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Liz Lilly,
International School
of Minnesota

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BY ABBY DEBRUINE
PHOTOS BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG

Play it Forward

In the zone with four Eden Prairie student athletes.

LIZ LILLY

"I just want to keep improving year by year—Never stop."

Liz Lilly's passion for sports started with a pre-bedtime ritual she and her father made up when she was just a little girl.

"I would always find a ball and start playing with it," Lilly says. "Then my dad and I started this tradition of doing 100 throws a night."

Playing all that ball with her father was good preparation for what came next. From fourth through sixth grades, Lilly was the only girl on her baseball team, and during her pre-high school years, she was a diver, a track and field sprinter and hurdler, a golfer and a swimmer.

Now, about to begin her senior year at the International School of Minnesota, Lilly divides her time between two sports she's played since age 4, as a midfielder and forward for the varsity soccer team and as point guard for the varsity basketball team. Lilly shows her leadership skills as captain for both teams; she uses the position as an opportunity to do whatever she can to boost her teammates' involvement.

As for Lilly herself, she's not willing to stop at a mere 12 years of strong athletic performances. "I just want to keep improving year by year," she says. "Never stop."





CHRIS MUELLER

“The depth of our long distance squad is so great that I have to work really hard just to keep up.”

It was during a sixth grade gym class that Chris Mueller first realized he was born to run.

“We were running the mile for fitness tests, and I was pretty fast,” he recalls. “I thought to myself, ‘Hey, I’m pretty good at this.’”

Soon after, Mueller started running with the Oak Point Run Club, and once he got to Central Middle School, he joined both the cross country and track and field teams. Mueller specializes in both the 1,600 and 3,200 meter races, but his favorite is the one he started it all—the 1,600 meter (one mile) race. With good reason. His first year at Eden Prairie High School, Mueller broke the freshman one-mile record with a time of 4:31. He received the well-deserved Rookie of the Year award that same year.

Since then, Mueller has helped the Eagles track and field team win championship after championship.

Throughout all these years of high achievements, however, Mueller has remained ever grounded.

“The depth of our long distance squad is so great that I have to work really hard just to keep up with it,” he says. “There is so much talent on our team, and I’m just one runner among them.”

Not content just running on asphalt during the fall and spring, Mueller also runs cross country during the winter—on skis, that is.

With hundreds—maybe thousands—of miles behind him and a long, full road ahead, Chris Mueller is certain to go the distance.

TYLER KUBLER

“Having fun keeps me going. And as long as sports are fun, I’ll be going for a long time.”

Minutes before walking out to the mat to wrestle in his usual 189-pound weight class at last year’s team sectional meet, Tyler Kubler was told he would be taking on a state-ranked 215-pound opponent. Much to his surprise, Kubler literally came out on top.

