

The Cougar Chronicle

NFL Draft Predictions

Manny Shklar, Managing Editor

1. Don't overthink it: The Bears stay at #1

The Chicago Bears find themselves in a predicament that most teams would kill for. Not only



do they have the first and ninth overall picks, they have a solid young quarterback in Justin Fields and loads of cap space. Fields has yet to show true arm talent in the NFL, but he's shown flashes of excellence and the Bears haven't gotten him much help. Despite this, Fields will be traded and the Bears will select Caleb Williams with the first pick. At 6'1" and 215 pounds, USC's 22 year old was born to play football. His only real issue is aggression as a passer, as Williams can be hesitant to throw a short checkdown and would rather take off with his legs or look downfield. Outside of that, he's fast, athletic, has a rocket arm and projects to be an elite player for years to come.

2. Michigan's gunslinger rises on draft boards

Watching the College Football Playoff National Championship, JJ McCarthy's maturity on the

football field stood out. The QB is a very raw talent, and we haven't seen him do too much, as he was surrounded by a legendary coach and a great running back and defense. Even with this, McCarthy looked like a veteran when he needed to make plays, asserting a strong pocket presence and making clutch throws when necessary. He just turned 21, so a team with great weapons or an aging quarterback to select him in the top 10 and develop his craft.

3. The best defender doesn't even go top three in his position

Analysts have loved talking about the numerous possibilities at quarterback and wide receiver during the draft, but a position that deserves more attention is cornerback. It's very possible that as many as five or six corners end up in the first round this year, a number that has seemingly gone up every draft recently. Of the top ones this year, Iowa's Cooper DeJean sticks out like a sore thumb. He can play all over the field, has the best ball skills in the class, can read an offense and is able to tackle, all making for the perfect cornerback prospect. However, Clemson's Nate Wiggins, Toledo's Quinyon Mitchell, and Alabama duo Terrion Arnold and Ga'Quincy "Kool-Aid" McKinstry have all made valid arguments to be CB1 this year. Each of them, though, lack traits the DeJean can do with ease, but their elite skills can shine through. Teams love players with that ability to be so good at specific skills as op-

posed to being solid as an all around player, forcing DeJean to fall in the first round.

4. Three pass catchers in the top 10

The term "generational" is thrown around with seemingly every top pick, but it's fair to say Ohio State's Marvin Harrison Jr. lives up to this label. The son of a Hall of Famer, the 6'4" wide receiver is far and away the best college football player we've seen in years, and his combination of athleticism and ball skills will translate perfectly into the next level. In short, the future All-Pro is



a lock to go in the top four. Following Harrison, there's a close battle for the class's second best receiver between Washington's Rome Odunze and LSU's Malik Nabers. Each player has a valid argument to be in this conversation, as Odunze catches seemingly every pass thrown to him and Nabers can turn a short throw into a long touchdown with ease. Both wideouts can land in the top 10, and it wouldn't be surprising to see one move into the top 5.

Power of the Platforms

Yoni Bleier, Staff Writer

There are two things that people like to talk about the most: Celebrities and politics. Now what happens when you mix them both? Politics has been an infamous cause of fighting as well as a reason for broken friendships, and even marriages. Celebrities have been a source of fascination and conversation ever since people learned to talk, and social media has given them a ginormous platform to take part in that conversation. We're all familiar with the phrase "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility" first written by Voltaire, a French author but memorialized by the Spider-Man comics. This quote is important to remember when discussing this topic because we have to realize that celebrities

have as much a right to discuss politics as any human being, but where is the line drawn between freedom of speech and manipulation, bias, propaganda, and even hate?

It is important to note why



someone is a celebrity. If they are celebrities because they have famous songs, then why should we take their opinions over someone who might only know 1,000 people, but has a major in political science? If some-

one is a celebrity because they have a famous political podcast, then it is fair to say that they probably know more than a singer or dancer who dropped out of high school to pursue their career. This doesn't mean

we should blindly accept what one says over another, but we should realize why we like them, and why we follow them on Instagram.

I believe that celebrities need to refrain from making political statements on major platforms because whether they like it or not they have huge responsibility and an enormous effect on people. I understand that people need to speak up for what they be-

lieve in, but I also believe that some sacrifices have to be made based on what career you choose, and if it's a free-for-all, then all global social media platforms become a battlefield. There is no way to ensure that a celebrity is a good or bad person, and unlike your average Instagram or an X (Twitter) account, their posts have much more sway. I also feel that celebrities will understandably continue to share their opinions because that's just the way it is, but remember: Just because someone's face is perfectly symmetrical, or because someone has an extremely successful makeup line, it does not make their opinion more important than your or anyone else's!

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Shedding Light on the United Nations' Negligence

Jillian Shweky, Opinion Editor

The United Nation has four purposes; “Maintain International Peace and Security. Protect Human Rights. Deliver Humanitarian Aid. Support Sustainable Development and Climate Action.” Unfortunately, the Israel-Hamas conflict



has placed a glaring light on the UN's blatant disregard of its duties.

According to Jonathon Schanzer of the Federation for Defense of Democracies, directly after October 7th, it became clear that the United Nations was going to stand with Hamas, even before Israel had retaliated. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, stated that “nothing can justify” the attacks by Hamas, yet he made excuses for them. He even said that “today's violence must be put into context,” and continued to blame the events of that day on the IDF's prior power over Gaza. A situation where innocent civilians are being targeted does not need “context.” The only thing necessary is support for the victims. The events of October 7th should have been a call to action for the UN to combat the terrorism, but instead they took this as another opportunity to condemn Israel.

Interestingly, the UN does not recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization, which allows members of this organization to receive UN resources. Many UN members have called for a

ceasefire which on the surface may seem as if it is an act to support Humanitarian aid, but in truth it just allows for Hamas to organize and prepare to attack Israel again. This is exemplified in a UN resolution, which intended to find a way to protect Palestinian civilians. Not only did they not mention Hamas by name in this resolution, but there was no mention of the Israeli citizens who had been so viciously attacked in the weeks prior.

Every single refugee group in the world is under the authority of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, except the Palestinians who have an entire UN aid agency dedicated just to them called UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). This

does not only show the favoritism the UN has toward Palestinians, but has also perpetuated the Palestinian refugee situation as stated by The Foundation for Defense of Democracies. When the older generations of Palestinians started to pass away, UNRWA expanded the definition of a Palestinian refugee to be the offspring of the original refugees and living anywhere Palestinian refugees have migrated including Palestinians living in Jerusalem, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. This definition of refugee is a status that is not applicable to any other refugee group in the world. In addition, with the education and healthcare systems that UNRWA has established over the last 75 years, they are operating like a government or corporation employing over 30,000 people, 99% of which are Palestinians according to the Migration Policy Institute. An entire infrastructure and industry has been built around the Palestinian refugee status with the world providing

their funding, the majority of which comes from the US at \$343 million a year. This perpetuates the refugee problem by giving monetary value to being a refugee and by thereby framing Israel as the continued perpetrator and maintaining tension between Israelis and Palestinians and Israel and the world. The UN is not fulfilling its duty to foster sustainable development and to “Maintain International Peace and Security.”

In addition, as the UN does not identify Hamas as a terrorist organization, it has been suggested that many of the thousands of those people that work for UNRWA have connections to Hamas. (See article about UNRWA in Israel

This hyperfixation the UN has on Palestinians is not maintaining international peace. It is perpetuating hate, divide, and violence.

News section.) Before UNRWA employees were identified as participating in the October 7th attacks, the UN knew of UNRWA workers with connections to Hamas when a principal of an UNRWA school was elected to an official position in the terrorist organization, showing how extremely corrupt and dysfunctional UNRWA is. This hyperfixation the UN has on Palestinians is not maintaining international peace nor is it helping them to break from the label of oppression of being a refugee. It is perpetuating hate, divide and violence. The UN was created after World War II to prevent horrific events like that from ever occurring again. It's disheartening to see the UN, such an influential organization, act in a way that does not align with their supposed edict and morals, and to actually enable a terrorist organization to achieve their goals.

Does Music Help or Hinder Studying Success?

Margot Englander, Centerspread Editor

Wouldn't it be awesome if simply listening to your favorite song would help you memorize those Hebrew words or solve that difficult math problem? Unfortunately, even your favorite album is not that powerful. Research shows that music can have several positive effects, such as reducing stress and improving performance. However, given that music (and different types of music) does not affect everyone in the same way, there is not a definitive yes or no answer. Music has great potential to aid in student's studying success, as it is found to reduce stress and improve moods. In a 2021 study, ICU patients said that they experienced less pain and anxiety after listening to music for half an hour than before. Studying can be stressful, so if you feel overwhelmed or upset, listening to music can potentially help reduce stress. Music has also been proven to have motivational effects; research from 2019 suggests that music can activate the same reward centers in your brain as do other things you enjoy, so rewarding yourself with music can provide the motivation to learn new information, or study for a test. If you prefer music that doesn't pair well with your study-



ing, you can opt to listen to music during study breaks. Furthermore, based on a 2007 study, music – specifically classical music – can help your brain absorb and understand information better, as it increases focus. In fact, in a study a couple of years later, 41 boys diagnosed with ADHD found that background music helped most of them focus more. Finally, music can help with the often daunting task of memorizing information. In a 2014 research study, listening to classical music seemed to help older adults perform better based on memory and processing tasks. Music helps stimulate your brain, similar to the way exercise helps stimulate your body, and it can be used to help students study habits.

However, there is also a good amount of research that suggests that music is unhelpful to, and even capable of hurting effective studying strategies. An important part of music's power is its ability to distract you; while this can be a positive when you feel sad or stressed, this can also distract you from studying, which we try to avoid.

