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Farewell Editors-in-Chief!

ALLISON PALMER, ALEX WERNER,
& STEVEN ZHANG
Incoming Editors-in-Chief

As the sun begins to set over the picturesque Jig Pat landscape and friends bid farewell for the summer break, the 2024-2025 school year comes to an end. Within these goodbyes, another shift is taking place, the torch is being passed to the next generation of the *Papyrus*, setting the stage for the 129th editorial board next fall. Throughout this year, the *Papyrus* has taken bold, creative strides in the publication, like bringing back the Pap Poll, a column in the 90s that asked students different questions about Taft life and pop culture. Publishing insightful news articles, captivating opinion pieces, and covering the pulse of student life here at Taft were staples in each issue. Behind this energy were the three current Editors-in-Chief, whose dedication to the *Papyrus* truly helped shape the publication: Sky Comfort, Courtney Edwards, and Izzy Read.

Sky Comfort's time on the *Papyrus* was spearheaded by a dedication and creativity so potent that it was admirable in all facets of his leadership. Whether working around the clock on the editorial process or writing his own pieces, he has always represented a thoughtful voice, inspiring future writers who will follow in his footsteps. Aside from working as Editor-in-Chief, Sky keeps himself extremely occupied with extracurricular clubs and sports. His leadership in the community extends beyond that of the *Papyrus*, as he is the Admissions Council Head as well as the head of the Community Service Board. Sky's leadership on campus is best exemplified by his unwavering commitment to the betterment of Taft as a community and his desire to improve all parts of campus, whether in the pages of the *Papyrus* or the initiatives he takes beyond it. In sports, Sky serves on both the Varsity Ski and Crew teams; he balances a challenging workload with a competitive drive for success and high-achieving athletic performance. Despite this challenging and impressive work in and outside of school, Sky brought the same integrity and care to each and every one of his communities.

From her earliest days as a Mid on the *Papyrus*, Courtney Edwards served as a staple of unmatched insight and reliability. Her passion for sports writing allowed her to explore unique articles and topics ranging from Taft athletics to professional leagues, each article written with the

helping hand if needed; her teammates on and off the ice knew they could count on her. Courtney's presence on the *Papyrus* will leave a lasting impression of cohesiveness and confidence, forming a bond that will continue to shape the publication even after she graduates

Last but certainly not least, Izzy Read, with her radiance and extraordinary artistic vision, has lit up campus and the hearts of faculty and students alike. In *Papyrus* meetings, we can speak to Izzy's ability to foster a uniquely welcoming and inquisitive environment – one where both returning staff and first-time writers feel safe, heard, and genuinely excited to share their ideas. Her calm yet lively presence and thoughtful leadership create a space where creativity thrives. Beyond our faculty room meetings, Izzy plays an essential role in the Taft community as a School Monitor and peer mentor, and she is a dedicated member of the Veterans Awareness Fund (VAFT), serving as their head of marketing. Her impact is also vividly felt through her artwork, which has spoken volumes in Potter's Gallery throughout her years at Taft. Her detailed portraits, rich color palettes, and seamless blending offer a brief, yet powerful window into the care, time, and dedication that Izzy pours into every endeavor she embarks on. Izzy's legacy on the *Papyrus* and at Taft will be remembered for her creativity, kindness, and the beauty she contributes to every project she is a part of.



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

precision and clarity that comes from a true love of both the game and the written word. She brought a unique voice to sports, one that balanced numbers and facts with an individual flair that made small moments on the field feel big in readers' hearts. In Taft athletics, Courtney has served as a two-year JV Ice Hockey Captain, guiding her team to victory on and off the ice. On JV Hockey, Courtney's leadership carried over and shone just as brightly as it did in the *Papyrus* meeting room. Her leadership on the *Papyrus* makes everyone feel like they are a part of the team. Courtney aimed to always include and hear every voice, and was always willing to lend a

As this year's EICs sign off, we want to thank them all for their incredible hard work and dedication. We are so proud of all that Sky, Courtney, and Izzy have accomplished throughout the year and wish them nothing but the best as they take their leadership beyond the walls of Taft. As we take on the new responsibilities of becoming the next Editors-in-Chief, the lessons we have learned from their leadership will stay with us next year and beyond. We are honored to carry the torch that they have passed on to us, and we look forward to building a new legacy, one issue at a time. To Sky, Courtney, and Izzy, from the bottom of our hearts, thank you for everything!

Understanding the Battle Between President Trump and Harvard

HOLLY RICHARD
Staff Writer

In a dramatic showdown between politics and academia, President Trump and a number of universities, most notably Harvard, are locked in a battle that could shape the future of higher education in America. The conflict reached a boiling point when the Trump Administration threatened to freeze up to \$2.2 billion in federal research funding for Harvard, triggering a chain of events that have left the two parties in an ideological battle.

Before the President's announcement on April 14th, the Trump Administration asserted that Harvard had to reform its policies, specifically regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, if they wanted to maintain their funding from the federal government. Among the Administration's demands were ending DEI programs, restructuring campus leadership, and ensuring "viewpoint diversity" on campus. Also among the Administration's demands was an agreement to allow government-approved curriculum and admission data examinations. However, Harvard refused to comply with Trump's demands, filing a lawsuit against the Trump Administration in federal court, refusing to negotiate its protected rights and independence. Harvard specifically argued that the Administration's threat violates the school's rights provided in the First Amendment and exemplifies government overreach. Harvard's complaint states that the First Amendment should protect any free speech related to the opposition of government interference that intends to force an ideological preference. The university's president, Alan Garber, described the changes that the Trump Administration demanded as an intrusive and improper attempt to control the school. Following Harvard's lawsuit, the White House responded, saying that "the gravy train of federal assistance to institutions like Harvard, which enrich their grossly overpaid bureaucrats with tax dollars from struggling American families is coming to an end." A court hearing is scheduled for July.



Photo courtesy of Fox News

This is not the first time that Trump and Harvard have come head-to-head. During his first term, his Administration supported lawsuits against Harvard's race-conscious admissions policies, accusing the school of discriminating against specific applicants. This went to court, and while the judges ruled in favor of Harvard in 2019, the case contributed to a 2023 Supreme Court decision, *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, banning race-based affirmative action in university admissions. Now, the Trump Administration is taking its attacks against Harvard even further, threatening to revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status. This threat, if successful, would essentially cost the university millions of dollars and could set a precedent that will force schools to comply with political requests. Legal experts argue that this would be a serious abuse of presidential power.

Separately, the Trump Administration has targeted other private universities, such as Cornell University, suspending \$1 billion in federal funding, and Brown University, suspending \$510

million. President Trump also threatened to slash federal funding of Columbia University, a hub for pro-Palestinian protests, due to antisemitism. Yet, the university agreed to some of the Administration's demands in order to maintain its funds. This conflict raises many questions: What role should the federal government play in shaping higher education? How do we balance the protection of free speech and academic independence with concerns about fairness, bias, and inclusion on school campuses? Supporters of the Trump Administration's stance argue that private universities have become politically one-sided and that reform is necessary to ensure a broader diversity of thought. Critics of the Trump Administration's position argue that their actions threaten academic independence provided in the Constitution, and that they are politically motivated attempts to silence institutions that challenge the government. This argument is not just about who controls education in the U.S., but what values and ideologies educational institutions should reflect.

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ENCOURAGE READERS'
REACTION TO THE
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HOW YOU FEEL!

