately navigates the terrain of personal insecurity and self-comparison, with alleged lyrical references to Taylor Swift: "I couldn't even be her if I tried." Far from a direct critique, the track unfolds as a nuanced internal monologue rather than a targeted rebuke. It is within this context of vulnerability and self-interrogation that "Actually Romantic" enters the conversation.

"['Actually Romantic'] is hard to get through," Farkas said. "Taylor tries to be discreet — it's always a puzzle. But some are easier than others. This one, for example, is quite easy."

Through lyrics alluding to "The 1975" and Charli xcx's rumored drug use, Swift implies that Charli's motivations stem from mere obsession. This reductive characterization flattens the emotional and psychological complexity at the heart of Charli's work, collapsing nuanced introspection into a narrative of pure antagonism.



The old Taylor can't come to the phone right now.

Graphic by Emma McLean.

Avery Terry, a junior history and German double major, defends "The Life of a Showgirl" as an entertaining pop album that doesn't need to be Swift's best. Yet, she agrees there is an overwhelming juxtaposition between songs.

"Context aside, [the songs] are not on the same level at all," Terry said. "'Sympathy is a knife' is definitely trying to make a more deep, profound statement about female relationships and competition … but I don't think [Taylor] was trying to make an equal statement."

Intentional or not, the message failed to resonate. Rather than engaging with these topics directly, Swift's response sort of sidesteps them altogether, offering instead a defensive posture.

This ultimately reinforces a broader cultural pattern in which women's emotional transparency is misread as hostility or madness-induced.

McKenna Curless, a junior media and creative entertainment and strategic communications double major, is a fan of Charli xcx and the inclusivity she stands for.

"In ['Sympathy is a Knife'], Charli is harping on her insecurities about Taylor Swift," Curless said. "I just think it's so crazy that someone would make a song — a mediocre song at that — clapping back at this when it's not even a diss track in the first place. It's disrespectful in my opinion … 'Actually Romantic' missed the point entirely."

Read the full story on thebutlercollegian.com

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