

I used to work at a college in Michigan which had a wonderful academic reputation and a phenomenal commitment to the arts. It was, and still is, a great college in many ways, but it just didn't have the "spirit" that you see at other institutions. Nothing really brought the place together, gave the community something to support, and gave the college an endearing image. Why? It had no athletic teams. At one time they were the "Roadrunners" with a symbol that the college community and the community at large, could get behind. But that ended and now they are a commuter campus educating students. In some important ways they lost a big part of their identity and their enthusiasm.

Having worked there and at colleges with athletics I can tell you in my experience nothing unites a college community like athletics! We are the Panthers. Students like to be part of that, even if they are not on the team or even come to a game. We actually sell more "Panther" clothes at our Ottawa Campus, where there are no sporting events, than we do in Chanute. It is important to our identity and to our students to be a Panther.

One can argue that as athletics goes, so goes the reputation of the college. I'll bet your impression of many colleges and universities across the country comes almost entirely from their athletic success. When an institution does well in athletics, such as PSU winning the National Championship in football last year or WSU's Final Four appearance, the enrollment spikes, donations rise, and general feelings about the college or university increases. Americans like winners (unless you're a Cubs fan, then you just have to love them. 1908 was a long time ago.) Like it or not, athletics can be an effective way to promote a college and impact all other aspects of the institution.

And with that in mind let me tell you (with help from our Sports Information Director, Mike Saddler) what a great year 2012-2013 was for the NCCC Panthers! By the way, I was going to write this "athletic year in review" article last month in May, but I couldn't because we were still playing in two national tournaments. That's a pretty good reason to miss a deadline.

NCCC had 20 All-Americans this year, 3 national players of the week, and appearance in 5 national tournaments that resulted in 3 national championships!

The fall season began with Asya Herron and the volleyball team recording their fourth 20 win season in her 5 years as head coach. She is only 9 wins shy of 100 in her head coaching career. The Panthers also saw two of their players earn All-KJCCC (The Kansas Jawhawk Conference of community colleges) honors including Yuleika Jimenez who also earned All-Region honors in addition to being named NJCAA Player of the Week.

The men's soccer member Logan Vestring was named All-KJCCC and also earned NJCAA Player of the Week honors during the season. The women's soccer team finished the year 10-7-1 including one win over a nationally ranked team. They finished 6th in the region to qualify for postseason play. After the season Kourtney Clark was named the new women's head coach.

The fall season was brought to a close with the NJCAA Cross Country National Championship in Rend Lake, IL. Freshman Joe Iman represented the Panthers at Nationals after finishing 10th in the Region VI meet. Joe also finished 3rd in the KJCCC meet.

The winter season at Neosho County was highlighted by Le’Roy Barnes who brought home a national championship in wrestling for the 2nd season in a row for the Panthers. Barnes led the way for the Panthers who placed 13th out of the 40 teams at the national championship. Barnes and freshman Tim Prescott both earned All-American honors.

The track and field team indoor season wrapped up at the NJCAA National Championship at Texas Tech University. Sharae Bates and Michael Kinuthia led the women’s and men’s teams respectively as they each earned All-American honors in two events. As a whole the Panthers brought home 7 All-Americans from the national meet.

The basketball season at Neosho County started with a lot of hope as both the men and women got off to hot starts. The women would go on to finish 10-21 on the season and 5th in the region.

The men’s team also got off to a hot start but saw their luck change as they finished the year 12-19. The Panthers were an extremely young team that had chances to win almost every game of the year only to see many leads slip away late. Despite their struggles the Panthers saw two of their players selected to the All-KJCCC team. Jamie Batish and Jake Stoppel each earned All-Conference honors while Stoppel was also named to the All-Region team. The Panthers Joe Acuil was also chosen to represent the Panthers on a much larger stage. The Australian import was selected as one of 17 to compete for a spot on the Australian Under 19 National Team.

The softball team got to spend the 2013 season in their brand new complex. The new field includes dugouts, press box, locker rooms, restrooms, and concession stand. The facility is one of the finest in the entire conference.

The track team built off the momentum they created at indoor nationals and improved in the outdoor season. The Region VI Championship saw four different Panthers claim four regional championships. Sharea Bates once again led the Panthers as she claimed a pair of championships. At the NJCAA National Championship the Panthers would bring home 11 All-Americans. The men’s and women’s teams each finished in the top 10 nationally in the team standings with the men finishing 8th and the women finishing 9th. Leah Bannister won the National Championship in the Women’s Discus, and John Ampomah won the National Championship in the Men’s Javelin! The track season overall was one for the record books as they totaled 18 All-Americans and broke 30 school records.

The baseball team looked to be in a rebuilding year after they lost nearly every member of the 2012 team that set a school record for wins while placing 6th at the JUCO World Series. Despite a 5th place finish in the Jayhawk East, the Panthers put together an impressive post season run including a season best 5 game win streak to secure their second straight trip to the JUCO World Series. It marks the first time in school history the Panthers have advanced to Grand Junction in back to back years. Steve Murry also notched his 800th career win early in the season. He currently owns a career record of 833-570. The Panthers also had five players named to the All-KJCCC team and one named to the All-Region team. Freshman baseball player Connor Goedert was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates in the MLB Draft. That’s two years in a row that we have had someone drafted. There are currently 5 former Panthers playing in various minor league

organizations now.

Academically, our athletes ended the year with 6 Academic All-Americans and 23 Panthers named to the Jayhawk Conference spring All-Academic team!

The NATYCAA (National Alliance of Two Year Collegiate Athletic Administrators) released the final standings for the NATYCAA Cup. Points are awarded in that competition to colleges for their finish at national competitions. It's a way to judge just how well your college athletic teams fared as a whole against other colleges' teams in the same category. How did we do? NCCC finished 21 out of 396 schools in the scholarship division. Not bad at all!

We are gearing up for the 2013-2014 Panther Athletics with some new coaches, lots of new players and an incredible amount of excitement! Schedules will be out soon, so come by and join us for another great year!

I am so proud of who we are. We are the Panthers! And I hope you consider yourself one too!

If you have any comments or questions for me, please feel free to contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.