



THE BEAR

Student Newspaper

October 2, 2025 WBHS Volume 29 Issue 1
900 W. Main St., West Branch, IA 52358

WEST BRANCH CELEBRATES TAYLOR AND SWISHER, CROWNS STAKER AND SCHULTES HOMECOMING KING AND QUEEN

Anthony Heitzman
Business Editor

Dozens of local businesses and community organizations participated in West Branch's annual homecoming parade led by grand marshals Jessica Taylor and Pete Swisher on Wednesday, Sept 17, 2025.

Afterwards, students and community members gathered at the Little Rose Bowl, where Nolan Staker and Addi Schutes were crowned Homecoming King and Queen.

Swisher works as a park ranger at the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, serves on the West Branch School Board, and is heavily involved with the fine arts program and the football program.

Taylor is a former science teacher who currently works as the head instructional coach at West Branch.

Many local businesses, non-profits, and school clubs participated in the parade, including Presidential Builders, West Branch Special



Nolan Staker and Addi Schutes pose for a photo together after being crowned king and queen. Photo by Anthony Heitzman.

Olympics, and Skills USA.

After the parade, students and community members attended the coronation ceremony at the Little Rose Bowl. Saylee Gingerich and Lynden MacGillivray emceed the event.

2024 Homecoming Queen Jordan Waters and 2024 court member Josh Kroemer attended, as well as crown bearers Natalie Hotz and Owen Johnson.

This year's court consisted of Nolan Staker, Oliver Trepanier, Lincoln Naber, Bodee Moorehead, Cooper Gates, Addi Finley, Alyssa Vargason, Lexi Skay, Addi Schultes, Briley Kaalberg, and Spanish exchange student María Monfort Felip as an honorary court member.

Gingerich and MacGillivray introduced court members one-by-one with short bios about them and why they were nominated.

After the introductions, Waters and Kroemer crowned Staker and Schultes as this year's king and queen.

MULTIPLE CHANGES TO HOMECOMING PEP RALLY PROVE SUCCESSFUL

Karlee Hansen
Staff Writer

WBHS student government hosted their annual homecoming pep rally in a new location, the performing arts center. On Friday, Sept. 19, students gathered between third and fourth hour, which changed from prior years.

Student government proposed a new pep assembly schedule based on prior years of doing the pep assembly during IS or at the end of the day. Moving the pep assembly earlier in the day avoided seniors being gone for PART. After tweaks and multiple new submissions, administration approved the schedule.

The pep rally started off with the band performing the "WBHS Fight song," "Sweet Caroline," and the "Hey song." The cheer team also performed to a few songs, including "Lose Control," "Hollaback Girl," and "Ride."

The main events of the pep rally included two grade-based games. First, all four grade levels faced off in a human ring toss game, using pool floaties that they had to toss and get over the head of their partner. Juniors

won the human ring toss.

After that, the homecoming court participated in a Family Feud style game. After three rounds of questions, the girls emerged victorious.

Finally, all grades faced off in a balloon game, where participants raced across the stage to hop on their partner's lap, popping the balloon in the process. The team to get the most balloons popped in the set amount of time would win. Seniors won the final round of the balloon game.

Student-athletes Lincoln Naber, Addi Finley, Brilley Kaalberg, Addi Schultes, and Lynden MacGillivray spoke about upcoming games and meets for all fall sports.

Kelly Staker and Christopher Reed, along with other staff around the school, expressed their thoughts about the pep rally and its changes from prior years.

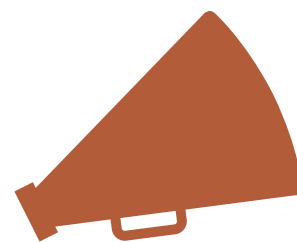
Student government collectively agreed that the 2025-2026 homecoming pep rally was indeed a success and received many comments about how the PAC location allowed everyone to hear the entertainment more easily.



Ava Burnett asks court member, Bodee Morehead, a question during Family Feud. Photo by Karlee Hansen.

**"BEST PEP RALLY EVER SINCE I'VE BEEN AT WEST BRANCH."
- CHRIS REED**

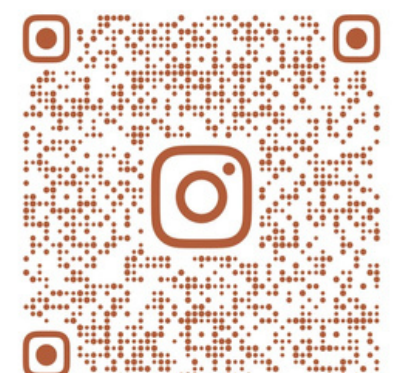
**"I THOUGHT THE ASSEMBLY WAS FANTASTIC! IT'S SO MUCH EASIER TO UNDERSTAND THE SPEAKERS IN THE AUDITORIUM VS THE GYM. IT WAS SO FUN AND HAD GOOD VIBES."
- KELLY STAKER**



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THEBEARSTUDENTNEWS



Student Life

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October 2, 2025

WBHS HOMECOMING DANCE THEMED "A NIGHT IN RIO"

Cameron Waters
Staff Writer

The annual homecoming dance featured a unique theme this year: A Night in Rio. The student government dance committee decorated for the dance at the end of the day on Friday so it would be set up for Saturday, Sept. 20.

The student government decorated the Bear Den with a photo booth, steamers, and water supplied by Hy-Vee. Students could dance the night away from 8:30-11:00 pm.

Throughout homecoming week, each grade could win points to earn a fifty percent off discount for their admission.

The general admission cost started at ten dollars but the grade that won only had to pay five dollars.

Points totaled came from dress-up days, hide-a-bear, and other homecoming activities.

This year, the senior class of 2026 won for the third year in-a-row with 1,835 points. The juniors slid into second place with a close 1,444 points. The freshmen class earned 1,399 points. Finally, the sophomores rounded out the week with 1,387 points.

More than 150 students attended the dance this year. Students donned feather boas as they danced to the playlist created by student government. They sent out a form prior to the dance to get input on songs that all students would enjoy.



