

An Outsider's Inside Look on FALL SPORTS PRACTICES

Molly **Misek**

The life of the average Marian athlete is a pretty strenuous gig. Long practices, widely-publicized games and continual tournaments make for a packed schedule.

Unfortunately, I'm apathetic to the plight of the athletically gifted. Since quitting volleyball three years ago, I've effectively estranged myself from the world of sports. I've picked up other extracurriculars and convinced my parents that my brother is the real athlete in the family. There's really no need for me to be on any sort of "organized athletic gang" or whatever the kids call it these days.

As it goes, my athletic ignorance has left me out of touch with some of my Marian classmates. I have no idea what goes on in the lives of Marian athletes. So, I finally decided to make an effort to see sports from these girls' perspectives.

After attending the practices of all four fall sports teams, I've gained solid conclusions about these hard-working athletes and their sports, the main one being that I'm just no longer cut out for the athletic lifestyle. At all.

Day One: SOFTBALL

When I first drove down to Marian's softball field, I was admittedly nervous. My whole life I've assumed that since I prefer baseball, softball has a vendetta against me. How else could I explain the numerous times I've been pelted with gigantic, neon-yellow balls out of nowhere?

Nevertheless, this fear melted away when I saw the whole softball team engaging in a tribal rain dance in sophomore lot. The rain dance, junior Shannon Daly explained to me, was a plea to the heavens to cancel practice.

I immediately scribbled down the word "crazy" in my journalism notepad, but I covered up my uncertainty with an awkward smile.

The rain didn't come; however, the coaches did. The junior varsity and varsity teams suited up and began to stretch, eventually splitting up and heading to either the field or the batting cages.

I felt out of place as I lingered on the field, like an off-brand bag of cereal sitting among a stack of Wheaties. I swiveled my arm in a softball-ish manner to blend in. I don't think it worked.

Varsity Coach Al Leaders called his team's attention. "What do we need to work on today?"

Standing in various locations on the field, the girls shouted out suggestions, and the team went to work. Players yelled a variety

of phrases like "I'll catch it!" and "Get there!" which seemed to heighten their energy.

So far, this didn't seem too hard. I could perform a rain dance. I knew how to yell random numbers and words. Pff, softball. What a joke.

Until I noticed that, besides shouting, the players were also running to catch balls. Throwing softballs at high speeds. They even began batting.

Oh, yeah. I must've forgotten that these were integral parts of the game. My confidence meter descended rapidly as I ran for cover in the dugout, watching the softball team in a sort of awe.

I witnessed a large number of daring dives in the outfield, as well as a series of slides from freshman JV player Felicia Roppe. Glancing at her mud-stained shirt and pants, I wondered if I could ever get that dirty for a sport.

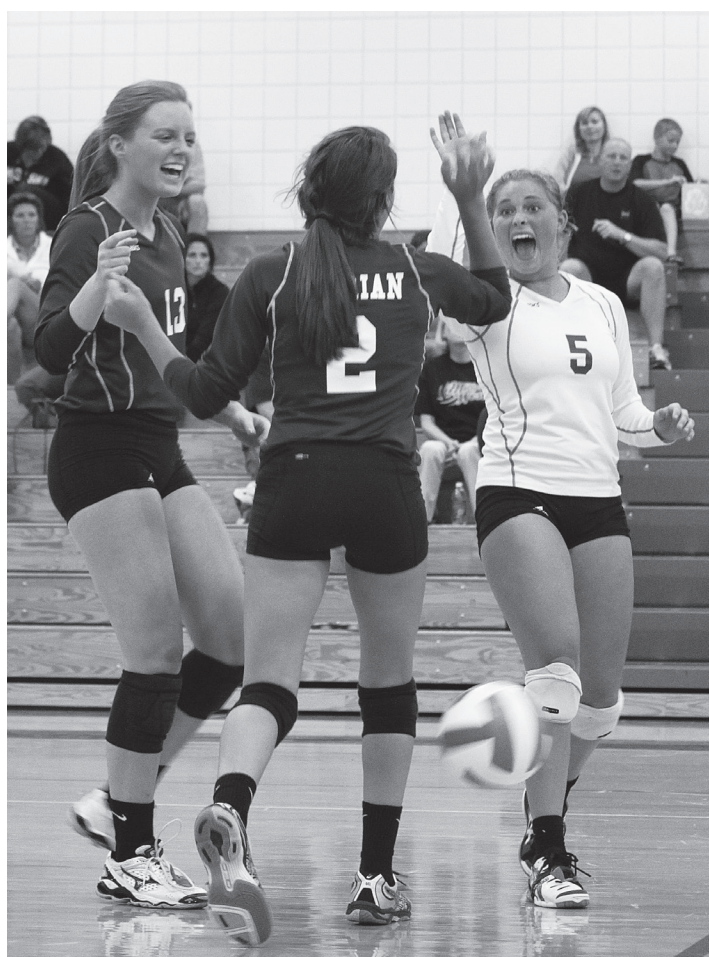
No, I answered myself, I couldn't. After watching senior varsity member Chelsea Lawson successfully hit 60-mph fastballs thrown by assistant coach Pat Kroll, I finally surrendered.

