

Bethel student athletes Joey Kidder and Allie Fauth take on multiple sports and balance athletics with academics year-round.

By Rachel Blood | Design by Bryson Rosell

Joey Kidder's Nikes squeak against the Robertson Center Gym floor, the rhythm of his dribbling punctuated by the shouts of Bethel University and Macalester College spectators. Coming in from the right side, he leaps and sends the ball into the air and right through the hoop.

The room erupts in sound with 59.9 seconds left on the clock, the scoreboard's orange numbers flickering to 58-56.

Bethel takes the lead.

Kidder, a sophomore biokinetics student from New Richmond, Wisconsin, spends his time not only on the basketball court, but on the football field.

Of Bethel's 600 student athletes, only about 40 take on more than one sport, and most of that number consists of students participating in both track and cross country. Balancing athletics with academic and social life, these athletes navigate their busy schedules with the help of supportive teams and coaches.

Even when basketball and football season overlap in early October, Kidder powers through, dialing in to get homework done after practice so he can continue to pursue what he loves.

Kidder got into football young, his family coming home from church every Sunday and watching the night's game together. He grew up with sports – pick-up games around the neighborhood, messing around with his dad, recess.

Kidder started looking for colleges under the impression that he'd have to choose football, but when Bethel offered him the opportunity to play both, he took it, not wanting to part with either sport. Even when Kidder doesn't come out on top, he finds joy on the court or on the field.

In the MIAC Championship football game against St. John's University, Bethel lost 28-29, but Kidder hasn't forgotten the crowd turnout and the wonder of second-half snow. For him, it was just another challenge to overcome. And Kidder is no stranger to challenges.

In a home basketball game against St. Olaf Jan. 8, Bethel played with seven players on the court, half the roster out due to COVID-19. Bethel held them off with a 71-61 win.

"It was pretty exciting to see that [even when] down numbers, we unified just to get a nice win against a good team," Kidder said.

Kidder recommends being a two-sport ath-

lete to those who know they can handle it.

"Just go for it," Kidder said. "I don't think I could give up either sport. It's a love I've had since I was really young, so I know I've got to work with whatever is going to get thrown at me and battle around it." Kidder's football teammate Aaron Loe came out for the basketball team this year. Football coaches Steve Johnson and AJ Parnell along with Head Basketball Coach Zach Filzen are also very supportive.

"It's a blessing to have them, honestly," Kidder said.

Athletic Director Greg Peterson, who took the position June 1, 2021, also played football and basketball during his time at Bethel. The opportunity provided by Bethel to play two sports while being involved in a Christ-centered community was one Peterson couldn't pass up.

According to Peterson, many student athletes actually perform better academically while in season, a probable result of the discipline and dedication that goes along with playing a college sport.

For graduate student Allie Fauth, choosing only one sport was never on the table. In searching for a college, she made sure she selected one that would allow her to continue both passions – softball and volleyball – while working toward a degree in elementary education.

Starting out young with slow-pitch T-ball, Fauth's love for softball is a part of her upbringing. Being competitive has instilled in her a love for all sports, but softball remains her long-time love.

Fauth didn't start playing volleyball until middle school, transitioning from soccer to spend time with more friends, but falling in love with it in sixth grade and sticking with it.

Though a few other Division III MIAC schools were options, Fauth chose Bethel and grew under the guidance of Head Volleyball Coach Gretchen Hunt and Head Softball Coach Penny Foore, both women she looks up to.

Fauth says it's common to see athletes begin playing two sports and choose one as the years go on, but a few of her teammates join her in dual-sport endeavors, including track hurdler and volleyball player Kelsie Sealock and softball and hockey players Lexi DeBace and Grace Halvorson.

For Fauth, there was a balance to be struck between playing a fall sport and a spring





NO FOR ONE

sport. When the volleyball season wound down in November, she started lifting with the softball team, and when softball season came to a close in May, she spent the summer months conditioning on her own before starting the whole cycle over again.

It was a system – one that worked.

And then COVID-19 pushed the volleyball season to the spring, and suddenly Fauth was doing everything at once. She went from having no athletic obligations but home workouts in her hometown of Hutchinson to a packed schedule filled with volleyball, softball and academics. Fauth, who puts in about 25 hours a week during the regular softball season, had her doubts.

How am I going to do all this stuff?

6 a.m. volleyball practice. Making the trek to Pact Charter School in Ramsey to student teach – a 20-minute drive on a good day, 30 minutes on a bad one. Back to Bethel for softball practice, bouncing between second base and centerfield. From softball to a volleyball game. Go, go, go.

“I would get overwhelmed and cry a lot, but I was never like, ‘Oh, I’m going to quit one.’ I was always 100% dedicated to each, which is why it was so hard,” Fauth said. “You don’t know how to split your time equally when

2021 as an outside hitter, finds momentum and endurance in the form of her teammates, who double as her closest friends. Now in her fifth softball season with the option of returning for a sixth, she is working toward her master’s degree in counseling while working full-time at the Anderson Center as an enrollment counselor. She goes home after nights spent with her softball team to two of her former volleyball teammates.

“You have two different team dynamics, two different groups of girls that you can really rely on and that are walking through different stages of life with you, and it’s just really, really cool,” Fauth said.

During her sophomore year, her volleyball team got into a bus accident when a car swerved into their lane and hit them head-on.

“It was super traumatic, and we ... were able to process that together,” Fauth said. “It’s definitely something that brought us closer and created a team dynamic that I’ve never been a part of before.”

Fauth’s softball team has provided a family for her, too. She remembers walking through the Brushaber Commons before COVID-19 hit her sophomore year and seeing the whole team crowded around Royal Grounds each day.

6.6%

Approximately 6.6% (60/400) of Bethel student athletes play multiple sports. | Stat from Athletic Director Greg Peterson.

they’re both technically in season.” Though COVID-19 moving the volleyball season was a first-time occurrence, her coaches were flexible and understanding about it.

With a support system in place, Fauth’s experience as a two-sport athlete has allowed for a lot of personal growth.

“I would really recommend it. The coaches, especially at Division III, especially at Bethel, are more than willing to work with you so that you can be able to do both,” she said.

Fauth, who was named the MIAC volleyball Elite 22 Award recipient in November

“[The softball team] are the goofiest group of girls I’ve ever talked to in my whole life. We’re always joking around, always making funny comments,” Fauth said. “It was just fun walking through the hallways and knowing that you’re going to see one of your best friends.”

Now, as Fauth finishes up her classes at 9:30 p.m. on a Thursday, she smiles to herself. She knows that this weekend’s double-header softball games, regardless of the outcome, will be more evidence that she does not have to be only one thing. **C**