Looking down into the Bear Den, students dance to the rhythm of the music. Feathers cover the floor from feather boas provided to students as photo props. *Photo by Emma Revis*

SENIOR SUNRISE



Seniors kicked off homecoming week bright and early on Monday, Sept. 15, with Senior Sunrise. For breakfast, Hy-Vee donated donuts and water, and a senior parent provided cinnamon rolls. Students decorated their cars and their parking spots with chalk markers or chalk. Many posed for photos with a "Senior Sunrise 2026" frame. About 40 students attended, which is more than double the number from last year. *Photo contributed by Abby Noelck.*

PowderPuff and PowderBuff



For both PowderPuff and PowderBuff, around 30 students attended from each grade. For both events, juniors came in first, seniors in second, freshmen in third, and sophomores in fourth. PowderPuff took place Sept. 14 at the Little Rose Bowl, and PowderBuff took place Sept. 17 in the high school gym. *All photos by The Bear staff members.*

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Student Life



October 2, 2025

ORDER
UP
DAYS

ADAM SANDLER DAY

Addison Schultes poses in her outfit for Adam Sandler Day.
Photo by Evan Highly.

Sydney Nash and Caitlyn Harrison dress for Adam Sandler Day.
Photo by Evan Highly.

M

USA DAY

Allison Gade, Whitney Spratt and Rena Holmes pose with America balloons for USA Day.
Photo by Karlee Hansen.

Cameron Waters, Raelyn Wilcher, Halia Gade, and Ava Lacina pose for USA Day.
Photo by Karlee Hansen.

T

COLOR WAR DAY

Olivia Becker, Kendall Hudson, Kendra Rarick, and Cora Hernandez wear pink for the Sophomore class.
Photo by Raelyn Wilcher.

Jenie Gomez, Brisa Carillo, Addysyn Rocha, and Kiley Pierce wear purple for the Senior class.
Photo by Raelyn Wilcher.

W

HAWAIIAN DAY

Tate Lynch, Logan Christoffel, Oliver Trepanier, Whitney Spratt, Alison Gade, and Rena Holmes stand in front of an "Aloha" banner.
Photo by Cameron Waters.

Tate Lynch, Logan Christoffel, and Oliver Trepanier with tropical shirts.
Photo by Cameron Waters.

T

SPIRIT DAY

Freshmen Zoey Brain and Eloise Guhl pose during Spirit Day.
Photo by Ava Lacina.

Cameron Waters, Raelyn Wilcher, and Harlow Goodale show off their Spirit Day gear.
Photo by Ava Lacina.

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Sports



October 2, 2025

NEW SEASON, NEW MINDSET FOR BEARS VOLLEYBALL

Halia Gade
Social Media Editor

West Branch welcomed new coaches, Leah Coates and Amanda Froese. The coaches have introduced a new technique to help with athletes' mental health. They bought a book called, "She the Confident."

People on the team take turns reading it, starting with a senior one week, a junior the next, and so on. The person who is asked to read gets a chunk of the book assigned to them, that they then take notes on. The next Monday, they sit in a circle and share what the book talked about. Based on what they shared, the group of girls will find their weekly mantra, or thing they are focusing on during the week.

When Froese and Coates were asked about the book, they shared, "We wanted to help the importance of self development, and as young people it is important to think about your mental health, especially regarding women's sports."

As the 2025-26 volleyball season kicks off, new talent, coaches, and techniques are entering the court.

Even though the team is only three weeks into the season, they are already celebrating some new accomplishments.

Captains for the season are seniors Addi Finley and Briley Kaalberg. To decide the captains, the team voted on two seniors they thought fit the role. The two seniors with the most votes became

Kaalberg set multiple goals for herself personally and as a leader for the team.

"I want to beat last year's winning record. I also want to better myself and my overall skills.

Senior Dani Crutchley hit 500 career digs at the game against Alburnett on Thursday, Sept. 11. Crutchley used to be an outside hitter, but when her sister Maddy Falco graduated and left the libero spot open, Crutchley took the opportunity.

Crutchley is at 42 varsity career aces and hopes to hit 50 by the end of the season.

The Bears' last season ended with a record of 6-26. This year, they have already tied their wins from last year. They sit 6-6 on the season and are just getting started.

The coaches are both pleased with how the season started, and can't wait to see what the future holds.

Coates said, "I am looking forward to building new connections, and just overall building the program; I hope to leave it better than it ended last season."

Froese also said, "At the end of the season, I just want to be able to look back, and say we had fun, and just overall enjoyed the season."



Junior, Julia Herring attacks the ball to tip it back over the net to Alburnett. The Bears won in three sets. Photo by Karlee Hansen.

the captains for the team.

Finley said, "My goals for the season are to win more games than last year, and hit 200 varsity career digs!"

I hope to have a better team bond."

Finley is a defensive specialist on, and has 170 varsity career digs. Kaalberg is a middle hitter, and has 193 varsity career kills.



HEAD COACH HUGHES TAKES ON BEARS '25-'26 FOOTBALL SEASON

Raelyn Wilcher
Staff Writer

The West Branch Bears football team starts off the season with a 3-2 record and a new head coach, Matt Hughes.

After the Homecoming win against Monticello and the close game on Friday, Sept. 26 against Alburnett, the team is proving to have many strengths to help face their opponents.

Hughes said, "[We have] experience, we have a big senior class, character, discipline, strong football IQ, and 'family' culture. Success really is selfless exceptionalism, not only on the field, but in the game of life." Hughes has played and coached at nearly every level in his career.

Playing in college at the University of Iowa and signing with the San Francisco 49ers. He was not there long, though due to a shoulder injury that ended his NFL career.

After that, he spent two years coaching at the University of South Dakota but later decided not to pursue coaching at the collegiate level.

In 2005, Hughes' family moved back to where he started to coach high school football.

He coached in many different high schools around the area, including Solon, Iowa City West High, and Clear Creek Amana.

Hughes spent four seasons there, then retired to invest time with his own kids.

Hughes then spent three seasons at Liberty High School before taking a second break to focus on being a father.

Now, the opportunity to coach at West Branch brought him back to the football field.

"This is the only coaching job that could have gotten me back into coaching because I love this community and this school district so much," said Hughes.

In 2023, the Bears lost four games, and in 2024, they lost seven. For the 2025 season, the Bears have only lost one game. New coaches and leaders bring new techniques and different goals. Hughes wants to win, but also wants athletes to learn life lessons.

"My biggest goal," said Hughes, "is to make this team a team of character and class. I want them to represent themselves, their school, and their team with dignity at all times."

