

**MORE SPORTS**

# Bainbridge Island water polo coach's big splash of success

BY NANCY TREDER  
Bainbridge Island Review

For Bainbridge High School water polo coach Kristin Gellert, 2021 was a winning year.

The boys team won state making her the first female coach to win the championship, she was named the state Coach of the Tournament for the third time in four years, and she coached the boys under 18 team that placed seventh at the Junior Olympics in Dallas.

She did all that during COVID-19, when teens across America were dealing with added anxiety, social isolation and depression.

Gellert said her philosophy is simple: It all comes down to "being nice to kids" and "coaching the whole person."

But she's being modest. It's much more than that. She started a program in town where kids can get started in water polo as early as age 6. It used to be just a high school program.

The organization is built upon providing a safe, encouraging learning environment that allows young athletes to grow physically, socially and emotionally to reach their full potential while also learning life skills to face adversity. She has seen that to be true for herself and her athletes during the pandemic.

From the first day she tried water polo in the eighth grade, Gellert developed a passion for the sport. The summer before her sophomore year of high school, Gellert's dad was transferred to Bangor Naval Base and her family settled in Poulsbo so she could play for Bainbridge High School. By the time classes started in the fall, Gellert had made many friends, which eased



Coach Kristin Geller talks with the Junior Polo team.



BHS water polo coach Kristin Gellert.

her transition to a new school. "Anytime kids can incorporate sports into their life during big moments like that, is just an incredible power that sports can provide," Gellert said.

BHS was a positive experience for Gellert, who felt

deeply connected to the coaches and players, and as the team improved she was driven to see how far water polo could take her.

"I felt like I was given so many really cool opportunities, and I didn't take any of them for granted," she said.

career when the team placed fourth in the NCAA finals.

"Those college years in Hawaii were some of the best memories of my life. I got to meet some incredible people from all around the world and play in some awesome tournaments ... I wouldn't trade that for the world," she said.

Gellert then moved back to Bainbridge and worked at a bakery while coaching for BHS, but longed to compete at a higher level. She reached out to the St. Vincent Water Polo Club in Dublin, Ireland, and they invited her to play. They went on to win the national Club Championship in 2010.

Gellert returned to BI with a new focus on personal training, and she's been coaching almost full-time ever since.

Today, her life is full. She is married, raising two young boys, and into her sixth year of coaching the Spartans while pursuing a master's degree in Applied Sports Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University with a desire to become a mental performance coach.

Gellert's happy place has always been in the water, and so it is for the students she's been coaching. She attributes her three Coach of the Year titles to the organic way the team has improved.

"We didn't just get a transplant from California, or an exchange student who made our team really good all of a sudden," she said. Gellert filled the BHS roster with kids who grew up through the BI club programs, and her fellow coaches noticed the team improve over the years.

There are a few things that her team does differently from other programs.

See COACH | B5

**"Anytime kids can incorporate sports into their life during big moments ... it is just an incredible power that sports can provide."**


**Kristin Gellert**  
BHS water polo coach

With a desire to play water polo in college, Gellert began playing for Mercer Island and Federal Way club teams with the goal of winning a state championship. She wanted to win so badly that she and a few other players would drive around the island picking up teammates to get them to practice.

That effort paid off when the BHS girls water polo team won the 2004 state


championship, and Gellert won the Defensive Most Valuable Player Award. "That was just such an honor," she said.

Gellert was lured to the University of Hawaii, where she redshirted her freshman year. Only 5-foot-7, "short for a water polo player," and 17, Gellert had to learn how to train as a Division 1 athlete and be the fastest person in the pool. She played all four years and ended her college



**FIRST PIZZA BOUGHT WITH MY NEW DEBIT CARD**

**Have a debit card?**  
Available to teens 13 and up with a checking account. Stop by a branch with your parent or legal guardian to pick the best account for you. Scan the code to learn more.



**First Fed**  
ourfirstfed.com | 800.800.1577  
Member FDIC



**Stressless**

**SAVE ON YOUR FAVE.**  
January 21 - March 7

Get \$200 off Stressless® Signature base recliners, Classic Power™ recliners, and new Cross base recliners OR get a free accessory.\*

\* See store for details.