Taft Says Goodbye to Señora Lara: Celebrating 19 Years at Taft and a Lifetime of Teaching

ELLY OUELLETTE
Staff Writer

As the school year begins to come to a close and summer inches closer, excitement builds on the Taft campus. For some, however, the end of this semester marks the end of their time at Taft (and I am not just talking about Seniors). At the end of the 2024-2025 school year, Ms. Luz Lara will pack up her office for the final time after 19 years of teaching at Taft and over 40 years in the profession.

Señora Lara began teaching in Medellín, Colombia, during her third year of college. However, her aspirations to teach did not start there. When asked why she decided to be a teacher, she replied, “I wanted to be a teacher since I was three years old. I used to play with my dolls, and later played with my little brothers and cousins. I never considered a different profession.”

As one of her students, I strongly believe Ms. Lara was always destined to teach. If you do not know her, her advice to new teachers should speak to that statement: “I believe this is a profession that requires a lot of passion. You need to love what you do. Every day is a new experience, and as educators, we must be open to learning from our students and know how to balance high expectations, education, and constant support for our students. For me, being demanding with kindness is key.” She also encourages openness and willingness to listen because “Each student has taught [her] something and allowed [her] to become a better person.”

That passion and kindness can be seen woven throughout everything Ms. Lara has done at Taft: she has been a pillar of the language department and helped with class trips.

Outside of the classroom, she has coached tennis, and shaped the lives of countless students, all while in the best of outfits (my all time favorite has to be her Cruella DeVille costume on Halloween my sophomore year).

When asked what she would miss most about Taft, Ms. Lara gave an expansive list, speaking to how involved she has been on campus: “I will truly miss my advisees, many of my colleagues who have offered me their friendship, a greeting, or a smile. I will miss the moments of interaction with my dear friend Ms. Santos, from whom I have learned many wonderful things that I will carry with me always. I will miss the fall and spring afternoons, playing tennis with many students and some of my colleagues, the trips as a chaperone with Mr. Thompson, and the dining hall staff, who have always treated me with great kindness. I will especially miss Mr. Tom Albon, who, every time I had a problem at home, would fix it immediately.”

Ms. Lara’s teaching journey does not end here, however. In her retirement, Ms. Lara is dedicating herself to multiple forms of community service. She is returning to an institution in Medellín, Colombia, where she has previous experience, to spend several months assisting children and the elderly with special needs while simultaneously raising funds and searching for sponsors. Additionally, she will be collaborating with missions in Kenya and developing a volunteer work plan at the Avon Library in Connecticut.

Congratulations on your retirement, Señora Lara! You will be deeply missed and always remembered. There is no one more deserving than you!



Photo courtesy of The Taft School

Taft Papyrus

The official student newspaper of the Taft School, est. 1893 CXXVIII

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The Papyrus is run by students at the Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut.

Founded in 1893 and issued periodically throughout the school year, The Papyrus is devoted to the ideas and interests of the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the Taft School. Since 2020, our newspaper has published content online (taftpapyrus.org).



Photo courtesy of The Taft School/Robert Falcetti

The Art of Seeing: A Tribute to Mr. Yin



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

SKY COMFORT
Editor-in-Chief

In the spring semester of my Upper Mid year, I needed to take one more art class to fulfill my requirement. My choices were limited: either join Dance for Everyone or try to get into Photography 3. As an amateur photographer, I took a chance and sent a portfolio to Mr. Yin, the photography teacher, hoping he'd make an exception. To my surprise and relief, he did. That class turned out to be the highlight of my semester.

Photography 3 was unlike any art class I'd taken before. It was conceptual: the technical training was done, and the focus shifted entirely to ideas and interpretation. Our only assignment was to explore two themes, *In the Beginning* and *This is Tomorrow*, with complete creative freedom. I was overwhelmed at first. I started with some safe architectural shots but eventually experimented with a photo of my friend wearing a VR headset, bathed in blue light.

Mr. Yin saw something in that image. He encouraged me to build a whole series around it, exploring illusions of light and time—the headset as a kind of portal to a prelapsarian world. His vision helped me reimagine what photography could be. He has a rare ability to pull meaning from images and push students to go deeper. As my classmate Sophie Brown '25 put it, "I have taken all three photography courses at Taft, and without a doubt, part of the reason I kept taking them was because of Mr. Yin. While I have always loved photography, Mr. Yin taught me not only how to take a picture but how to make a pic-

ture. His hard critique comes from love and desire for us to get better." That one photograph became the seed for a project that felt bold and alive. Mr. Yin didn't just teach us how to take pictures; he taught us how to see.

Yee-fun Yin has taught photography at Taft for 18 years, starting his teaching career after a career in engineering and automation. Engineering wasn't fulfilling him creatively, and he decided to become involved in his interest in photography. Hired by Taft in 2007, he was tasked with creating a digital photography curriculum, something being rapidly adopted by our peer boarding schools. He started a digital lab with computers and printers. Mr. Yin decided to limit digital photography to intermediate and advanced courses. Beginners start learning film and analog photography, as Yin says, "to be creative, you need to work within limitations." His ideology towards film photography is that in order to be a successful photographer, you need to know all the technical skills. Students in Photo 1 need to do everything manually: shutter speed, aperture, and ISO. Mr. Yin compares learning how to photograph to English classes: "You have to know all your grammar, then you can start writing stories. To be able to photograph clearly, you need to understand the technical details."

For our second photo series, *This is Tomorrow*, my theme was a dystopian future of extraterrestrial activity and supernatural lighting. I had the opportunity to travel to Japan over Spring Break and shot Yayoi Kusama's pumpkin on a dock, a super-sized dotted pumpkin. Mr. Yin

loved the effect of the people within the shot, all standing back from the pumpkin, as if alarmed by its alien-like presence. Similarly, as Mr. Yin will be retiring after this school year, he speaks of his "tomorrow," excited about a return to his own photography.

Mr. Yin has struggled to find time for his own photography while at Taft, so he is excited for the free time he will be able to dedicate to his career. As I asked him about his plans after Taft, his face gleamed when talking about his next series he plans to title "Rumors." Just like my pumpkin photograph, he wants to discover the non-factual part of photography, the contrast between a digital photograph, which is objectively real, and the insinuation of other themes of mystery that can be crafted through photography. Mr. Yin will continue living in Litchfield after the school year. He will begin his next series by photographing Dudleytown, an eerie, long-abandoned ghost town tucked away in northwestern Connecticut. This mysterious place will serve as the spark for the rest of his work.

As Mr. Yin embarks on this next chapter, there is a shared sense of excitement among his former students as he returns to the kind of creative work he has inspired in his students. As Sophie Brown reflects, "From what pictures Mr. Yin has shown of his own work, I can't wait to see what *Rumors* entails." Neither can I. On behalf of the many students whose lives you have impacted, thank you, Mr. Yin, for your years of dedication, vision, and mentorship. We look forward to witnessing the next stage of your artistic journey.

Passion, Legacy, and Love: The Music and Life of Bruce Fifer

STEVEN ZHANG & LOUISA PRENTICE
Staff Writers

On a freezing night in 1958, a tall, slender man wearing a tuxedo stepped out onto the stage in front of a sold-out audience in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. As the warm hum of conversation and applause came to a still, the young pianist began playing. This was the inaugural Tchaikovsky Competition, and the pianist who was about to perform was Van Cliburn, a rising 23-year-old pianist from a small town in rural Texas.