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Impact of Music - Continued

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In some cases, listening to music has been found to reduce one's working memory capacity, which is used to memorize lists, steps for an equation, or a sequence of events – all of which are found in traditional school settings. Lastly, certain types of music – including music with lyrics and instrumental music that is fast and loud – can hinder your ability to understand and comprehend reading material.

So, what kind of music works best? We should avoid music with lyrics, as they can be distracting when trying to study, and instead can choose slow, instrumental music. Surprising or experimental music that changes abruptly or lacks a fixed rhythm can leave you guessing about what to expect and can be distracting when trying to focus. Keep your volume low, as it should stay at background volume. Also, stick to

Reduce stress and improve moods

songs that you don't have strong feelings about (either positive or negative) because this could affect your ability to concentrate.

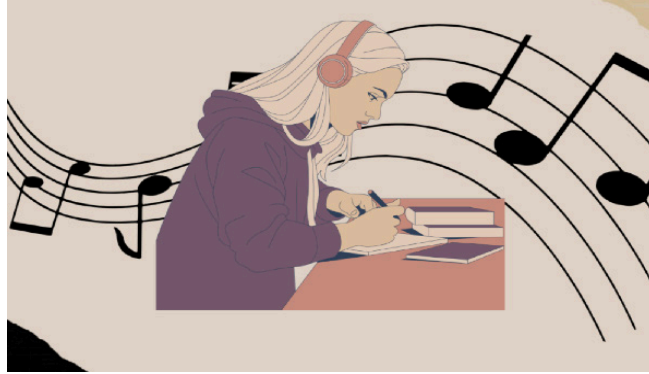
Music activates both the left and right side of the brain at the same time, which can maximize learning ability and improve brain function.

Music based activities in early childhood education have proven to support self-regulation, cognitive and intellectual development, and literacy and language abilities. No matter their age, students can benefit from music to help their academic performance.

In my opinion, music has the ability to help me when studying, but I often find myself getting distracted by catchy lyrics instead of focusing on my homework. Also, music is only helpful to me when I'm working on certain subjects. A background playlist is great

for when I'm knocking out some history note cards or working through a complicated math problem, but when I'm trying to write an English essay or review Hebrew vocabulary, it proves to be more of a distraction. Therefore, I think that music is optimal for more passive forms of learning, instead of active types.

Everyone should test out their individual relationship with music while studying, because it could prove to be extremely beneficial to you! Who knows?



There's No Need for Bad Blood With Taylor Swift

Ari Eisenstadt, Staff Writer

The grammy winning and future hall of fame artist, Taylor Swift, was facing backlash for attending a comedy show whose proceeds went to the organization American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), specifically to help Palestinians in the Israel-Hamas Conflict. Her presence at the event

Taylor Swift has not made a public statement agreeing with the Free Palestine movement

has upset many Zionists because they argue that Taylor Swift giving money to a Palestinian organization is wrong because it could get into the hands of Hamas, and therefore we must cancel Taylor Swift. There are many flaws to this argument including the fact that Taylor Swift has not made a public statement agreeing with the Free Palestine movement and there is no proof that she directly donated. Also, ANERA is an aid organization that is not directly affiliated with Palestine which proves that Taylor Swift was supporting the innocent lives of Palestinians. Though it is alleged by some right-wing politicians that there are a few employees who support Hamas, the organization has not made any statements that are Pro Hamas. Addi-

tionally, Free Palestine's mission is to "defend and advocate for the human rights of all Palestinians." While they do not support trade with Israel, their website does not directly call for Israel's destruction, meaning that if Taylor went to this function as a political point she was not being antisemitic and probably not anti-Israel either. Furthermore, Taylor Swift attending this function does not directly mean she is anti-Israel nor does it prove anything but her supporting people

in a situation of poverty and struggle. This theme of supporting the less privileged aligns with her beliefs since she has been involved with Feeding America for many years. Overall, trying to cancel Taylor Swift over an alleged association with a group that is trying to aid Palestinian refugees and civilians is an extreme response and is boosting cancel culture.



Taylor Swift Ruining Football for Chiefs Fans

Aviva Markowitz, Arts & Entertainment Editor

Recently there has been a lot of dispute online about international popstar Taylor Swift attending the Kansas Chiefs football games in



support of her new boyfriend Travis Kelce. Most fans are angry about the amount of screentime she has been given when it really should be on the players instead. More specifically, every time the Chiefs score a touchdown, the cameras almost immediately pan to Swift instead of the team celebrating the play. Some are even comparing her to Yoko-Ono, the late musician John Lennon's girlfriend, who was rumored to cause tension in the band, The Beatles, leading to their ultimate break up. As Ono was always with Lennon, people find Swift to constantly be around Kelce, attending every game he plays. Some suspect that

she is simply using the NFL star to promote herself and her world famous Eras tour even more. Male viewers are also angry about football being "feminized" by the singer and are mad their viewing experience is ruined and claiming that Swift is single handedly ruining the game for everyone. NFL's X (formerly known as Twitter) and Instagram accounts have removed all references to Taylor Swift because of all the backlash from die hard fans. The reminder that she is at the game disrupts the enjoyment for many fans, causing people to contemplate leaving the Chief's fandom.

Welcoming Ms. Plunkett, Barrack's New Math Teacher, to Our Kehillah

Ariel Shavit, Arts, Features, & Games Editor

Where did you grow up and go to school?

Ms. Plunkett grew up in Philly and is a product of the Philadelphia public school system. In fact, she went to the School for Engineer-



ing and Science (now called Carver High School for Engineering and Science). She finished in 3 years!

How long have you been teaching?

Ms. Plunkett has been teaching for 31 years.

How do you like Barrack so far?

Ms. Plunkett loves Barrack! She feels so lucky to be here.

What has your favorite part of Barrack been or what are you looking forward to?

Ms. Plunkett's favorite part of Barrack is working with the kids. The

close second is the math department!

What's your favorite movie?

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is one of Ms. P's favorite movies. She would borrow the series from her local branch of the Cape May Library System and binge-watch them with her kids when they went to the shore.

How do you spend your free time?

Ms. Plunkett loves to read and she is a dog grandmom! She also loves the beach!

Do you have any fun facts about yourself or hidden talents!?

Her SATs were higher in verbal than math. She is intuitive and pathic and just gets things about people. She also loves classic rock guitar, though, her talent is in her ear. She loves flowers and also goes bird watching.

What is one important piece of advice you tell all of your students?

Don't say yes when you actually mean no and also, wash your hands! With Barrack, the empowerment of the students actually works. She admires and respects the values that are held and the degree to which students carry them out. We are so excited to welcome Ms. Plunkett to the Barrack Kehilla.

Another Successful Production

Liana Matez, Staff Writer

This year, Barrack's drama department has been on a roll! Starting off the 2023-2024 season, the middle school put on a bubbly performance of Finding Nemo Jr. with directors from Wolf-PAC at the head. The middle schoolers did a fantastic job bringing the heartwarming story to life. The student-directed show this year was Alice in Wonderland, directed by Ella Abramovitz '24 and Liana Matez '24. With rehearsals beginning in late December and performances the first week of February, the cast and crew had a short production process, with only five weeks to get the show stage-ready. The entire cast put forth their best selves and put on a show to remember. At each rehearsal, the cast did scene work and character work, learned their lines, played warm-up games, and



had a ton of fun. The show was a huge success with a full crowd on the Sunday evening show, and many teachers and students coming out to support as well. The show featured three seniors on stage, Stacey Lipson '24, Don Miller '24 (and his puppet), and Zoe Kaplan '24, who all did an incredible job, as well as Raphi Hammermesh '24 stage managing. Next up on the drama department's agenda is Mean Girls! The entire drama department is so excited to be working on this incredible musical, coming to our auditorium on April 14th, 15th, and 16th. A record 25 people auditioned for this year's Upper School Musical, so stay tuned to see this amazing performance with its fantastic cast!

Interview With Mr. Maybloom, Barrack's New College Counselor

Rachel Loeb, Editor-in-Chief

This year, Barrack is welcoming a new Director of College Counseling Joe Maybloom! He is on campus on Fridays and will be joining full-time this summer. For this edition, Chronicle, was able to interview him on his new position - the following are his responses.

What is your position?

I am the new Director of College Counseling. I'll be leading the College Counseling Office and working with students and their families to help

navigate the college search process.

What did you do before coming to Barrack?

Most recently I served as the Chief Enrollment Officer and Associate Dean of Student Success at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York City. In my work I oversaw admissions to JTS's five undergraduate and graduate programs, including List College, the dual-degree program with Columbia University and Barnard College. I also advised first-year undergraduate students

(including some Barrack alumni!).

What are you most looking forward to in this position?

I am most looking forward to getting to work with students at this pivotal moment in your lives! The college admissions process can be a stressful time, but it is also a time to envision your future success and learn more about who you are and who you would like to become.

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New College Counselor - Continued

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There are opportunities to find joy throughout the college admissions process, and I am here to help you find those moments!

Also, one of the perks of coming from a college that puts Jewish life at its center is that I understand how much that can influence the college process. I'm thrilled to be working with students that are considering the multitude of ways you can be Jewish in college. There is no singular college experience, and there is no singular Jewish college experience. I'm excited to work with each of you to figure out what that experience looks like for YOU.

Do you have any specific ideas/goals? If yes, what are they?

I've seen first-hand how successful the College Counseling Office is from many years of working with Barrack students, and I look forward to partnering with everyone here to continue that stretch of success.

My first goal is to immerse myself in the Barrack community, learning all I can about the curriculum and student experience. I am a detail-oriented person, so I enjoy being in the weeds and gaining information from the ground up. The more I understand students' experiences, the better I can advise on what comes next!