Softball, you've won. I thought I could master you easily, but I was wrong. As I humbly retreat to my baseball background, I promise to never again blaspheme you or question your all-knowing ways.

Though I still don't understand the mechanics of an underhand fastpitch.



Stretch Out. Junior Erin Fitzsimmons stretches during a softball practice. The softball team is 8-7 this season. Photo by Molly **Misek**



High Spirits. Juniors Kate Elman, Ashley Jansen and sophomore Maggie Heim high-five during the varsity's game. The team's record this season is 15-3. Photo by Kara **Schuele**

Day Two: VOLLEYBALL

Volleyball, my former alma mater (or should I say sport mater), was next up. Though I'd never been on varsity, I at least understood the logistics of the game.

Or so I thought, until varsity Coach Rochelle Rohlfs brought several large, wooden sticks onto the court. Was this some weird form of team discipline?

It turned out to be part of a drill where a few players held sticks waist-high as the team ran through defensive positions, forcing other players on the court to stay low to the ground to avoid hitting the sticks.

A little weird, but hey, to be great is to be misunderstood.

After this, it was time for the real volleyball to begin.

The players began with wash drills, throwing a few sneaky tips into the middle "donut" and showing off their cannon-like hits. Every player was constantly moving.

To the untrained volleyball analyst, this would look intimidating, but I knew this game and its tricks. I wasn't scared.

That was, until a ball sailed straight through junior Lauren Sieckmann's hands at a ridiculously fast speed toward me, which would have nearly killed me had I not moved a second before.

I was shaken up; nevertheless, I figured that would be the worst of it. Then I was informed

that the past 45 minutes of intense drills had only been the team warm-up.

Oh. After a brief water break accompanied by stretches, the team spent the majority of the rest of practice playing a scrimmage game called "Stay Positive," which was created by Coach Rohlfs. It featured a complex system of scoring where one side of the court's mistake would result in a loss of points. The goal of the drill, as its name infers, was to keep the score positive. It was also a cute play on words, encouraging players to have an optimistic mentality regardless of how many mistakes were made.

By five o'clock, the players were sweaty, bruised, and worn down, yet they were still at the top of their game. Each teammate was as quick, powerful and vocal as she was at the beginning of practice, not to mention "staying positive." Junior Kate Elman never ceased to hustle across the court, shouting and diving for balls as if each play were a life-or-death scenario. This was probably the reason I was never on varsity.

After an hour and a half, it was time to surrender to volleyball.

Considering that the height difference between me and the shortest team member is roughly eight inches, I'm not sure there was ever another option.

Day Three: CROSS COUNTRY

By this time, I was aware that I just couldn't keep up with the other athletes. However, this was never so apparent as when I attended cross country practice. I literally could not find them.

At the beginning of practice, finding the team members was relatively simple. All of them sat in the Quad, where they stretched and talked with teammates. Coach Roger Wright told me that the group would be splitting up: half would run down by Benson Park, and half would head to the track.

I decided I'd go to Benson Park first. I didn't see any runners there, but I wasn't worried. It was still early.

I wandered over to the lake casually, keeping a lookout for any large body of people moving particularly fast. No signs yet.

Ten minutes later, I spotted a short, blonde figure in the distance, advancing at a rapid pace. A crowd of runners followed her closely, heading down Ames Ave. It didn't look as though they were running around the lake anytime soon. Could they possibly be headed toward... the Green Monster?!

I wasn't actually sure where or what this mysterious Green Monster was, but I figured it was something gigantic and greenish in hue. I ran back over the bridge hastily, sprinting to the softball fields. There were lots of grassy hills over here, which could be an ideal location for the Monster. The troop of runners must have been coming my way, right?

I huffed and puffed my way up to the fields, looking toward Ames. And there

they were, 100 yards off, still running in the complete opposite direction of me. Where on earth could they be going? I wondered. I really should have gotten a course map before I did this.

Dismayed, I decided to head to Marian's track for the time being, then I could drive down to Benson again and catch the runners on their way back.

Meanwhile, the girls on the track were doing 200-meter sprints. I witnessed a total of 10 sprints in a row, with a break of about 30 seconds in between. I felt like I was about to die just watching them, especially sophomore Allison McLeay, who consistently led the pack. Astoundingly, the runners' speeds seemed to increase with each time around the track. Their looks of half-determination, half-pain symbolically inspired me to push through the tough situations in my life, although I wasn't inspired enough to actually get up and run with them.

