



THE

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# Rider track sweeps players of the year

Graphic by Gail Demerski/The Rider News



## A decade-long ride: Dell'Omo's farewell to Rider

By Grace Bertrand

**A**FTER serving Rider through a pandemic, ongoing financial deficits and multiple lawsuits, President Gregory Dell'Omo is hanging up his hat on July 31, closing out a decade-long run.

In the final weeks of the spring semester, Dell'Omo wrapped up the accumulation of saying goodbye to his place of work and home of 10 years in one word: "bittersweet."

"I really feel that the Rider experience has grown since I've been here and I feel like I've had a little bit of an impact on that," Dell'Omo said in a sit-down interview on April 14 with The Rider News to talk about his retirement.

Dell'Omo announced his retirement in a universitywide email on September 10, 2024, calling his presidential term "one of the most fulfilling chapters" of his life. Since then, Dell'Omo has taken the time to ponder on his accomplishments during his tenure and his hopes for the future of the university.

### Taking the reins

Reflecting on his achievements over the years, Dell'Omo is most proud of his implementation of the Engaged Learning program in 2018. With the initiative, students are required to combine academics, career goals and extracurricular activities in order to graduate, enhancing their college experience.

Dell'Omo recalled the inspiration for the program was sparked by conversations he had when he would sit with students at lunch in Daly Dining Hall. They confirmed that a majority of students would not want to attend campus events and join clubs unless required to.

"When you're losing the campus experience, you're kind of losing a piece of the Rider puzzle," Dell'Omo said.

Dell'Omo's vision for the program aimed to help students figure out if they are passionate about their

discipline and how to use it in the outside, post-graduation world.

The desire to focus on student engagement came during his biggest presidential hurdle: the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming back from an extended lockdown, in which Rider moved to online learning, it was challenging for students to get re-acclimated to campus life.

"Once we got to the point where we were fully back on campus, I think we experienced the same kind of cultural issues that the rest of the country experienced, particularly from a student standpoint," Dell'Omo said. "I really felt the campus did everything from an academic standpoint, from a financial standpoint, from a health standpoint and communication standpoint as well as we possibly could and it really showed."

With Engaged Learning, students were pushed to transition from hibernation to getting involved on campus, strengthening both their social and professional skills.

Dell'Omo reflected on other past achievements, such as the Transforming Students, Transforming Lives campaign, an initiative he founded to raise funds. The goal was to support Rider by increasing the endowment, funding student scholarships and finance campus improvements.

When first considering the campaign, Dell'Omo explained that Rider announced an initial goal of \$60 million. Once it began, Rider raised \$80 million and is now on the road to \$100 million before Dell'Omo's leave in July, with \$98.7 million.

### Jumping through hurdles

In order to get to where he is now, Dell'Omo overcame many obstacles like Rider's recent annual financial deficits and two no-confidence votes from the faculty union. From low enrollment to lack of housing revenue, Rider was not taking in as much money as it had hoped during the pandemic, causing an unexpected long-term issue.

"When you have one bad year of enrollment, it's not a one-year problem, it's a four-year problem. When a small freshman class comes in, it's small all the way through," Dell'Omo said.

According to the university's most recent audited financial statements, for the fiscal year that ended in June 2024, Rider's operating deficit was \$21.3 million, which included about \$12 million in depreciation.

Dell'Omo said he is closing out his presidency with an estimated \$7 million deficit by June 30 and is hopeful the university will break even next year through new unannounced fundraising initiatives.

Another struggle that plagued Dell'Omo's presidency was moving Westminster Choir College to Lawrenceville and the transition of the Princeton property, leaving Rider to deal with more than one lawsuit over the years.

After Dell'Omo announced in 2017 that Rider was attempting to sell WCC's Princeton campus, Princeton Theological Seminary sued Rider in 2018. They claimed that if the land was not being used for religious music education, the property should go to the Seminary, according to the conditions of philanthropist Sophia Strong Taylor, who donated the property to WCC in 1935. Dell'Omo confirmed that the lawsuit between Rider and the Seminary has since been resolved.

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"CLOSING"  
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President Gregory Dell'Omo speaks about his July retirement.

Jake Tiger/The Rider News

INSIDE

### A BROTHERLY CONNECTION

Junior pitcher Gavin Hawkes and sophomore infielder Joe Tirol's relationship extends beyond Rider.

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### EGGCELLENT EGG HUNT

The egg hunt drew in hundreds of students, faculty and their families to enjoy the event by 107.7 The Bronc.

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### SENIOR EDITORS REFLECT ON THE RIDER NEWS

Outgoing executive and managing editors reflect on their experiences.

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# Geiger reflects on win as new SGA president

By Caroline Haviland

**M**OIRA Geiger created a bingo card for herself at the start of 2025 with a different goal for the year in each square, and she just crossed out the box that said “win SGA presidency.”

Geiger, a junior computer science major, was elected on April 17 as the Student Government Association’s student body president for the 2025-26 school year, the organization’s second uncontested presidential election in two years.

The newly-appointed leader’s journey to Rider began at 15 years old when she came to campus to support her cousin on the field hockey team.

As a lifelong field hockey player, Geiger saw the strong dynamic the women had as she attended more games, which ultimately led to her commitment to Rider as one of the women’s field hockey goalkeepers.

“The team’s dynamic hasn’t changed from when I was first watching at 15 to now as a 20 year old. ... All the girls are my absolute best friends here. I’m really blessed with that,” said Geiger.

Sarah Fitzpatrick, a junior criminal justice major, is also a player on the women’s field hockey team and has been Geiger’s roommate for the past two years. She attributed their friendship to helping her through numerous tribulations.

“We met last year before coming to school because we’re on the field hockey team. It took us a while to get close, but we went through a lot of things,” said Fitzpatrick. “We got COVID at the same time and were quarantined together, which brought us together. I value our friendship a lot.”

Despite committing to play field hockey, Geiger realized she could participate in numerous clubs and organizations when she arrived her freshman year, ensuring her college experience would not be “entirely athletics.”

Geiger was hesitant to join SGA at first due to the possible difficulty of balancing her sport with the organization’s duties.

To find out more, she messaged Emma Cordero, SGA’s current vice president of student affairs and a player on the women’s soccer team, and was invited to attend one of SGA’s meetings to see how she liked it.