It must have seemed strange to the audience that someone of his background would venture into the Soviet Union during the peak of the Cold War, and dare to perform a piece written by Rachmaninoff, a Russian composer. Yet, despite all expectations, more than 40 minutes after the start of his performance, Cliburn began playing the final coda of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3. With aching fingers and his hair soaked with sweat, Cliburn struck notes and melodies that resonated through the hall, enraptured by those gorgeous chordal repetitions. And without even realizing it, after striking those final notes, Van Cliburn — an American in front of Khrushchev — immediately and trance-like gets up from his bench to kiss Kiril Kondrashin, the conductor. Needless to say, Cliburn won gold. Audiences were transfixed, judges were stunned, and millions around the world read about this incredible performance. And among those millions was a young boy in Pennsylvania named Bruce Fifer.

From even his earliest days, Mr. Fifer grew up loving music; both of his parents were part of the church choir in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, his hometown. They brought classical music home to him, and he remembers spending hours of his day listening to the church organist play. In sixth grade, Mr. Fifer and his mother were given tickets to the Bach B Minor Mass, a work that blended Catholic tradition, Baroque technique, and international musical styles. "We went, and I was blown away by it." Another one of the greatest inspirations to the young Mr. Fifer was reading about Van Cliburn's victory in the Tchaikovsky Competition — a young Texan winning a Russian music competition at the height of the Cold War was simply extraordinary. This was a moment that would carry itself throughout Mr. Fifer's life as he forged his love for music in a myriad of ways.

Mr. Fifer's musical and choral accomplishments are so vast that we find it staggeringly challenging to fit them into a single article. From singing on the soundtracks of *Beauty and the Beast* to touring Collegium around the world, Mr. Fifer has done virtually everything and anything remotely related to choral music. His career can roughly be divided into three chapters: his direction at the choral program at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, his enduring choral recording and performance career, and his time leading Collegium Musicum at Taft.

In the 1980s, after a rich music upbringing and graduating from Westminster Choir College, Mr. Fifer started his 22-year-long journey at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, first as assistant and eventually as director of liturgical drama and music. Within the Gothic revival facades and buttresses of the church, Mr. Fifer led the creation of everything from a staged version of Bach's St. John Passion to annual performances of the *Messiah*, in addition to countless choral performances for larger audiences. "The building's cavernous acoustics have defeated



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

many a musical performance over the years," one reporter noted in a review from *The New York Times*, "but Mr. Fifer, the cathedral's director of liturgical music, turned them to superb dramatic use here with his varied placements."

Outside of leading and conducting choirs, Mr. Fifer has had extensive solo experience in performing. He can be heard on the soundtracks of classic Disney movies such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Mulan*. Prior to even joining The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Mr. Fifer led a 30-year career as a solo baritone, where he could be heard on live performances and recordings of virtually every choral ensemble in the New York metropolitan area. He has also performed with the finest symphony orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein; the Boston Symphony and the Buffalo Philharmonic under Michael Tilson Thomas; and the Philadelphia Orchestra and National Symphony.

In 1996, Mr. Fifer joined Taft as the Director of Collegium Musicum. Having been familiarized with the boarding school environment (his daughter was already a student at St. Paul's), Mr. Fifer was drawn to how integrated the music program was to life at Taft. "What was attractive to me was that it wasn't extracurricular... four times a week, they were mine to work with." Since the start of his tenure, Mr. Fifer has conducted Collegium in numerous performances each year during Family Weekend, Alumni Weekend, and of course, the beloved Lessons and Carols held every December. Collegium is more than just a class. He sees it as "a life lesson... It's something that is so important in this day and age when we really have to connect with music that's beautiful." With an unwavering passion and irresistible personality, Mr. Fifer has also ushered Collegium to perform beyond the halls of Taft and around the world in New York City, San Francisco, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, China, Spain, France, Austria, and Italy. To be able not only to teach, but also to inspire a class of 40 students of all identities and musical backgrounds is a true testament to how remarkable a maestro and pedagogue Mr. Fifer truly is. Head of School Emeritus Willy Macmullen '78 said it best: "When you combine excellence and humility in a teacher, it looks like Bruce... He has been the face of Taft arts for decades." Beyond Collegium, Mr. Fifer also brought music to the Taft

and Watertown communities through the "Music for a While" concert series in 1996, which to this day has invited world-class musicians to perform right at Taft's campus.

As we wrote this piece, we found ourselves returning not just to Mr. Fifer's numerous accomplishments, but also the small moments and memories that defined our experience with him. For me, Louisa, I have been so marked by our annual concerts in New York City and the pure joy radiating from Mr. Fifer. Throughout every song, he felt so deeply connected to every one of us, through eye contact and smiles. And for me, Steven, I can never forget playing the violin solo on Ola Gjeilo's *Serenity (O Magnum Mysterium)* during the last service of Lessons and Carols of Mr. Fifer's career. Between two of the sections I played, there was this moment of stillness where I stood, with my eyes closed, as the entirety of Collegium crescendoed behind me. I peeked open my eyes, and there I saw Mr. Fifer waving his hands with such effervescence and determination, his gaze full of passion, and his mouth uttering every single word the choir sang. When the singers behind me reached the climax of the piece — a chord that reverberated throughout Woodward Chapel — all the nervousness disappeared and I knew that this moment would be something that I'd remember forever. Now, whenever I listen to the piece, I admit that I tear up a little thinking about that last performance — in that fleeting moment of music, we all created something that was much larger than ourselves.

From St. John the Divine to the intimate rehearsal spaces at Taft, Mr. Fifer's story is one of devotion to music, education, and the countless people he has inspired. As he looks back on almost three decades of his career at Taft, Mr. Fifer realizes how much his wife, Mrs. Fifer, has truly been his "rock, enabler, and support." "She's always extraordinary, and I wish for everybody that you have a partner in life like her," he says. Just as Mrs. Fifer has constantly supported his life, Collegium has also served as a guiding force. For him, Collegium is more than just a class. He sees it as "a life lesson... It's something that is so important in this day and age when we really have to connect with music that's beautiful."

As Mr. Fifer begins to say goodbye to his students, he encourages them to continue singing beyond the classroom. "There's a whole world out there," he notes, "of like-minded people who love to get together and make music." To that, his departure from Taft does not mean music will leave his life. He plans on joining a choir and revisiting programs from past performances in his career, and will certainly be seen at performances throughout the year. Although he will miss the close-knit Taft community and intimate connections between him and his students, Mr. Fifer will remain close, both physically and in our hearts. His years of teaching have left an indelible mark on his students and the Taft community at large, and his legacy will remain for long after his departure this May. Thank you, Mr. Fifer, for teaching us the joy of music — of how to savor every moment we have, no matter how ephemeral, whether as performer or audience. And as we sing our last notes with you, remember your voice will always be part of ours.

Isaac and Louisa: A New Chapter for Taft Leadership

LUCY RYAN
Staff Writer

For many, the changes that come with the end of the school year can be daunting. When saying short goodbyes to some and long goodbyes to others, it is natural to be afraid of what is to come. One thing, though, that the Taft community can rest easy knowing is that we have left the school in the incredible hands of Co-Head Monitors Louisa Prentice and Isaac Obeng. When their names rang through the microphones in Bingham announcing their Co-Head Monitorship, a unanimous buzz of applause, confidence, and enthusiasm filled the auditorium. Since the beginning of their time at Taft, Isaac and Louisa have embodied the essence of what it means to be a Rhino. Isaac and Louisa have been members and co-chairs of the Class Committee since their Lower-Mid and Mid years, respectively, and beyond that, have consistently demonstrated their devotion to the Taft community.

