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|  | DEPARTURE DATE<br>March 10  | FROM/DE: One Waverley Place<br>TO/A: Winter ISSTs | RETURN DATE<br>March 11 |
|   | <b>Locations:</b> London, Brussels, Vienna, Zurich<br><b>Estimated travel costs:</b> £0, £250, £450, £470<br><b>Participating teams:</b> varsity swimming, varsity rugby, varsity girls basketball, varsity boys basketball |   |                         |

Details for the 2023 Winter ISSTs according to John Farmer

### Boarding pass comeback: Sports travel returns post-pandemic

Elena Alexander / Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Print

This school year marks the first complete year of overnight sports trips since travel was paused in March 2020 due to COVID-19. Sports trips entail traveling to a European destination to compete against a host school or to participate in the International School Sports Tournament.

Athletic Director John Farmer said overnight trips abroad are “part of the fabric of the athletics experience” and date back at least 53 years to the inaugural year of the ISST.

Farmer said the trips have multiple purposes, including maximizing game time, facilitating team bonding and providing athletes with new competition.

“You see the difference in terms of a season with travel or without travel,” Dhanani said. “Especially during COVID, when we couldn’t travel, we could see the clear difference when we traveled this season for soccer.”

Saba Hejazi-Tehrani (’25), who was on JV volleyball this year, said traveling for volleyball this past season improved the team dynamic.

“It was a really good experience, it helped like the team bond and all of us become closer,” Hejazi-Tehrani said. “Our team already had a really good dynamic, but I think just spending that time, like those two full days together just like helped our team become closer and for us to work better together.”

Farmer said overnight trips build “team chemistry” because they bring teams together in an immersive experience out of context of regular practices, games and daily life.

“I’ve never been to a trip abroad or an ISST where I didn’t see you know, kids having chances to just like lie on their, on their duffel bags in a gym or on a field and just hang out and laugh and listen to music and do all that,” Farmer said. “The kind of bonds and the culture within the team has an opportunity to flourish.”

“I always love traveling,” Lama said. “I think it gets the team very close.”

With regards to funding, Farmer said families pay for their athletes to travel and the school pays for the coaches to

travel. Costs of traveling include transport, accommodation and meals not covered by the host school.

Post-pandemic, Farmer said accommodation for sports trips was switched among the ISST schools to exclusively hotels, instead of host-families housing, lifting the burden for host school families.

Farmer said switching to hotel accommodation, while allowing for more team interaction, ultimately made the trips more expensive as it added extra accommodation and meal costs to the bill families receive.

Assistant Athletic Director Pranay Dhanani, who is also the varsity girls soccer head coach and varsity girls softball assistant coach, said international sports traveling is valuable as it builds relationships within a team.

“You get to know each other more than just the player, you get to know each other in terms of personalities,” Dhanani said. “It’s a chance for the players to see another side of the coaches, not just training and matches, especially now that it’s hotel stays.”

Dhanani said the break from traveling during the pandemic made him appreciate the influence travel has on team

dynamics on and off the pitch. “You see the difference in terms of a season with travel or without travel,” Dhanani said. “Especially during COVID, when we couldn’t travel, we could see the clear difference when we traveled this season for soccer.”

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Daniel Gooch (’25) participated in varsity track and field and rugby, and went on the

varsity rugby trip to Paris Feb. 10-11.

Gooch said, in addition to team bonding, trips serve as motivation to improve.

“Another thing that the trip does is it sort of gives you an end goal to sort of strive for so it’s a reason to go and practice, and well it’s a reason to put in more effort,” Gooch said.

Gooch said international away games have a more exciting feel than games closer to home.

“Going on a trip like that, it’s fun, you want to win,” Gooch said. “You’re actually taking time out of your day to get somewhere so you’re gonna have more intention to make it worth it.”

While athletes who go on trips tend to have positive experiences, for larger teams, many players often get cut from going on trips due to limited space.

Last spring, Gooch was selected to represent the school for the 2022 track and field ISST, but had to give up his spot last minute due to an injury. Further, he was not able to go on the first rugby trip of this winter season due to a scheduling conflict.

“It was a little bit disappointing because I saw everyone else was having a good time,” Gooch said. “But ... I knew there’s going to be lots of other opportunities to go soon.”

In general, Gooch said getting cut from a trip could impact athletes by causing them to lose motivation.

Lama, as a three-season athlete who has been on several sports trips, said an additional benefit to traveling abroad is the opportunity it provides to “experience a different court and also a different team,” which brings a fresh face to the game experience.

“Playing against these different teams like, it’s very interesting to see how they play, especially in like a different country,” Lama said. “You don’t know what you’re expecting.”

Lama said competing internationally also fosters relationships between schools from different countries. Lama said she has gotten to know players from ISST-member schools during weekend travel exchanges, and teammates cross her sports that have done the same.

“When you’re on these like away games, you also bond with them and you develop new connections and new friendships,” Lama said.