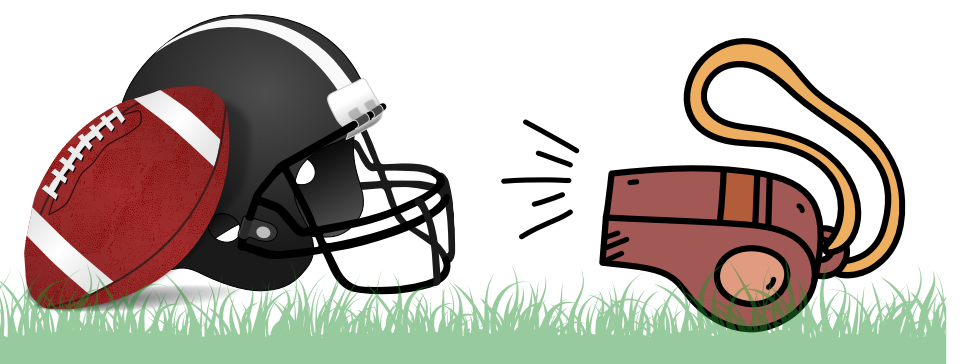
Having a new coach can be a big change for a team, as they might see things differently or have a different mindset than the previous coach. Everyone focuses on different aspects of the game, but this year Hughes has the team, players and coaches, working on a level playing field.

"I'm a big believer in giving all our players the opportunity to lead.

We don't have a hierarchy of players and coaches; we are all on the same level, and we depend on each other giving all that we have in order for us to be successful," said Hughes.



Head coach Matt Hughes gives the Bears a pep talk for the homecoming game against Monticello. Photo by Raelyn Wilcher.



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Clubs & Orgs



October 2, 2025

WATERS SELECTED FOR FIRST IOWA STUDENT LEADERSHIP BOARD

Wyatt Chapman
Writing Editor

The Student Leadership Board for FIRST welcomes WBHS senior, Lillian Waters. FIRST stands for For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology.

This group was founded in 1989 to prepare young people for the future through a variety of inclusive, team-based robotics programs. The Student Leadership Board is a statewide group of 16 FIRST students who serve as ambassadors and advisors for the Iowa FIRST community.

The selection process involved filling out a Google form and waiting for an email response to let Waters know if she was selected or not. The questions on the form included, what grade the applicant would be going into, what team the applicant is on, FRC FIRST Robotics Competition, or FTC, what achievements the member has achieved, and if the member was a Dean's list finalist or not.

"I didn't know I got in until Cain told me, but it felt really good, like I could do something for FIRST but also here for 5041," said Waters.

Waters, being one of these ambassadors/advisors, will help plan and support events, lead workshops, amplify the student voice to organizers, and drive outreach that grows teams and inclusion across the state. These students model gracious professionalism and cooperation, two words that are huge in the FIRST community.

"I'm thrilled and proud to see Lillian chosen, especially as she is the first ever from our program. It's a huge milestone for her and for our team," said Matt Cain. "Most of all, her selection shows our girls and our small-town kids that they belong at the table shaping the future of FIRST in Iowa."

Waters, a member of the WBHS FFA, typically attends the FFA state convention. This jump-started her idea for a robotics convention. She is currently working to help the head of FTC, FIRST Tech Challenge, understand what a convention can look like so that a robotics convention can be established in the future.



Lillian Waters poses with trophies. Photo contributed by Lillian Waters.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS IN WALK-ON POSITIONS

Anthony Heitzman
Business Editor

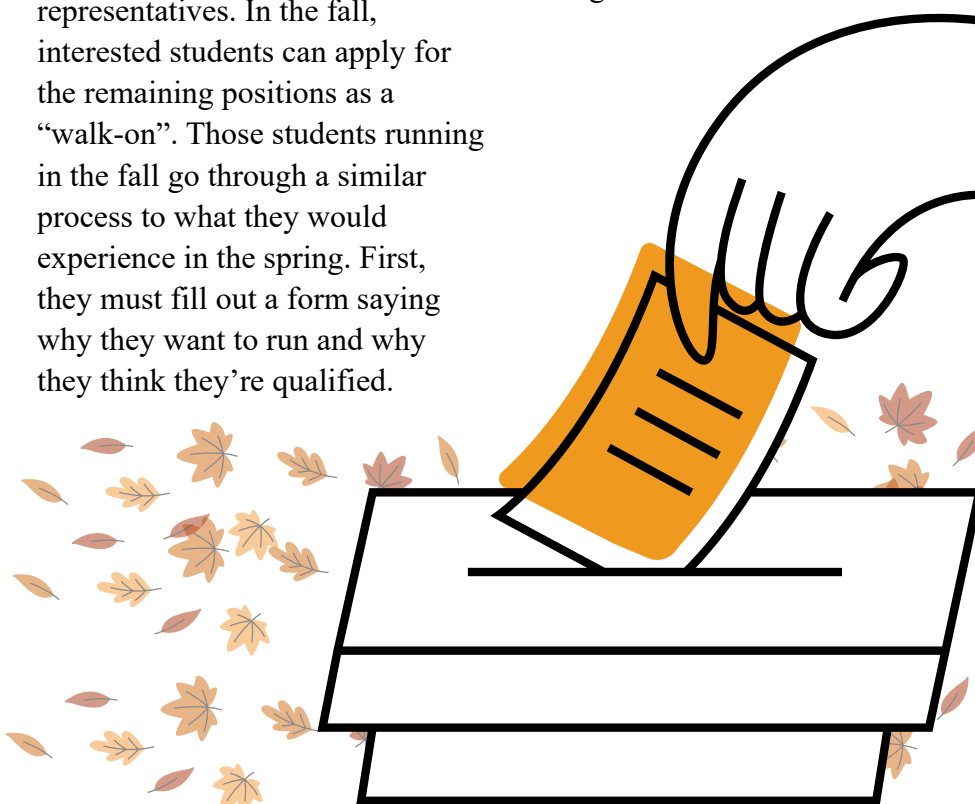
West Branch Student Government recently welcomed new members in walk-on positions to fill vacancies left after the 2025-2026 elections. New members this year are Cash Staker, Olivia Becker, Gavin Oxley, Rey Watt, and Lauren Keeler.