“The rest is history,” Geiger said.

By her second year, she moved up to vice president of university affairs and realized how attainable it was to balance her commitments by delegating labor to her fellow executive board.

Now heading into her third and final year at Rider, Geiger plans to make sure that while the university welcomes a new president and provost, SGA keeps the current relationship it has with the administration.

“Our faculty and administration are really good at



Moira Geiger is SGA’s new student body president.

being involved with us. And that’s something I really want to keep pushing for next year too,” said Geiger. “This is a staple that we have, this open line of communication.”

Geiger also wants to ensure any SGA-related events and meetings are “very welcoming” to keep students involved, which helps maintain consistent student feedback to relay to the university president and their cabinet.

For this year’s elections, the executive board positions of vice president of communications, vice president of student affairs, vice president of university affairs and vice president of class connections went through an appointment-based process and interview with current SGA members instead of being featured on the ballot like years prior.

Geiger said none of these positions are uncontested, and SGA saw a significant increase in candidates for these roles compared to the ones on the ballot.

“I feel like we’ve seen less people go for president because they’re kind of scared of the work and putting themselves out there, even though all the other people on the executive board do the same amount of work,” said Geiger. “There is not a big dropoff.”

Once her time at Rider concludes, Geiger plans to continue to play college field hockey and pursue her master’s and doctorate’s degree at another university, calling herself “a very big school person.”

As she looks to her future presidency and beyond, Geiger has a testament to mirror her mentality: “I feel that you can’t complain about something if you’re not doing any work to change it. That’s been my whole involvement mindset. ... If you want the best experience at it, you have to work for it.”

*Journey.New is a copy editor for The Rider News and is the student organizations committee chair for SGA. They had no part in the writing or editing of this story.*

# The Rider News wins 11 NJPF awards

By Caitlyn Sutton

**T**HE Rider News strives toward greatness in each issue of the university’s student-run newspaper. This year, the paper brought home 11 awards between six staff members at this year’s New Jersey Press Foundation.

The Rider News won first place for Best Overall Website, as well as third place for General Excellence. These two honors for The Rider News highlighted the work each student journalist does on Monday and Tuesday nights as they strive to make the paper as great as can be on Wednesdays.

Jake Tiger, a senior journalism major and outgoing executive editor at The Rider News, won four awards this year. He won second place for Biography/ Personality Profile, second place for Enterprise/ Investigative Reporting, first place for News Writing and first place for Web Project.

Tiger humbly expressed thanks to each section of the staff, as everyone worked together to finalize the award-winning stories.

“They are individual awards with my name on them, but they really are not just me,” Tiger said.

The Rider News did not fall short in reporting, editing or digging deep as they won awards across multiple categories from news to sports and videos.

Each staff member actively worked to produce great pieces and brought all 11 awards back to

Rider. There is no skipping a “thank you” for any contributor — no one did this alone.

Despite having difficulties with splitting between online and print release schedule for the 2024-25 school year, The Rider News staff adapted and still made incredible achievements as a group of NJPF award-winning student journalists.

Josiah Thomas, a senior graphic design major, won first place for layout and design alongside senior graphic design major Maggie Kleiner. Thomas also won third place for online video and is a finalist with the Society of Professional Journalists for the Mark of Excellence title.

“Getting an award [finalist for the Mark of Excellence] like that, it really makes me feel very proud to be an artist because I personally love to just do it for fun,” said Thomas.

Junior journalism major Grace Bertrand won third place for Feature Writing, senior journalism major Hannah Newman won third place for News Writing and junior journalism major Benjamin Shinault won second place for Sports Writing.

The Rider News’ section editors, copy editors and reporters, as well as the executive and managing editors all work together to make the newspaper shine each week. NJPF recognition affirms the hard work The Rider News displays each week in releasing accurate information to the Rider community.

# Closing a chapter at Rider

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“To make a long story short, the lawsuit with the theological seminary and Rider has been resolved,” Dell’Omo said. “The original lawsuit is still hanging out there, but in fact, it’s probably gonna become moot because we don’t own the property anymore.”

The Municipality of Princeton recently acquired Westminster Choir College’s embattled Princeton campus for \$42 million on April 1, resulting in Rider and the Seminary filing petitions to receive a share of that profit, according to Dell’Omo.

“We presume within the next month or so, that chapter is gonna be closed,” Dell’Omo said.

In the aftermath of the property ownership transfer, Rider sued its former law firm that helped Rider acquire WCC in 1992, for “legal malpractice over its handling of negotiations around the property,” according to the lawsuit.

Dell’Omo declined to comment on the lawsuit, as it is still pending.

In regards to the recent rollbacks in diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in higher-education, an executive order issued by President Donald Trump, Dell’Omo stood firm on ensuring Rider remains a place for all.

Dell’Omo signed onto a joint statement from over 220 university leaders on April 22, opposing the Trump administration’s treatment and involvement in higher education institutions.

“We are open to constructive reform and do not oppose legitimate government oversight,” the statement said. “However, we must oppose undue government intrusion in the lives of those who learn, live and work on our campuses.”

Dell’Omo told The Rider News, “Given the current affront on higher education and challenges being directed at colleges and universities, I feel it is critically important that our entire industry join together in voicing our concerns and calling for constructive engagement on the issues. The long-term ramifications of many of the changes being presented by the Trump administration are much too important and serious to go unchallenged.”

American Association of University Professors President Quinn Cunningham explained that though they have not seen the letter, they share a similar sentiment to the university leaders.

“I certainly think Trump is attempting to do some really negative things to higher education,” Cunningham said.

Cunningham also expressed hope for AAUP to have “more of a collaborative relationship” with the next Rider president.

## The home stretch

With Dell’Omo’s exit comes another president’s entrance.

Although he is not involved in the search for the next president, Dell’Omo said he met with the two final candidates in April.

“The next president will hopefully take our plan, working with our Board of Trustees, and put their imprint on it as they go forward. I think it has a good chance to be successful,” Dell’Omo said.

Closing out his chapter at Rider, he looks forward to spending quality time with his family and plans to pay a lot more visits to his grandkids and his “granddogs.”