The overnight travel program has expanded this year, which is the first full year of sports seasons unaffected by COVID-19. Farmer said JV teams travelled “infrequently” before the pandemic, but now they are traveling almost as much as varsity teams, often accompanying varsity teams in all trips aside from ISSTs. The JV teams are set to travel even more starting next year, though, as Farmer said JV teams will compete in their own ISSTs starting this fall.

Farmer said a large part of

the significance for JV teams traveling is to have access to more competition, because often times there is not a wide selection of JV teams to play in London. The school’s JV teams frequently have to play other schools’ varsity teams, which Farmer said is not ideal because he wants for the school’s JV teams to play other JV teams.

Farmer said bringing JV on trips is also advantageous for the host school, as the schools that receive ASL often rely on teams visiting over the weekend for their competition.

“We become a less attractive option for them from a scheduling standpoint if we’re not including JV as well,” Farmer said.

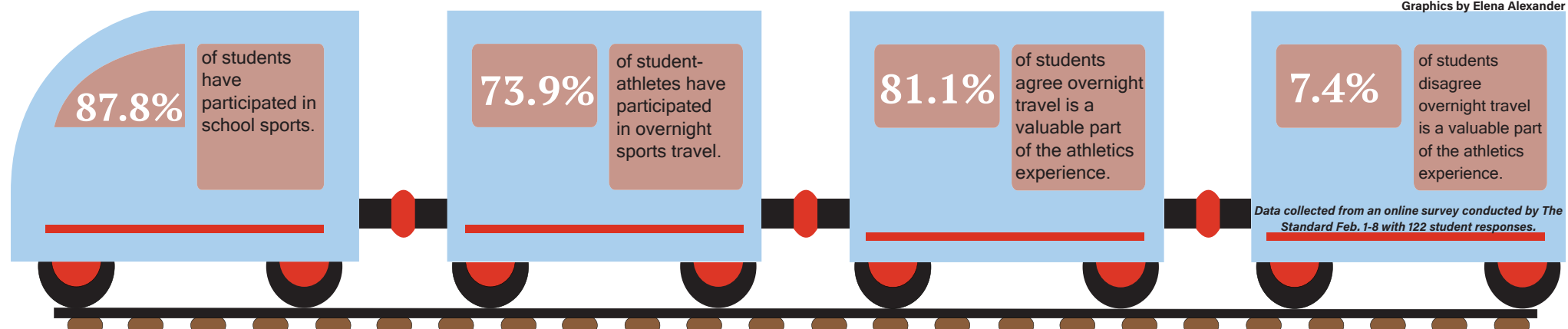
Hejazi-Tehrani said she supports the change to include JV teams in more trips, as having not traveled for her Grade 9 JV volleyball and softball seasons, she noticed traveling made a difference for this year’s JV volleyball team.

“Getting to travel has just helped us all become even closer together, which was I think, a big difference compared to last year,” Hejazi-Tehrani said.

In reflection, Farmer said travel is a valuable part of the sports program.

“I always hear great feedback from the kids and the coaches about how much they love to do that and parents who travel and get to watch that and the kind of camaraderie,” Farmer said. “It makes it seemingly worth it every time we go.”

Graphics by Elena Alexander



## Athletes, coach share favorite sports travel memories



The 2022 varsity girls softball team poses with their medals and trophy after winning first place at the ISST hosted by Frankfurt International School May 22-24 2022. The team won against FIS in the final. Photo courtesy of Dolma Lama

### Varsity Girls Softball ISST win May 2022

“During our ISSTs, we didn’t expect it but we were having a very tight [final] game and at the last inning we were like both at the same point. So we didn’t know who would win and when we did get the win it was very sweet. And then later on, we celebrated in our bus, we were singing all together, we were like, having McDonald’s together, so it was very sweet and I really enjoyed that moment.”

- Dolma Lama (’23)



The 2017 varsity girls soccer team poses after winning the ISST hosted by the American School of the Hague November 2017. Head Coach Pranay Dhanani said the team had encountered difficulty during the season but finished out strong. Photo courtesy of Pranay Dhanani

### Varsity Girls Soccer ISST win November 2017

“[My] first season as head coach of varsity girls, after a turbulent season, we managed to win the ISST’s. That’s a massive highlight in the sense that the group and the team became a unit over the course of the two to three day trip.”

- Head Varsity Girls Soccer Coach Pranay Dhanani

### JV volleyball 2-1 win vs Frankfurt International School Sept. 17

“It was a good game because at first we were losing and then we caught up and just like the final points were just memorable for all of us. It was just so fun for all of us.”

- Saba Hejazi-Tehrani (’25)



The JV girls volleyball team huddle together on the court of the International School of Brussels Oct. 14 2022. JV Volleyball went on two trips this year, one to Paris and the other to Brussels. Photo courtesy of Saba Hejazi-Tehrani