

Successful athletics sure can bring people together! Every year I devote one of these monthly articles to the on and off the field successes of our athletic department. In the year since I wrote the last article, so much has happened around us with athletic success. The image that comes to my mind is a picture of the thousands of people who came to downtown Kansas City for the celebration of the Royals winning the World Series. It was a HUGE event where businesses and colleges shut down so that employees and students could join the excitement of the moment. It brought everyone together to celebrate that success.

Yes, athletics is a very popular form of entertainment earning \$60.4 billion in 2014 in North America according to Forbes. My beloved film industry only made \$38 billion total in 2014, just to give you some perspective, and that's worldwide.

Athletics is a hobby for many people, beyond just watching the games. They follow teams, study opponents, read sports magazines, watch sports news programs, form fantasy leagues and on and on. It is a big part of their lives in terms of time spent and money too. Studies show that the average fan watches more than 8 hours of sports a week on TV but less than a half an hour a week playing a sport themselves (that might explain part of the heart disease statistics in the country too).

Local papers often have an education page about every month, which is great, but they have a sports page every day. What does that tell you? It's what people are interested in reading. Bottom line - Athletics is a big deal in the United States.

For NCCC Athletics is a wonderful way to bring students, alumni and members of the community together. Yes it is a popular form of entertainment, but here it means so much more!

It provides access to college for many students who may not have come to college at all if not for the opportunity to play their sport. The scholarships provided often are very much needed to help students pay for college. And the grade eligibility requirements keep them motivated in class to perform so that they can play on game day.

All coaches at NCCC have three areas where their students are expected to perform – in this order – academically, socially, and competitively. And WOW did we ever perform this year in all three areas!

Our combined GPA for the teams was one of the highest in college history. In fact, five teams had over a 3.0 GPA last year. 42 of our student-athletes were named to the Jayhawk Conference All-Academic Team with 21 of those earning that honor by the NJCAA. More than half of the student-athletes had over a 3.0 GPA with eight 4.0 students.

Socially the Panthers were out in force in the community with over 4,000 hours of community service, a school record. Six teams put in more than 400 hours each with Baseball and Volleyball leading the way. We volunteered at Cherry Street Youth Center, Heritage Health Care, Chanute Historical Society, Children's Mercy Hospital, Erie Chamber of Commerce, American Red Cross, and on and on. Head Baseball Coach Steve Murry received the Community Investment Award from the Chanute Chamber of Commerce. We hosted many special games in basketball and baseball for awareness for such causes as

autism and fighting cancer. Our teams were part of many public events both big and small, helping where we could.

Why does NCCC make volunteering a priority for our student-athletes? Because we appreciate all this area does to support us, so we need to give back. And we want our student-athletes to be more than just college graduates. We want them to be good responsible citizens of the world as well. That behavior of lending a hand is not automatic - it must be taught.

On the field we had a wonderful, exciting year! A total of 36 student-athletes earned All-Conference honors while 14 were named All-Region in 2015-2016. While all of our teams can boast of some successes, two of our teams did some extraordinary work this year!

In baseball, for the first time since 2006, the Panthers claimed the Jayhawk Conference title and finished with a 51-11 record. Brylie Ware put up one of the greatest offensive seasons in school history after finishing the regular season leading the NJCAA with a .589 batting average, 122 runs batted in and 29 homeruns. Ware's final numbers were even more impressive as he set school records for batting average (.560), hits (122), RBI (125), doubles (29), homeruns (29), runs (123), hit by pitch (29), slugging percentage (1.128), and on base percentage (.660). Ware was named the KJCCC and Region VI Player of the Year and headlined 11 All-Conference selections and five All-Region honorees. He and catcher Ryan Toliver were named NJCAA First Team All Americans, a very rare thing for two All-Americans to come from the same college. Not all of the awards for the NJCAA have been announced yet for baseball – there may be more to come!

After guiding the Panthers to a school record 51 wins and the program's first ever No. 1 NJCAA ranking, Steve Murry was named the Jayhawk East Coach of the Year.

In Men's Basketball Neosho finished the regular season a game short of claiming a conference championship but responded with a perfect run through the Region VI playoffs to earn their first trip to the NJCAA National Tournament. The Panthers ended the season with a school record 30 wins with only 6 losses and reached No. 16 in the NJCAA Poll. Freddie McSwain was named the Region Tournament MVP and Marc Moon and Richard Granberry were named to the All-Tournament team. McSwain and Granberry were also both named first team All-Conference and All-Region.

I am very proud of everything our coaches, Athletic Director Mike Saddler, and, of course, our student-athletes have accomplished in 2015-2016. Thank you to the community that has supported our programs by watching the games, buying a t-shirt, and rooting us on! You have come together around our teams and I could not be more grateful for it. 2016-2017 season starts soon! Go Panthers!

If you have any comments or questions about this column, or anything else about the College, please email me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).