Two of my main areas of expertise at JTS were student success and financial aid. I am excited about bringing both of these things to my work at Barrack as well. We are currently seeing sweeping changes to the federal aid system, combined with an increase in college costs. Helping students and families maximize college affordability, especial-

ly when making decisions about where to attend, is something I hope to champion in my work.

Additionally, part of what I formerly did was help new college students manage the transition from high school to college. That first semester is an important adjustment period, and helping Barrack students to be more prepared for that change when building college lists and deciding where to attend is important to college success!



What is something non-academic within the school year that you are looking forward to?

As a theatre person, I am excited to see the student-directed shows at Barrack. I've also heard such great things about the Upper School Shabbaton. I love to see those moments where our community comes together!

What are your hobbies?

I majored in Theatre at college, so discovering new shows--especially obscure, off-Broadway/regional shows--is a big hobby of mine.

I also love exploring new places. In every city I've lived in I've enjoyed finding hidden gems (especially bookstores!) and contributing to the local community. Moving to Philadelphia gives me a lot of new ground to cover!

What are your favorite TV shows/movies?

I am a big fan of TV shows that are comedies with a deeper side: The Office, Schitt's Creek, and (more recently) Derry Girls are top of my list. On the movie side, I will always love the early 2000s: The Devil Wears Prada, Mean Girls (the original!), and the first Harry Potter movie are on constant repeat.

In which Hogwarts house would you be sorted and why?

I am a Ravenclaw through and through. I am an avid reader, truly believe in the power of education, would consider myself a life-long learner, and love to pull out random facts in conversation.

Anything else you would like us to know?

I am currently here at Barrack on Fridays for the rest of the school year, so stop by and say hello! I'm excited to get to know you, learn more about your goals for the future, and help you achieve them!

Barrack Hosts Annual Red Cross Blood Drive

Sophia Mittman, School News Editor

Barrack is gearing up for its annual American Red Cross Blood Drive, scheduled to take place on Tuesday, February 27th, in the Mitchell Building Gym from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This event, held in partnership



with the Red Cross, aims to contribute to saving lives both locally and globally. One pint of blood has the potential to save up to three lives. As part of the Barrack community, you have the opportunity to make a meaningful impact by participating in this noble cause. Our goal this year is to collect 45 units of blood, and your contribution can help us achieve this milestone. To be eligible to donate, individuals must be 16 years or older. For 16-year-olds, parental permission is required. Those who are 17 years and older do

not need a signed form but must meet the health requirements outlined by the Red Cross. Furthermore, to be eligible for donation, individuals must not have donated blood within the past 56 days. As a token of appreciation for your generosity, all donors will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card. This serves as a small gesture of gratitude for your life-saving contribution. However, if you are unable to donate blood, there are still numerous ways to contribute. Supporting your friends or volunteering to assist with the event are just a couple of examples of how you can make a difference. Join us on February 27th at Barrack Gym for a day of giving back and making a difference in the lives of others. Your donation can provide hope and healing to those in need. Together, let's support our community and beyond through the power of giving blood. We are likely to have another blood drive next year, so try to be involved!



BLOOD DONATION

Singing for Change: Koolulam Releases New Song

Mikaela Garber, Managing Editor

Koolulam, founded in 2017, is a social initiative with the goal of bringing people together through music. Their mission is to inspire participants and viewers alike to recognize their personal ability to change reality and the importance of a community to help strengthen an individual's voice. Participants come from all over the world and from varying backgrounds, having never met before.



These large groups of people are brought together for a few hours to create a musical performance like never before. Often, participants

Koolulam, participants cite feeling a greater sense of community and togetherness. Additionally, they have peace in the knowledge that

they are seen and heard, and having created something that no one person could do alone. Koolulam has over 140 million views on so-

home. For many reasons, this song was a symbolic choice. Although Madonna is not Jewish, she has historically supported Israel. The singer owns a home in Tel Aviv, and calls Israel "the energy center of the world." In fact, Madonna even celebrates some Jewish festivals and does not hold concerts during Shabbat. However, Koolulam's song choice goes beyond the singer.

The word choice is powerful. Repeatedly, the song asserts that their prayers are heard and that they want nothing more than to "take you there." This, coupled with a new arrangement of the song to change the theme from rock to something much more subdued, makes for a powerful and moving piece.

learned the new arrangement of the song and taught it to their local Jewish and non-Jewish communities. The end result was an inspiring and heartwarming song of support from people everywhere.

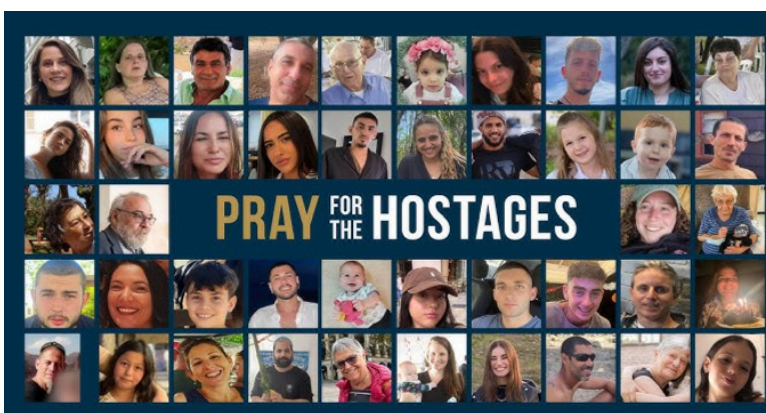
The finalized music video opens with chilling videos of the hostages and tunnels. While communities from many different parts of the world are featured in the video, the clips always return to the central stage, Tel Aviv. The Tel Aviv stage incorporates a beautiful choir. Even more striking, the front few rows show empty seats, one for each hostage abducted into Gaza, with their poster shown. The participants hold posters as they sing, many of them holding a picture of their loved one, still gone. In various points in the song, video clips of the hostages before October 7th and during their abduction are flashed onto the screen. These videos, combined with the haunting music, humanize the hostages, reminding viewers of the innocence that was taken away from them - innocence that can never be given back.

The organization reached out to the families of hostages, ultimately deciding to send out the message in the way they know best - song

learn their parts in less than an hour, complete with harmonization. Notably, participants need no previous background or talent in singing to participate; as an emphasis to their mission, Koolulam strives to welcome people of all kinds, finding harmony and strength in diversity. Each event promotes a different social message, whether that be advocating for change or bringing awareness to an issue. The message is emphasized not only in the song choice, but also in the performance and teaching of parts.

cial media, including recognition by global leaders and celebrities. Furthermore, Koolulam has been recognized by organizations worldwide for its impact on the world. Following the attacks on October 7, Koolulam brainstormed ways to share the pain and hopes of Jewish people all over the world. The organization reached out to the families of hostages, ultimately deciding to send out the message in the way they know best - song. They ultimately chose to use the Madonna song, "Like a Prayer," to convey their wish to bring their loved ones

Since its opening, Koolulam has facilitated more than 250 event, with over 350,000 participants in all. Following their involvement with



Koolulam quickly rallied conductors from communities all over the world, including China, America, Israel, Canada, and the Netherlands, among others. At an unprecedented pace, conductors

In just two months, the video had been viewed approximately 455,000 times. However, the video must continue to be shown and shared, until every hostage is back in Israel. #BringThemHomeNOW

Israel Rescues Two Hostages in Miracle Operation

Rachel Loeb, Editor-in-Chief

Early morning on February 11, the Israeli Defense Forces freed two hostages which were being held in an al-Shabura refugee camp, in the north of Rafah, a city in southern Gaza. The rescued hostages were identified as Fernan-

do Simon Marman, age 60, and Louis Har, age 70. Both men are dual Israeli-Argentine citizens who were kidnapped by Hamas terrorists on October 7 from the Nir Yitzhak kibbutz. They were taken hostage along with other family members, who were freed in November as part of a weeklong cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. Over 100 hostages taken during the Oct. 7 attacks are still being held in Gaza, and more than 1,200 people were killed in those initial attacks. This is only the second time that the Israeli defense forces have succeeded in rescuing hostages alive since the war began.

The only other instance where Israeli forces successfully rescued a hostage was at the end of October. Troops found Ori Megidish, a soldier taken from the Nahal Oz army base, during a ground operation in Gaza. This raid came as Prime Minister Netanyahu announced his plan for Israeli forces to launch a broader offensive within Rafah with the goal of eliminating Hamas terrorists from the city. According to Army spokesman Daniel Hagari, special forces broke into the apartment at 1:49 AM Monday, and a minute later, was followed by a series of airstrikes.



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Hostages Rescued - Continued

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He then told reporters that this operation required “highly sensitive and valuable intelligence” and involved the Shin Bet, police special forces, and an IDF tank brigade.

This operation required a complex process of approvals from officials of various statures including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu



and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. The plan was also postponed several times because of its massive undertaking and uncertainties regarding the intelligence information. The two hostages were found on the second floor of an apartment building. During the operation, the rescue team broke through the apartment door with explosives

and engaged in a firefight, killing several Hamas terrorists and safely securing the hostages. Although one soldier was injured, there were no Israeli casualties which makes this

operation one of the most successful in all of IDF history. After this, the hostages were taken to a nearby area, protected by the IDF, where they were given a quick medical check before being airlifted to a hospital in central Israel. The hostages, 60-year-old Fernando Simon Marman and 70-year-old Louis Har had spent 128 days in captivity. Both men are in relatively good condition and have since reunited with their families. Their reunion with their families was captured in a video released by the Israeli military, where the two men cried and embraced their respective family members at the Sheba Medical Center.