Student government has offered walk-on positions since 2021. They got the idea at a conference with other student councils from around Iowa, and liked that it would allow students who are new to the district and those who missed out in the spring to join student government.

At the end of the 2024-2025 school year, WBHS Student Government held elections for the 2025-2026 student body representatives. In the fall, interested students can apply for the remaining positions as a "walk-on". Those students running in the fall go through a similar process to what they would experience in the spring. First, they must fill out a form saying why they want to run and why they think they're qualified.

Then, they must gather signatures from 15 other students in their grade and two teachers. After they turn in their application, they will be interviewed by two class presidents who will recommend whether or not they should be accepted. If there are enough open seats, all applicants will be accepted. Depending on the year, some are not accepted due to the volume of applications, but are encouraged to apply again the following year.

Student Government has greatly benefited from the practice of allowing walk-on positions, as it has allowed the group to have members from many different backgrounds and clubs and acquire new ideas. Advisor Abby Noelck said, "It's nice when people come in and shake things up a bit. It forces us to evolve and change."




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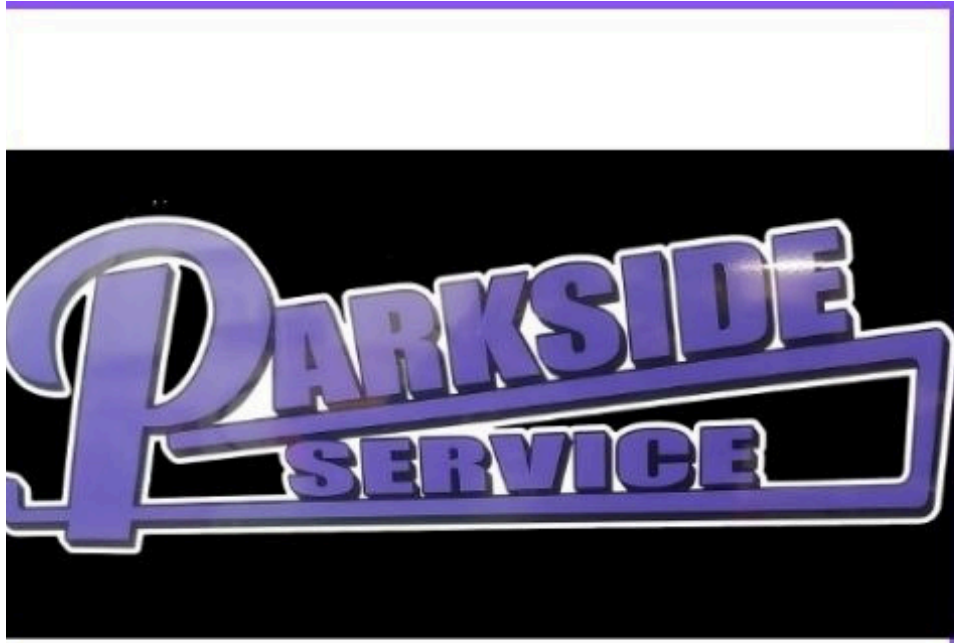
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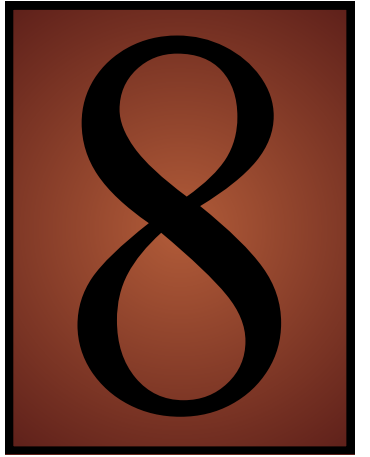
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Spotlights



October 2, 2025

STUDENT Spotlights



MICHAEL MONTGOMERY

Q. What is the great thing about playing football and why has football been important to you?

A. I think the greatest thing about high school football is being with your friends under the lights. It gives me goosebumps every time I run onto the Little Rose Bowl, while I listen to the crowd go wild. I also like giving out high-fives to the little football players that wait for us by Butch's statue.

Q. What is your favorite football tradition?

A. I would say the walk is my favorite tradition. It's a great feeling when people are cheering for us while we pass them.

Q. What is your favorite movie?

A. Creed.



LAUREN KEELE

Q. If you had one piece of advice for incoming cheer freshmen, what would it be?

A. For incoming cheer freshmen, I would say to try your hardest and look at YouTube!

Q. Do you have a favorite cheer or sideline dance? If so, which one?

A. I think my favorite cheer is Defense Go-Go because it's a lot of fun.

Q. What's your favorite part of cheer?

A. My favorite part of cheer is definitely cheering, performing at football games, and getting to interact with the student section. I also enjoy practices with the team and team bonding.

Q. If you could dance to one song that you haven't yet, what would it be?

A. On the floor by Jlo.



ADDI FINLEY

Q. What responsibilities come with being a team captain for volleyball?

A. We pick out the color jerseys to wear and what to wear to school. We also coin flip for serve receive in a game.

Q. What advice would you give to the freshman

A. Don't be nervous and don't be afraid to ask for help. If you make a mistake, brush it off and get the next ball.

Q. What's your favorite memory from high school season

A. ISU camp junior year

Q. How does your experience differ this year from last year with the new coaching

A. The coaches are uplifting, understanding, and more enjoyable to go to practice.

CASSIE SWISHER



Q. What made you want to do cross country?

A. Summer before my freshman year, I was pressured by Nora Ziehr and Nina Torkelson since I worked with them and it was like having built-in friends when school started.

Q. How do you think this year is going?

A. Really well! Personally, it's nice to be back doing unfun things with fun people. As a team, it's exciting to watch everyone PR and find the reason to keep pushing like I did.

Q. What is your favorite part about cross country?

A. My favorite part is my Bearhawks. Car rides and stopping for ice cream after hard workouts are the best.

Q. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?

A. Heyn's Cookie Dough and Brownie Batter.

ADDI SCHULTES



Q. What made you want to be a drum major?

A. To be a bigger leader in the band.

Q. What is your favorite memory?

A. Our field trips to Mount Mercy.

Q. What was your biggest struggle this year?

A. My biggest struggle is balancing leadership and friendship.

Q. How do you think this year is going?

A. Really good, I'm really excited for the rest of it.

Q. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?