Having worked long hours during his time at Rider and his previous presidency at Robert Morris University near Pittsburgh, leisure time for Dell’Omo is unusual and unnatural. He joked that his wife may even kick him out a week into his retirement.

“I’m a little nervous because, you know, you go 100 mph then the next day, you’re like ‘no one’s emailing me, no one’s calling me, there’s no crisis I have to deal with,’” Dell’Omo said.

As he enters the home stretch and ties up loose threads, Dell’Omo is ready to cross the finish line and pass the baton on to the next president.

“I think the university will be in good hands with the selection of either [presidential candidate],” Dell’Omo said. “There are issues that we are going to continue to work on. I know it sounds a little trivial and trite sometimes, but the only constant out there is change.”



# Help is just a tap away with Safe Broncs app

By Kaitlyn Seawood

**R**IDER will soon launch a campus safety app called RAVE Guardian, also known on campus as the “Safe Broncs” app, offering students a quick and accessible way to contact Public Safety, share their location with trusted contacts and access emergency resources — all from the convenience of their phones.

The app was introduced during the Student Government Association’s town hall meeting on April 3 and is set to be demonstrated during the final senate meeting of the semester on April 24 by Vice President of Facilities and University Operations Mike Reca.

Since the announcement, student leaders have begun highlighting the app’s key functions and potential impact. Among them is junior computer science major and incoming SGA president Moira Geiger, who emphasized how the app’s design prioritizes both safety and accessibility.

“You can turn on tracking for Public Safety to see your location, but its geofencing will only be within the campus radius,” said Geiger.

“But you can request for help directly from Public Safety if you need it.”

Students will also be able to share their location with friends or family outside the Rider community and access contact information for other campus resources, such as the Student Health Center and Counseling Center.

Public Safety Director Matthew Babcock noted during a student-led press conference on April 9 that the app will link to Rider’s online reporting forms for Public Safety, Title IX and the Counseling Center. An emergency preparedness database will outline what to do in situations like a shelter-in-place.

While the app is expected to go live over the summer, Babcock confirmed that it will not include a two-way communication feature or allow Public Safety to notify students individually about parking violations. However, student leaders hope this is only the beginning.

“I think two-way communication could be a really good factor of the app, it would take time to be built in and get approved,” said Geiger. “I think if it’s something that’s continuously brought up, eventually it could be something in the app.”

The app will cost the university around \$125,000 annually to operate, according to Chief Financial Officer James Hartman.

It is designed to be accessible to everyone on campus not just students and staff, and will deliver emergency notifications.

“It’s a much more efficient and better system,” Reca said. “It’s used at I think 75 or 80 other colleges across the country. You’ll be able to tap and contact Public Safety immediately on the app.”

Reca emphasized that privacy is still a priority, “We’re not just going to be like big brother watching you. You have to request it and say, ‘Hey, it’s dark or I don’t feel great walking back from my car.’”

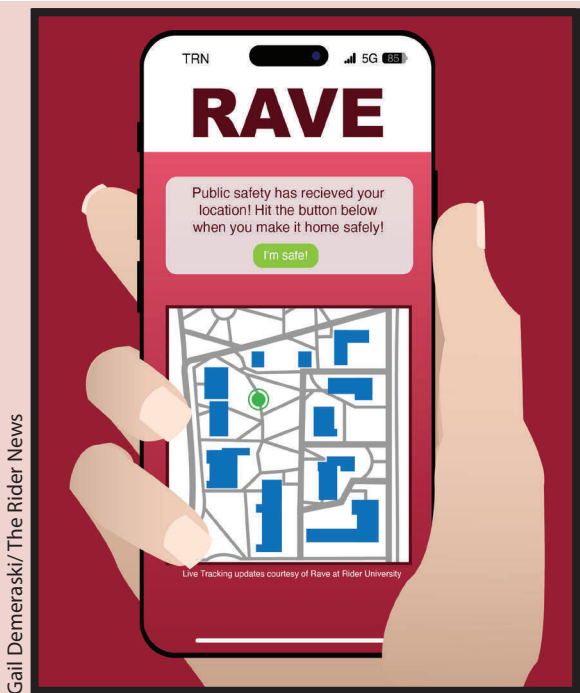
Geiger, whose current role in SGA as the vice president of university affairs involves oversight of health, safety, academics and facilities, regularly meets with Reca and Babcock at university operations meetings. Those meetings, alongside SGA’s facilities committee, are where concerns like parking, sidewalk cracks and lighting get addressed.

“[Facilities] does a very good job at attending to what we say to them,” she said, highlighting how student voices are heard. “The more feedback we get from people on the app, the better it’s going to be to serve the rest of the students.”

While Babcock is new to his role, Geiger said he has already expressed interest in collaborating with SGA in the summer and fall.

“Matthew Babcock hasn’t been in the job for more than a few weeks, but hopes to meet with us in the summer and fall to create a coherent plan,” Geiger said.

Babcock has begun focusing on campus infrastructure improvements, with updates to parking signage already underway, a direct response to issues frequently raised in facilities and student operations



Gail Demerski/ The Rider News

The university is launching a new app with safety features.

meetings, Geiger explained.

Geiger emphasized that while the app is still in its early stages, Reca and his team are encouraging students to use it regularly and share feedback to help improve its features over time.

Geiger said “This will be a new app with bugs and there will be things that need to be improved along the way.”

## DIGITAL EXCLUSIVES:



*Campuses on high alert: students react to FSU shooting*

By Zyheim Bell



*With new ticketing habits, Rider creates cash, confusion*

By Jake Tiger

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# Every ‘bunny’ went for the red egg at Egg Hunt

By **Madison Lewis**

**I**n the center of the Campus Mall, there was a mosh pit of students, but there was no concert — just 10,000 plastic eggs scattered haphazardly in a roped-off portion of the field.

At 12:30 p.m. on April 17, hundreds of Monster Energy-filled attendees fought over plastic eggs, pushing and shoving one another, in hopes of obtaining two tickets to a Royal Caribbean cruise to the Bahamas or a 2.5-carat diamond pendant.

Every year, 107.7 The Bronc hosts the Eggscellent Egg Hunt, which includes a multitude of activities and lavish prizes. Along with the cruise and diamond pendant, a 55-inch television, WaWa coupons and Phillies merch were among the rewards.

