

## 'Ain't no gravity' for this Green Wave pole vaulter

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Don't let Merritt Van Meter's cascading blonde hair fool you. The New Orleans-area native wore white to her debutante ball in January, but this anti-gravity machine is no delicate lady.



A third-generation Green Wave student-athlete, Merritt Van Meter shows her pole-vaulting form. She is a majoring in public health and recently was named to the Conference USA Commissioner's Honor Roll. (Photo by Larry Miller)

The redshirt sophomore on the Tulane [track and field team](#) has come back from three knee operations and 10 knee drains to set multiple school records in pole vault in a dream season this year. Her latest, a mark of 4.11 meters (13 ft., 5 in.), was set at the outdoor Sun Angel Classic in Tempe, Ariz., on April 5.

She currently ranks seventh in the East region and 30th in the NCAA. To qualify for the national championship in June, she must place within the top 12 at the NCAA East Preliminary Championship in May.

[Van Meter](#) is no stranger to success. The Metairie, La., native was the nation's top-ranked pole vaulter while competing for Metairie Park Country Day School. But an aggressive case of seronegative arthritis in her knees derailed her first year at the

University of North Carolina, and took her out of competition completely when she transferred to Tulane last year.

After two years of injuries and daily physical therapy sessions, Van Meter was shocked when she set a personal record of 4.23 meters (13 ft., 10 in.) during the indoor season with only three months of training under her belt.

"Where I am now, I never complain about my knees hurting," she says. "One of the biggest things I've learned is you have to take things day by day."

Van Meter is third in a line of standout Green Wave athletes. Her grandfather, Cliff Van Meter, took a bus from Mulgee, Okla., to New Orleans in 1946 for a Tulane football scholarship. The full-blood Cherokee was later drafted by the San Francisco 49ers. His son, the late Cliff Jr., also played on the Green Wave gridiron.

"Both of them just seemed larger than life," Van Meter says. "I'm extremely humbled and proud to be a part of it."

*Johanna Gretschel received a bachelor's degree with an English major from Tulane in 2012, and she is in the master's degree program.*