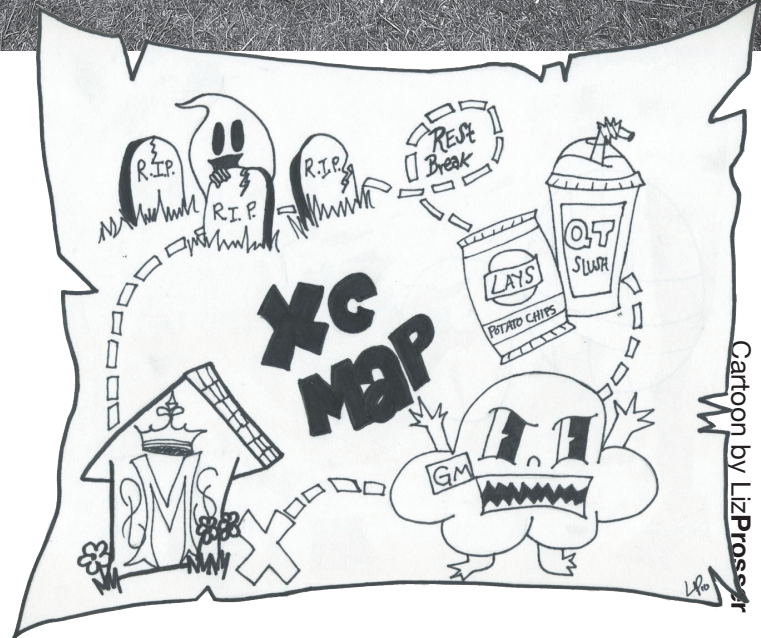
It was time to check back on the Benson girls. When I arrived at the park, I noticed that the supply of runners was drastically depleted.

Most of them had already completed the trek back to Marian while I was distracted at the track! I caught a glimpse of the last few stragglers around the lake, disappointed at my ill timing.

Well, cross country, it looks as though I'd surrendered to you before I'd even come to practice. Besides, how could I have ever expected to keep pace with people who are crazy enough to be in the 300-mile club?



Push It. The cross country team sets out at the Papillion LaVista South High School meet. The meet was held on Sept. 13. Photo by Annette Vinton



Day Four: GOLF

My only prior experience with the sport of golf occurred last summer when I went to a nine-hole golf course with a friend of mine. I ended up abandoning my club in favor of throwing the ball toward the hole, if that gives any indication of my ability.

I was not expecting day four of fall sports practices to go well.

The trip to The Knolls Golf Course amounted to a 10-minute drive down Fort Street, winding through neighborhoods till I came across an open green, where girls with golf clubs were lingering.

At least I found the place. Step one complete.

I glimpsed at the variety of faces around me. These girls weren't particularly loud or tall, and they didn't look eager to run anywhere. Hey, maybe I had a chance at this sport.

Golf, I silently prayed, *please take pity on me, just this once.* Perhaps Tutengolfen, the golf god whom I just made up two seconds ago, would hear my plea.

Fortunately, nature was on my side – the happy sun's rays glistened on the nearby pond water as geese squawked in the distance. I took a picture of the geese, since they made me forget the previous pain golf had inflicted upon me.

Soon enough, Coach Jim Miller rounded up the team, directing the junior varsity players toward the course while varsity worked on chipping and putting.

After following the varsity teammates, I was wary of stepping onto the thing called "the green," since there was a barrage of tiny, white balls soaring in different directions across it.

I finally mustered up the courage to take a

few steps onto the green, keeping an eye out for any little white demons. Sophomore Sarah Pravec provided me with some comic relief as I stood amongst the action, watching players chip simple balls that I could never hope to hit.

After applauding myself for lasting twenty minutes without being pelted by a golf ball, I headed over to observe the junior varsity members in their journey on the course. On my way I almost collided with a wild, untamed golf cart driver, but I dove out of the way and narrowly spared my life.

That shook me up, which in turn caused me to lose my way on the course. Unaware of where the team was, I was suddenly haunted by images of my experience at cross country.

However, I hitched a ride with a random man in a different golf cart who somehow knew where the Marian team was. We made small talk about the weather and the geese. I even showed him my geese picture.

I found the junior varsity players, who were somehow managing to "drive" a golf ball 200 yards. I wasn't sure why it was called a drive or how junior Claire Troia hit her ball so far, but after following the team around at a leisurely pace for 45 minutes, I was proud of myself.

I still may not be able to make contact with the ball when I swing a golf club, but after watching Marian golfers, I'm no longer afraid of the sport.

Golf, I have not surrendered to you yet. Who knows what could happen next time I get a club in my hands?

Well, you could probably bet that I'd whiff it at least five times in a row, but even so. Maybe I've found my sport.



Fore! Senior Joslyn Wojtalewicz celebrates as she sinks her ball at practice on Sept. 27. Photo by Molly Misek