One of the reasons why rescuing these hostages is so difficult is because Hamas has scattered them among several secret locations. While many hostages are likely hidden in Hamas’ tunnels, Israe-

li information has revealed that they have also been hidden in the homes of Gazan civilians. Hamas is holding the hostages in small groups,

This operation is one of the most successful in all of IDF history

which makes large rescue operations more difficult, as any attack has the risk of killing hostages. For this reason, planning an operation takes a lot of time and information, and the IDF generally does raids without the explicit goal of finding hostages. The remaining hostages are believed to be spread out and likely in poor conditions. Israel has identified the return of the hostages as a key objective in the war. Despite international scrutiny, Netanyahu remains resolute in continuing Israel’s military offensive, insisting on achieving “total victory” and has described Rafah as the last remaining Hamas stronghold in Gaza.

While Israel still has a long way to go to eliminate Hamas as a threat and bring back the innocent civilians taken, this mission is a positive milestone in Israel’s fight and has forever impacted the lives of the hostages and their families.

Has UNRWA Become an Arm for Hamas?

Jillian Shweky, Opinion Editor

One’s title in life is crucial to understanding who they are socially, and even morally. Yet, titles can be deceiving. One would think that an agency called the United Nations Relief and Work Agency would aid the innocent, but recent evidence has shown that members of this agency were involved in the Hamas attack on October Seventh.

Multiple members of UNRWA were accused of taking part in inhumane acts against Israel, including kidnapping a woman, being a part of an attack on a Kibbutz, and providing ammunition. Also, they are accused of helping Hamas prepare for October Seventh, and in the days after the attack. The Israeli government claims that there are a dozen of members of UNRWA who were a part of this. All of these people



Multiple members of UNRWA were accused of taking part in inhumane acts against Israel, including kidnapping a woman, being a part of an attack on a Kibbutz, and providing ammunition

who are accused were active members in the United Nations agency, by providing food, schooling, and shelter to Palestinian civilians.

As a result of this, UNRWA has claimed to have fired nine out of twelve of the participants. The director of UNRWA pleaded with the representatives of aid countries asking them to reconsider withdrawing funds from UNRWA.



Eight countries including the U.S, have withdrawn funds already.

According to the Israeli government, ten of the members of UNRWA that are accused are actual members of Hamas, and another member of UNRWA is a part of the Islamic Jihad. It is frightening to see that these people had normal jobs, contributing to Gazan society. One member was a teacher in UNRWA schools, who taught math and Arabic. Another was a social worker who later was accused of bringing the dead bodies of IDF soldiers in Gaza. A school counselor was charged

with kidnapping an Israeli woman.

This is not the first time UNRWA has been involved in dangerous acts. According to the foreign Relations Committee, they have a history of putting antisemitic material in their textbooks, which in turn, engrains these anti-Semitic thoughts in young minds.

UNRWA has been a crucial part of Gazan aid for decades, and in this current time of crisis they’re services are needed more than ever. But their acts are inexcusable. Neither the United Nations nor UNRWA recognize Hamas as a terrorist group. UNRWA members have continuously disseminated anti-Semitism on social media, plus support for Hitler. Though most UN agencies have a board of people to oversee their actions, UNRWA does not. The United Nations is literally supposed to unite different regions, not divide them. Acts like these discredit them as a whole, and make it clear that things must change within the system if aid wants to be restored within Gaza.

Beyond the

Embracing Empathy: Kindness Week at Barrack

Mikaela Garber, Managing Editor

Random Acts of Kindness Week, which ran from February 12-16 this year, was set up in 1995 by the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation. It was created as a reminder that even a small act of kindness can greatly impact someone else's day. In a world where people are often so busy doing their own thing, it is important to take time to be selfless and think of others. This is especially true in February, which traditionally is one of the busiest times for students as they are right in the middle of the school year. Contrary to what one may believe, being kind to others not only gives them a pick-me-up, but is also likely to give the kind person a burst of dopamine as well.

This year, Barrack celebrated Kindness Week with several different activities and giveaways each day of the week, sponsored by our school's Mental Health Matters (MHM) Club. The club's mission is to spread awareness about mental health, particularly in the scope of our school. As such, MHM Club felt it fitting to bring attention to Kindness Week, because being kind to others and ourselves is important for our mental health.



Prior to the official start to the week, MHM club members prepared and hung up signs throughout campus with easy, accessible ways to be kind. Suggestions included everything from giving others the benefit of the doubt to simply loving oneself. As students rushed between classes, they got the chance to contemplate acts of kindness that they may not have previously considered.

The week kicked-off with laptop stickers on Monday. MHM members facilitated the giveaway in the front lobby in the morning. Students and staff alike had the opportunity to choose from varying designs, all of which emphasized the importance of being kind. The stickers - that now find themselves on laptops, swipe card holders, and water bottles - are a consistent reminder to the Barrack Kehillah that our community needs to be built on kindness. While the plan for Tuesday was to hand out hot chocolate, the weather had different plans, and

the school day became a shortened, virtual day. Even though we were not physically together to exhibit kindness in the Barrack halls, the virtual day provided everyone with the chance to be kind at home, whether that be hanging out with a sibling or practicing self-care. Wednesday brought a new day, with a chance to reflect on kindness

through conversation. In the comfortable, supportive environment of advisory groups, students considered what kindness meant to them and what they do to be kind to themselves and the people surrounding them, among other discussion prompts. In addition, the Barrack com-



munity enjoyed hot cocoa at lunch, with the hope that it would warm everyone's heart, prompting them to spread that warmth and kindness to others. The drink was served in "cups of kindness," which featured kindness stickers to brighten people's days and spread positive vibes. Finally, Thursday was a schoolwide PJ day, making it a cozy end to the short week.

Ultimately, Kindness Week was a rousing

Students and staff alike had the opportunity to choose from varying designs, all of which emphasized the importance of being kind.

success! Barrack saw many amazing acts of kindness throughout the week, and MHM Club hopes that everyone will carry the good vibes into their lives, spreading love and kindness during the coming months, too!

Another Triumphant Year for Barrack's Mock Trial Team

Jillian Shweky, Opinion Editor

Could friendly competition turn into a cut-throat fight to the death? That is just the question in the 2023-2024 Pennsylvania mock trial case in which both our defense team and our prosecution team were victorious within their competitions. Geoffrey Esper was a successful business owner in Wasaw, Pennsylvania. His business was located in a square bustling with customers, but also competition. Esper's greedy nature led him to launch a war on his competitors, resulting in him buying out the square, and evicting the other businesses. Esper's success came to a sudden end when he and his dog were shot dead in his office. Who would do this? Why would someone commit such a vicious act? Could it have been revenge? With months of preparation studying this year's murder trial, the Barrack mock trial (A and B) teams traveled to Montgomery Courthouse. They



presented their cases in different courtrooms with judges who acted as if this were a real case. An esteemed jury watched and came to a conclusion at the end of the trial. Each of our teams competed against another school's team, who remain anonymous. Thanks to Barrack seniors Don Miller, Tal Tzabbar, and Rachel Loeb, younger grade participants were mentored and led to success. Rachel Scheinmann, the Mock Trial Faculty advisor, along with Carole Cleere, Lisa Sandler (Barrack Board President), and Joelle Margolin have been there to pave the way through this case. From learning objections and hearsay, to closing statements, they have been there to lend a helping hand. The mock trial team's cooperation, dedication, and unity has gotten them so far and we look forward to seeing their future success next year!

Classroom

Fun Ideas for Warm Weather

Claire Englander, Staff Writer

As the weather is getting warmer and nicer there are so many fun outdoor activities to do this Spring! Taking a bike ride alone or with friends around the neighborhood, feeling the breeze on your face and getting in some exercise. You can even make a pitstop somewhere fun like an ice-cream shop for a sweet treat. There are also so many beautiful trails in Philadelphia like the Wissahickon Valley Park, trails along the Schuylkill River, Pennypack Park, or even your own backyard! Spending time outside no matter where or for how long is renewing and great for mind and body.

Exploring farmers markets, botanical gardens, local businesses, and flower festivals are great ways to spend time with friends in the warm weather. Warm weather is a great time to pick up gardening, plant flowers or fruits and veggies to add fun and color to your backyard or even your room. Spring is a perfect time to pick up a new book, you can read outside listening to the birds chirping happily. There are endless options for refreshing activities in Spring so get out there and enjoy the warmer weather!

A Look Inside DECA States Competition

Jemma Dengel, Staff Writer

Barrack's DECA team left Wednesday 21 to go to the Hershey Lodge where DECA state competition was held. The first day consisted of testing for participant's categories and the kick off of the opening session for the competition



which consisted of energetic music and introduction to the state officer team. The next day, everyone competed at various times for their events. This included either presenting two role plays or sharing a pre-written entry with a professional in the field. There was also a huge array of empowering workshops for members to attend including one from Men's Warehouse, Penn State, and Citizens bank. In their free time, students go to take a bus to Hershey world and the outlets. Following dinner, were the mini awards ceremo-

ny where Andy Jacoby '24 and Chloe Hockfield '24 advanced to finals for their category and Ben Martin '25 and Jessie Singer '26 won awards for their performances. To end the night, there was a DECA dance where participants got to meet other DECA members and celebrate finishing the competition. On Friday, Barrack attended the Grand Awards ceremony where Ben Marton and Jessie Singer qualified for ICDC! We are beyond proud of their amazing accomplishments and are so excited for them to move on to internationals.