Junior film and television major Zoë Jones has been attending the egg hunt since she was a freshman, winning only small prizes like candy. This year was different — she won the coveted cruise.

When asked how she prepared for the trials and tribulations of the egg hunt, she laughed as she said, “I made sure to wear some good sneakers and yoga pants, and I had some food from the food trucks before. Got my energy up.”

Around the perimeter of the Campus Mall, students were served with food trucks, TCC’s Hibachi being among the most popular. The truck dished out servings of matcha and flavored teas. Other trucks included the recognizable Bronc Bites and Yooo Cuz.

Music from Sabrina Carpenter, NSYNC and Janet Jackson blasted from the 107.7 The Bronc’s DJ booth and attendees danced waiting in line for their food and beverages.

Monster Energy had a tent where students could get free full-size cans of new flavors like “ultra sunrise,” helping caffeinate the students before the egg hunt count down.

After a quick nibble, students hopped over to the other attractions that beckoned the attendees.

Students captured the memories in a photo, posed with someone dressed as the Easter Bunny. Egg



Hundreds of students line up preparing for the barrier drop around the thousands of Easter eggs.

dyeing and creating wax hands were other tangible collectables a student could take home.

Clubs and organizations also had booths set up, like the Counseling Center, allowing students to select from an array of goodies to make their own Easter baskets.

Further to the left of the Campus Mall was a petting zoo featuring goats and chickens roaming in the confines of their fenced-in portion of the field.

Easel, an animal rescue league in Ewing, New Jersey, paraded around adoptable dogs on leashes, greeted passers-by, pawing at pant legs as if they were begging to be picked.

Beyond the petting zoo and puppy play-space was a mini-golf course run by 107.7 The Bronc members, freshman television and film major Zander Blickley and junior sports media major Jacob Rodriguez.

Blickley said the 107.7 team was up at 5:30 a.m. and had been setting up until the start of the event at 11 a.m.

The two joked about there being an elusive red egg, as there was only one red egg within the 10,000 eggs.

“We believe in the red egg,” said Rodriguez, while laughing. “The running joke is that there was just one red egg out of all the ones we made. How hilarious would it be if we made that egg super, super special and there is nothing in it?”

Blickley mentioned that members of 107.7 The Bronc were posting on Fizz, a social media app,

engaging with the rumors about the red egg.

Alas, the big prizes were not in the red egg.

However, there were many lucky Broncs that did not have a mysterious and humorous backstory.

The excitement was palpable when the lucky students claimed their prizes at the six different tables.

Junior behavioral neuroscience major Sophia Fleischer, who won the diamond pendant, was excited to see the slip of paper inside her winning egg.

Fleischer and Jones took photos with John Mozes, general manager of 107.7 The Bronc, to commemorate their wins.

Jones said, “Be calm. Don’t be too stressed and nervous about getting it and you might just get the big prize.”



**Sophia Fleishcher** (left) and **Zoë Jones** (middle) celebrate their wins by taking pictures with the Easter Bunny and the Manager of 107.7 The Bronc, John Mozes (right).

*Sports Editor Benjamin Shinault, Social Media Editor Journey New and Copy Editor Gabriela Tobar are members of 107.7 The Bronc. They had no part in the writing, editing or reporting of this story.*

DIGITAL EXCLUSIVES

Plant and play for Earth Day  
By Morgan Dickens

The Black Campus Ministry gives glory to God  
By Jasmine White

## Senior Spotlight: Jared Hiller to deliver class of 2025 commencement speech

By **Brianna Velazquez**

**I**n the crowd of friends and family at his sister’s Rider graduation in 2022, Jared Hiller felt a wave of emotions. Inspired by the passionate words of the commencement speaker, he imagined himself one day standing at the podium and delivering the closing remarks for the final chapter of his college journey.

On April 4, Hiller, a senior double major in secondary education and math, received the call that turned his dream into a reality — he had been chosen to be the Class of 2025 commencement speaker.

“It’s definitely really exciting. It’s an honor,” Hiller said. “Since I don’t know all of the students personally, it’s cool that I get to represent everyone ... and tell all the guests in the arena about our experience.”

Hiller’s path to education began early, shaped by his father’s teaching career, and solidified when he began tutoring peers in high school as a member of the National Honor Society.

“It’s really fun to help kids that are struggling and use my strength of explaining things and helping them to make sure kids are achieving at a high level,” Hiller said.

That passion followed Hiller to Rider, where he not only studied education but also focused on honing skills to help special education groups and provide the resources necessary to equip his students with better learning experiences.

Currently student teaching at Henry C. Beck Middle School, Hiller has learned the ways social media is impacting young learners.

Hiller immersed himself in campus life, despite being a commuter student from Pennsauken, New

Jersey. He has been involved with Math Club, the Association of Commuting Students, Student Education Association, The Council for Exceptional Children and was the vice president of Rider Dance Ensemble. Currently, he serves as the president of the International Honor Society for Education Kappa Delta Pi and is the lead tour guide for the Office of Admissions.

As the president of KPD, Hiller noticed other members’ interest in interacting with education professors outside the classroom. Hiller acted upon interest by organizing an event that invited education professors to present their research, offer insightful information for aspiring teachers and answer KDP members’ questions.

Susan Makowski, executive director of admissions, has seen Hiller’s positive impact firsthand through his role as lead tour guide.

“He is Mr. Rider,” Makowski said, laughing as she recalled mistakenly calling him Jacob for 15 minutes during his first year on the job.

“He was just the sweetest boy to say, ‘It’s OK Susan, it’s not a big deal.’ Like it was a big deal [to me],” Makowski said. “That’s just the kind of person he is. He wants you to feel comfortable and he wants you to be OK. He’s willing to be Jacob for 15 minutes if that’s what it takes. There’s something very kind about him that’s needed in the world.”

Off campus, Hiller’s love for teaching continues at his local dance studio, Ronnie McLaughlin Dance Studio, where he has taught ballet, jazz, and tap to students ranging from 7 to 13 years old for the past six years.

Hiller shared he began dance lessons in fourth grade, inspired by his older sister. He shed light on the pressure and judgment competitive dancers



Senior secondary education and math major **Jared Hiller** reflected on his academics and being commencement speaker of 2025.

encounter, sharing he hopes to instill “positivity and happiness” into his young dancers.

