Uliana Pokutnia settles into college life

By Avery Martin
Contributor

For any freshman athlete, adjusting to the collegiate environment is a challenge. Setting a personal best in an event is even more so. But doing that while family and friends remain in a war-torn nation? That is a challenge only Uliana Pokutnia is facing.

The freshman left her hometown of Kremenchuk in central Ukraine in her junior year of high school. She picked up track only after enrolling in an American high school. Now, in her first college season, she was named the NE10 Rookie of the Week on April 8.

"We just started. We only had one meet this outdoor season, and I had a nice PR. That's the only event I did so far in outdoor season," Pokutnia said.

Pokutnia, who teammates call a "hard worker," currently sits atop the NE10 rankings in triple jump. She finished second at the UConn Dog Fight meet on April 4 with a final jump of 11.49m. That is not only a personal best, but it was the best DII women's triple jump result at that meet. She is ranked 39th in the national DII standings as of April 11.

Those results are especially impressive given Pokutnia's background. Having started the sport much more recently than some of her peers, she has had to learn everything about it while adjusting to living a continent away from home.



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Uliana Pokutnia, a freshman, poses with the Ukrainian flag during media day.

"I did dance in Ukraine, but when I came here, they had certain sports in high school and I thought I might as well pick something," Pokutnia said. "I started jumping my senior year of high school because I was trying out different events and seeing how it is. I was kind of started for fun, but then I started to really like it and kept doing it."

Pokutnia initially wanted to study abroad temporarily before the war, but when Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, her parents sent her to Connecticut to escape the fighting. Her hometown has come under mass missile attacks since she left.

She says her new love of track keeps her busy and distracts her from the news.

"Track a little bit distracts me from everything that's going on. At least to stay busy and to not read the news the whole day," Pokutnia said. "So I really like that about track and in general, it's fun to do track here and send my results to my family and my friends. They support me so much. So it's nice for them to also see me do well here."

Pokutnia has used this motivation to inspire her to work hard on the track. Coach John Wallin works with the jumpers on the team and says her attitude stands out amongst the athletes.

"She's very sharp, it's really refreshing. She's very intentional with a lot of things that she does, as opposed to just going through the motions and I think that is why she has improved so much. She really takes it to heart. If she does it wrong, she wants to do it right," Wallin said.

Mackenzie Glenn competed alongside Pokutnia as a teammate last semester. Now, she is working on the coaching side. She has also seen the hard-working attitude that makes Pokutnia stand out.

"As an athlete, I think I was able to see her personality more. I was able to get to know her as just a friend. She's really funny, she has such a great personality where anyone can be friends with her. But now moving into more of a coaching role, I've noticed how coachable she is and how hard working she is," Glenn said.

Being able to use constructive criticism from her coaches to better herself is a skill that Pokutnia uses well, Glenn said.

"She takes it to heart in the sense where she understands where the constructive criticism is coming from. She knows that it's not coming from a bad place," Glenn said. "She internalizes the mistakes and the criticism that she's getting and instead, she puts it towards progressing and getting better."

Pokutnia herself is relatively humble about her results and attributes it to the environment she is in. She believes the coaching and expectations at the collegiate level have held her accountable to perform at her best.

"I would say I'm just part of this environment where everyone is trying to improve and get better. I'm just trying to be like them," Pokutnia said. "I'm surrounded with all these amazing people, and I'm just trying to be a part of that and keep working."

Pokutnia and her teammates are back in action on the track on April 18 at the UConn Northeast Challenge and on April 19 at Yale's Mark Young Invitational.

A rising star makes an immediate impact



PHOTO | SCSUOWLS.COM

Shortstop Izzy Ingersoll, a freshman, starts versus Post University.

By Kayla Johnson
Contributor

For Owls freshman Izzy Ingersoll, softball is not just a sport, it is a lifeline.

"I wouldn't be in college without it," Ingersoll said. "It's how I'm here."

Born in Norwalk and raised in Bridgeport, Ingersoll began playing softball at just 4 years old. By the time she was seven, she was already competing in travel leagues. Though she was younger, she always played with older girls. That early drive led her to elite-level showcases and eventually to the Owl's softball program, where she is now making an impact.

Earlier in the season, Ingersoll was named NE10 Rookie of the Week, a recognition she did not see coming.

Ingersoll explained that she had been experiencing a challenging week when she happened to scroll through her Instagram feed to see the achievement.

"It was one of those moments where I felt like God was just reminding me, 'You're doing okay,'" Ingersoll said.

Interim Head Coach Kate Bowen was just as surprised when the announcement dropped on social media that Monday morning as coaches find out at the same time as the athletes.

