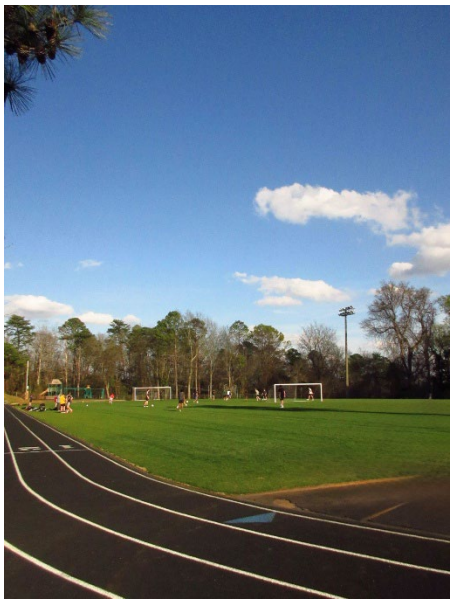
INTERVIEWS: Knight Athletes and Coaches Share Visions, Excitement for Spring Sports

By Audrey Thrower

It is time for Altamont's spring sports! After a successful winter, the Knights are excited for a new season. *The Acta Diurna* interviewed coaches and athletes to understand their visions for this season and share what the Altamont community can look forward to.

Varsity Boys Soccer

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?



Jason Swam, Head Boys Varsity Soccer Coach: "The vision for the team this year is to progress by building a foundation that can push the program forward, not just for this year, but for years to come."

Powell Fry, senior: "The vision for the team heading into the new season has been to build chemistry together. Having lost 11 seniors last year, we have many players who have never played together, so establishing chemistry and coming together as teammates will be very crucial when we head into area games. For example, team dinner has quickly become an activity that we have once a month where we get together and simply have fun together. In addition, our main goal is to win the area and make it playoffs."

What are some successes that the team is going to build on from last season? What are some obstacles from last season that the team is hoping to learn from?

Swam: "Last season we were able to make it into the playoffs and win our first-round game [which was] the first playoff win for the boys since 2019. This year we have set a team goal to win our area – a goal the coaches and players feel is attainable if we put in the work. The largest obstacle that we faced last year was ourselves. We have to change our mindset from being able to win the big game to *winning* the big game. We learned last year that we can compete with quality opponents, and this year we look to learn what it takes to beat the quality opponents. I have built a difficult schedule this year, one that will challenge us both physically and mentally. The hope is that we play tough opponents to prepare us for the difficult playoff games ahead."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Fry: “The Altamont community should be excited that our team is so young. We have so many players that span among all ages – even middle school! Not just this year, but for many years to come, Altamont soccer is in great hands. In addition, the community should be excited for this team and the potential that we have to make a deep run in the playoffs this year. In past years, we have been steadily building towards a deep run, and I truly believe we have the talent, ability, and leadership to make it happen this year.”

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

Swam: “We lost 11 seniors at the end of last season, many whom were leaders on and off the field. I challenged the boys last year to ‘reset the standard’ of Altamont soccer; the team did that with our playoff win. This year I've challenged the boys to ‘rebuild the standard’; I want them to take the next step this year and claim the area title at a minimum, then advance to the state semi-finals. This starts with us winning our area. Our team would love to have a packed house at Lily Field for our games. We have one of the best home fields in Birmingham, and the students packing the sidelines make it one of the greatest environments. Come out, make some noise, and cheer the soccer teams on as both teams push to claim area titles.”

Fry: “The Altamont community should know that their support is greatly needed! Every athlete knows how much your friends [and] others yelling for you and supporting you can help. When we get tired and exhausted and don't feel like going anymore, the support that the community brings truly helps us to find more energy and dig deeper. Specifically, we need everyone that can come out to the home area game against Tuscaloosa Academy. Aside from Indian Springs, this game is the most important game of the season, and it would help everyone if we could get a crowd to show support.”

<u>Varsity Girls Soccer</u>

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Halle Morton, Head Girls Varsity Soccer Coach: “The vision this year is to play our version of soccer. This means keeping the ball on the ground, defending with intent, and scoring team goals. The plan is to be disciplined and take it all the way to the state tournament!”

Sanjana Gaddamanugu, junior: “When it comes to the Altamont Girls Soccer Team, both our past season and this one have found success in our tight-knit group. Being a small school and team, our team finds a lot of fun in the time we spend with one another and the rapport we've built ... Especially with the 2026 season, the girls soccer team would love to continue our bond and take advantage of bettering each other’s experience this season!”

What are some successes that the team is going to build on from last season? What are some obstacles from last season that the team is hoping to learn from?