Even if you do not know Isaac personally, you have probably seen him strolling down Main Hall, chiming a friendly ‘Hello!’ to each passerby. A New York native, Isaac is from Newburgh and has been at Taft since his lower-mid year. Isaac has been involved in various activities over his time at Taft, each one giving him a unique perspective on the community: the Fall and Spring Musicals, thirds squash, Math Table, the Global Leadership Institute, and Collegium, just to name a few. While some know him for his ovation-worthy performances, and some for his astute math tutoring, everyone knows Isaac for his go-getter attitude and inviting personality. As Head-Mon, he hopes to revamp school spirit by bringing back old traditions like “Taft’s Got Talent” or Bingham movie nights. Isaac is also a Monitor on HDT 3, so he certainly has no problem showing a little tough love now and then. He works in tandem with Mr. Coleman to wrangle the halls of HDT 3, a faculty member he believes would bring fierce



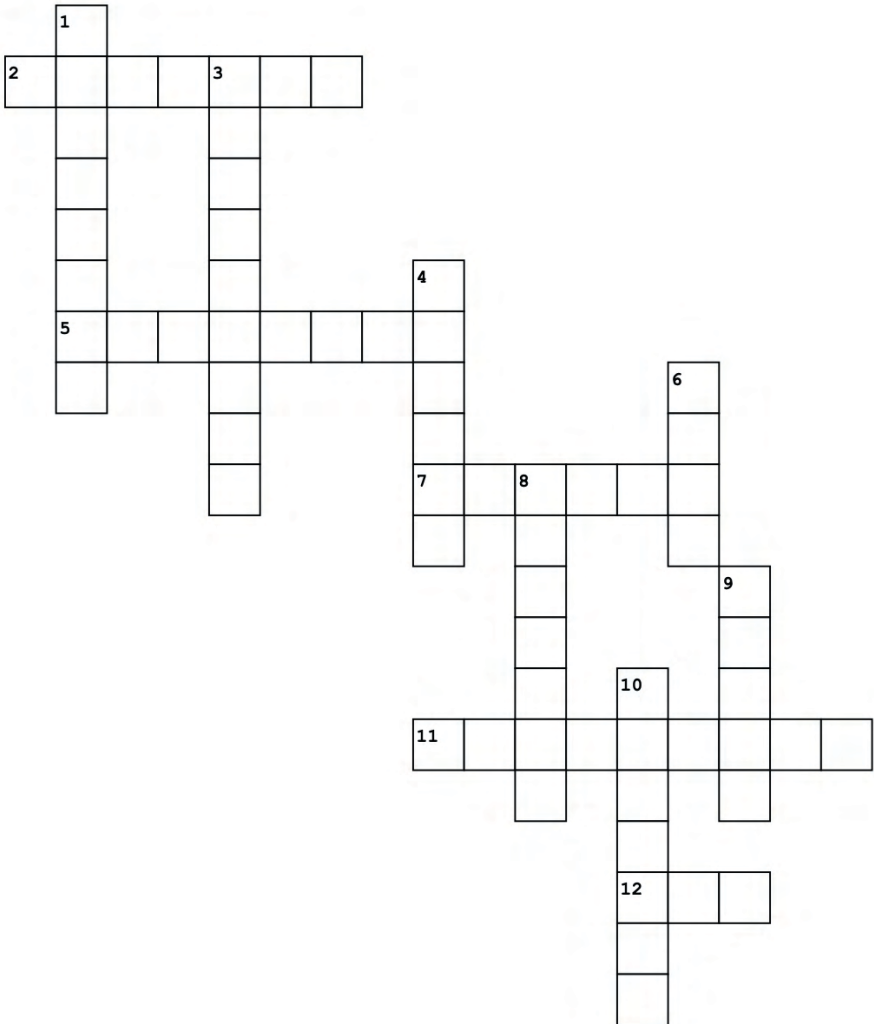
Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

competition to “Taft’s Got Talent” next year.

Whether you’ve seen her on the slopes in the winter or on the track in the spring, Louisa is a universally adored figure in the Taft community. Just like Isaac, Louisa is among the most involved students at Taft; she has done everything from playing thirds field hockey to writing for the *Papyrus* and *Global Journal*. She is also a Monitor in Mac, a dorm that Louisa lovingly describes as “tight-knit and lively.” Next year will be her third year living there, so her love for the dorm is no understatement. As Head Mon, Louisa is excited to reignite school spirit and hopes to plan events where the entire community can bond. One of Louisa’s favorite Taft memories is the Hot-kiss Day 2022 Thirds Field Hockey game; after a buzzer-beater in the last minute, the Red Sweater Club stormed Camp Field and celebrated with

the team. Louisa believes that it is the unexpected moments, like that game, that highlight how uniquely bonded we are as a school. Also hailing from the Big Apple, Louisa is “beyond excited” to work with Isaac next year, a feat which should be easy, because, in addition to Co-Head-Mons, they are also close friends.

Throughout their past three years at Taft, Isaac and Louisa have built indelible ties to Taft; they have come through their classes and extra-curriculars, but most importantly, through their friendships. With Commencement and summer fast approaching, the next school year can feel like an afterthought, and many can be mentally elsewhere. Despite this, the Taft community can all place trust in Isaac and Louisa to make next fall memorable.



May Crossword

Across

- 2. Find pots of gold at the end of these
- 5. Bring one when it rains!
- 7. A popular spring holiday
- 11. The flower commonly associated with Mother's Day
- 12. Black and yellow creature that many people are afraid of

Down

- 1. We have these on Jig Pat in good weather
- 3. The final form of a caterpillar
- 4. Where flowers, vegetables, and weeds grow
- 6. Post-rain explorers that make some squeamish
- 8. "April _____ bring May flowers"
- 9. A common and classic spring flower that means love
- 10. Good luck bug

Second Semester Socials: Which is better – Winter Formal or Spring Fling?

ZOE CHIWESHE
Staff Writer

On Saturday, April 26, the Red Rhino Fund hosted the annual Spring Fling up at the Watertown Golf Club, an event loved by many in the Taft community. As soon as Tafties finished their athletic contests for the day, it was straight to preparations for the occasion. Similar to sit-down dinner, there were last-minute scrambles to find dresses to borrow from friends; students ran between floors and dorms to find the perfect outfit. In typical Connecticut fashion, the on-and-off downpouring rain tried to spoil everyone’s day, and had many scared for their freshly-styled hair. Like the Winter Formal held in February, girls of all ages piled into Voge Hallway for photos well before buses headed up the road.

Inside the Watertown Golf Club, the usual ducking and diving under iPhone cameras and people’s outstretched arms made what was an already small space feel even smaller. If that wasn’t enough, more pictures were taken upon arriving at the Golf Club, this time by Mr. Falcetti, who directed traffic with his high-quality camera and knowledge of the right angles and proper lighting for a great pic. Like any Taft event, a DJ was at the top of the dance floor, urging people to start dancing through a mix of trending and throwback songs.

Yet, the real question remains: *Is Spring Fling Better than Winter Formal?* The two are constantly compared to each other, despite being completely different Taft events. While two people cannot speak for all, we interviewed sophomores Ellie Taylor and Julia Anto-

nucci to hear what they had to say in terms of which event they liked more.

Ellie: “I think I like Spring Fling more than Formal because with it being practically on campus, you have more freedom for when you can come and go. Even though Formal had the bigger venue and more activities, it is nice to be able to leave and/or come to Spring Fling whenever you would like.”

Julia: “I enjoy Formal more because of the lead-up to it. The asks are more fun to make and watch, and being able to shop for a dress [compared to wearing what you would for sit down] is part of it all too. I also think that with Formal, being able to have a sit-down dinner is easier than thinking about having to either eat before or after the event, like you do with Spring Fling.”