10th Grade DC Trip

Evan Berman, Staff Writer

On February 25th, the 10th grade simultaneously arrived at the Barrack Gym at a painful 7:30 am to board the buses for DC. We were all ecstatic about the annual trip, and after we had our bags checked, we boarded the buses. The two-and-a-half-hour trip consisted of naps, music, snacks, and conversations, and by the second hour, our impatience had reached its maximum. Finally, we arrived at the Sheraton in which we were staying, and indulged in our lunch which consisted of deli meats and cookies. Once we had recuperated, we began journeying throughout Washington DC, and went to the Jefferson, FDR, and MLK memorials, where we discussed American political values within our workshops. After the memorials, the Tenth Grade had the opportunity to walk around the white house, where we saw many protests and demonstrations regarding the conflicts around the world. When we left the White House for our hotel, our legs were aching and we were very hungry, so we were extremely excited to be able to rest a bit. Once we got back, we did some



preparation for Capitol Hill, where each group (dependent on addresses) had the opportunity to talk with a representative about the issues we find most important in our lives. After dinner, we had about an hour of free time, and then we all fell asleep within minutes of getting into bed.

The next day, we woke up for breakfast at eight, and then left the hotel for the war memorials. Our grade was able to see the World War II, Korean, and Vietnam War memorials, and we had about two hours to roam around and take in everything we saw. We then went to Sixth and I, one of the oldest synagogues in the country, where we had lunch and heard from two speakers. One speaker taught us about the dangers of gun violence in our country, and the other informed us about how we can decrease our carbon footprints and help preserve our planet. After the two speakers, our grade went to the U.S. Holocaust Museum, where we saw the horrors of the Shoah. We were all very moved, and especially in this day and age, we all kept in mind how important it is to protect our Jewish faith and identity. In order to lighten the mood, we went out to dinner at a Kohser restaurant called Char Bar,

which was followed by bowling at pinstripes.

On the third day, we had to wake up even earlier to be down at breakfast by 7:30, as this day



was our trip to Capitol Hill. Once we got to the hill, we visited our corresponding representatives, and after, we were able to walk around the hill and visit wherever we wanted. Some groups went to the Library of Congress, some went to the Botanical Gardens, and one group even got to go to the Supreme Court and sit in on a real case. Everyone was very jealous of this particular group. After these few hours, it was time to depart from D.C., and at around 2:15, we left D.C. for Barrack. Unfortunately, there was an accident on the highway, so our two-hour trip turned into more of a five-hour trek, but in the end, we all made it out alive.

Transition of Movie Theater Industry After COVID-19

Rachel Loeb, Editor-in-Chief

As COVID hit and forced people into quarantine, movie theaters suffered a significant blow, an aspect often overlooked amidst the chaos. The pandemic caused disruptions in both film production and exhibition, resulting in movies being shelved for extended periods and keeping audiences away from cinemas. As movie theaters became inaccessible, the demand for streaming video services surged, leading to massive growth in subscribers. According to Forbes, 99% of households in America now subscribe to at least one or more streaming services. In 2020, as Hollywood studios began releasing films simultaneously to streaming services and theaters, or bypassing theaters entirely, movie theaters experienced an 80 percent decline in their domestic box office revenue. While the movie theater industry is showing signs of recovery emerging from COVID-19, it has required

the need for collective human engagement, the need to live and love and laugh and cry together, will be more powerful than ever". As regulations like capacity restrictions were gradually lifted, studios began to put movies in theaters again. This led to great success; Spiderman: No Way Home, Jurassic World Dominion, and Top Gun: Maverick all reached \$1 billion in global box office grosses, and Avatar: The Way of Water was one of only five other films to have reached over \$2 billion. This success, after a harsh 22 months, proves that movie theaters provide an experience that can not be replicated on Netflix or any other streaming service. As Paul Dergarabedian, a senior media analyst at Comscore, put it "if the right movies are in the mix, people will

moviegoing experience. In 2020, numerous theaters earned narrow profit margins and relied entirely on

roomier recliners. In line with this strategy, theaters are experimenting with premium pricing for the best seats, as well as for highly anticipated movies on their opening weekends. Some Cinemark locations are planning to revive their older locations with arcades and laser tag, however, these additions would cut out about half of the movie theater's screens.

Even with these upgrades, many movie theater companies are still struggling financially, which has led to some chains dropping locations. Some theaters didn't make it, as there are currently around



federal pandemic relief programs. Since the premium experiences that movie theaters offer, like IMAX theaters, generate around 80% of the

This resurgence has been accompanied by necessary adaptations to navigate through the challenges.



necessary adaptations to navigate through the challenges. This resurgence, nonetheless, signals a hopeful trajectory for the future.

When AMC, the largest movie exhibition company in the US, closed its cinemas, director Christopher Nolan issued a plea in the Washington Post, claiming that "we need what movies can offer us" and that "when this crisis passes,

Even films with large production budgets like West Side Story, Nightmare Alley, The King's Man, and The Matrix Resurrections have performed much worse than expected.

As the movie theater industry attempts to recover in the aftermath of COVID-19, cinemas are undergoing a significant transformation, investing millions to elevate their offerings and reimagine the

rush out to the movie theater to see them." However, this success has mainly been for big-budget films with massive marketing campaigns. Other films, without these resources, have performed much worse.

business, they are trying to capitalize on this in order to increase revenue and incentivize people to come back to theaters. Among these new additions include heated lounge chairs that fully recline and have buttons to call waiters. Some theaters also offer seats that move in sync with the actions occurring in the movie and provide special effects like blasts of air, fog, water, or various scents. In general, theaters have increased the sound quality, and the size of the screen, seats, and food. There are theaters that offer screens on the side, and the menus now include bowls, salads, and sushi. Theaters have also introduced mobile food ordering, expanded alcohol sales, upgraded their projectors, offered private rentals, and tried simulcasting concerts and hosting video game tournaments. Overall, theaters are focusing on quality over quantity, with auditoriums accommodating fewer patrons in favor of

5,000 theaters in America, down from 5,869 theaters pre-COVID. AMC is facing over \$5 billion in debt. About half the movie screens in North America are controlled by AMC, Cineworld, and Cinemark Holdings, and each of them has lost money in the most recent quarter. Not only are the movies underperforming, but the investments in technology, that the theaters are undertaking are expensive — an IMAX system costs about \$1 million, not including installation.

Although doing better than the last few years, movie theaters are still struggling to retain the patrons they once had. That being said, theaters are successful when screening big blockbuster movies and have found ways to adapt by upgrading their theaters.

The Cougar Chronicle's Oscar Picks

Jonah Pappas, Staff Writer

In the glittering world of cinema, the Oscars stand as the pinnacle of excellence, where talent, creativity, and cinematic achievements are celebrated. As we edge closer to the much-anticipated Oscar night, predictions and speculations are rife about which stars will take home the golden statues. This year's race is shaping up to be one of the most exciting yet, with a diverse

array of films that have captivated audiences and critics alike. This article will predict the winners of the eight most popular Oscar races.

Best Picture

The nominees are: American Fiction, Anatomy of a Fall, Barbie, The Holdovers, Killers of the Flower Moon, Maestro, Oppenheimer, Past Lives, Poor Things, and The Zone of Interest.

My winner: Oppenheimer. An epic historical drama by visionary director Christopher Nolan, Oppenheimer narrates the life of one of history's most famed scientists. It made almost a billion dollars during its theatrical run and has won numerous awards already.

Continued on following page.

Oscar Picks - Continued

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Best Actor

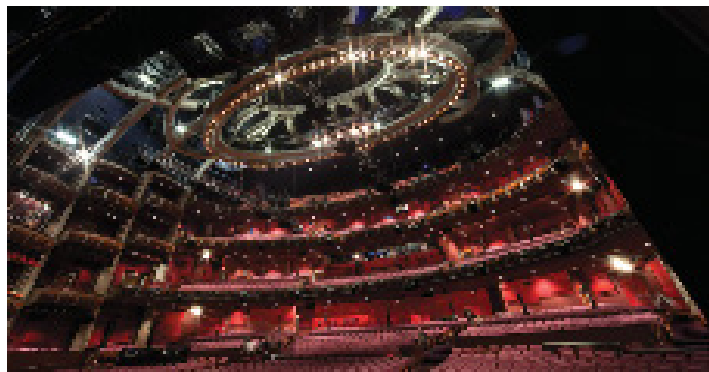
The nominees are: Paul Giamatti for *The Holdovers*, Cillian Murphy for *Oppenheimer*, Jeffrey Wright for *American Fiction*, Bradley Cooper for *Maestro*, and Colman Domingo for *Rustin*

My winner: Cillian Murphy for *Oppenheimer*. His portrayal of the tortured scientist was fantastic and has been praised by many, with most lauding it as the best performance of the year. He already won the award for best actor at the Golden Globes and the BAFTAs, so I believe he will complete the trifecta at the Oscars.

Best Actress

The nominees are: Emma Stone for *Poor Things*, Lily Gladstone for *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Annette Bening for *Nyad*, Carey Mulligan for *Maestro*, and Sandra Hüller for *Anatomy of a Fall*.

My winner: Lily Gladstone for *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Gladstone's performance as an Osage woman is haunting and anguished. She masterful



Best Animated Feature

The nominees are: *Nimona*, *Robot Dreams*, *The Boy and the Heron*, *Elemental*, and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*

My winner: *The Boy and the Heron*. Legendary

Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki's potential final film, *The Boy and the Heron* takes the things we expect from a Studio Ghibli movie, gorgeous drawings and a whimsical story, and combines them with a melancholy rumination on mortality and the creative process. This delightful mov-

ie is a rollercoaster of emotions, right up to its heartbreaking finale.

Best International Feature Film

The nominees are: Io Capitano, *Perfect Days*, *Society of the Snow*, *The Teachers' Lounge*, and *The Zone of Interest*

My winner: *The Zone of Interest*. Jonathan Glazer's chilling portrayal of a family living right next door to the Auschwitz concentration camp is a must-watch for any Jew. Although it is hard to watch at times, this film reminds us how easy it is for people to turn a blind eye to hatred, and holds special significance due to the events happening in Israel right now.