“That’s one of the best things about my life. Outside of college, one highlight of my journey just on this planet ... it would literally be teaching dance and seeing those kids smile when I teach them something or laughing with them in the dance studio. It’s one of my favorite things ever,” Hiller said.

Reflecting on his college career, Hiller shared a big lesson he learned in college and encourages students to practice: do not take everything too seriously.

Hiller explained that students learn by asking questions, navigating who they are and looking ahead.

As May 17 approaches, Hiller continues to recite and write his speech leading up to graduation.

“Everybody’s experience is unique, and [I’ll] be trying to share that and be as open as possible with the graduating class,” Hiller said.



# Senior editors reflect on their time with The Rider News

## Former executive editor Jake Tiger

On the first day of Introduction to News Writing, Sept. 8, 2021, my professor informed the students that there was a meeting for The Rider News later that day and each person in the class was required to attend at least once throughout the semester.

Determined and inspired, I decided to apply myself and attend that meeting on the first day of classes, so that I could get that requirement out of the way and never have to worry about The Rider News again.

Thankfully, that mandatory meeting was the beginning of the most important four years of my life — a time that, when I needed it most, imbued me with a confidence and purpose I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

For most of high school, I was pretty sure I wanted to major in journalism; I always loved writing short stories. In elementary school, I made my own comic books about a super-powered hot dog, and in high school, I wrote the sports section for the student newspaper.

However, just before applying to college, I was scared away from journalism by an assignment in my personal economics class where we had to look up the job outlook of our future careers. The journalism outlook read -9%, and I remember being chuckled at by my friends who were interested in more traditional jobs. I ended up committing to Rider as an exercise science major, because I thought it would be fun to be an athletic trainer. That was a terrible, terrible mistake that I would happily repeat.

I did not pass a single class my first semester. I fell flat on my face and I knew something had to change. I could feel that my heart was not in it; exercise science simply was not what I was put on this earth to do. After a spring semester solely dedicated to pulling myself out of academic probation, I decided to turn my focus toward something that I actually cared about.

Since that first meeting in 2021, I have received signs that I made the right decision in choosing to follow my passions, and there is a fire within me that will not allow me to squander this second chance. Because of journalism, and because of Rider, I have undergone a professional and personal transformation that freshman Jake would be really proud of.

It is difficult for me to wrap my head around everything this newspaper has given me. I have met incredible people, written stories with genuine impact, accomplished things I never thought possible and maybe even had a couple dozen or so deadline-related stress dreams. But, alas, that is journalism.

Thank you to every single person over the years who allowed me to make mistakes, but did not allow me to fail. Thank you to the Rider community for being the perfect place for a lost, anxious student journalist to grow into a more caring, confident and completely new person.

Jake Tiger  
senior journalism major

## Former managing editor Hannah Newman

When I came into college I wanted to write. That was as far as my mind took me. I never saw myself as a journalist but always envisioned myself as a writer. I never saw myself as a photographer but always loved to take photos. After spending the last four years in all different parts of The Rider News, I learned that once you pursue what you love, you can turn it into anything.

When I walked in the newsroom door my second week of freshman year, the opportunity to create change in my community and hold the power to spread people's voices, transformed my vision of journalism and became something I knew I needed to do to fulfill my writing passion.

After a year as a contributing writer for features and entertainment and a section editor for two years, my passion only grew stronger and my determination to grow the section into a staple for the community was pivotal.

I remember proposing the idea to create a monthly series to my co-editor Tristan Leach. They were ecstatic about the idea and had their own contributions on how to implement it.

The idea of encapsulating people's lives and turning them into stories was something I was destined to make reality. There were so many people on this campus that had a story to tell and I felt that there was no such thing as the "right time" to share it.

We converted every month into a theme and students began to shape our narrative by nominating others for a profile or even themselves.

I covered students that came to America from war in the Middle East, interviewed alum that survived triple negative breast cancer and highlighted the accomplishments of students, and all the stories have taken my love for journalism to new heights.

As the managing editor in my senior year, getting to lead a staff as passionate about making our mission to the community about 'finding a voice for you' instead of 'finding content for us' was the highlight of my newsroom experience.

The people here and the work I have done is what challenged me to try new things, have the confidence to take on more journalistic responsibility and assist in leading the paper to numerous state awards.

More importantly, I had the opportunity to transform a paper with a 95-year-old history as a printed publication to nearly fully digital weekly issues.

I am honored to be a part of the immense change that the world has hit not just the newsroom with but all of us as human beings over the years.

There is no better feeling than leaving college feeling empowered by the lives I have impacted and having people that continue to make me a better person and writer every day.

Hannah Newman  
senior journalism major



Senior journalism majors **Jake Tiger** (left) and **Hannah Newman** want to express gratitude for their time spent with The Rider News.

## DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE STORIES:

The Rider News: Looking back and moving forward  
By Libby D'Orvilliers

Why I saved a life, and how you can too  
By Maggie Kleiner



Photo courtesy of Maggie Kleiner

Letter to the editor: A different way of thinking about general education courses  
By Richard Zdan