ENDORSED BY  
**ACA**  
AMERICAN CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION

**Voted Best Furniture Store and Best Mattress Store in Kitsap!**

**2021 BEST OF THE best**  
Kitsap Sun WINNER

**ARNOLD'S HOME FURNISHINGS**

3520 Kitsap Way, Bremerton • 360-377-5582 • 1-800-533-5311  
Mon-Fri: 9:30am - 6pm • Sat: 9:30am - 5:30pm • Sun: Closed  
www.ArnoldsHomeFurnishings.com

## MORE SPORTS

### Coach

CONTINUED FROM B4

"Number one, I just really like being nice to kids" and boosting their confidence, she said. The essential piece of the program is we give them ownership so they feel really involved and invested.

The older athletes mentor the younger ones in the cycle of growing and caring for the team as Gellert holds the swimmers to strong values and high standards to become better players and better people. "I keep raising the bar, and they keep rising to meet it. They're great sportsmen and kind humans, and that's more important than any state championship."

Gellert helps relieve pressure on team members because good mistakes are celebrated. "That's how we learn. A kid is never punished for making a mistake. It takes a lot of courage for young people to go out in front of their families and peers knowing that they're going to make mistakes."

The values stick with the athletes long after they leave the pool because they build character. They end up knowing the value of a team, and the importance of finding people who become their family. They know the value of a support system and helping teammates because, "Everyone plays their best when they feel supported, loved and valued."

Charlie King said his son joined the water polo club in grade school and transitioned to the BHS team in 9th grade and immediately noticed that Gellert was dramatically different from other coaches.

"Her effort to shape these young athletes into competitors is rooted in sports psychology. So many nights our son would come home and discuss what the coach shared and how it is causing him to start thinking differently about himself and the game," King said.



Coach Kristin Gellert referees a scrimmage for the club program.

NANCY TREDER/BAINBRIDGE ISLAND REVIEW

Ruth Baydo, president of the water polo board and mother of BHS senior Oskar Bannister and sophomore Michael Bannister, said Gellert has had a big influence on all of their lives.

"Oskar and Michael both have a group of really close friends who have worked hard over the past four years to support each other in and out of the pool with a dream of winning the state championship, and together, with some outstanding coaching, they made that dream come true," something the Spartans had not achieved in 25 years, she said.

As Gellert works to finish her master's degree she's completing 200 required hours training with Brian Alexander, the mental performance coach for the U.S. Men's National Water Polo Team. Gellert said she's grateful the team has allowed her to guide them through mental coaching training.

It made a difference at state. "We've been in big games in the past, and not performed to our best because of nerves ... As my team walked out of the locker room, they were so ready," Gellert said. "This is really powerful stuff, and you can change a lot of lives this way."

During the past two years, the mindfulness practices have helped the water polo athletes manage their anxiety and build resilience to come through the pandemic mentally and physically stronger. She said she hopes that learning life skills, setting goals and practicing their focus will set them up for a better future.

"I've witnessed firsthand that sports and a good supportive team of coaches who really care can save lives. It does, and it did."

Raelene Rossart remembers how Gellert shifted training after the pandemic shutdown, "to

create a virtual space where the kids could stay connected with one another. ...She knew the most important thing she could give them during that time of immense isolation was each other."

BHS senior and girls water polo player Maja Carroll is headed to Colorado State University in the fall and will play on its water polo team.

Of Gellert, she said: "She's taught me how to push myself to do more. She helped (us) learn to lead the team with kindness. Most importantly, she's given me the confidence to accomplish my dreams."

### Gymnasts

CONTINUED FROM B3

Derr had an 8.525, Reeb an 8.425, Olliffe a 7.825, Mason-Todd a 7.75, Kate Hansen of BHS a 7.65, Spartan Elizabeth Pickle a 7.5, Miller a 7.2, Peri Anderson of Kingston a 6.45, Julia Cleaver of NK a 6.3 and Natalie Cleaver of NK a 5.25.

MacDonald was second in the uneven bars at 9.1, Reeb seventh at 8.3, Gray eighth at 8.15. and Bereman 12th at 8.0.

Lovett scored a 7.5, Miller and Bruns both had a 6.4, Olliffe a 6.05, Mason-Todd a 5.5, Sydney Oswald of BHS a 5.45, Hansen a 4.9, Falen a 4.5, Arlene Morisath of NK a 4.4, Fiona Schmid of Kingston a 4.15 and Ellie Lewis of NK a 4.05.