Best Director

The nominees are: Justine Triet for *Anatomy of a Fall*, Martin Scorsese for *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Yorgos Lanthimos for *Poor Things*, Christopher Nolan for *Oppenheimer*, and Jonathan Glazer for *The Zone of Interest*.

My winner: Martin Scorsese for *Killers of the Flower Moon*. At the age of 82, Martin Scorsese proves once again that age is just a number. He delivers an ominous adaptation of David Grann's book from 2017, which does not shy away from the gruesome actions taken by white men against their Native neighbors in the early 1900s.

Best Supporting Actor

The nominees are: Mark Ruffalo for *Poor Things*, Robert De Niro for *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Robert Downey Jr. for *Oppenheimer*, Sterling K. Brown for *American Fiction*, and Ryan Gosling for *Barbie*.

This year's race is shaping up to be one of the most exciting yet

My winner: Robert Downey Jr. for *Oppenheimer*. Downey Jr. delivers arguably the performance of his career as Lewis Strauss, an insecure but powerful scientist in the 1940s and 50s. His monologue at the end of the film is dynamic and a little



frightening. Even though many of his scenes are in black and white, they create some of the most vivid images of the entire film.

Best Supporting Actress

The nominees are: America Ferrera for *Barbie*, Danielle Brooks for *The Color Purple*, Da'Vine Joy Randolph for *The Holdovers*, Emily Blunt for *Oppenheimer*, Jodie Foster for *Nyad*

My winner: Emily Blunt for *Oppenheimer*. Blunt's amazing performance as Kitty Oppenheimer complements Murphy's fantastic performance perfectly. Blunt masterfully portrays a woman who is cheated on and disrespected countless times, but still remains loyal and strong through it all.

Usher, Alicia Keys, and More Perform at the 2024 Super Bowl Halftime Show

Aviva Markowitz, Arts & Entertainment Editor

This year's 58th Super Bowl Halftime Show was performed by Usher, Alicia Keys, H.E.R, Will.i.am, Jermaine Dupri, Lil Jon, and Ludacris. The show started off tame with the regular popular songs and dances, but as the show progressed, people were shocked again and again. The first thing people online have been talking about was Keys' off-tune start to her infamous song "If I Ain't Got You". Controversy sparked when during Usher's songs

Though it was surprising, the Super Bowl Halftime Show has gotten less and less family friendly throughout the years

"Bad Girl" and "OMG" women were dancing on stripper poles when the show is labeled as "family friendly". Though it was surprising, the Super Bowl Halftime Show has gotten less and less family friendly throughout

the years (throwback to Shakira and Jennifer Lopez in 2020). People were also disturbed by how close Keys and Usher got during their performance of the song "My Boo", especially since afterwards Usher an-

nounced his marriage to Jennifer Goicochea. Another shocker was when Usher showed the world really how skilled he was by roller skating, dancing, and singing all at the same time. This really surprised the audience, turning their attention away from the previous scandalous song with Keys.



Aleksei Navalny's Death

Rachel Loeb, Editor-in-Chief

Aleksei Navalny, a prominent Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption advocate, passed away on February 16 at the age of 47 while in custody at an Arctic prison, where he was serving a 3-decade prison term. Throughout his public career, Navalny galvanized a generation of young Russians through social media and gained renown for his investigations into Russia's elite. The exact cause of Navalny's death remains unconfirmed, but Russia's harsh penal colonies, including the one where he was held, are infamous for their hazardous conditions, suggesting he likely faced exceptionally severe treatment. Navalny's passing will undoubtedly carry significant repercussions, and to fully comprehend his legacy it's important to have an understanding of pertinent background information.

In 2000, when Vladimir Putin was initially elected as president of Russia, Navalny joined the liberal Yabloko party. He persisted in his opposition to Putin, gradually expanding his influence by moderating political debates, hosting a radio show, and criticizing pro-Putin figures in a popular blog. Navalny vocally criticized the Kremlin over issues such as lawless Moscow construction projects, aiming to mobilize grassroots support against Putin. In 2011, Navalny led thousands in protests over fraud in Russia's parliamentary elections, marking the largest anti-Kremlin demonstrations since Putin's presidency began. After he was barred from running in Russia's 2018 presidential election due to a fraud conviction, Navalny organized nationwide protests and boycotts in response to Putin's reelection, as well

as led an investigation into the corruption of the Russian elite. He faced further repression as he was imprisoned over accusations of money laundering, and raiding the homes of fellow activists.

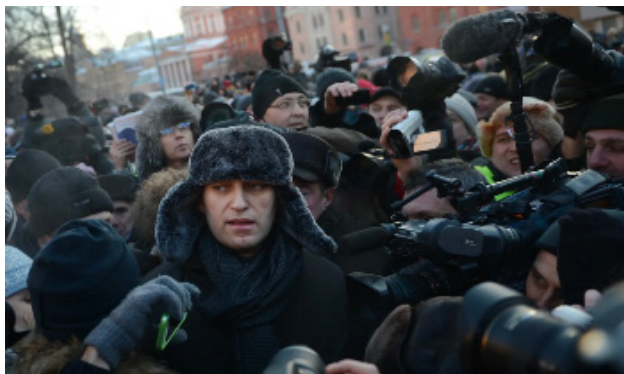
In 2020, Navalny fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow and was later determined to have been poisoned with the military-grade

nerve agent Novichok, a class of chemical weapon developed by the Soviet Union, by Russian agents—a claim the Kremlin denies. After going to Germany for treatment, with a flight that was



delayed by Russian doctors, he returned to Moscow and was arrested immediately upon arrival. In response, tens of thousands of protesters staged the largest public showdown in years between the Kremlin and its critics, demanding Navalny's release. Navalny was sentenced to a two-year prison term, and in prison he went on a hunger

strike to protest inadequate medical treatment, worsening his health. In 2022, the documentary "Navalny" premiered, which followed Aleksei Navalny's investigation into his poisoning.



sentence for supporting "extremism." He was transferred to the harsh IK-3 Polar Wolf penal colony, and on February 15, he was seen in a video at a court hearing, only to be reported unconscious and deceased the following day. The authorities at the prison where he was held said he collapsed after a short walk and suffered from

"sudden death syndrome".

Aleksei Navalny's mother was told she has to wait 14 days to receive his body, which has raised suspicions that Navalny was poisoned and the Kremlin is waiting for the poison to disappear from his body. In a video message, his mother said, "Vladimir Putin killed my husband ... We know exactly why Putin killed Alexei three days ago. We will tell you about it soon." According to a spokesman for the family, his body was transferred to his mother on February 25. It is unclear whether he will be having a funeral

which the public can attend, and many believe that the Russian authorities were attempting to blackmail his mother into burying him privately.

Navalny's death has prompted an outpouring of grief and calls for justice, uniting world leaders and demonstrators worldwide. In London, demonstrators projected an image

Navalny's death prompted an outpouring of grief and calls for justice, uniting world leaders and demonstrators worldwide

of Aleksei Navalny on the Russian embassy. In Washington, President Biden called a news conference and declared, "Make no mistake: Putin is responsible for Navalny's death." His death also stunned Russian dissidents and left Russia without their opposition to Putin's increasingly repressive policies. Across Russia, at least 400 people have been detained at Navalny memorials since his death. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, pledged to continue his mission for a democratic Russia, representing a newfound hope for united opposition to Putin's regime despite the challenges posed by his absence as many of the Russian opposition figures are in exile and none with the widespread support that Navalny had. Although there is no clear successor to his legacy, the strategies that Navalny developed in his fight against the Putin regime have spread to a diverse group of Russian pro-democracy advocates, and his mission will continue, with him as the martyr of the cause.

2024 Election Season Begins

Edan Held, World News Editor

As America gears up for the 2024 Presidential election, the Republican Party is deep into primary season. With Joe Biden almost certain to be the Democratic nominee, Republicans have been voicing their opposition to the Democratic Party while seemingly fighting internally amongst one another. Following five Republican national debates spanning from August 2023 through January 2024 and having taken place in early primary battlegrounds, a number of candidates dropped out of the race. Those candidates include Chris Christie, former Governor of New Jersey; Ron DeSantis, Governor of Florida; Mike Pence, former Vice-President of the United States; Vivek Ramaswamy, investor and former pharmaceutical CEO; Tim Scott, South Carolina Senator; Asa Hutchinson, former Gover-

nor of Arkansas; and Doug Burgum, Governor of North Dakota.

Still in the race is the frontrunner and former President of the United States, Donald Trump, and former Governor of South Carolina and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley. At the time of writing, Donald Trump leads Nikki Haley in national polls by an astounding 60% despite not showing up to a single Republican national debate.

Seeing this in action, at the time of writing, Donald Trump had beaten Nikki Haley in every primary election and caucus that had taken place, including Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada.

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2024 Election - Continued

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Even in her own homestate of South Carolina, Haley could not withstand Trump's domination of the Republican party, losing by nearly 20%.

Nikki Haley has campaigned with a message of shaping the future of the Republican party after Donald Trump. With Trump's legal battles still ongoing, there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding his bid for President and the possibility that a convicted felon will win a presidential election.

Donald Trump and Nikki Haley share many of the same values, as seen through their policies. Here is where they stand on a number of major issues. With respect to gun control, Haley opposes expanding background checks and passing gun legislation, believing mental health issues should take priority. Contrasting Haley, Donald Trump actually signed legislation in 2017 banning bump-stocks and supports expanding background checks; yet he has also appointed judges who are pro-second-amendment and vehement gun-rights supporters. On abortion, Haley believes it should be left to the states while also maintaining that she would support a 15 week abortion ban. Similarly, Trump has recently been

reported to support a 16 week abortion ban. Haley has said that she would use immigration agents to deport undocumented immigrants and make it harder for them to obtain jobs. Trump maintains his stance on a border wall, supporting mass deportation and family separation. Lastly, regarding the climate, Haley has said that she believes in it and its effects on extreme weather, but she is not ready to provide clean energy tax credits or increase government regulation. Donald Trump on the other hand denies that climate change has affected extreme weather events and opposes tax credits, agreeing with Haley that regulation is not the solution.