Morton: “One success we plan to build off is the success we found in defending well. Our girls learned a lot about defensive positioning [and] field positioning last year, and we can continue

to build on this knowledge of defending to win games. An obstacle we will have to overcome is showing up for every game. We have to be ready for every opponent despite heavy legs and busy schedules."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Gaddamanugu: "Home games! The boys and girls teams play home games at Lily Field. Soccer is such a fun game to watch, and I believe the success of our teams can improve with the support of our fellow Knights."

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

Morton: "Please come to Lily Field on April 14th, 2026, for our area game against Tuscaloosa Academy!"

Gaddamanugu: "As a multi-sport athlete and past athlete for other sports at Altamont, the single constant I find is the new relationships that get forged. I encourage any and every Altamont Knight to find your sport and community. These relationships not only span multiple seasons but exist between different grades, and it's a great way to further engage in the Altamont community!"

<u>Baseball</u>
What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Jeff Schalk, Head Baseball Coach: "The vision for the team is the same every year. We strive to further develop every student athlete on the team into a responsible and mature young man. I want them to leave this baseball program with the tools necessary to lead their future families, jobs, and teams. While doing all that, our goal is to also make each student athlete into the best baseball player he can be. Our goal is never a set number of wins or to win a specific game. Rather, we strive for constant personal and athletic development while also competing at a high level athletically."

Aubrey Sanders, senior: "We have had one goal in mind over the past four years, and that is to win a state championship. We have put in a lot of work in the weight room and on the field over the past six months to make that vision a reality. We are extremely fortunate with the talent and work ethic that this team possesses, so we're really looking to make the most of that this year."

What are some successes that the team is going to build on from last season? What are some obstacles from last season that the team is hoping to learn from?

Schalk: "Last season we won 16 games and we had a run-rule-enforced win in nine of those games (meaning we were winning by ten plus runs after five innings, so the game ended early). Those teams we beat were teams Altamont would have typically played rather evenly with in years past. We are at the point with this team that we needed to take a step up in who we

scheduled. If you take a look at this year's opponents, you'll see many names of schools who are much bigger than us. We want to take on the challenge of these bigger schools to test our team and be ready for area games and playoffs."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Sanders: "Honestly, the Altamont community should be excited about every aspect of this baseball season. We have a strong team culture, we are going to win a lot of games, and the energy down at Comer is unmatched. If you're looking for an exciting atmosphere, good baseball, and delicious hamburgers, I would recommend coming to our home games."

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

Schalk: "Altamont has an opportunity right now to become a special place for athletics. With Sheri Salmon at the head of our athletics department, we have a leader who is committed to making the student athlete experience second to none. What every single student athlete at this school wants is the unwavering support of our entire student body, our parents, and our alumni. Altamont will always be a special place academically; that's a given. The goal for the athletic department is to make it someplace where students absolutely love their time competing in athletics, are supported by everyone in every sport, and end up leaving here with the best education you can possibly get in the state of Alabama."

Sanders: "In all honesty, the team that we have this year is the best Altamont has had in a long time. We are doing all that we can to represent Altamont in the best way possible and bring home a state trophy. We really appreciate this community's support over the past few years, and we can't wait to see everybody at the games this season. Go Knights!"

<u>Boys Golf</u>

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Eddy Dunn, Head Boys Golf Coach: "Our goal for this season is to find ways to replace the talent that graduated last year and to continue a log run of post-season appearances in the sub-state tournament, with the ultimate goal of qualifying for the state tournament both as a team and individually. We have a streak of sub-state appearances running 18 years and would like to keep that alive for this final year of competition against both public and private schools combined. Two seasons ago we had an individual appearance at the state tournament by Ben Wetta. It would be nice to return this year."

What are some successes that the team is going to build on from last season? What are some obstacles from last season that the team is hoping to learn from?
Dunn: "[For the girls and the boys, my] focus this season and every season is to instill the character of the game of golf into all our players. I want people to come to know our players as those who count every stroke no matter if they are in the fairway with everyone watching or in

the trees where no one can see them. This is a character trait that will follow them into every area of life. If they can be the same person when no one is looking as they are when all eyes are on them, they will win in every situation even if the score is against them."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Dunn: "We have two very talented boys in Ben Lebensburger, ninth [grade], and Ben Wetta, tenth [grade]. These two deliver a high level of golf each time they hit the course. These two often lead our first group in our matches. Our home matches are played at Highland Park Golf Course. If you enjoy watching a good round of golf, come out a give our boys and girls teams a look."

Girls Golf

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Eddy Dunn, Head Girls Golf Coach: "Our goal for this season is to improve our average scores over last season, repeat as Section Two champions, and continue a ten-year streak of appearances at sub-state. While we are an overall young team, I would like to see an improvement in our sub-state finish as we build toward earning a spot in the state tournament."

