



# PAWPRINT

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**Penn State International Athlete Profile**  
**By Jen Long**  
**Field Hockey**

When being recruited to come to a school, potential student athletes will take an official visit to get a feel for the atmosphere of the university. Perhaps they will be lucky enough to go down on the field at a football game, have brunch at the Nittny Lion Inn, or dinner at the Tavern. For many, that is a typical recruiting trip; however, in Sasha Abraham's situation, that was not the case. Sasha never saw the school, met the coach or potential teammates. Only after a few phone calls and emails did Sasha decide to come to Penn State. She thought it was a big risk for both her and the team. Although looking back now, she could not have imagined going anywhere else.

Sasha comes all the way from Hyderabad, India. Being an only child made it difficult for both her and her parents. She is very close with her parents and goes home the second she has the opportunity, which is only Christmas and the summertime. After first arriving her freshman year, she can remember calling her parents every day, sometimes multiple times a day. Sasha has been to over twenty-five different countries, so coming to America was anything but a shock to her.

There were only two real big adjustments that Sasha had to make. The first was being more accustomed to the English slang. Some simple phrases and words, like "stoked" left her puzzled, but she soon caught on. The second biggest adjustment was adapting to the independent style that America takes on. The "do it yourself mentality" was much different than what Sasha was used to. In India, everything was much more integrated and group-oriented.

Sasha was five years old when she first started to play tennis. Neither one of her parents played, but after her mother's suggestion, Sasha was out on the local courts. She had no intention of being competitive, but at age seven, she entered her first competition and never looked back. Since then, Sasha has been a three-time National Champion in India. For the under eighteen division of the International Tennis Federation (ITF), Sasha ranked 177, and for doubles she ranked 57. This is a world ranking which consists of thousands of competitors. Her world ranking of 57 for doubles granted her an invitation to the Junior Australian Slam. She had a chauffer drive her to and from the courts, and she saw tennis stars like Venus Williams and

Monica Seles. Sasha says this was one of the greatest experiences of her life.

Here at Penn State, Sasha plays a huge role on the team. She is the number one doubles and singles player. Her most memorable tennis moment is beating Illinois last year. Sasha was a three-time winner of the Sportsmanship Award, which her teammates voted for. Sasha was not used to playing on a team; her whole career was individual based; however, coming to Penn State, she loves the atmosphere of being a part of a team. She says it is such an "energy rush." Something else that was new to Sasha was the emphasis on physical fitness. Having to train all year round, inside and outside the weight room, was a huge adjustment. On the aspect of tennis, this was the biggest difference between India and America.

Sasha is currently a senior at Penn State majoring in marketing and will be entering her last season at Penn State this spring. After graduation, Sasha is looking to go home for a while although she has every intention of going to graduate school, hopefully in the United States. She has mixed feelings about ending her career here at Penn

State. However, Sasha looks at it as though one door is closing while another is opening.

**Tennis Player Sasha Abraham:**



**Penn State's Walker and O'Rourke Take on Big 10 Foreign Tour**

**By Kelly Silvis  
Dance Team**

While many of us were relaxing by the pool, traveling to the beach and taking advantage of the warm summer weather, two Penn State athletes were taking their game to a new level. Mike Walker, a junior forward for the Nittany Lion Basketball Team, was Penn State's representative on the Big Ten Foreign Tour Team in Australia over the summer. The Foreign Tour Team included student athletes from 10 of the 11 League schools, including Illinois' Marcus Arnold, Indiana's Roderick Wilmont, Iowa's Seth Gorney, Michigan's Lester Abram and Jerret Smith, Michigan State's Travis Walton, Minnesota's Jonathan Williams, Northwestern's [Tim Doyle](#), Ohio State's Ron Lewis, Penn State's Michael Walker and Purdue's Gordon Watt. The team played against the West Sydney Razorbacks Basketball Club, the Sydney Kings Basketball Club, the Brisbane

Bullets and the South District Spartans.

When he wasn't busy on the court, Walker spent his off-the-court time with teammates traveling throughout the city and enjoying the night life. "I played cards with my roommates and tried to see the different culture of Australia. An interesting part was when we were in Sydney, but our hotel was in the middle of Chinatown. It took a little getting used to, and I'll never look at Chinese food the same," says Walker.

Looking back on the experience, Walker says that basketball overseas is different because although the athletes seem to be a lot smarter and referees allow players to get away with more, the majority of his competitors were not as athletic. "My time in Australia taught me how to get along with guys from all across the country that had completely different backgrounds than me," says Walker.

Brianne O'Rourke, a sophomore guard for the Lady Lions, spent July 18 through the 28 as a representative for the Big Ten Foreign Team, traveling and playing basketball in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Despite learning to adapt to a new culture, the experience left O'Rourke with a new outlook on her game, both on and off the court. "It really taught me a lot about myself; learning how everything is so different, like understanding foreigners and what they go through when they are in our country," she says.

According to O'Rourke, a trip overseas just wouldn't be the same without site-seeing and shopping. She recalls visiting the mermaid statue as her favorite memory. "Once, we went to visit and realized how much this statue

meant to their culture; it became very interesting to us as a group. Their mermaid statue is pretty much what we refer to as our Statue of Liberty."

Throughout the trip, O'Rourke had a lot of interaction with her teammates and met a lot of professional players. "We actually met a girl on Denmark's National Team that played previously for Michigan; we thought that was pretty interesting. We also ran into a guy who had on an Ohio State shirt; even though we're not their fans, it was still interesting to see people from different countries as fans of the Big Ten," says O'Rourke.