A. Cookie dough

Q. What made you want to be a drum major?

A. It just seemed fun and all of my friends had done it.

Q. What is your favorite memory?

A. Any Uni band day, it's just a good experience.

Q. What was your biggest struggle this year?

A. Having a new band director, and learning how to be a drum major and learning how she teaches.

Q. How do you think this year is going?

A. I think it's going good! I think we are a little behind but I think we always are.

Q. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?

A. Mini chocolate chip.



SOPHIE OAKS

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Academics



October 2, 2025

21 STUDENTS ATTEND RVC HONOR CHOIR

Chloe Kleinmeyer
Staff Writer

Every year, the River Valley Conference hosts an honor choir comprised of schools within the conference. 12 West Branch High School students and nine West Branch Middle School students will participate this year on Oct. 6, at 7:00 PM in West Liberty.

Choir director Chris Reed said, "We have been attending the River Valley Conference honor choir since 2014."

Back in 2017 or 2018, West Branch hosted RVC honor choir; however, won't be hosting again for over 20 years. The event rotates among schools in the RVC conference each year to be fair.

The honor choir provides new experiences and allows students to sing with people they don't know.

Junior Grace Vincent says, "I'm looking forward to spending the

day singing with others who enjoy it as much as I do."

To prepare for this event, students must complete a few steps. High school students must prepare to wear their provided robe with black underneath, while middle school students must wear usual dress clothes.

Students must also listen to vocal tracks and practice with their director. Reed provides students with everything they need to set them up for success.

"We are given five songs, which we use to prepare ourselves," said senior Sophie Oaks.

Some of the songs being performed include: "Stand Together" by Jim Papoulis, "Sisi ni moja" by Jacob Narveud, and "Light Transforms the Darkness" by Shanelle Gabriel and Kyle Pederson.



NEW 'TWIRL GIRL' JOINS WBHS MARCHING BAND

Ava Lacina
Staff Writer

West Branch High School's marching band acquired a girl to twirl a baton for their performances, thanks to new band director Jamie Flanagan and athletic director Jake Stenberg's open minds.

Ayla Gingerich, a current freshman at West Branch, wanted to introduce twirling—a fiery passion of hers—into the marching band. However, a twirl girl has not been a part of the band in recent years. Gingerich decided to change that.

Baton twirling is a performance art that mixes dance and aerobics to create intricate routines while throwing (or 'twirling', rather) a baton. These twirls can include throws, catches, rolls, and spins. It is a common visual, typically seen

in parades, marching bands, and numerous other public events.

This practice requires coordination, discipline, and flexibility.

When asked how she came to renew and revitalize marching band twirling, Gingerich says, "At my studio, some of the other girls did twirling for their high schools, and it's something that I've been wanting to do. When I got into high school, we reached out to see if twirling could be incorporated into the marching band."

Based on Gingerich's fascination with her cousin's participation in dance and baton, she started performing five years ago. After overhearing that other girls in her classes twirl for their own marching bands, Gingerich realized she wanted to as well.

She reached out to Flanagan and Stenberg to ask for the opportunity to present herself as a baton twirler for WBHS.

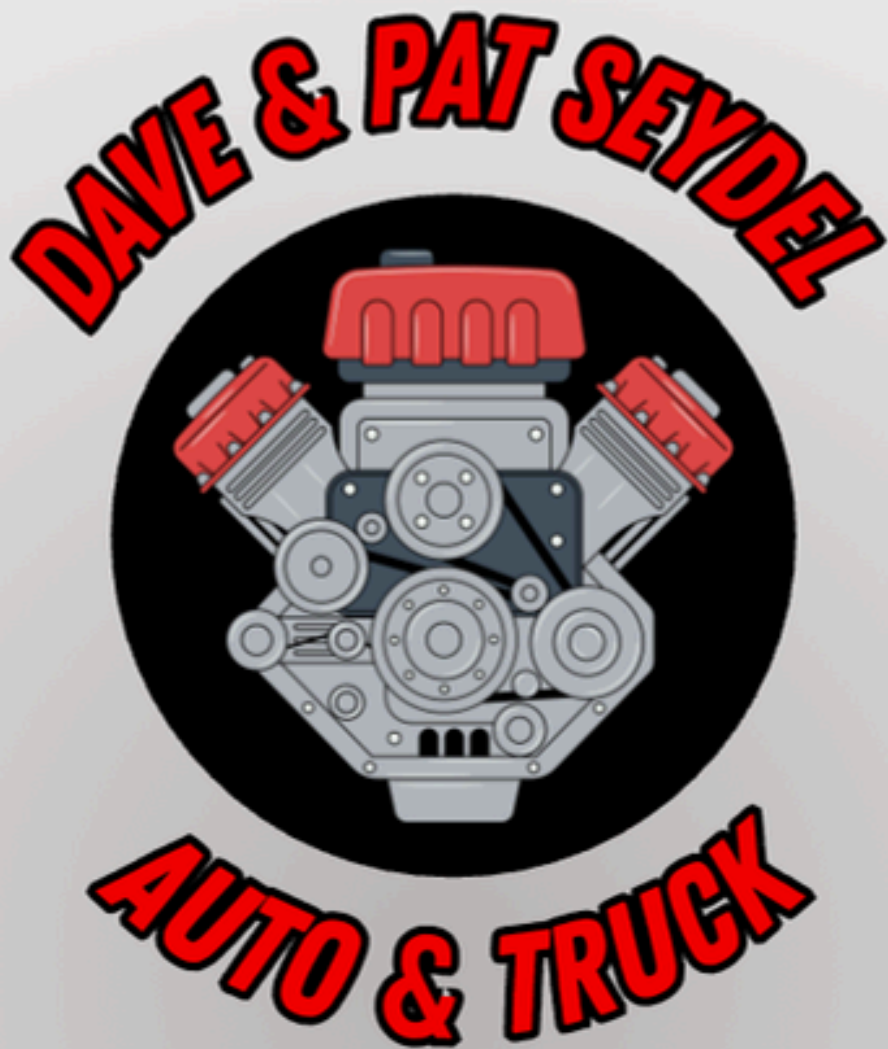


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Academics

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October 2, 2025

13 WBHS SENIORS HONORED AT 2025 YOUTH SALUTE CEREMONY

Caitlyn Harrison
Head-Editor-in-Chief

Thirteen seniors from WBHS earned recognition at this year's Youth Salute Awards Ceremony for their leadership, academic achievements, and community involvement. Among them, Saylee Gingrich received recognition as one of five semifinalists and earned a \$300 scholarship.

