

I'll admit it freely, I was never very athletic. Some of us can play, others well... I was one of the others. I was a soccer and basketball player as a middle-school student in the Future Owasso Rams program in Oklahoma. In soccer I was named the goalie, not because I had the fastest reflexes, but mostly because the coach didn't want to watch me try to run up and down the field. He said it made him sad to watch. In basketball I think I fouled out of nearly every game I played. "Elbows Inbody," the coach called me. And they weren't smart fouls either, just overly aggressive. I remember the coach telling me, "If basketball had a linebacker position you would be a natural at the game." Sadly, there is no such position in basketball. I think I scored four points in one season, my highest. It was an easy decision for me to stop playing sports and focus on my true passion at 12 years old, watching TV.

At NCCC we do have quite a few students that are naturals at their sports and quite a few programs that have been very successful both on and off the field of play. I have been very proud of the many accomplishments, both team and individual, that the Panthers have won this year.

Men's Soccer won the Conference Championship this year, the first championship since 2006! They had a record of 14-4-1 and went 8-1 in the conference, First Conference Championship since 2006. Nelson Landaverde was a three-time Conference Player of the Week, and Ryan Davis was a two-time Conference Goalie of the Week and a first team NJCAA Goalie of the Week! Steven Harrison was named the Jayhawk Conference Coach of the Year.

Softball was our most improved team of the year with a record of 27-22, had a 10 game winning streak, and was just one win away from the NJCAA Region VI Championship. It was quite a turnaround for the team!

Panther Baseball recorded yet another 40+ win season going 42-16 this year, the 8th 40+ win season in Steve Murry's career. We were in the national polls again this year rising to 12th in the country at one point and we finished 3rd in the Jayhawk Conference. Jonah Bride set a school record with 96 hits and 166 total bases. Coach Murry achieved another phenomenal milestone this season, recording his 900th career win!

In Wrestling the team placed 3rd at the Kansas Cup, 3rd at the West/Central District Championship, and 8th at the NJCAA National Championship. Two of our wrestlers were District Champions, Dillon Archer and Richard Black. We had nine qualify for Nationals this year and of those, four placed – Richard Black 2nd, Dillon Archer 3rd, Austin Hood 6th, and Ryne Cokeley 8th. Panther Wrestling has ranked in the top 20 for 20 consecutive polls dating back to February of 2010. Two of our former Panthers did well this year too. Some may remember Tim Prescott who transferred to St. Cloud State. He won the NCAA Division II National Championship this year! Mat Oliver was named the head coach for Spartanburg Methodist College. Congratulations to both of these Panthers!

Men's Basketball had a great season, going 18-12 this year. Standout player Joseph Acuil received many honors including 1st Team All-Conference, 1st Team All-Region, and Jayhawk East Defensive Player of the Year. Joe signed with Baylor University and it will be exciting to see him perform on a national stage!

But he wasn't the only Panther with individual success. B.J. Jenkins won 1st Team All-Conference, and 2nd Team All Region honors. He signed with an NCAA Division I school in Detroit. Brett Frantz won Honorable Mention All-Conference and signed with DI Youngstown State.

Many of our other teams posted success as well. Women's Soccer had its fifth season at or above .500 in the last six years. Haylie Kinzey was twice named the KJCCC Player of the Week leading the conference in goals scored (21) and was second in assists (10).

Track and Field saw four students do very well at Nationals. Christopher Allen was 3rd Outdoor Nationals-Javelin and earned NJCAA All-American, Dymond White was 6th Outdoor Nationals-Hammer Throw, Kyle Washington-Scott placed 7th Outdoor Nationals-Hammer, and Dominique White won 8th Outdoor Nationals-Shot.

Women's Basketball (11-20) had back to back double digit wins for the first time since 2009. 100% of sophomores moved on to 4-year schools. While Volleyball (16-20) placed 7th in the conference and three Panthers won individual honors. Jill Starling was 2nd Team All-Conference and 1st Team All-District, Annelle Anderson received Honorable Mention All-Conference and 2nd Team All-District, and Peyton Peavey won Honorable Mention All-Conference.

Those successes were the ones that made the sports page and I am so very proud of what our student-athletes accomplished. But it is in the classroom, where accomplishment doesn't often make headlines, where I am most proud.

This year NCCC Athletics set a college record with 17 NJCAA Student Academic Awards with cumulative GPAs of 3.6 or higher! Our previous record was 11 – this group shattered it! 52% of our Student Athletes scored a 3.0 or better this spring with 28 students with a 4.0 GPA.

We had an impressive 57 Jayhawk Conference All-Academic (3.0 or better in season) Awards this year, 22 in the fall and 35 in the spring/winter. In fact our cumulative Athletic GPA was 2.897, the highest in college history since we have been keeping that statistic. Baseball was the highest men's team GPA with a 3.32, but the Volleyball team edged them out this year with a 3.34 GPA. Six of the teams had over a 3.0 GPA this year. Way to go!

And the good news doesn't stop there. In 2014-2015 NCCC Student Athletes accumulated over 2,400 hours of community service! They volunteered at many events in the community, helping serve meals, cleaning up after events, and assisting charities. Here the top teams were Baseball, with 626 hours of community service, and Women's Basketball with 510.5 hours. These two teams had almost half of the total hours generated! Thanks to all of the teams for their commitment to the community, but especially to Coaches Murry and Davis and their teams for their extraordinary support of our area!

Thank you to all of the coaches and players for all the incredible success this year. A special thanks goes to all of the faculty and support staff who helped these players be successful in the classroom and beyond. I also want to thank all of the fans of the programs who turned out game after game to lift the

spirits of the players to show your support. I can tell you it means so much to our Panthers to see and hear you cheer them on.

NCCC Student Athletes may not always win the game, but what they are always winning is a sense of accomplishment and self-worth, a strong curriculum of life lessons, and, of course, a college education. Maybe that's a bit better than watching TV.

If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at binbody@neosho.edu.