With the school year winding down, Spring Fling is a great event that brings the Taft community together while supporting organizations in the greater Watertown area by providing them with all proceeds. Even though it occurs during most people’s least favorite season, Winter Formal tends to be the “big thing” that keeps people excited while trying to get through the bitter, long New England winters. Surely, each person in the Taft community could think of pros and cons for both events, whether on their own or compared to the other. But regardless of the good, bad, or season of the year, students and faculty make both events worthwhile by indulging in each other’s company. After hearing arguments for both sides, what staple Taft function do you think is better?



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

Hanging in the Balance: The Future of Taft Track

TATE CELEBI
Head Writer

Track and Field has a long and successful history at Taft, bringing together distance runners, sprinters, throwers, jumpers, and even pole vaulters into one team that competes across seventeen events. As the name suggests, the track team’s operations center around Taft’s very own Weaver Track. The athletics team page reads: “Since 1999, the boys team has trained and competed together on the Weaver Track, a state-of-the-art all-weather track and field facility.” This description was obviously written many years ago. While our track was certainly state-of-the-art in 1999, we are in a new century now, and it has felt the wear and tear of over 25 years of constant use.

Perhaps the dilapidated state of our track would be best described as a landscape. Once a smooth, flat plain, the Weaver Track is now a region of vast canyons and divots. Its surface has transformed from soft and springy to hard and concrete-like. When it rains, lane one becomes a beautiful series of rivers and lakes, and the back stretch becomes a floodplain. In other words, our track barely qualifies as a track anymore. It has expired. Twenty-five years is certainly pushing the limits of when a track is due to be resurfaced. It is a large investment, sure, but Taft has never been shy about spending money on other athletic endeavors. A new track would fit in perfectly with MacMullen Field or Odden Arena. Track athletes have learned not to expect equal treatment, but the ability to effectively practice and compete in one’s sport should be a guarantee, not a privilege granted only to some.

Over my four years running for Taft, I have witnessed the injury rate on the team increase steadily each year, as the surface on which our athletes practice became increasingly hard. Ironically, so far

this year, I have been the only captain unaffected by injury, and I have also run the most on the road (hard, rough pavement) and the least on the track. We might as well compete on a four-lane highway. Over my four years, I have also seen that Taft Track and Field athletes are capable of incredible feats of strength and will, especially when given the opportunity to compete on facilities such as Loomis’ or Hotchkiss’. It is frankly an embarrassment to the program, and therefore the school, when one of those teams visits us to compete, and we must apologize about the state of our track.

This season, the question arose of whether or not we would even be allowed to host competitions due to the track’s damaged condition. Next year, if the track is not renewed, we likely will not. For the last couple of years, I and the rest of the team have been promised that this crucial renewal would be happening this summer before the 2025–2026 school year. However, at the beginning of this season, we were told that this was not the case. It seems the funding simply is not there. Despite the cost, the renewal of the track after over 25 years should be non-negotiable. The athletes of boys’ and girls’ track teams have given the program their all despite the declining conditions, and they deserve a return on their investment. Taft’s Track and Field program simply cannot survive another year of neglect.

This problem has not gone entirely unnoticed by the administration. Although funding from the school is no longer promised, the administration has begun taking steps towards fundraising for the track’s renewal and is accepting donations. The purpose of this article is not to beg for money, but to spread awareness about an issue that can and must be addressed through community support. By spreading the word, finding donors, and holding the administration accountable, we can save Taft Track and Field.



Photo courtesy of Tate Celebi

From Popularity to Purpose: Reforming Our Class Committee

ELEANOR LEMON & RACHEL CHAE
Staff Writers

I was not expecting to spend my Tuesday night in C118 delicately balancing dry spaghetti, masking tapes, twine, and a marshmallow – but there I was, at 9 pm, building a pasta tower with Tatum '26, Omar '26, and Lincoln '26 under the watchful eye of Mr. LaCasse. It was part of this year's leadership training for dorm monitors, and our goal was to create a structure somewhat reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower. What we ended up with looked slightly more like a hayseed swaying in the wind: spaghetti held together by a little masking tape, and a lot of hope. We tried, and ultimately succeeded, in keeping our structure from falling over, but the exercise prompted me to reflect on what structure looks like within leadership. Is there a "perfect structure" for student government here at Taft?

The Student Handbook defines the "central agency of self-government at Taft as the monitorial staff, a group of 12 to 16 seniors elected by their class. The school monitors implement the Honor System, assist in the supervision of the dormitories, and accept a large share of the responsibility for the day-to-day conduct of the school's affairs." Ultimately, Taft's definition of leadership is "choosing to act with empathy,

integrity, and courage to help one's group achieve its goals."

Yet despite this definition, many students still feel unsure of how our leadership systems *actually* function. At other boarding schools, student governments often include defined roles like president or vice president, with formal campaigns, platforms, and structured opportunities to influence school policy. At Taft, our class committee system can feel far more ambiguous. In our interview with Mr. LaCasse, he described the purpose of class committees as a chance to "represent the interests of the specific class and provide an opportunity for the class to work together on things that are important to the class." But when asked about the specific responsibilities, he admitted, "There's not really a clear articulation about what it is that [class committees] are supposed to accomplish. It's very much at the discretion of the class and the class deans."

Without clarity, elections can often hinge on a person's charm and charisma rather than their actual ideas — essentially, a "glorified popularity contest." Underclassmen, in particular, told us they didn't feel equipped to vote for people they had practically just met. With no speeches or campaign process, they lacked the information to engage meaningfully. To put it simply, Taft students tend to vote for the names they recog-

nize, not the ideas they believe in. Yet, Mr. LaCasse didn't oppose the idea of adding structure; he welcomed it. "If students want something different and can articulate the rationale for it, that's worth discussing," he said. He even proposed the possibility of a "constitutional convention" where students could reimagine how leadership is defined and elected. What matters most, he emphasized, is that student leadership remains rooted in community. "This really is a space where you all are responsible for what happens," he said. "And the more that you feel agency there, the better outcome you're going to have."

At the end of the day, our tower of pasta looked nothing like the Eiffel Tower, but it stood. It stood because we worked together as a group, with the materials we had, and adapted. This can serve as a metaphor for how we see Taft's leadership structure: it is a system held up by effort, tradition, and trust. One that is in the hands of the students. It is therefore up to us, to build and shape the system of student governance that represents us all: whether you believe that looks reminiscent of the format we have today, or if you envision something different. It's up to us to decide whether class committee is just a title — or a responsibility.



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

Behind the Scenes of the Spring Dance Showcase



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

MOLLY WYNNE
Head Writer

The lights blaze as we step out onto the marley platform. For a split second, our minds go blank, and we feel an intense pounding in our chests. The smell of hot rosin mixed with sweat fills our noses immediately. Our pupils dilate, and just beyond the platform’s edge, hundreds of heads come into a faint focus. Suddenly, the music booms, and our muscles take over. We transform; we are entirely ourselves, present and in the moment. As the notes carry our feet through the choreography, we know nothing but our bodies in space. In our dreamlike state, we hear the roar of hands clapping, and our legs fold into a bow. For those two minutes on stage, we are connected to something larger than ourselves: the audience, the choreographers, and the musicians. We are at once whole, free, and powerful.

