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Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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Striking Up the Band

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Monday December 18, 2023

By Eric F. Spina

Ever heard of volleyfootsketball season? It's the magical, adrenaline-pumping moment when fall sports collide on the calendar.

For one glorious, long weekend this fall, musicians in the Pride of Dayton Marching Band and the Flyer Pep Band divided and conquered, helping the football team end its season on a winning note at Davidson, providing a rousing backdrop for the nationally ranked volleyball team's Atlantic 10 championship win over Loyola Chicago, and rocking the Charleston Classic as the men's basketball team competed for the tourney championship. Some musicians stayed at home to pump up the crowd at the women's basketball game against Detroit.

Whew!

But that's not all. That was the same weekend the Flyer Pep Band walked the red carpet in St. Louis, where they received the 2023 Musial Award for their "extraordinary display of sportsmanship and overall class and character." During March Madness last season, Dr. Willie Morris and the rowdy pep band, whose mantra is "go crazy or go home," traveled up the road to Columbus to play for Farleigh Dickinson University as the Cinderella team upset top-seeded Purdue.

The Flyer Pep Band wore FDU's "Going Dancing" shirts and wielded plastic swords as they learned the school's fight song, picked up a few new cheers and brought an infectious energy to the house. This was not the first time they played for Farleigh Dickinson. They also showed the team what "lowd" means during its First Four game at UD Arena in 2019.

"It fits our Marianist character of giving back and serving," says Dr. Morris, who also teaches saxophone performance and directs the UD Jazz Ensemble. "You don't have a band? That's OK. We'll help you out. One year we got to sub for three bands. We ended up having two groups of my students playing against each other."

I'm so impressed with the stamina and heart of these two bands, who represent the best of our University on the home courts and fields and beyond on national and international stages. While nearly all members played in the band in high school, only about one in five band members are music majors, with the School of Engineering contributing the most musicians.

It's also noteworthy (and inspiring!) that the 172-member Pride of Dayton Marching Band has more than doubled in size since Kenneth Will became director in 2016. Since then, they've performed in the Chicago Thanksgiving Parade and the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin and have been invited to participate in June 2025 in London Band Week, where they will perform in a military tattoo with His Majesty's Royal Marines and in concerts. A "good chunk" of the marching band also lends its talents to the 90-member Pep Band.

Why the growing popularity? "It's the direct result of the spirit of the students," says Professor Will, who also assists with the Flyer Pep Band. "They've taken ownership of the program. They're passionate about it, and they love it."

And it shows in both bands. They're all about sounding the Flyer spirit — loudly and proudly.

So, let's cue *Go Dayton Flyers* and strike up the band. Take a bow, band members! Your talent, spirit, dedication, and teamwork are helping the Dayton Flyers soar.

(The 2023 Musial Awards will air throughout the country on Christmas Eve on CBS and Paramount+. Check your local listings for the airtime in your city. Students can sign up to join the Pride of Dayton [here](#).)