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As a member of the UW Marching Band, Port High graduate Sarah Wiskow will be part of the New Year's Day excitement in Pasadena for a third time

Sarah Wiskow admits she's spoiled.

In her third year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the 2010 Port Washington High School graduate will make her third trip to Pasadena, Calif., next week to see the Badgers play in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day.

But Wiskow is more than just a spectator. As a member of the UW Marching Band, she will be part of the Rose Bowl spectacle yet again.

"I have to admit I am pretty lucky," said Wiskow, who has played trumpet in the marching band since her freshman year. She has never known the Badgers not to earn a Rose Bowl invite.

"Three trips in a row to the Rose Bowl is amazing."

Wiskow is home in Port to celebrate Christmas with her parents, Gerald and Kathryn, but her holiday respite will be short.

On Friday, Dec. 28, she will return to Madison for band practice. At 5 a.m. the next day, she and the band will fly to Pasadena.

A Rose Bowl veteran at age 21, Wiskow knows what to expect.

“It’s an amazing experience, but it’s also pretty exhausting,” she said.

Shortly after touching down in California, the band will start performing at a series of pep rallies for UW fans that have come from near and far to see their beloved Badgers play.

The band also makes an appearance at Disneyland.

“It’s really amazing to see all the Badger fans in California every year,” Wiskow said. “They’re everywhere. Sometimes it seems like it’s all Badger fans, but since we’re playing Stanford this year, it may be a little different.

Stanford University, located just outside Palo Alto, Calif., is about 350 miles north of Pasadena. The university is reporting that it has sold 39,000 tickets to Cardinal fans and will set a school bowl game attendance record at the Rose Bowl.

One of the people Wiskow hopes to see in Pasadena is her brother Michael, who works for the University of Southern California.

“I usually catch a glimpse of him, but we’re so busy I don’t really get a chance to talk much to him,” she said.

Wiskow will start the new year early by marching in the Tournament of Roses Parade, which by parade standards is a marathon, she said.

“I’m not exactly sure how long it is, but it’s a lot longer than the Fish Day parade,” Wiskow said, referring to her hometown’s longest parade, which she has marched in several times.

“If I remember correctly, (the Tournament of Rose Parade) takes about 2-1/2 hours. That’s a lot of marching, but it’s so fun seeing all the people along the route that it doesn’t seem that long.”

Then it’s off to Rose Bowl Stadium, where the marching band will perform on the field before the game and during halftime.

Wiskow isn’t sure if the band will be allowed on the field after the game to perform its famous Fifth Quarter, but that won’t stop members from playing from their seats if necessary, she said.

“We love the Fifth Quarter,” she said. “I think it’s more fun for the band members than the fans.”

There’s a lot of fun to be had at the Rose Bowl, but that’s not to say there isn’t a lot of pressure on members of one of the most respected college marching bands, which will be performing live for more than 100,000 people and
a TV viewing audience of millions more.

“We prepare for this all year long,” Wiskow said. “We always have to bring our best. We

always have to be the band people come to see."

That means a lot of work for band members, who go through a rigorous tryout process.

The band practices two hours a day, four days a week during the school year, and, like the football team, it reviews videotape of its performances.

"Believe me, our director notices every misstep," Wiskow said. "There's some speculation that the band practices just as hard as the football team."

In addition to learning the music, band members have to perfect complicated routines that require its roughly 300 members to march in perfect step, said Wiskow, who noted she is one of 100 trumpet players in the band.

"Some of our performances are nearly 11 minutes long," she said. "It's definitely an awesome workout."

The marching band experience was nothing new for Wiskow, who learned to play the trumpet in fifth grade and marched in the Thomas Jefferson Middle School band before joining the Port Washington High School band.

Her decision to attend UW-Madison gave her the opportunity to continue marching and follow in the footsteps of her brother Robert, who marched in college as a member of Northwestern University's band.

Although it's not always easy balancing academics, the rigors of the marching band and a part-time job, Wiskow said, she wouldn't trade the experiences she's had on the field for anything. But if she had a wish, it would be for
one thing she hasn't experienced during her fortuitous tenure in the band — a Badgers Rose Bowl victory.

"It would be great to win, but in the end it's just great being part of a group that is so well known and respected," she said.

SINCE HER DAYS of playing with the Port Washington High School marching band on the football field, where she posed last week, Sarah Wiskow has gone on to play with the University of Wisconsin March Band and will travel to Pasadena, Calif., next week to perform during the Rose Bowl for a third time. Photo by Bill Schanen IV