This feeling is a culmination of months of late-night rehearsals, choreography sessions, and sore muscles. Unlike the Winter Dance Ensemble, which is composed primarily of outside choreography, the Spring Showcase features original works by students in the Intermediate and Advanced classes as well as the Dance Club. This year, the advanced class is home to six Seniors: Fiona Chou, Evelyn Doogue, Ashley Triumph, Tatsha Kumthampinij, Meredith Werblow, and me, Molly Wynne. For us Seniors, this showcase represents the culmination of our Taft dance experience. As we reflect on our years in the studio, it is certainly true that the hours of practice stand out, but even more enduring are the friendships and deep bonds we’ve built through movement.

I believe I can speak for all

of us when I say that the dances we will perform this May are a testament to the love, trust, and commitment we share. Each of us will perform a repertory solo, choreographed by outside artists as well as Ms. Surber and Dr. Benedict. In addition, we each choreographed a group piece. Fiona brings dynamic energy to a playful jazz duet. Tatsha and I created a contemporary piece exploring memory, danced alongside five other seniors. Meredith and Evelyn offer a bold, stylized burlesque jazz number that radiates empowerment. Ashley did a creative contemporary piece full of groove and individuality. Tatsha and I will also perform an original duet. The intermediate class will perform a trio, and the dance club will perform an original number.

Although the showcase is only about an hour long, with each piece lasting just a few minutes, we’ve been rehearsing since early March. As choreographers, we’ve also taken on the challenge of shaping the performance beyond the movement, finalizing lighting, costumes, and music edits. At last year’s graduation, Mr. Becker mentioned how Tiffany Zong ’24 looked as she watched her choreography on stage: focused, proud, and a little nervous. I understand that now. There’s a unique pressure and satisfaction that comes with seeing your work take shape in real time.

This year’s show is at 7pm on Sunday, May 18, just a week before the Class of 2025 graduates. For those of us finishing our time at Taft, the showcase marks a meaningful end to years of practice and collaboration. We’ve put a lot of time, energy and joy into this performance and hope to see you there! If you cannot make it in person, be sure to check out the recording which will be posted on

My Friend, The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee



Photo courtesy of Robert Falcetti

VERONICA ANTOV
Staff Writer

Taft’s thespians have done it again! *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is a performance somewhat reminiscent (there’s a “syzygy” between the two, if you will) of last year’s spectacle *Matilda* — with its talk of troubled children, solemnity that’s relieved by hilarious comedy, and a Miss Honey-esque figure — though it is truly one-of-a-kind. At the time that I am writing this article, I have not yet seen an official show but rather only a dress rehearsal. But what I watched was so well-coordinated that I forgot it was just a rehearsal, except for when I reminded myself that I was the only audience member. One person’s applause can only be so riotous, but my enthusiasm was through the roof.

The Spelling Bee is a compelling amalgamation of different styles of music and comedy, and just the right amount of edgy vulgarity. It features a cast of odd and endearing young characters who attend a contentious spelling bee with a savings bond, a trophy, and bragging rights all on the line; they include a sickly boy with a magic foot that helps him spell, a charismatic underdog with absentee parents, and an elegant principal with an eccentric flair. Every kid experiences either pressure from their parents to succeed, or self-inflicted expectations because they hope they will impress their families.

My favorite number was “Pandemonium”, in which the kids express their grievances about the competition but also about their home lives. There were countless other standout performances, solos especially. Elle Smiley ’25 “I Love You Song” is incredibly touching; Elle is the perfect Olive Ostrovsky, gentle and self-assured despite her misgivings about her future. Tania Muangman ’25, the production’s only other senior, delivers a wonderful performance as Marcy Park, uptight but with a cathartic character development at the end, and she handles this shift skillfully.

Among the juniors are Jabari King as the energetic but unfortunate Chip Tolentino who embarrasses himself onstage, Daniel Kaminju as the spacey and whimsical Leaf Coneybear who makes his own clothes, and Isaac Obeng as Olive’s love interest and primary competition. And what would this play be without Anny Qian ’27 in the role of Loghainne, the quirky daughter of two doting dads, with an incredible solo about having her hobbies and interests forced on her, a lesson in overachieving?

I was impressed by the swift changes of tone and character for the little vignettes or flashbacks that are used to provide backstory. Isaac and Daniel seamlessly transitioned into the roles of Loghainne’s dads, and just as easily became their previous characters again. If you sat next to someone familiar with the play like I did, you’ll have appreciated all of the pithy impromptu lines that the actors came up with on the spot. Additionally, while the musical is already very relevant, the jokes that were written in as references to pop culture made it even more thrilling. Mentions of the Kentucky Derby or the recently concluded conclave keep the audience at the edge of their seats. Kudos to whoever wrote all this in, as everyone found it very clever! There is also a great deal of interactive details. Guest spellers were called by name, often with personalized introductions that I’ve been told were written by Jess Heine ’26, who also played the empathetic principal, Ms. Peretti. And the music from the orchestra conducted by Mr. Thompson was spectacular, as were the dancers who appeared in various costumes throughout the show.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee was marvelous; everything came to life vividly on that stage. The work that the whole crew put into a very congruous show was evident, and the excitement and anticipation among the audience was palpable. And the play’s messages could not have been more relevant; I left Bingham humming some of the tunes, and also considering the ways in which I saw each of these characters in my daily life. If you didn’t get a chance to see it, you missed out!

Spring Has Sprung: Taft in Full Bloom

MARY KIDD LINDSEY & HAYDEN CHURCH
Staff Writers

Winter at Taft is an infamous season that sends shivers down the spines of any Taft student. Between slushy Wu-train walkways, 4 p.m. sunsets, and emotional damage from slipping on black ice in Mac Quad for the fourth time this week, it's no wonder students dislike it so much. But fear not, Tafties— spring has finally decided to show up (fashionably late, of course... but better late than never!) and with its sunny weather comes an immense boost of serotonin. Dorm windows are flung open in celebration, almost everyone can be seen sporting their flip-flops to class, and even the beloved squirrels seem to be in a better mood! Spring has returned in all its glory, and Taft students are basking in it.

Starting as a casual pre-study hall game, SpikeBall has morphed into the unofficial Spring sport of Taft – and likely the most intense athletic event on campus. As soon as sports teams break at the end of their practices, students race down to stake their claim on one of three nets, leaving others crowded to wait in line (the real professionals bring their entire kit). There is hardly a moment when Taft's best SpikeBall players are not dominating against those who dare to challenge them. Lower schoolers play until exactly 7:58 p.m., when they must bolt inside for study hall check-in. As the season progresses, players have become so skilled that there's talk of starting an official SpikeBall team. While tryouts remain TBD, rumor has it that Mr. Dunn is coaching– or at least refereeing. Or maybe just shaking his head on the sidelines.

If you can manage to turn your head from the intense Spike-Ball competition, surely you've seen your fair share of fishermen around Potter's Pond. Now that spring has rolled around, Taft's Fishing Club– the unofficial owners of the pond– are back and better than ever. Led by Watts Littman '26 and James Morrison '26, this club has recently become one of Taft's biggest hits. But you don't have to be a part of the club to participate– all you need is a rod and some patience! If you wait long enough, you're sure to catch something amazing – whether it be a two-pound bass, a traffic cone, or a long-lost Jig Pat chair from 2013. So, next time you find yourself with a free afternoon and some curiosity, borrow a rod from a friend and head over to Potter's Pond!

On Thursday, April 24, Taft Dining hosted a Farmer's Market in Mac Quad. An assortment of fruits, veggies, and snacks, such as cucumbers, hummus, jams, bell peppers, juices, and more, was offered. Everything was locally and organically sourced, and students were allowed to take three items of their choice free of charge. It's safe to say that the Farmer's Market was a huge hit among students and faculty!