The unintentional effects of intentional boycotts  
By Caitlyn Sutton



Gail Demeraski/The Rider News



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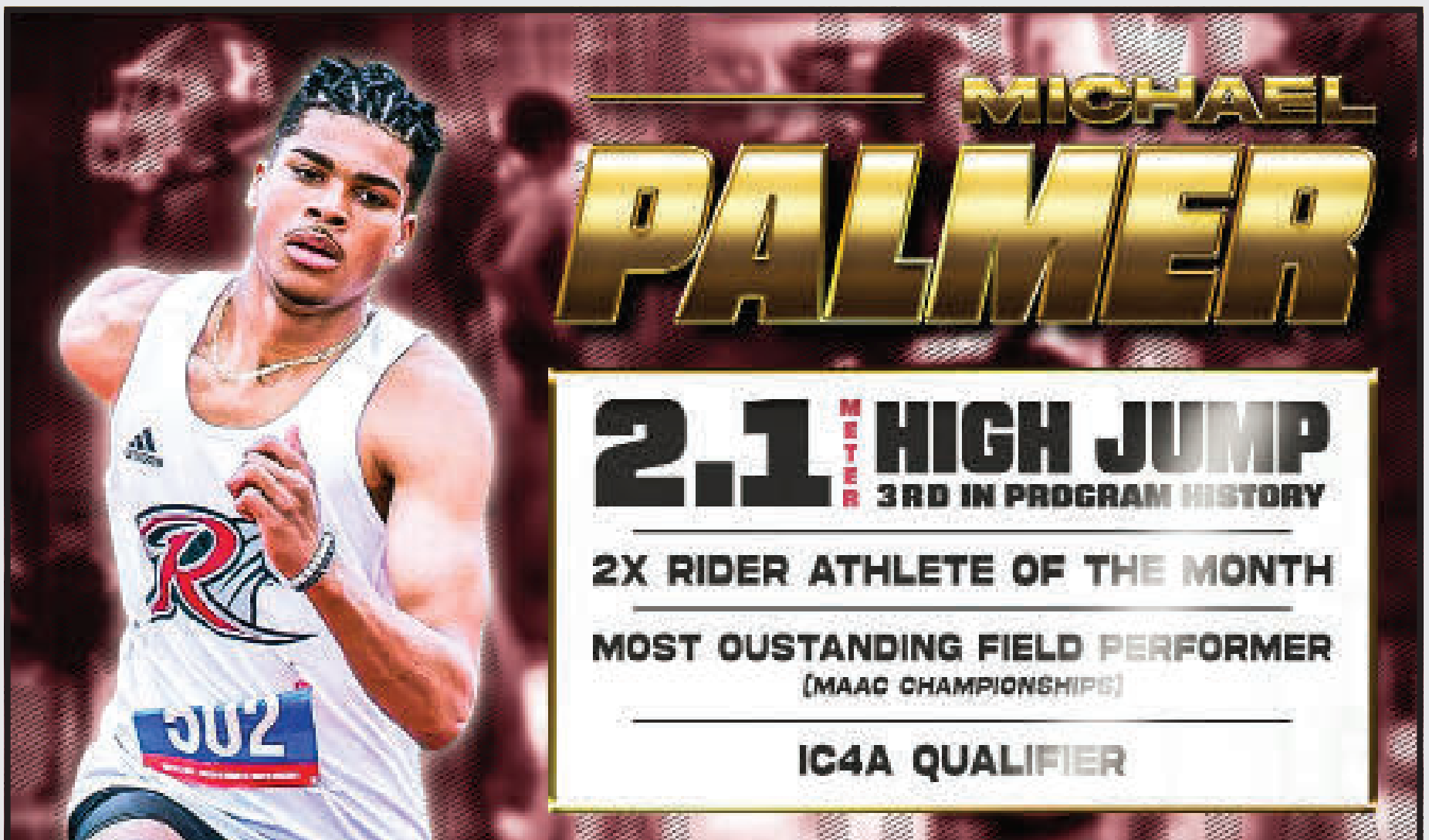
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Junior jumper **Michael Palmer** has had an illustrious amount of success this season.

Graphic by Josiah Thomas/The Rider News, Photo courtesy of Rider Athletics

## MEN'S TRACK & FIELD

# Palmer's leap of faith to Rider track

By Benjamin Shinault

**S**OME athletes are born to become stars. Others train, night and day, to become the best they can be. But for one athlete in particular, it seemed as if he was destined to be a high-flying star for Rider track and field, even if he did not know it.

Michael Palmer, a junior high-jumper and long jumper, has been racking up field awards all season. On April 15, Palmer won his second consecutive Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Field Performer of the Week award and won Rider athlete of the month in February.

In Rider's dominant showing at the Rider Invitational on April 18, Palmer won the high-jump event with a leap of 2.05m. At the highly-competitive Duke Invitational on April 12, Palmer finished fourth in high-jump, qualifying him for Intercollegiate Association of Amateur Athletes.

At the MAAC championships in February, Palmer took home the MAAC title in high-jump, with a jump of 2.05m.

Palmer then, at the Sam Howell Invitational this season, cleared 2.10m, the third-highest mark in Rider program history. It is the highest mark in the MAAC and could qualify Palmer for the NCAA championships in May.

One would think that Palmer has been training for meets, invites and championships his whole life, but they would be mistaken.

### A three-sport athlete

"I actually started my junior year of high school," Palmer said. "One of my friends had me come out, I really didn't think too much of it and my first year, I ended up doing pretty good and I ended up sticking with it."

Palmer, a Hawthorne, New Jersey native, considered himself more of a football and basketball player, not a track star.

"I grew up playing football and basketball," Palmer said. "I never really thought of track as a sport I would be doing at the collegiate level but here I am now."

Palmer was in varsity football and basketball in high school. On the football field, he played wide receiver and cornerback, and finished his career with eight receiving touchdowns and accumulated five interceptions and 41 tackles.

On the court, the former point guard finished with 350 career points, including 29 career-made 3-pointers.

Although Palmer had success on the court and the field, the three-sport athlete found his true calling on the track.

### 'We became brothers'

"Coming into college, I didn't even expect to even do track in college, I wasn't thinking my track career would take off but at this point now, honestly everything is a blessing," Palmer said.

When he first stepped foot on Rider's campus in the fall of 2022, Palmer met junior jumper Josh Burgess.

Not only was Burgess a great outlet for Palmer as a teammate, but the two have been close ever since they first laced up their spikes.

"We've been here together since freshman year," Palmer said. "We've always been roomed together so we have been able to build that relationship through these three years."

Burgess, who has seen Palmer on and off the track for the past three years, has seen quite the character development.

"Off the track, Michael [Palmer] is probably one of the funniest people I have met at my time at

Rider," Burgess said, "He's genuinely a person that is going to look out for you, make sure you are good ... if you have a goal, he's going to make sure you get it."

Burgess, who is from Ewing, New Jersey, was not close with the track and field team during his freshman year because of commuting to Rider but it was Palmer who made him feel comfortable.

"The first time that we really met was at a track meet and at that time I personally wasn't close with the team because I commute," Burgess said, "So, we ended up rooming together and from that moment, I feel like we just clicked and that became my brother from that point on."

With both Palmer and Burgess being jumpers, Burgess has seen all of Palmer's success and has seen some failed attempts at trying to eclipse the bar.