Gingrich said, "To be one of the top nine Youth Salute nominees is an honor."

"I hope that with this recognition I have represented the high-quality individuals coming from West Branch schools."
-Saylee Gingrich

Other students nominated included: Ewan Arlen, Ali Gade, Caitlyn Harrison, Aizlyn Marsh, Lincoln Naber, Maddie Neuberger, Sophia Oaks, Addison Schultes, Nolan Staker, Madelynn Tygrett, Lillian Waters, and Rey Watt.

Youth Salute is a national program through the National Council on Youth Leadership (NCYL) that highlights high-achieving high school juniors. The local chapter, Greater Iowa City Area, has been sponsored and run by Hills Bank since 1994, encompassing 17 high schools across 15 school districts in eastern Iowa.

Dave Kriz served as Chapter President for 25 years and recently joined the National Board of the National Council on Youth Leadership.

School administrators, counselors, and teachers nominated the students.

After being nominated, the students went through an application process that included an interview with local professionals. They also received a free photo shoot with a local photographer to use for their display pictures.

"Being nominated for Youth Salute by your school personnel is an honor that students should take as an opportunity to enhance their leadership skills."
-Dave Kriz

"It is a strong way to head into your senior year and be recognized for all the hard work you have already put in," said Kriz.

"We simply see ourselves as a vehicle to allow students to get the recognition they deserve, and the Youth Salute Program provides us

that opportunity." Each year, the local chapter awards approximately \$10,000 in scholarships to students based on their applications, school recommendations, and interviews.

This year, 25 students received \$200 scholarships, five students earned \$300 scholarships, two students earned \$500, and the top two students received top honors with \$1,000 scholarships.

The top two students from the area also received the prestigious opportunity to attend the Town Meeting on Tomorrow, a national leadership conference that brings together winners from local chapters across the country.



WBHS seniors pose with their certificates following the ceremony. Back row: Saylee Gingrich, Addi Schultes, Nolan Staker, Lincoln Naber, Caitlyn Harrison. Front Row: Lillian Waters, Sophie Oaks, Madelynn Tygrett, Maddie Neuberger, Rey Watt, Ewan Arlen, Aizlyn Marsh. Photo contributed by Marcy Willier.

WBHS FFA AND PHOTOGRAPHY COMBINE CLASSES ON FIELD TRIP

Evan Highly
Design Editor

WBHS students experienced a field trip blending horticulture and art. The conjoined FFA and photography classes visited Carver and Kinnick stadiums at the University of Iowa on Thursday, Sept. 4, to see and photograph the flowers grown by the WBHS FFA and the pollinator gardens on the west side of Carver.

Renee Thompson, the agriculture teacher, and Lukas Jordan, the art teacher, thought it would be a great opportunity for their students.

"Each year, I talk with Mr. Jordan about his photography class and the opportunities they have to take photos of something different than what we have on campus," said Thompson.

The flowers served as an object of the students' photography. Students could work together and witness what their peers were trying out with the cameras.

Additionally, the trip exposed the photography class to different avenues of art.

"They get a chance to see what others are doing in other curricula... I can take my students, and also so they can practice their photography," said Jordan.

Typically, the FFA class does not see the end result of their plantings; however, this trip allowed them to enjoy the beauty of their hard work. They learned about the planning that goes into landscaping, and what plants grow best in specific locations or groupings.

The groundskeeper of the university also spoke to the class about the normal, invasive, and endangered bees living in the pollinator gardens. The Rusty Yellow Bee, an endangered bee, can be found in the pollinator gardens and in West Branch.

Senior, Lillian Waters said, "It was a really good time to learn about landscaping, how deep you can plant flowers, and how far apart. I would definitely do it again."



Photos taken by photography class students.



October 2, 2025

2025-2026 WBHS NEW TEACHER Q&A

BAND TEACHER: JAMIE FLANEGAN



Photo by Wyatt Chapman.

Q. How long have you been teaching?
A. **This is year 6.**

Q. What do you hope to accomplish at WBHS?
A. **Creating a fun and productive space for music to be created.**

Q. Have you always wanted to be a teacher?
A. **I wanted to be a figure skating coach but teaching had better stability.**

Q. What is a fun fact about yourself?
A. **I used to drive a zamboni.**

Q. Who's your favorite artist and composer?
A. **Taylor Swift or Fallout Boy & Julie Giroux.**

Q. Since you graduated from WBHS, is it weird being back?
A. **No, because they remodeled the school, it doesn't feel the same.**

Q. Where did you go to school?
A. **Wartburg College**



MATH TEACHER: JODEE CULVER



Photo by Chloe Kleinmeyer.

Q. Why did you want to teach math?
A. **I was influenced by some staff and many students to teach.**

Q. What is your biggest teaching challenge?
A. **My biggest teaching challenge is preparing for multiple classes and making sure to have a rubric prepared before the assessment.**

Q. What makes your class the most successful?
A. **Being transparent with students makes my class successful. I want them to understand that I am learning as well.**

Q. How would you describe yourself to others, and what's your biggest trait?
A. **I am honest, approachable, and a good listener. I am a positive person.**

Q. What is your biggest strength?
A. **My biggest strength is caring. I am very compassionate. I genuinely care for others and want them to succeed.**

Q. Did you initially choose to teach or did you want to do something else with your future?
A. **I never wanted to teach. I struggled with thinking I could help others in a way they needed. I love math and initially attended college to be an acturarian. Little did I know the stars would line up for me to become a teacher.**

LIFTING COACH: KALEB DUWA

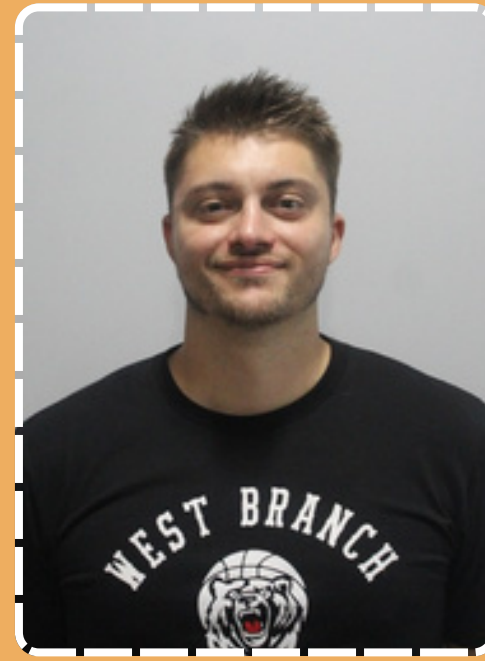


Photo by Karlee Hansen.