Walker and O'Rourke intend to use this summer's tour to bring experience and skill to their teams this year, and both look forward to a successful 2006-2007 basketball season.



**Brianne O'Rourke**



**Mike Walker**

## **Penn State Women Fencers Show The World What They're Made Of**

**By Tara Berardi  
Dance Team**

Two Penn State women's fencers prove they are among the best in the world. Sophomore Caitlin Thompson of Portland, Oregon, and freshman Doris Willette of Lafayette, California, recently competed on the international level and are making Penn State proud with their achievements.

Thompson has been a successful fencer ever since she got her start at her local recreation center. "I took a class, and the coach told me that if I stuck with it for six months, I would be sent to a national tournament at Disneyland," Thompson said. She has been training for more than five days every week for eight years since then and has many awards under her belt, including the title of the under seventeen World Champion in 2004. Thompson recently traveled to Italy with the United States National Team where the team won a silver medal in the World Championship. "It's amazing to get to travel so much and see so many different places, but it is really stressful. You miss a lot of school and fun things, but it is definitely worth it!"

Willette is only a freshman, but she has already achieved more in the world of fencing than many can hope to accomplish in their entire college career. "I would be sent to a national tournament at Disneyland," Thompson said. The Californian credits her father with introducing her to fencing when she was only 9 years old, and she says she has loved it ever since.

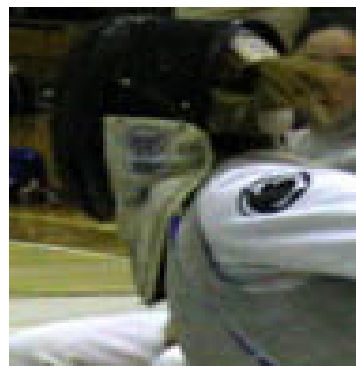
Willette traveled to Bratislava, Slovakia, in October where she earned the title of 2006 Women's Foil Junior World Cup winner. "It was a really great achievement for me just because I've worked so hard, and everyone wants their work to pay off." Willitts said.

Both of these women have the opportunity to show their Penn State pride and incredible talent around the country and the world. "It feels amazing to travel to different countries, not only because I get to compete against the best in the world, but because I get a chance to see what is out there. The international competitions provide such a challenge, and it's an arena that I truly enjoy competing in because when you do well, you know that you've earned it," Willette said. Both athletes will attend the North American Cup in Richmond, Virginia, at the beginning of December.

Aside from being top competitors, Thompson and Willette both have to maintain their roles as students. Thompson, an advertising major, says it is hard to stay focused, but fencing keeps her in check. Willette, still in the early stages of her freshman year, is still undecided on what major she will pursue. "As a freshman, I still haven't gotten a routine down, so I'm still trying to figure that out, but what I've noticed so far is that the long plane rides are perfect opportunities to do homework. As long as I talk to my teachers and get work ahead of time, I'm fine."

Even though both must deal with the stress of balancing constant travel and competition with school, both women say that fencing is worth the sacrifices. "I love the people I have met and the places it has taken me," says Thompson. Willette agrees

and says that fencing has given her countless opportunities. "I have gotten to see so much, and I am extremely grateful for that. I also love the tradition that is embedded in this sport and the friends I've made in the process."



## **Swimmer Claire Hawley Competes for the U.S.A.**

**By Rachel Ahrenhold  
Women's Swimming**

Claire Hawley, a distance swimmer and senior on the women's swimming team, was selected by *USA Swimming* as one of eight swimmers nationwide that comprise the United States National Team. The team competed at the 2006 Open Water World Championships, which were held August 29-September 3 in Naples, Italy. Hawley's inclusion on the team was mainly based on her performance in this summer's U.S. Open Water National Championships, in which she finished second in the 25k race held in Fort Myers, Florida, in June. At first, it wasn't definite that Hawley had made the team because of new rules that were set into action this summer. "My coach told me there was about a 10% chance I would make it, so at first I was shocked," Hawley said. "Then I was really excited and focused on training to get ready for the competition."

Claire set off to Italy, and because she did not swim until the last day of the Championships, she had a chance to familiarize herself with the route in which she'd be racing. "I was able to swim the course a couple of times and watch the first two races." She said, "Open water swimming requires much more strategy than pool swimming. It helped to know what landmarks were around the course, where the feeding docks were located, and what type of feeding plan I would need."

And a feeding plan she would need, as her race lasted almost *seven* hours! "After the halfway point, I was really struggling with the large waves and was basically swimming by myself; my body and mind wanted to give up," She said. "But each time I rounded the third buoy of the course, I swam by my teammates who were holding up a huge American flag. Knowing that I was representing my country was what motivated me to push through."

Six hours and fifty-five minutes later, Claire triumphantly finished the grueling 16 mile swim. "I felt two things when I finished: overwhelmingly emotional and physically sick," Hawley said. "I felt like I had strep-throat, hypothermia, and like I would never lift my arms again. But it was the greatest sense of accomplishment I have ever experienced."

After such an emotionally and physically draining race, Hawley was able to take some time and take in her experience. "The last night of the meet, we had the closing ceremonies at a castle right on the bay," She recalls. "We had a spectacular view of the skyline at night, and it made me appreciate the beauty of Italy."

So, has the fact that she represented the United States of America in what is basically the longest race in the world sunk in? "The whole trip rejuvenated my love of swimming and made me proud to be a Penn State athlete," She said. "I know I would never have made the team without my teammates and coaches here pushing me every day."

### **PSU swimmer Claire Hawley competes in Naples, Italy**