"We were at this one track meet ... it was freezing out and I remember that we were all doing high jump and Palmer jumps up and he hits the bar and the bar snaps," Burgess said with a chuckle.

Whether it was seeing Palmer snap the bar or cheer on his teammates, Palmer always sets the example for Burgess and the rest of his teammates.

"He's putting in four hours of physically demanding stuff and he probably takes another hour-plus to himself to make his body OK," Burgess said.

### 'I'm a man of faith'

With winning award after award, Palmer states that it is hard to describe what he is feeling in the moment an award is bestowed to him, a sense of surrealism coursing through Palmer.

"When something like that happens, it's obviously a surprise and the feeling, I can't really explain it but, it's definitely a surreal moment," Palmer said.

Palmer credits a lot of his on-the-track success to his faith.

"When it comes down to it, to put your faith in something other than just you because as humans we always fall short, each and every day so to be able to put my faith in something else personally puts me at peace" Palmer said.

Photo courtesy of Michael Palmer



Junior jumper **Michael Palmer** was a star football player at Hawthorne High School.



MARIAH

STEPHENS

12.14

METER

TRIPLE JUMP

INDOOR SEASON RECORD HOLDER

6.05

METER

LONG JUMP

INDOOR SEASON RECORD HOLDER

3X MAAC CHAMPION

3X RIDER ATHLETE OF THE MONTH

5X PERFORMER OF THE WEEK  
(MAAC)

Senior sprinter Mariah Stephens has had one of the most decorated careers in Rider track & field history. Graphic by Gail Demeraski/The Rider News, Photo by Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

WOMEN'S TRACK & FIELD

# Stephens flips her way into the recordbooks

By Samantha Clark and Kadie DiGiuseppe

**M**ARIAH Stephens tumbled and flipped as a gymnast for over 10 years before she unleashed her true talent in an Egg Harbor Township Eagles track and field uniform in 2017. After realizing her potential, Stephens committed to Rider in 2021 and contributed to the three time Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Championship program.

Under the leadership of Head Coach Bob Hamer and Associate Head Coach Brett Harvey, Stephens has raised the bar, claiming over 10 championship titles, second and third place accolades in both indoor and outdoor meets throughout her four years as a Bronc.

### Bird to a Bronc

Stephens grew up in a track and field household with her father and two brothers formerly competing. “I was looking for something after gymnastics to stay in shape and something to do with my friends. Most of my friends did track,” said Stephens.

When it came to collegiate track and field, Stephens knew Rider was the place for her, even though the entire recruitment process was virtual due to the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming to Rider and having older girls to look up to reassured Stephens her decision to become a Bronc was the right one.

Stephens explained that, despite her success the past four years, it was not always sunshine and rainbows. She faced the most challenging setback of her career this season when she suffered from a grade 2 quad strain on the first day of the MAAC indoor championships.

With the injury, Stephens was benched for the beginning portion of the outdoor season, which she said was only “more motivating” for her to finish her Rider career strong.

The cherry on top may have been the support she received from her teammates at the 2025 MAAC indoor championship when she decided to compete in her event, despite her injury, to give Rider a mere two points.

“Having so many of my teammates say that they did what they did for me, that’s what really makes

Rider special,” Stephens said. “The group of women that I get to compete with is what makes this place so special.”

### Tons of thanks

Not only does Stephens want to thank her teammates, but also her parents who helped her get to where she is.

“They have been my biggest supporters since I was two in a gymnastics leotard to then switching to some track spikes and a new uniform. They’ve just been my biggest supporters through it all,” Stephens said.

Stephens recalled her parents being the best supporters by always making sure she had everything to reach her fullest potential on and off the track. No matter the place she was at in her life, Stephens said her parents were always in her corner.

“From when I was two [years old] in gymnastic leos to a big switch to track spikes and a new uniform ... they never missed a meet,” Stephens said.

She wanted to thank her coaches, explaining she would not be where she is today without them.

“Accountability is huge to them. I wouldn’t be who I am without that,” Stephens said.

Both Harvey and Assistant Coach Matt Siley have had massive impacts on Stephens during her career, not allowing her to slack off and holding her to a high standard.

“Even on my not so great days, they’ll say ‘We know you’re better than this and you need to be better than this,’ and that’s what pushes me,” Stephens said.

### Learning lessons

Stephens’ biggest lesson she learned from her time in track and field is patience.

“Since track is an individual sport and you’re not always going to be at your best and it’s a really mentally challenging sport. When you know that you are capable of so much but just aren’t seeing the results, it’s hard,” Stephens said.

Stephens came off her junior season with a shoulder injury which taught her more patience going into her senior year. After not seeing her time on the track improve, she knew that was not her, but she remained

patient. At the indoor season of the MAAC, Stephens’ junior year, it finally clicked for her on the track, finding the improvement she worked toward all season. “Knowing that the results will be there if I work hard and stay committed to it, I’m excited to get back to it and get back to who I am this outdoor season,” Stephens said.

### ‘A long time coming’

Coach Harvey personally recruited Stephens her junior year of high school over Zoom without ever meeting her in person. He explained that he chose her based on her personal characteristics, and her ability to do well in school and on the track.

He recalled that during her time at Rider, Stephens continued to prove herself by always showing up as her best self and trying to get better.

Coach Harvey said, “I think [this award] is, in a way, a longtime coming. I think she’s been a standout kid for a long time and it’s great to see her get that recognition.”

Harvey, who has been at Rider for 13 years, had high praise for the three-time MAAC champion, saying, “We think she’s one of the best kids to ever come out of the women’s track and field program.”



Photo courtesy of Mariah Stephens


Before she was jumping hurdles, senior sprinter Mariah Stephens would stunt in gymnastics.



# Sports

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*Lacrosse, softball and baseball were all in action this week.*  
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BASEBALL

## From Falcons to Broncs, a brotherly connection

By Benjamin Shinault

**P**ENNSBURY High School in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, is a juggernaut of a high school baseball team. The team has won four district championships, one state championship and their league championship 23 times.

Pennsbury saw 10 of their alums reach professional baseball and countless Falcons have committed to play collegiate baseball.

On the 2021-22 team were two Rider Broncs, junior pitcher Gavin Hawkes and sophomore infielder Joe Tirolly.