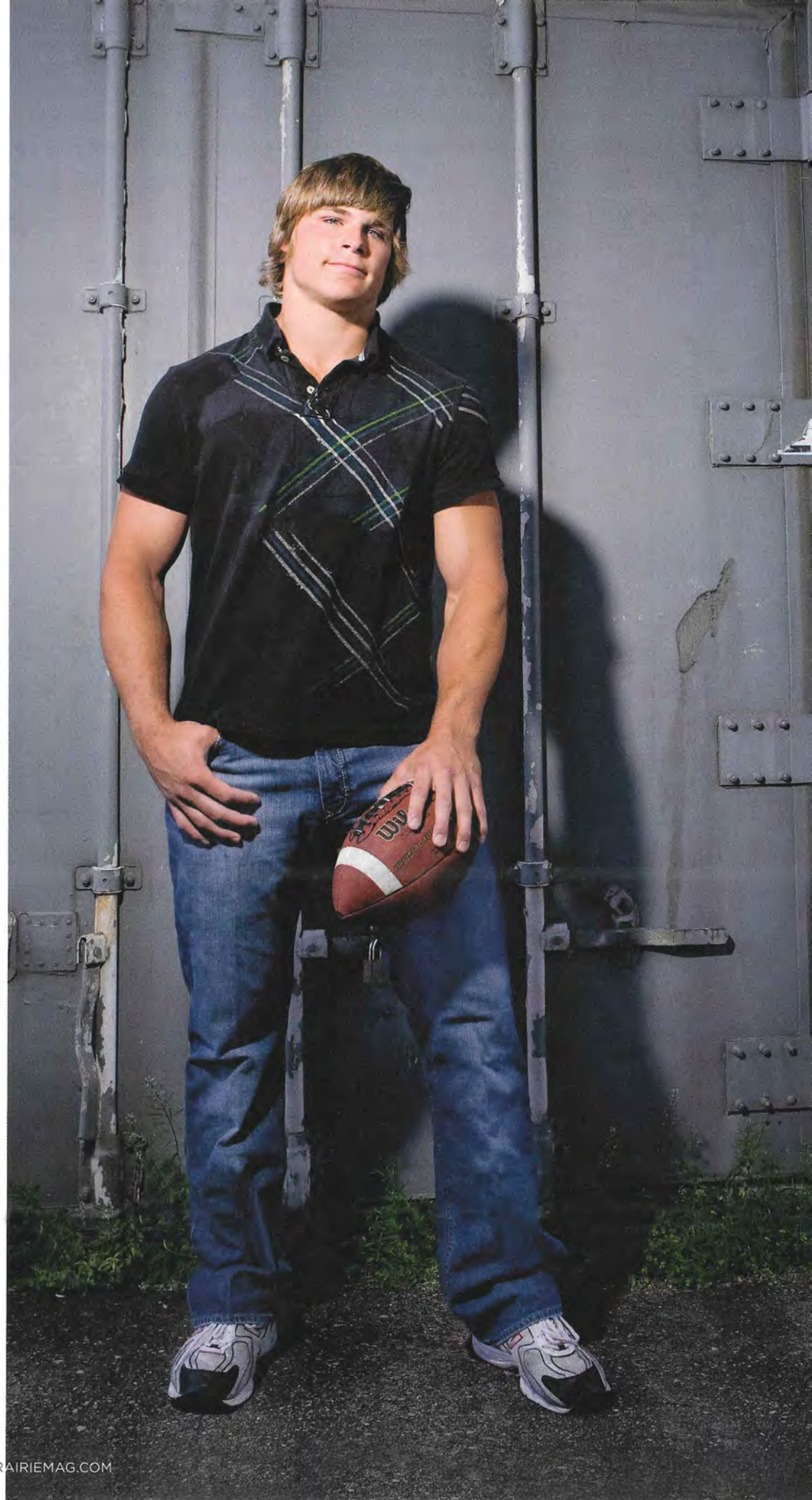
Kubler started wrestling at a very young age. While most children in kindergarten were bending Play Dough into different shapes, Kubler was practicing bending people.

A few years later, he laced up his first pair of football cleats, followed shortly by the throw of his first shot put and the fling of his first discus. He’s been competing—and improving—in all three ever since. Kubler has been a varsity-level wrestler since joining the team as a freshman, and he’s been the team captain since his sophomore year.

No sooner is the wrestling season over than football kicks in to full swing. Actually, the two seasons often overlap. But multi-sporting is no match for the varsity defensive lineman, who sees only the positive in needing to be present at what can, at times, amount to three practices a day.

When he’s not tossing opponents on the mat and on the field, Kubler tosses the shot put and discus.

For an athlete who is used to winning, it’s not the first-place pins, nor tackles, nor throws that keep Kubler motivated. It’s something simpler and more humble. “Having fun keeps me going. And as long as sports are fun, I’ll be going for a long time.”





MAKENNA BORG

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"I love playing these sports. They've given me so much, and I want to give back."  
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It is possible that Makenna Borg could measure her years in matches.

Borg started playing tennis when she was 5 years old. By the time she turned 10, she was serving up aces in tournament play. From ages 12 through 14, she played in the collegiate group at USTA Supnationals, a tournament in which only the two top-ranked girls in each section are selected to compete.

A varsity and all-conference player since first joining the Eden Prairie tennis team her freshman year, Borg boasts many individual and team accomplishments, partially due to her sheer dedication.

While the Eagles' tennis season may end when the weather becomes too cold for tennis skirts, for Borg, practices continue. She plays tennis year-round in preparation for the big tournaments that start during the summer.

In the spring, Borg takes to the field, where she plays the midfielder position on Eden Prairie's varsity lacrosse team. As with tennis, Borg plays a lot of lacrosse on her own time to strengthen her skills. She plays for several club teams, including the Minnesota Lakers, and competes for spots in as many tournaments as she can shake her lacrosse stick at.

The source of her devotion could technically be defined as "nothing."

"I love them. I love playing these sports," she says. "They've given me so much, and I want to give back." Advantage: Borg.