Into the summer, both candidates will continue to go head-to-head in primaries across the country. While Donald Trump dominates polls at the time of writing, Americans are eagerly awaiting Super Tuesday to better understand who the Republican nominee to take on Joe Biden will be. With 847 Republican delegates up for grab, the Super Tuesday races on March 5th will likely have decided who that nominee will be.



Standardized Testing is Back! (At Least at Dartmouth)

Margot Englander, Centerspread Editor

Dartmouth College – an Ivy League school in New Hampshire – is reinstating standardized testing requirements (the SAT or ACT), beginning with the Class of 2029, after going test-optional during the pandemic. It was one of hundreds

of colleges and universities that stopped requiring scores amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and at least 1,900 schools have made standardized test scores optional since.

Valuable element of the undergraduate admissions process

of colleges and universities that stopped requiring scores amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and at least 1,900 schools have made standardized test scores optional since.

Previous research found that standardized tests put less wealthy students at a disadvantage, inherently favoring richer, white, and Asian students. However, the College Board (which administers the SAT) argues that the test itself is not at fault for the disparity, instead it simply mirrors the inequities in education. Research from a Harvard University and the National Bureau of Economic Research study found that SAT/ACT scores and academic ratings can be accurate predictors of post-college success – defining success through monetary outcomes and “elite” employment status.

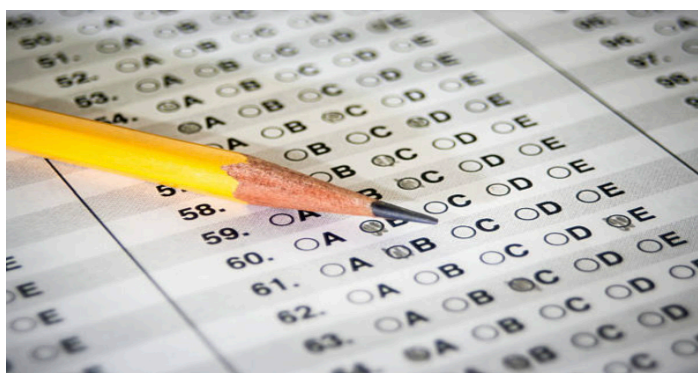
Dartmouth is not a traditionally economically diverse school, with a third of admitted students having attended independent schools and 11% being legacies.

So, in the memo sent out by Dartmouth College on February 5, 2024, the university justified the change by claiming that “a standardized testing requirement will improve [their] ability to bring the most promising and diverse students to [their] campus.” Dartmouth says that the decision comes following research that test scores might actually help disadvantaged students receive admission to the college. During the test-optional years, disadvantaged students were more likely to leave out their test scores, even if their scores could have been high enough to help them. Dartmouth reports that they are working on better ways to communicate with prospective students what a helpful score is, so in the future they are not scared off by reporting scores. The research study confirms that standardized testing is a valuable element of Dartmouth's undergraduate admissions process. They found that a high school transcript paired with a test score is the most reliable indicator for success at Dartmouth. Test scores are valuable in identifying high-achieving applicants from low and middle-income

communities. Of course, Dartmouth emphasized that a student will never be reduced to just their test scores, but it is an important data point among many.

Dartmouth President Sian Leah Beilock acknowledged that SAT and ACT scores “reflect inequality in society and in educational systems.”

In an effort to address discrepancies in access, the college has said that



it will increase financial aid opportunities so admitted students can attend regardless of income. Dartmouth re-emphasized their commitment to a holistic admissions process, believing that “the whole person counts, as do the environmental factors each person navigates.”

Beginning with the Class of 2029 (high school class of 2025), Dartmouth will require high school applicants to include either SAT or ACT scores (with no preference) on their application. The results of mul-

iple attempts will be superscored, meaning the highest score on individual sections will be considered.

Moreover, the SAT has gone virtual in 2024, with the first virtual test occurring on March 9, 2024. The new digital format is adaptive, meaning that how students do on a set of test questions affects the difficulty of the subsequent set of test questions. The test is shorter, going from three hours to two; the

questions are also more concise, with only one question (rather than multiple) tied to each reading passage. The previous SAT had a non-calculator and calculator section, but the digital allows calculators for the entire math portion. Students can bring

their own calculators or use the one embedded into the exam, reducing test-day barriers, as many students cannot afford a personal graphing calculator (which range from \$100 - \$200). With the pilot launch of the digital exam, 80% of students found the high-stakes test to be less stressful than the paper version. Despite the changes, the SAT remains on a 1600-point scale, and tests three sections: math, reading, and writing.

The NBA Playoffs Rush

Micah Friedman, Staff Writer

The 2023-24 NBA season is reaching its end, and fans are getting excited for the playoff race. The current standings highlight the strengths of top teams like the Boston Celtics, Minnesota Timberwolves, and Cleveland Cavaliers. These teams have shown exceptional performances, making them strong contenders in the playoff race.

Historically finals winners are usually teams that reach forty wins before twenty losses. The only teams that have a chance to do so are the Celtics, Cavaliers, Timberwolves, Thunder, Clippers and Nuggets and they are the top five favorites to win the finals.

Looking at the playoff bracket and matchups, fans can expect intense showdowns filled with anticipation and excitement. The key matchups in the rest of the NBA season are extremely important for playoff seeding, drawing great attention from fans. Though there is still

much time left in the season for the playoff picture to change, we can begin to predict what the matchups will be.

In this year's NBA many things have changed since last year. The one seed in the west, the Minnesota Timberwolves, already have almost the same number of wins that they did last year. This shows how much can change in one half of the season and how much can still change. As teams come out of the All-Star break, a new intensity occurs, and the fight for the teams competing for lower seeds and the play-in spots intensifies.

However, the playoff race faces challenges with significant injuries and roster changes. Joel Embiid, last year's MVP, is experiencing many injuries that can bring uncertainty to the outcomes, potentially reshaping the dynamics of the playoff race. The Sixers have an uncertain future but with young stars such as Tyrese Maxey



and veterans such as Tobias Harris even teams riddled with injuries such as the Sixers can still make a push to the finals.

As the playoff race unfolds, the excitement among basketball enthusiasts continues to grow, emphasizing the importance of each game and shaping the narrative of the 2024 NBA playoff race. With thrilling showdowns and compelling storylines on the horizon, all eyes are on the teams as they compete for supremacy in the quest for championship glory.

Athlete of the Issue - Tal Kahn

Jonah Pappas, Staff Writer

I had the pleasure of sitting down with a star sophomore basketball player Tal Kahn today to chat about his life and his basketball career so far, so here is an excerpt of that conversation.

Jonah: Hi, Tal. Thanks for doing this interview. Can you share your basketball journey? When did you start playing and what drew you to the game?

Tal: I started playing in elementary school for a little rec league in Philadelphia. Growing up in Philly led to more competition in sports and really helped me improve as a player. What really inspired me was wanting to dunk. I've also always liked watching and following the NBA and other sports.

J: As a sophomore, you're already standing out on the court. What goals do you have set for next season?

T: Well my goal in my career is to reach 1000 points. For the team, I want to win multiple games in the Friends League.

J: Can you describe a particularly memorable game or moment from this season and what it meant to you?

T: In our first real game, Carter hit a buzzer-beating layup. It was an excellent comeback win.

J: What are some of the biggest chal-

lenges you've faced in your basketball career so far, and how have you worked to overcome them?

T: I've had a lot of injuries, I broke my ankle twice in the span of six months. I had to go through so much physical therapy to recover but it was worth it in the end.

J: How do you view your role on the team, as a young player among so many fantastic upperclassmen?

T: I think my role this year was just to score as much as possible.

J: I believe that you either led the team in scoring or at least came very close, how does that affect your mentality going into next year?

T: Obviously it's great that I was able to score so much, but there's always room for improvement. I'm locked in, and ready to go at all times.

J: Can you talk about the support systems that have been crucial to your development as a student-athlete?

T: My teachers are always there for me, if I miss an assignment due to basketball they are understanding. The faculty here at Barrack is very supportive.

J: You've had a tough basketball career, last year the coach was brand new to the system, and this year was the same thing, how has that turmoil affected your play?

T: Last year was my first year in the varsity program, so it was a new ex-

perience. With time I adapted well, and this year I was ready for anything. At the end of the day, you're here to play basketball, no matter what coach you have. That being said, the coaching staff had little to no effect on my mindset and how I played.

J: Have you had any coaches or mentors that have significantly affected your game?

T: I think all my coaches have helped me as much as possible. But someone who has always pushed me to my limits is my father. If I have a bad game he's always motivating me and helping. But he's also pushing me to my limits, making sure that I'm trying my best at all times.

J: Basketball, like life, has ups and downs, can you share a time when you faced adversity and what you learned from the experience?

T: When I broke my ankle the first time, it was rough but I got through it. Then I played basketball in the summer, went to a tournament in Florida, and broke my ankle again. If I'm being honest, I was considering quitting basketball altogether. But I went through physical therapy and worked hard to recover, and when I got back on the court it was such a surreal feeling.

J: How would you describe your leadership style on the court?

T: I think leadership comes with

great responsibility, and this year we had a great group of upperclassmen to lead. However, I still felt like I motivated some of the younger guys. Younger guys, when they were in slumps, I helped them out of it and got them back on track.

J: Every athlete has a dream scenario, what's yours and how are you working to achieve it?