In the fall of 2022, Hawkes made his way to Rider University and following behind a year later was Tirolly, sparking a new level to both their teammate chemistry as well as their brotherhood.

### This season

Tirolly and Hawkes had their fair share of both individual successes and leading the team to victories.

For the former Falcons, Hawkes is first in ERA in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference and he has already shattered his previous season-high in strikeouts with 29. Hawkes has allowed the least amount of runs, hits, home runs and has only walked 12 batters in his 38 and one third innings of action.

“The past two years, I went out and I wasn’t 100% confident and I wasn’t 100% myself so I think that was the biggest change for me,” Hawkes said to his starkly improved numbers.

Tirolly is third in the MAAC in batting average, first in slugging percentage, second in on-base percentage, first in RBIs and first in home runs. Before the 2025 season started, Tirolly was named to the All-MAAC preseason team, which served as a warning to the Broncs upcoming opponents.

“I think it was just having my freshman year under my belt, that year of just perspective and growth because I know what I’m getting myself into,” Tirolly said. “Nothing really changed in terms of training, I think it was just knowing what I was getting myself into and being prepared.”

Tirolly and Hawkes took home MAAC honors for the week of April 15, with Hawkes winning pitcher of the week and Tirolly winning player of the week for the second time. But before they were dominating competition in college, Tirolly and Hawkes had a special brotherly connection in high school.

### ‘Come to Rider’

Back in 2022, the Pennsbury Falcons controlled the Suburban One League, finishing with a record of 19-6 and had a dominant conference record of 13-3, and would go on to the league championship.

At practices, Tirolly and Hawkes were throwing partners but there was a lot more to their friendship than tossing the baseball around before practice.

“We threw together everyday, [Tirolly] was my throwing partner. We were over there together at third base, he took my spot and he made sure I didn’t hit in high school so I would talk to him everyday,” Hawkes said.

Hawkes committed to Rider as an unranked recruit according to Perfect Game and Tirolly was quick to congratulate him.

Hawkes turned himself into a recruiter and tried to get Tirolly, the 15th ranked third baseman in Pennsylvania, to commit to Rider as well.

“I was begging him to come as soon as I committed and he knows that, everyday I would say, ‘yo, come to Rider, come to Rider,’” Hawkes said.

Hawkes, in his first year at Rider, would always stay in contact with Tirolly and would sometimes get in former Head Coach Barry Davis’ ear about getting Tirolly to Rider.

“I was talking to him more than anything, I never really talked too much to Davis besides when Davis would ask questions about him and stuff like that but it was pretty much like telling him he should come here because I knew how much he could impact our



Photo courtesy of Joe Tirolly

Junior pitcher **Gavin Hawkes** (top) and sophomore infielder **Joe Tirolly** are bringing their high school relationship to Rider.

program,” Hawkes said.

After enough time with Hawkes being in his ear, Tirolly committed to Rider.

In his first year, Tirolly made an immediate impact as a freshman. He found himself on the All-MAAC second team and as a member of the all-rookie team. He slammed 10 home runs, hit nine doubles and finished with a batting average of .284.

Part of the credit to Tirolly’s comfortable first year in Lawrenceville was due to his high school teammate.

“There was just a sense of comfort that he gave me just knowing that I knew somebody on the team,” Tirolly said about Hawkes. “He’s going to be someone I can go and talk to... Gavin was just a huge part of me coming to Rider and feeling comfortable.”

The relationship between the two did not change much when they both swapped in their orange Pennsbury jerseys for the black Broncs jerseys.

“We have to get up in the morning together, we have our morning runs in the fall, we will drive together,” Hawkes said. “He’s the first person I see when I’m miserable at like 5 a.m.”

However, one thing did end up changing.

“The one thing that did change though was that we can’t throw together anymore,” Hawkes said.

### ‘He taught us the right way’

Their head coach in high school, Joe Pesci, saw a special bond in the two teammates and was not surprised about the success they are having in collegiate baseball.

“They played really significant roles for us,” Pesci said. “The type of people that they are draws kids toward them which is great because you want them to set the tone for a program and they did.”

For Tirolly and Hawkes, being formerly coached by Barry Davis and now interim Head Coach Lee Lipinski, they spoke out on what it meant to have Pesci in their ear at high school practices.

“He was a big influence, we were with him everyday, getting yelled at by him everyday, he’s kind of made practices easier now because everyday I’m not getting screamed at,” Hawkes said with a smirk. “He has definitely made the transition to college much easier.”

Tirolly, who was considered ‘Captain America’ in high school, offered his insight on what it meant to have a more verbal head coach at a younger age.

“Because of how stern he was during our practices and on the field, you get yelled at a few times but I think overall it definitely helped us not just with mental toughness but just perfecting your

craft,” Tirolly said.

When Tirolly and Hawkes were in high school, they emerged as leaders in the eyes of Pesci, which proved to be a critical piece to the team’s success in the 2022 season.

“Guys like Joe and Gavin could hear the message through the method,” Pesci said to his load coaching approach. “I try to justify what I do out of passion and sometimes I know its a little over the top but then there’s also guys that go on to college and they are like, ‘Man, I was prepared for that level of intensity,’” Pesci said.

### Off the field

When the two are not getting up at 5 a.m. for runs in brisk weather or hitting the batting cages, the two can be found talking and hanging out or, most likely, grabbing food.

“We go to the Yardley WaWa because we pretty much live there... Joe always has to have his Buffalo Wild Wings too, he loves the All-American burger,” Hawkes said.

“It’s a good burger,” Tirolly said in defense.

When the season comes to a close, everyone can expect for the Hawkes-Tirolly combination to not grow weak.

In the summer, the two have ‘intense’ live at-bats. They do not keep the stats from those one-on-one battles but one believes they have the slight edge.

“It’s a lot of fun, we definitely have bested each other a few times but I do remember the stats and I think I have you [Hawkes] right now but I wouldn’t say either of us have dominated each other,” Tirolly said.

To ensure the brotherly-like relationship, Tirolly sometimes tries to hang out with Hawkes but it is usually a swing and miss, believe it or not.

“I text him but he never calls me,” Tirolly said with a laugh.

Hawkes added, “Yeah, I hate you Joe.”