

Koch Bar '20 is surrounded by teammates and fans celebrating Bradley's 57-54 victory over Northern Iowa in the Missouri Valley Conference title game in March.

BRADLEY BRAVES

BRADLEY
12

MEN'S BASKETBALL 2018-19

1ST

MVC TITLE SINCE 1988

NCAA BID SINCE 2006



MVC WIN: ZACH DALIN '13; TROPHY: DUANE ZEHR.

GOING FOR THE WIN

ATHLETICS
BY BOB GRIMSON '81
& MARY BROLLEY
⌚ 5 MIN.



MEN'S BASKETBALL

ONLY

ILLINOIS SCHOOL TO BEAT
FINAL FOUR PARTICIPANT LOYOLA
IN 2017-18 SEASON

*With 19 points, six rebounds
and three blocks against
Michigan State, Elijah Childs '22
was the Ameren Illinois Player
of the Game. #TheArrival*





WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

MORE WINS IN THREE STRAIGHT YEARS

First Time in School History

The Braves start their pre-game warm-up for a game against Northern Iowa in January.

ATHLETICS, particularly on the national stage, has always been a point of pride for the Bradley family. That's evident again as men's basketball won its first Missouri Valley Conference title since 1988 and went to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2006.

But the win isn't the only achievement visible on a campus where students often know and hang out with student-athletes. From basketball to track to volleyball to cross country, Bradley athletes are racking up wins and records while excelling in the classroom and contributing to the community.

After an historic run through the MVC title game in St. Louis — where they set a record for the largest comeback

(18 points) in a championship, the Braves' automatic bid to the NCAA tournament started against Michigan State. It ended with a hard-fought 76-65 loss to the Spartans in the first round of the East Regional at Des Moines, Iowa, that drew praise from famed Michigan State coach Tom Izzo.

But Bradley did have an NCAA champion — before the game Kaboom! topped a mascot ranking by USA Today's

VOLLEYBALL



The Braves posted an improved overall and conference record for the third-consecutive season, marking the first time with an improvement in three-straight years since 1992-94.

“For The Win” for teams involved in the tournament, beating out Sparty of Michigan State and 66 other contenders.

Bradley set the stage for tournament success in February when they defeated the top Missouri Valley Conference team in a 61-54 victory over Loyola, then rallied from an 11-point deficit to knock off archrival Illinois State. They swept the season series and won on the Redbirds’ home court for the first time in 12 years in what was the team’s most successful conference stretch in February in 22 years.

These accomplishments have probably drawn the most notice in and outside of the Bradley community, and they are a pattern of increased excellence established over the past four seasons.

For volleyball, last fall marked the program’s first postseason appearance — at the National Invitational Volleyball Championship. To get there, the team racked up a 14-1 record at home and the most MVC victories since 2001.

Now in her first semester of graduate school at the University of Tampa, Erica Haslag ’18 was an outside hitter for the team, which became much more competitive during her time at Bradley.

“WE WORKED HARD TO PUT THE TEAM BACK ON THE MAP.”

— Erica Haslag ’18

Outside Hitter **Rachel Pranger ’22**

“We came in when Bradley volleyball was not successful, and we worked hard to put (the team) back on the map,” she said. “The community was also amazing; it was great to see the best fans over and over again at our games. We took pride in being the underdogs and fought hard to make other teams respect us.”

For Haslag, being a successful college athlete requires more than winning. “A strong team atmosphere and good chemistry off the court help a player stay invested and not frustrated in games, even on days they’re not playing their best.”

A ROUNDUP OF TRIUMPHS

Bradley men’s basketball scored back-to-back seasons with at least 20 victories. Women’s basketball improved its overall and Missouri Valley

Conference records for the fourth consecutive season, highlighted by 20 victories in 2018–19.

The Braves earned three Academic All-Americans, including a pair of first-team scholar-athlete selections in 2017–18 that tied a school record. The seven sports recognized by the NCAA

set a school record and led the conference.

Athletics also garnered its third-straight conference All-Academic Award and a record 46 conference scholar-athletes. For graduation success rates by student-athletes, Bradley was at 93 percent, better than both the NCAA Division I



THREE ACADEMIC ALL-AMERICANS

The Braves tied a **school record with three Academic All-Americans** during the 2017-18 campaign as **Clark Emerson** of men’s soccer, **Zach Jewell** of men’s golf and **Will Anderson** of men’s track all received the prestigious honor (also accomplished in 2010-11). Additionally, Emerson and Anderson became just the ninth and 10th Braves in the 66-year history of the award to collect first-team accolades in their respective sport and the first time two Braves earned the honor in the same year.



Michael Ward '19 at the 2018 Bradley Pink classic. He also won the MVC Indoor 3,000m and 5,000m Indoor Championships that year.

FOUR-STRAIGHT MVC CHAMPIONSHIPS IN MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

average (87) and the other MVC schools (86.9).

Men's cross country has won four-straight MVC championships, while men's track had a school-record 86 points and a fourth-place finish in the MVC Indoor Championship — the first in the top four since 1970. The men, who were ranked 25th nationally, ran for the first time at the NCAA Cross Country Championship, where they finished 24th, after a second-place finish at the NCAA Midwest Regional.

The women's distance medley won its first conference title and the team more than doubled last year's overall score by the end of the indoor championship. Women's cross country earned its fourth MVC title in five years.

Last year, the Braves landed a spot at the NCAA Men's Golf Championship for the first

time since 1955 after winning their first conference title.

As of press time, women's tennis overall wins/losses is at 11-6, the best record in the last five seasons.

Student-athletes, coaches and staff have contributed more than 10,000 hours of service to the community in the last three years.

Sure, they've been winning, but student-athletes also achieved in the classroom and gave back to the community — the athletic department's three focus areas outlined by Chris Reynolds, vice president for intercollegiate athletics.

"If we are a stock, it's time to buy," Reynolds said at a recent meeting. "We're headed in the right direction. This is a bus where everybody should jump on board."

While outside observers wonder how athletes balance their

many responsibilities, Senior Associate AD for Academics and Student Development Jennifer Jones knows how and why. "Student-athletes at this level are naturally competitive and driven toward success. That desire for achievement is a great motivator for both athletic and academic progress," she said.

"As the saying goes, 'No one rises to low expectations.' As a department, we are very clear on the front end with prospective students on the mission of Bradley Athletics."

Even many years later, the benefits to athletes of camaraderie with teammates and coaches and learning time management are clear. **Chuck Buescher '67 M.A. '70** played basketball and baseball at Bradley, and later coached both sports at the university before embarking on a longtime career as a high school basketball coach, where Reynolds was one of his star players. He recalled

that academic support for athletes was less structured in the 1960s.

"Back then, we didn't have academic advisers. We didn't have anyone checking to see that you went to class. You were on your own. Nobody called up the coach to say, 'Chuck Buescher wasn't in class' like they do today.

"Which is a good thing. The kids get a lot more help, and that's a good thing."

Baseball player **Andy Shadid '19** is grateful for the support he's received. "Everyone in the athletics department is family. When walking into the Renaissance Coliseum, I can't walk down the hall without talking to a faculty member or fellow athlete. It's pretty cool to see everyone get along and know that those people actually care about you." **B**