Q. What did you do before you were a lifting coach?
A. **Worked in Cedar Rapids in a suspension program for 7 years.**

Q. Where did you go to college?
A. **Kirkwood and UNI**

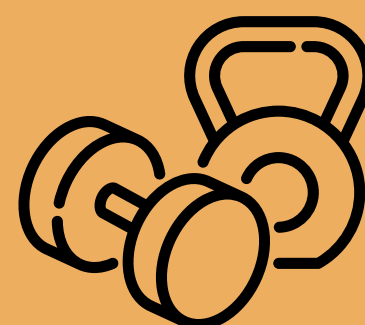
Q. What is your favorite sports team?
A. **Green Bay Packers**

Q. What's your favorite time of the school year?
A. **Basketball season**

Q. What school did you go to?
A. **Mid prairie**

Q. What advice would you give to the freshman/new lifters?
A. **Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Worry about technique more than the weight.**

Q. Where did you grow up?
A. **Wellman Iowa**



FOREIGN EXCHANGE STUDENT MARIA MONFORT JOINS WBHS

Q. What country are you from?
A. **Spain**

Q. What are some major cultural differences between Spain and West Branch/Iowa?
A. **The food is different and forms of entertainment.**

Q. What encouraged you to be a foreign exchange student?
A. **I wanted to live the American high school life, improve my English skills, and gain new friends.**

Q. What activities are you currently involved in and plan to be in, and do you enjoy them?
A. **Cross Country and cheer, and maybe soccer and track, I enjoy them.**

Q. When returning home, what is one thing you think you'll miss the most here?
A. **The people I met here.**

Q. What is your favorite dish from back home?
A. **Tortilla de patata**

Q. What are your family's names and ages?
A. **My dad Manolo, is 50 years old, my mom Raquel, is also 50, I have a twin brother, Manuel, and a little sister Carla, who is 11.**

Q. Is school from home very different from school here?
A. **Yes, the classes are different, we don't mix grades, we only go with people in our grade, and we don't play sports with the school.**

Q. How well have you adjusted to speaking/reading/writing English?
A. **It's hard to mostly understand English, but I can speak it. I feel more comfortable now.**

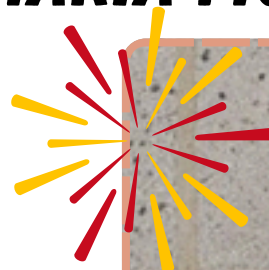


Photo by Sydney Nash.





Opinion

October 2, 2025



BROKEN POLICIES: WHAT REALLY ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

Cassie Swisher
Photography Editor

With school starting it's sixth week at West Branch High School, a new question arose. What really are the consequences for our students when breaking school policy? Every detail is impeccably laid out in the WBHS student handbook, but in real life, it feels inconsequential and varies from case to case.

Some believe the execution of consequences is what really varies across the school. According to a poll sent out to the high school, nearly half of the respondents don't believe that punishments are carried out thoroughly.

With so much confusion, it's hard not to assume that there's bias ruining the actual repercussions of wrongdoing.

Not only can this seem blatantly unfair from student to student, but it's also severely misleading for how punishments actually compare in the real world. A "mistake" some WBHS students make could cost a job or worse beyond high school. An anonymous voice from the high school stated, "It's better to find these things out when you are in high school when the consequence is severe enough that it affects your life, but not so severe that you can't come back from it."

Another important question to ask is whether the punishments enforced are severe enough for a student to understand why what they did was wrong. No one likes being taken out of a sport or activity they enjoy because of a mistake, but consequences should be based on the varying degree of the offense.

In the student handbook, it lumps a long list of "offenses" against the school into one category and the following consequence applies: "Declared ineligible from 30% of all activities that the student is currently involved in during the scheduled season.

Scrimmages/non-season contests

and/or performances that are not officially recognized by the IGHSAU, IHSAA, and IHSMA do not count." (This is a first offense consequence.)

Almost all of the respondents in the poll agreed that there was a stark difference between a one-time bullying claim versus underage drinking and they shouldn't be treated the same. Considering high school prepares you for adult life, not all crimes receive a one-size-fits-all punishment.

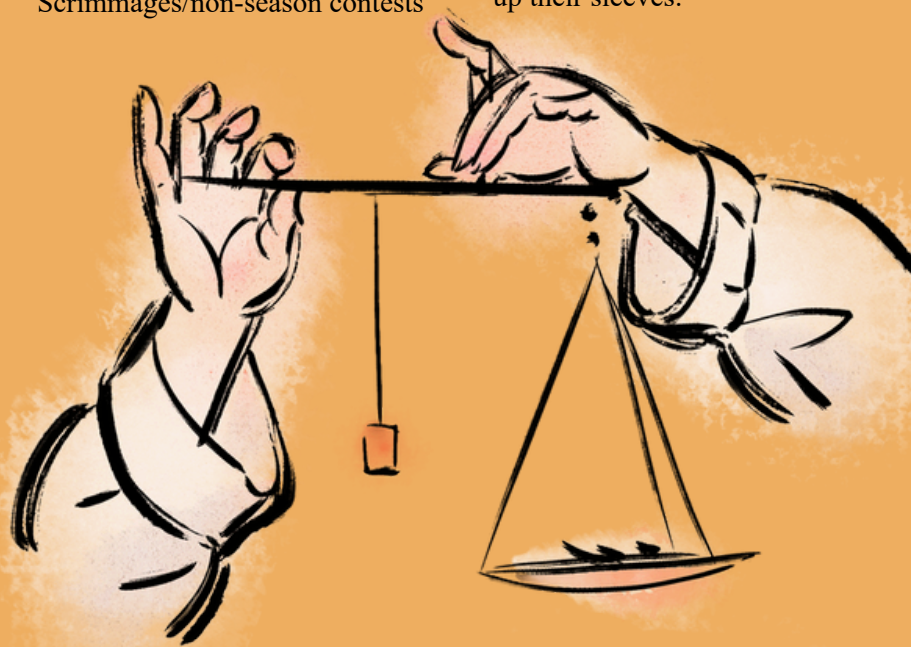
When you think of high school, most do not assume that every student is off the rails trying to commit illegal wrongdoings or trying to hide things up their sleeves.