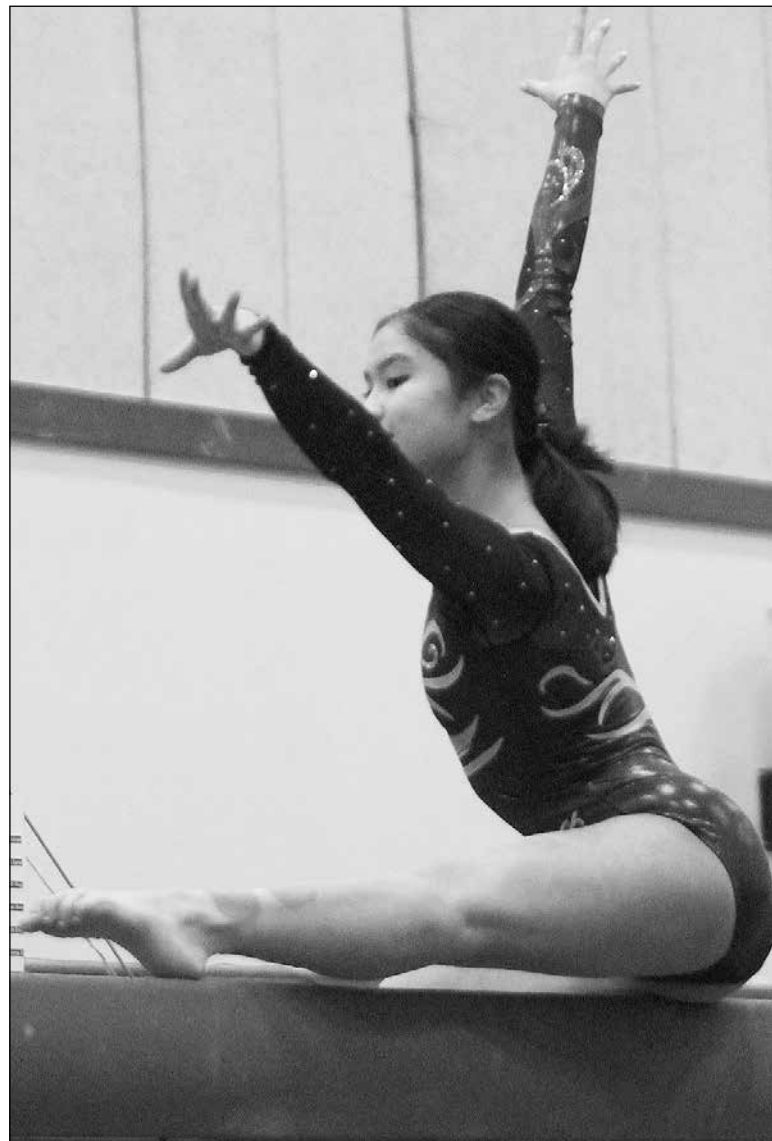
No locals finished very high in the vault. Lovett was tops at 14th with a score of 8.15. MacDonald and Bereman was right behind her with scores of 8.125, and Reeb was next at 8.1.

Other local scores were: Gray and Bruns, 8.05; Miller, 7.75; Deitrich, 7.675; Lovett, 7.275; Shawna Smith of BHS, 7.15; Hansen, 7.125; Mason-Todd, 6.9; Arlene Morisath of NK, 6.8; Schmid, 6.45; and Falen, 6.35.



Avery Gray of Bainbridge on the balance beam. She was seventh in the all-around.

FILE PHOTOS



BHS's Jade Bereman on the balance beam. She won the floor exercise at districts.

### Wrestlers

CONTINUED FROM B2

She then won her next by

pin in 4:35. But with a quarterfinal match on the line, she lost by pin in 4:35.

Jesus Mares at 285 pounds won his first match 3-1. Mares lost a heartbreaker in

the next round 1-0. He then was sent to the consolation bracket and was pinned at the end of the second round.

At 113 pounds, freshman Wyatt Trogeden won by

pin in his first match in just 54 seconds. But Trogeden was disqualified in his next match. Moved to the consolation bracket, he lost a 7-2 decision.

#### Kingston

At 285 pounds, sophomore Gavin Garner wrestled Treavor Atkins tough for two rounds. He started with a 4-0 deficit after two takedowns, but a reversal cut the lead in half to 4-2 until Atkins added an escape. The Buc was pinned

in the third round at the 4:39 mark. Sent to the consolation bracket, he was pinned at the end of the second period.

Jefferson Hernandez, a junior, lost his first match 9-1 at 182 pounds, then was pinned in his consolation match in 49 seconds.



Monica Kaiser of South Kitsap breaks away from Aubrie Aukland's control.



Monica Kaiser turns the tables to pin Aubrie Aukland of Bainbridge.



Wyatt Goade of Bainbridge listens to what happened in his second match.