T: I really want to dunk in a game, so I've been training my legs and my vertical to be able to do so one day. Watching the NBA so much you see guys throwing down windmills and tomahawks, it's a basketball staple that I want to achieve.

J: Can you recall a specific moment or game that solidified your love for basketball?

T: Yes, it was 8th grade, I was on the 8th grade barrack team and we played Friends Central. It may have been the best game the team had all season. We only had five guys and we just played our hearts out. I think we ended up losing by 4, but it was still such an amazing game. It was one of those games where you go to sleep that night feeling accomplished

J: Well Tal, thank you so much for joining me today.

T: It was a pleasure to be here!

Everything You Need to Know When Filling Out Your Bracket: A March Madness 2024 guide

Benny Scheinmann, Sports Editor

March is the time when the flowers are beginning to bloom, spring break is right around the corner, and 64 of the best college basketball teams battle it out to crown a March Madness champion. With the tournament right around the corner, here are the tips and teams to pick that will help you win your bracket.

Top seed: UConn Huskies

It's not often that the reigning champions are the best team for two consecutive seasons, however, that is exactly the case with the UConn Huskies. With most of their major contributors returning from last year, UConn has cemented themselves as the best team in college basketball. Through an



undefeated season this year at home, UConn has proven to be the team to beat in the tournament.

Sleepers: Northwestern Wildcats

Northwestern may not have the star studded lineup that Purdue has but Northwestern has the tools to be the best team coming out of the Big Ten. With their superb shooting ability, the Wildcats have the ability to run up the score which comes in handy in March.

Utah Utes

Although in a bad Pac-12 conference, the Utes have a solid all-around team this year on both sides of the floor. Led by redshirt senior and seven-footer Branden Carlson, the Utes can protect the rim, unlike many other teams.

Potential Cinderella teams: Grand Canyon Antelopes

Grand Canyon's fast-paced, firepower offense is what I think makes them a potential Cinderella team in this year's tournament. Led by two seniors, Tyon Grant-Foster and Gabe Mcglothan who can score in bunches. Grand Canyon has a real shot to make a deep run in March.

McNeese State Cowboys

McNeese State is not on this list for their elite offense but for their lockdown defense. Allowing the least points in the southland conference McNeese States tempo is what is best about them. They play efficient basketball and shoot the three-ball consistently. All of these factors make them a team that a powerhouse offense fears in

March and a potential Cinderella team.

My Pick: Creighton Bluejays

Led by South Dakota State transfer Baylor Scheirman the Creighton Bluejays' streaky nature and



ability to stay in games is what makes them my favorite team in this year's tournament. Although I am writing this before the Big East tournament, their win against UConn shows that they could be the best team in the Big East.

This year's tournament should make for an exciting conclusion to college basketball with many fun to watch teams. Unfortunately, no matter how much research I do I tend to always lose to people who have never watched a game the entire season: so maybe it's best to forget everything I've said and just pick randomly.

A Love Letter to Barrack Softball

Eliana Weinstein, Staff Writer

Some people celebrate the beginning of a new year by watching a ball drop in New York City. I celebrate the new year with a ball drop that takes place in Bryn Mawr, PA. When I step onto the softball field for the first game of a season, my heart leaps out of my chest and I feel alive again. As a passionate softball player, I can be spotted weekly in a blue and white softball hoodie, or a black Cougars t-shirt with a bat embellishing the front. Both of these tell a story about my love for the sport and my pride in my school.

Beginning softball as a Barrack middle schooler, I became "in like" with the sport because it helped me get my energy out and make new friends. I was an athletic kid who always loved sports, but I had never played softball prior to the Barrack Middle School team. Working hard to achieve the goal of winning games, my middle school years of softball were fun, but that was not enough for me; I wanted to be a challenging competitor who could achieve excellence within the sport. To accomplish this goal I tried out for varsity softball in eighth grade. Making the team was a huge accomplishment, but my season was cut short. The COVID-19 pandemic halted what was supposed to be my chance to work with a more talented team and sharpen my skills. However, when I returned for freshman year I felt even more eager to play; I had forced my dad to have frequent catches with me, and I watched college softball any time I was off online school. My freshman season was fun, but it was also incredibly educational. Months of practicing at Tee's batting cages flew by quicker than a fastball, and my sophomore softball season began. Although this season did not necessarily result in a lot of



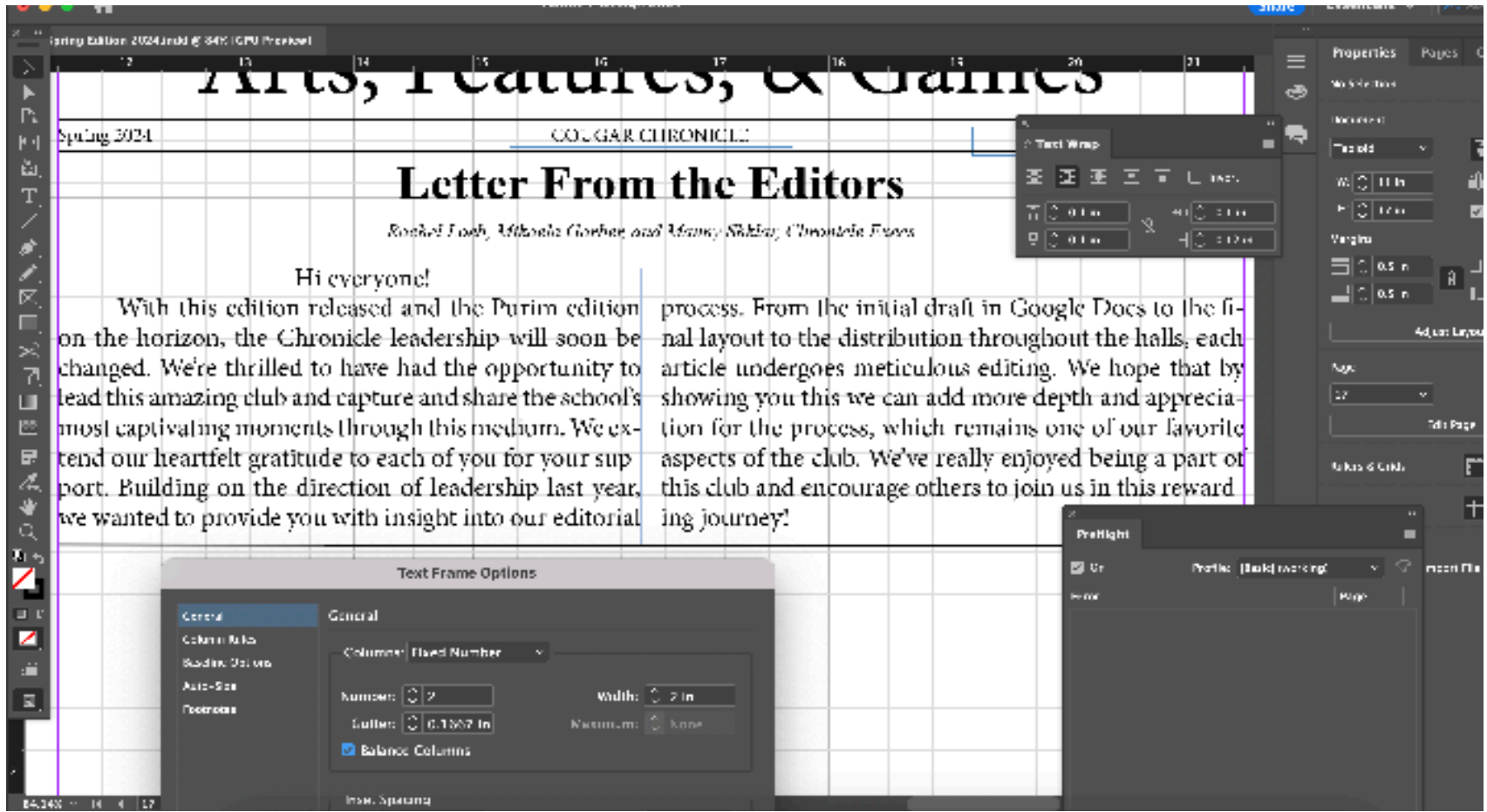
actual game victories, I had one of the most fun seasons of my athletic experience, as everyone on the team became very close. Then, junior year season rolled around, and the combination of fun and educational seasons that our team experienced truly built on themselves. The Softball Cougars were ready to face good teams and win. We were more victorious this season than we could have ever imagined, and although the team lost in the semi-finals, we had played our hearts out and taught me the importance of continuously pursuing hard work.

The last game of my junior season brought me to tears because I knew that I would only have one more season playing Barrack softball. I went home that night and stared at my raggedy glove and shiny bat, and I admired my damp puffy eyes in my mirror -my "like" for Barrack softball had turned into love. The pain I was experiencing was an anticipated heartbreak that would occur in approximately one year. Now, of course, I can and most likely will play softball on a club team in college but it wouldn't be as a cougar anymore.

My "like" for Barrack softball had turned into love

When I woke up the next morning it was a Friday, and I attended school like normal. When school came to a close I drove home and re-entered my room which was still cluttered with softball gear from the night before. This time I looked into my mirror and with dry eyes regained some clarity; My senior year Barrack softball season will be the best because I am not just "in like" anymore, nor am I in love anymore; I am obsessed.

Arts, Features, & Games



Sudoku

Ariel Shavit, Arts, Features, & Games Editor

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Word Search

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Words:

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- Softball
- March
- Baseball
- Flowers
- Blooming
- May
- Spring
- Pesach
- Purim
- April
- Sunny
- Umbrella
- Butterfly
- Clouds
- Bees
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- Sports
- Cougars
- Golf
- Fruit
- Caterpillar
- Tennis
- Track
- Pencils
- Markers
- Presentations
- Barrack

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