However, maybe the first thing someone might remember about their high school years is naivety or peer pressure. Students might succumb to drinking underage or driving too fast.

Without consequences, there can't be recognition of what is right and wrong, and without recognition, there can't be growth. Simultaneously, just because a student gets a note on their transcript about their wrongdoing doesn't mean there can't be compassion for that student who might be juggling grades, sports, a job, and social relationships in one day. The power of empathy in an ever-changing world is a remarkable thing to have, but it is more important that empathy and discipline go hand in hand.

The poll concluded by asking what better options for a consequence might be. Some stated more time should be taken out of their sports season. Others stated less of a consequence made more sense.

Regardless, the rules in the student handbook should be properly carried out no matter what rule has potentially been broken, and a lack of proper discipline results in student ignorance of real-world consequences. If our students go out into the world ignorant, who does it fall on? The student, the parents, the coach, the staff, the school board? The blame is anyone's guess.



THE SUMMER I TURNED A CHEATER

Sydney Nash
Staff Writer

If you are keeping pace with popular shows at the moment, you have probably heard about the hit show, "The Summer I Turned Pretty."

The show is about a girl named Isabel Conklin, and her love triangle with two brothers, Conrad and Jeremiah Fisher. The show starts off with her being in the summer house she goes to every summer with Conrad and Jeremiah, and having a very fresh and warm feeling to it. That is, until Belly's mother's best friend, Susannah, also the mom of Conrad and Jeremiah, gets diagnosed with cancer.

The love triangle slowly dies out because of Susannah's sickness, and the one huge happy family slowly drifts apart. Fast forwarding through the rest of season one and season two, after many different mixed feelings, including a long relationship with Conrad, Belly ends up dating Jeremiah.

Now to discuss season three. In this season, I thought cheating was extremely normalized, and having 4 or 5 couples who cheat, if you count Adam (Conrad and Jeremiah's dad), is not okay. The first couple that made cheating seem like not a big deal, and have no consequences for cheating, is Taylor and Steven.

Taylor is Belly's best friend, and Steven is her brother. We know from previous seasons that they have had affairs with people before. This does hurt me to say, knowing that Steven and Taylor are a couple I really like, but it seemed like their cheating got excused because they really liked each other. In season three, they both were seeing each other while seeing other people whom we didn't know much about, but we knew they were dating. They also were barely even ashamed about it and didn't seem to try to hide it from their roommates or Belly at all.

Next, Jeremiah cheated on Belly twice with Lacie in Cabo. This is very controversial to some people if it is considered cheating or not, but in my opinion, I think it is. Some may argue they were on a break, which Belly did not seem to think so, but it's still arguable



how he shouldn't have been emotionally able to just cheat on someone he was so in love with twice because of a fight. It also sickened me how Jeremiah used the emotional state of Belly as an advantage after Stevens' car accident to propose to her. Again, there was no consequence of him cheating; after all, they got engaged after the situation. Even at his bachelor party, Jeremiah did not seem ashamed of his actions when his friends were talking about his cheating.

The actual cause of Jeremiah and Belly's fight was also because of the concept of cheating. Jeremiah knew that Conrad and Belly were alone at the summer house during Christmas without telling anyone, and he thought something had happened between them. He was angry she didn't tell him about it, which caused the big fight, and he left to go to Cabo alone.

To an extent, you could say Belly has emotionally cheated multiple times on Jeremiah this season, from the almost kiss scene in episode six to admitting she pictured herself marrying Conrad.

Overall, I believe this show represents grief and other struggles well. Still, the lack of consequence for cheating and how normalized it is in the show is concerning, as other viewers may pick up on this behavior and think it's okay. Besides the normalization of cheating I did enjoy watching the show, I thought it was cute and the drama situations through the show kept things entertaining!

TIME SEEMINGLY SLOWED DOWN WITH THE RELEASE OF "A MATTER OF TIME"

Wyatt Chapman
Writing Editor

"A Matter of Time" Laufey (Lay-vay)'s newest album releases Aug. 22, 2025. There are 14 normal tracks included in the album, plus "Seems like old times", a bonus track. "Seems like old times" is a jazz standard and Laufey did a cover of it, similar to "Misty" in her 2023 album "Bewitched". Laufey's "Misty" is a modernized cover originally sang by famous jazz musician, Ella Fitzgerald, whereas Kate Smith released "Seems like old times" in Jan. of 1946.

My top three songs from this album are "Forget-Me-Not" a very slow song that has a lot of power behind it, especially when Laufey sings the most powerful part of the song in Icelandic, which translates to "Never forget me, my love".

Number two is "Too Little, Too Late" a song that Laufey wrote from the male perspective, talking about how someone watches their crush of sorts fall in love with someone else.

The song that receives spot number three goes to "Castle in Hollywood", a more upbeat song but with a sadder meaning behind it. "Castle in Hollywood" is a song about losing one of your closest friends.

All in all "A Matter of Time" is

absolutely my favorite album and I give it a ten out of ten. When and if you give this album a listen make sure to listen to "Sabotage" full blast.

Eight million people follow Laufey on Spotify, which surprisingly is more than Chappell Roans' following of seven million. Which proves that people should listen to Laufey. I would compare her music to Olivia Rodrigo's album "Sour".

"A Matter of Time" received 12 million listens on its first full day and reached the top four on the U.S. Billboard 200 on Sept. 6, 2025.

Laufey herself might not ring a bell, but she is the artist behind "From the Start" from the album "Bewitched" arguably her biggest song to date. She could also be recognized from "Falling behind" or "Valentine" from her 2022 album "Everything I Know About Love".

This was the album I was the most excited about and that's saying something considering how excited I was about the release of "Mayhem" by Lady Gaga. Laufey is on tour throughout the U.S. and I get to go see her live in Minneapolis on Oct. 11, 2025. "A Matter of Time" is an amazing album, and was exactly the emotional rollercoaster I needed before my first week of school.