Senior spring– widely accepted as the best part of the year in one's time spent at Taft– is back and in full swing. With the official OK to skip sit-down dinners and school meetings, The Jig has



Photo Courtesy of The Robert Falcetti

become especially packed, and Marty is working overtime on students' daily bacon, egg, and cheese. Most nights, you'll find the senior class gathered around fire pits on Jig Pat, enjoying their last few weeks together before heading home for the summer, before scattering to different corners of the country for college. The controversial and recently banned Senior Jig Line causes a bit of unwanted tension in line each day, as students cram and rush to get a vanilla iced coffee two minutes before School Meeting begins (or even two minutes after– we're sorry, Mr. Campbell!). With summer creeping closer with each day, every night feels a bit more special for our Class of 2025. This is the final lap, Seniors. Enjoy every bit of it!

The Power of Mind-Body Wellness

MICHAELA LYNCH
Staff Writer

The connection of mind and body is more than a wellness fad; it's a scientifically supported phenomenon that reveals how our mental and physical states are deeply intertwined. If you have ever felt your stomach twist in knots before a big test or noticed your heart race around your crush, you have experienced this connection firsthand. Communication between the brain and body happens through chemical messengers called hormones and neurotransmitters, and researchers have identified the pathways that link the emotional processing areas of the brain to organs involved in stress responses. For example, stressful emotions can decrease the body's immunity and response to infected cells and cancer cells. It causes us to heal more slowly and be less responsive to vaccinations. But how can this understanding help us to thrive at Taft?

Oftentimes, life at Taft can feel like it's moving a million miles per hour. Between heavy workloads, extracurricular commitments, and everything in between, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Being in this state raises stress hormone production and suppresses non-vital systems, such as digestion, immunity, and brain functions that support memory and learning. But many of us are so focused on pushing through the day that we forget to check in with how we are feeling. You are not just tired; your busy schedule has taken a brutal toll on your mind and body. That's where the mind-body connection becomes especially useful. By recognising that our thoughts and emotions can influence how our body feels, and vice versa, we have the power to make intentional choices to take better care of ourselves.

Move your Body

Stressed? Well, you actually should sweat it. Physical activity is one of the most effective and well-known ways to support our psychophysical health. When we move our bodies, whether through exercise, sports, or even just taking a walk, we release chemicals in the brain that act as natural mood boosters called endorphins. Regular activity helps to reduce the production of stress hormones, making it easier to manage stress and anxiety. It increases blood flow to the brain, which enhances focus, memory, and cognitive function. Finding time for physical activity is an incredibly important tool for maintaining mental wellness and physical health, providing balance to our bodies.

Feed your body healthy, nutritious foods

The rumor is true: You really are what you eat. The mind-body connection manifests itself in the communication between the brain and the gut. Often referred to as the second brain, the gut contains millions of neurons that are sensitive to emotional states. In fact, a large amount of serotonin, one of the primary hormones of mood and emotion regulation, is produced in the gastrointestinal tract. A healthy, diverse gut biome supports emotional stability, while an unhealthy one, caused by an overgrowth of bad bacteria, can make a person more vulnerable to mood disorders and cognitive challenges. Signs of an unbalanced gut include acne, fatigue, digestive issues, and changes in mood. Fortunately, you can support your gut health by staying hydrated and prioritizing whole foods. Specifically, fermented and fiber-rich foods, like our school store kombucha and Saturday açai bowls, which all help to restore balance and promote a healthier emotional state.

Practice Mindfulness

Being told to "take a deep breath" at the peak of stress usually feels pointless. But as it turns out, it is surprisingly effective. Deep breathing activates the nervous system to slow the heart rate, relax the muscles, and calm the mind. By taking time to practice mindfulness, we can promote a sense of calmness in our mind and body. It helps to ground us and focus on the present moment, rather than getting lost in past regrets or future worries. We can tune into our bodies and notice how emotions impact our physical being. By bringing attention to these sensations, such as a fast heartbeat or tense shoulders, mindfulness can help us to be more aware of how stress emerges in the body. This is the first step in achieving peace of mind and body simultaneously. Knowing how mental well-being impacts our physical health can serve as a reminder that taking care of our minds is not optional; it is essential if we want to stay healthy and perform at our best.



Photo Courtesy of HolidaySmart

A Spring Staple: PSBL



Photo Courtesy of Mr. Falcetti

The seasons at Taft are very distinct. The fall constitutes back-to-school, with new students and crimson leaves. Then comes winter, a long season of pond skating and treacherous Wu Train walks. Finally, as the trees bloom and the last determined snow patches melt, PSBL begins, marking the start of Taft Spring. PSBL stands for Pre-Study Ball League, a tradition since 2008. For the ones in the back, it is not P-B-S-L. PSBL!! Games usually occur before a shorter school day, starting at 6:30 and 7:10 PM. Ms. Drakeley, PSBL head commissioner, describes the fun of this tradition: “It’s a time to be with your friends, and also meet people from different grades.”

As Ms. Drakeley explains, the groupings certainly keep the league entertaining. With names like “The Brinkleshlogs,” “The UNC’s,” and “The Snow Dusters,” teams are comprised of boys and girls ranging from Lower-Mids to Post-Graduates, and some faculty. This year’s competitive bracket has eight teams, including six assorted groups, the ski team, and the “Faculty Team.” While the Faculty Team may dominate on the field, they certainly don’t win the most creative team name. Ms. Drakeley, who graduated in 2017, recalls that the league used to be very intense: “I remember when I was a Lower-Mid, as soon as you walked on the campus, people would try to recruit you to their team in the spring and have you sign a contract.”

While today there don’t seem to be any legal documents involved in PSBL, each unique player brings something different to the field. Some players

show up very serious, ready to put their bodies on the line to get that out. These dedicated (or sweaty) competitors can be spotted arriving a few minutes early to warm up, often wearing white pants from their earlier baseball practice. They probably went to bed at 9:30 PM the evening before to “rest up” for the big matchup. Additionally, there’s always the overly competitive teammate who actually plays baseball, most likely breaking the non-dominant hand rule. On the other hand, some players show up to laugh with their friends as they whiff the ball over and over. You can identify this species of player most likely wearing flip-flops and Brandy shorts. Those players are there for a good time and do not know the rules of softball. “Yes, three strikes and you are out.”

Finally, there are the serial no-shows. Whether it’s “tutoring” or a “hurt knee,” these players just can’t seem to ever make it. Excuses, excuses! PSBL is the perfect combination of fun and friends, a tradition that brings the community together. Whether you’re a fierce competitor or a passive spectator, the games bring joy to everyone. But don’t get me wrong - PSBL is not all fun and games. For the past ten years, the Faculty Team has dominated the league. However, they faced an impediment at the end of the regular season, suffering a loss to the UNC’s. So the question remains - Will the Faculty Team be able to defend their title once again this year? Or will the student body step up and take down the reigning champions? Only time will tell.

May Horoscopes!