"She's only gotten it once so far, but it's such a big honor," Bowen said. "It just speaks to the work she's put in."

This work ethic has shown itself not just in the box score but in her everyday presence on and off the field.

Bowen stated how Ingersoll's vocality on the field showed positive impact towards team performance.

"Izzy came in really passionate about the game. You can just see how much she loves it by how she plays shortstop. Even if you didn't talk to her, you'd know," Bowen said.

Ingersoll has confidently held down the shortstop position, though she has been flexible across infield positions in the past. For now, Bowen is not looking to change that.

"She's done a really great job for us at short," Bowen said.

Ingersoll exhibits value on and off the field.

"She's always the one to raise her hand and stay for extra reps or stick around after practice," Bowen said. "That's the kind of player she is. That's why she's thriving."

For Ingersoll, the path to the university was not a one-way street. She initially committed to Tufts University, drawn by its academics and strong softball program. But after facing serious health issues, requiring regular visits to Yale New Haven Hospital and wanting to continue coaching youth travel teams in the area, she pivoted to a more local option.

"Southern was the perfect choice," Ingersoll said.

Ingersoll has also found a spiritual grounding during her journey. Though she did not grow up religious, she gives credit to her high school peers at Notre Dame Fairfield with helping her connect with her belief in a Higher Power.

"I pray before every game now," Ingersoll said. "I believe in God and His plan."

Ingersoll is not focused on collecting more awards during the regular season.

For more on this story visit thesouthernews.com

Men's Outdoor Track shines in home meet



PHOTO | WADE BARILLARO

Joe Nham, a freshman, competes during the Wilton Wright Invitational.

By Matt Cain
Contributor

The Owls Men's Outdoor Track & Field team opened up their first home meet with a strong showing at the Wilton Wright Invitational, finishing second overall behind Central Connecticut, who posted 170.5 points. The Owls were led by standout performances across both track and field events, with multiple first-place finishes and personal records set throughout the day.

The distance squad delivered some of the day's most impressive results. Luca Cazzaniga, a senior, headlined with a personal best in the 10,000-meter run, capturing first place in 32:21.16. Teammate Dom Tartarelli, a sophomore, followed with a solid fourth place finish at 34:00.15. In the 5000-meter, Joseph Lamburn, a freshman, added another victory for the Owls, clocking a personal best of 15:29.50. Matt Speight, a senior, crossed fifth in 15:53.36 and Ryan Gagne, a junior, also set a new personal best, finishing 13th in 16:16.83.

In the 1500-meter run, Evan McNeice, a senior, placed fourth with a time of 4:15.03. The 800-meter race saw Nate Huebner, a junior, take third in 2:00.98, while Dylan Horkey, a sophomore, finished eighth at 2:06.68.

The sprint and hurdle events featured strong efforts from the Owls. In the 400-meter, Nolan Freeman, a junior, set a new personal best, taking third in 50.00. Marquis Ward, a freshman and Matt Kilmer, a sophomore, followed closely behind in fifth (51.04) and sixth (51.14), respectively. Noah Conrod, a junior, placed ninth at 51.72, while Ty Phelan, a junior (52.69) and Philip DePoutot, a freshman, (53.61) rounded out the group in 16th and 20th.

Freshman Joe Nham placed fourth in the 110-meter hurdles with a time of 15.58 and Mekkhi Adkins secured fourth in the 400-meter hurdles, finishing in 59.71.

In the 100-meter dash, Lucas León, a freshman, ran an 11.82 for 25th place, and Raysean Emrie, a sophomore, finished 36th at 12.05.

Field events were a stronghold for the university. Cameron Belton, a senior, led the way with a win in the shot put, throwing 16.07 meters (52-08.75). Fellow senior Natanael Barbosa Torres was close behind in second at 15.73m (51-07.25) and Leo Jolly, a sophomore, placed fourth at 15.10m (49-06.50).

Belton also finished fourth in the discus with a throw of 44.31m (145-04), while Barbosa Torres added a seventh place finish at 39.64m (130-00).

In the javelin, sophomores Michael Von Ehr led the Owls with a fourth-place finish (47.44m / 155-07) and Drew Schwartz followed in eighth (43.44m / 142-06).

Lawrence Hicks, a freshman, cleared a season-best 1.95 meters to win the high jump, adding another victory for the Owls. JC Joyner, a freshman, placed 13th in the long jump (6.15m / 20-02.25) and claimed third in the triple jump with a mark of 12.88m (42-03.25).

With a mix of event wins, podium finishes and personal bests, the Owls demonstrated depth and momentum as they continued their outdoor season.

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