Jenevieve McNeil, senior: "My vision for this year is to build a stronger girls' golf community both for the girls on the team now, and for girls who are interested."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

McNeil: "The Altamont community should be excited for another great season; we were almost undefeated last year, and we are looking to go undefeated this year!"

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

McNeil: "I would love the community to know that they can come out and support us at Highlands [Golf Course]! Adam Hemingway and I are working with Mrs. Salmon to find ways for students and faculty to support us on the course!"

Boys Tennis

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Sutton Gregg, junior: "For this season, I would say our biggest goals are to build stronger team bonds and to make it to state."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Gregg: "The Altamont community should definitely be excited for high energy, intense matches, and some big upsets."

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

Gregg: “Come out to a tennis match and you won’t be disappointed.”

Girls Tennis

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Susan Keith, Head Girls Tennis Coach: “The Altamont Girls Tennis Team is composed of one senior, one sophomore, one freshman, three eighth graders, and three seventh graders. We are a young team with plenty of potential and promise for the future. The vision for this team is to compete well in our Area and place in the top three at the Section Tournament in April.”

Kennadi Sullen, senior: “Going into the 2026 season, our vision is to build a competitive team that continues to grow individually and collectively. With many young players stepping into large roles, this season is about building confidence, strengthening our skills, and taking on the challenge of competing at a varsity level. We want to create an environment where everyone feels supported and motivated. Beyond wins and losses, the team is focused on being consistent and on teamwork. Tennis can be an individual sport, but the success comes from the encouragement we give each other. We want to compete with intensity and represent Altamont well. Ultimately, our goal is not only to do well this year, but to also create a foundation for the team to grow on.”

What are some successes that the team is going to build on from last season? What are some obstacles from last season that the team is hoping to learn from?

Keith: “Our main obstacle coming into this year is the loss of three seniors from last year.”

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Sullen: “The Altamont community should be excited to see the many new young players on the varsity girls' tennis team. Although the team is quite young, the girls are incredibly skilled, hardworking, and passionate about the sport. There is a lot of potential on this team, and it will be exciting to watch them grow and compete throughout the season.”

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

Keith: “The future of Altamont Girls Tennis is very bright. With seven of our nine players being in ninth grade or below, we will be a strong force for the next six years.”

Sullen: “Historically, spirit for the tennis teams hasn’t been very high, which is understandable considering the sport’s quiet nature. However, even a small crowd makes a big difference. Having people come out to clap and encourage the team truly boosts our energy and

motivation. We would love to see more of the Altamont community come to support us this season!"

Outdoor Track

What is the vision for the team going into the 2026 season?

Jamie Rediker, Head Track and Field Coach: "We have two strong teams entering the season with opportunities at the state championship to win some individual and relay events, with lofty aspirations for team trophies. We want to continue to grow middle school participation and increase our depth in field events, so we are prepared for continued success in subsequent years."

Mia Mayo, senior: "For the 2026 season, I'd say we're looking for positive vibes, state titles, but also new athletes! I'm honestly just excited to have a good time with the team, and as a senior, savor my last season of track."

What are some successes that the team is going to build on from last season? What are some obstacles from last season that the team is hoping to learn from?

Rediker: "Last year was our first year in a higher classification, 4A, and we did well [competing] alongside schools larger than ours. We have proven that we are not daunted by higher levels of competition. Navigating a long season with a variety of external obligations is always a challenge, so keeping focus and avoiding burnout is imperative as we approach the state championship in May."

What should the Altamont community be getting excited about this season?

Mayo: "Last year we moved to the 4A division for outdoor track and field, meaning we're going to Gulf Shores for state! As displayed by our indoor state titles from both the girls and the guys team, we're definitely ready for the challenge and would love for anyone to come along [and] stay tuned for the championship. Outdoor [track and field] is going to be a long, fun season, and if students are looking for a sport, I'd recommend they give track a try!"

Is there anything else important that you would like the Altamont community to know?

Rediker: "We have several Saturday track meets in the Birmingham area (Vestavia, Homewood, Mountain Brook, and Spain Park) and we'd love to have some spectator support!"

Mayo: "Honestly, I'd just like to promote 'hyping up' all of [Altamont's] spring athletes. With so many seniors playing soccer, baseball, and running track, there are endless opportunities to support not just the teams, but the class of '26. It would mean a lot! Lastly, I'd like to highlight Coach Salmon, our athletic director, who is doing a fantastic job. She works hard behind the scenes to make sure each athlete is celebrated and has the resources they need to excel. Thanks Coach!"