- Horoscopes:**
Capricorn: December 22 - January 19
You’ve been grinding all year—give yourself permission to not check your email for a few days or to take a rest day from the weight room. Yes, the world will keep turning. Try relaxing, even if it’s scheduled relaxation.
- Aquarius: January 20 - February 18**
Let your creativity shine as the year winds down, maybe pick up a new hobby or activity over the break!
- Pisces: February 19 - March 20**
You’re in your feels, and that’s okay. Take care of yourself and prioritize self-care in this upcoming week: drink more water, clean your room, and strut your stuff like the main character you are!
- Aries: March 21 - April 19**
Your life has taken a turn recently, and you’ve had to adapt—something you’ve handled better than you give yourself credit for. Take the end of the school year as a chance to reflect on all you have accomplished, and take pride in your achievements; you deserve it!
- Taurus: April 20 - May 20**
Embrace the little disruptions—they might just lead to something big. The end of the school year is the perfect time to loosen your grip on the routine, dream a little bolder, and welcome the unexpected.
- Gemini: May 21 - June 21**
You have been craving comfort lately, but the universe says it’s time to step (slightly) out of your comfort zone. Maybe try a new snack in the dining hall? Or...talk to a new person? Baby steps.
- Cancer: June 22 - July 22**
You’re a nurturing soul, but don’t forget to nurture yourself too. Self-care isn’t just steaming hot showers—sometimes it’s saying no to uncomfortable situations, and putting your mental health first.
- Leo: July 23 - August 22**
Your season is coming! Head into the summer months with enthusiasm and excitement for all of the good coming your way. Stay humble, though.
- Virgo: August 23 - September 22**
New people may be entering your orbit, and while you’re usually the one helping others figure things out, this time it’s about you. Ask yourself what is really helping you grow. Let go of needing to plan everything and say yes to a little spontaneity. Adventures await (even if your calendar says “laundry day”).
- Libra: September 23 - October 22**
You have been feeling indecisive lately: ripping your hair out over what color highlighter to annotate with, or what type of dressing to drench your salad in. This is your sign to trust your instincts— they are stronger than you think (blue highlighters are always the way to go).
- Scorpio: October 23 - November 21**
You’re a water sign! Take this as a message to try to go with the flow: say yes when people invite you to things, roll with the punches as they come, and be adaptable and adventurous in the face of discomfort.
- Sagittarius: November 22 - December 21**
You’ve got opinions—and this week, people might want to hear them. Don’t hold back your hot takes (within reason), because your boldness could spark something interesting. Your energy inspires others more than you realize. Keep being fearless, but also kind—you never know who’s quietly looking up to you.

Rhinos Baseball Heats Up

JOE GANNON
Staff Writer

Ask any Taft Varsity Baseball player or Head Coach Michael Mastrocola '08 how the 2025 season is going so far, and you can immediately sense the excitement that has been building at Rockwell Field this spring. As of this writing, the Rhinos are off to a strong 9-5 start and currently sit tied for third place in the Founders League. And, they believe their best baseball is still ahead of them.

Lights-out pitching and barreling it up at the plate have been key to the team's success so far. "Our strengths have been our consistent strike throwing," Coach Mastrocola told the *Papyrus*. "And we have a strong lineup of hitters with no let-up Xin our batting order."

Christian Barbuto '26 has been leading the charge for the Rhinos on the bump. The Upper Middler has tallied two wins, with a very impressive 0.792 ERA and 22 strikeouts over 17.2 innings, making him one of the top pitchers in the league. According to teammate Noah Jettelson '25, "Barbuto has been our rock on the mound." Barbuto attributes his success to "the mechanical adjustments [he] made this pastoffseason" as well as the hours spent grinding in the weight room. Evan Douglas '27, two wins, 1.615 ERA, and Co-Captain Owen Palmer '26, three wins, one save, 2.423 ERA, have also been standouts.



Christian Barbuto '26 winds up for Taft. Image Courtesy of Yuqi Qian '27

At the plate, senior Jettelson, a Holy Cross hockey commit, has been nothing short of spectacular. Boasting a batting average of .541 with 17 RBI and 15 runs, Jettelson has made significant strides in his confidence in the box. He also credits Assistant Coach Tommy Piacenza "for the extra work he put in to help fix my swing last year, as it has helped me in ways I couldn't have imagined."

Co-Captain Cayden Van Dolah '25 is also committed to Holy Cross for baseball. Van Dolah is batting .342 with 17 runs and a team-leading 13 steals. Meanwhile, Mid sensation Parker Woods '27 is making a huge impact at the plate, batting .364 with 10 RBIs, and the Taft team boasts five other players hitting .300 or more including Omar Minaya '26, Oliver Lefkowitz '26, Angel Quiles '25, Owen Palmer, and Bolen MacKellar '25.

After dropping their Opening Day game to Kingswood Oxford by a score of 5-2, the Rhinos bounced back with a 9-3 victory over Westminster. During early April, the team put together a three-game winning streak before being stopped by first-place Avon. However, after that defeat, the Rhinos quickly picked up where they left off with a four-game winning streak.

The most important of those wins was a 6-4 victory in a rematch against second place Kingswood. As Jettelson put it, "Coming off the loss the last time we played them, we were able to dig deep and, while fighting some injuries, pull out on top. That game showed us that we have what it takes to win a championship."

Van Dolah also pointed to the team's resiliency, most notably after losing starting catcher Quiles to injury and Palmer stepping in to replace him. "Everyone here wants to win and wants what is best for the team," he told the *Papyrus*. "This has been shown through guys playing different positions, and everyone stepping up when their number is called."

To provide some perspective at the halfway point of the season, Coach Mastrocola welcomed Taft alum Jeremiah Vargas '16 to practice on April 24th. A standout player at Taft and Stonehill College, Vargas shared his journey with the team, ending with the founding of his successful bat manufacturing company, Tater Baseball. The Taft players loved the visit by Vargas and hearing his advice about recruiting. He left the team with two important messages they hope to carry into the second half of the season: win each and every day, and have fun playing the game you love.

May Book Recs

ELEANOR PURICELLI
Staff Writer

Normal People - Sally Rooney

Sally Rooney's *Normal People* follows Connell and Marianne, two Irish teenagers whose lives are vastly different yet deeply interconnected. Connell is well-liked and the center of every social setting, while Marianne is reserved and remains private. When Connell's mother, Marianne's housekeeper, connects the two outside of school, a secret relationship begins to form. As they graduate from high school and attend Trinity College in Dublin, they find themselves in new social settings but are constantly running back to each other. In a complexly woven novel, *Normal People* discusses the complications within a relationship and the various ways one is willing to save the other.

Sunrise on the Reaping - Suzanne Collins

In her fifth novel in the *Hunger Games* franchise, Suzanne Collins returns to the fantastical world of Panem with *Sunrise on the Reaping*. This prequel tells the story of Haymitch Abernathy, District 12's only living victor before Katniss Everdeen. Set during the 50th Hunger Games, more commonly known as the Second Quarter Quell, Haymitch is forced to compete against twice the usual number of tributes. He soon realizes that the odds are not in his favor, and his chances of survival are extremely low. Driven by determination and grit, Collins tells Haymitch's story as one of the most pivotal moments in The Hunger Games' history. To any fans of *The Hunger Games* series, *Sunrise on the Reaping* is a must-read for you, as it may be Collins' best work yet.

Great Big Beautiful Life - Emily Henry

Emily Henry's newest novel, *Great Big Beautiful Life*, tells the complex stories of two rising authors. Alice Scott is a confident young novelist eager to make her mark, but Hayden Anderson is a well-renowned, though pessimistic, writer. While they may seem like opposites, the two arrive at Little Crescent Island for the same reason: to write the biography of Margaret Ives, a woman who has not been seen in years. Margaret invites Alice and Hayden for a one-month trial, after which she will choose the narrator for her life's biography. However, Margaret only tells certain parts of her story to each author, meaning the pair must piece together the complex details of her narrative. As Alice and Hayden's story unfolds, it becomes evident that the pair is more connected than they may seem. Emily Henry's most recent novel, *Great Big Beautiful Life*, reveals how words, or a lack thereof, can reveal new perspectives into life.