

How do you define a “win” in college athletics? Is anything short of a national championship a failure of a year? I know that’s how a lot of sports fans and athletes themselves feel. One of the clichés often used about winning from Dale Earnhardt is, “Second place is just the first place loser.”

Second place can be quite disheartening. I’m reminded of a study conducted on the reactions of medalists at the Olympics. The gold winner was often euphoric, as you can imagine. And the bronze winner, while not as happy as the gold medalist, was quite thrilled to be on the stand. The third place winners were happy to be recognized and to earn a medal at all.

According to the study the one who was the most dissatisfied with the award – the silver medalist. To get so close to gold and to come up short is just overwhelming. Silver winners often forget that they defeated hundreds to get to the Olympics in the first place, not to mention beating all the best in the world – save one person. Who can forget McKayla Maroney’s facial expression at the London Olympics in 2012 during the medal ceremony? Her twisted mouth said it all. All that work to come up second.

At NCCC, a win in athletics is not just about on the court/field success, although we have had that. It’s also about academic achievement as well as community support. We believe that is not the destination but the journey that makes a student/athlete a better, well-rounded person.

And once again NCCC Panther Athletics has had a wonderful year of success! For the first time since we have been keeping this metric the 270+ Panther student-athletes combined for a 3.01 cumulative grade point average, our highest ever! We have been flirting with being above a “B” average for a few years and this year we made it!

All of our internal studies show that student-athletes generally have a higher GPA, complete classes, and graduate at a higher rate than the general students do. That’s pretty impressive when you know how many hours a day student-athletes spend in practice, games, and physical training. NCCC’s coaches put emphasis on academic achievement and it shows.

This year 59 NCCC student-athletes were named to the Kansas Jayhawk Conference All-Academic Team and 38 of those students made the NJCAA National All-Academic Team!

Some of our individual teams were recognized for academic achievement. Our Women’s Basketball Team was first in the Kansas Jayhawk Conference for team GPA and 12th in the nation! NCCC Volleyball was third in the state and 13th in the nation!

We also want our student-athletes to understand the importance of giving back to the community, that if you want to live in a great community you have to do your part to make it that way. Our service area gives NCCC a great deal of support and our athletic department appreciates that. That’s why we charge each student with completing hours of community service.

Panthers have helped many organizations such as the Erie and Chanute Chambers of Commerce, the Cherry Street Youth Center, Chanute Recreation Commission, City of Thayer, USD 413, Salvation Army, Bit & Spur Saddle Club, Diversicare, and on and on. We have hosted special event games in basketball and baseball for such causes as Autism Hope for Families and Relay for Life.

The athletic department as a whole hosted the KVC Christmas Party for local foster children, which was a wonderful event. There I helped out a little and called in a favor. Santa was able to come for a few hours to greet the kids. As you may know, Santa often hangs out at my house at Christmas time. If you

have been by my house at night during the season, you know what I'm talking about. He was happy to do it, especially after eating all of my cookies night after night.

All told the athletic department puts in 4,427 hours of community service for the year. That's over 16 hours per student-athlete. Women's basketball led the way in this metric. The team averaged 36.8 hours of service per player, over double the student-athlete average!

But, of course, we care about athletic success too.

NCCC plays in the KJCCC, better known as the Jayhawk Conference (sorry K-State fans, I didn't name it) and Region VI of the NJCAA. Our conference is one of, if not THE, best in the nation. This year the Kansas conference/region won the National Championship in football, DI men's basketball, and DI softball (two years in a row there) and third at the College World Series. It is HIGHLY competitive, so to do well in our conference is saying something.

Despite this competition, or maybe because of it, on the court/field the Panthers performed very well. We did have a 2017 National Champion in the javelin. Sophomore Sergio Wilson won both the NJCAA Region VI championship and the NJCAA National Championship! Our Cheer/Dance team made us all very proud by winning the Region VI Championship! And both our volleyball team and our baseball team made it to the Championship Game of their respective NJCAA Region VI tournaments. Men's basketball made it to Wichita again this year. That's three times in a row!

Overall our teams had marked improvement as they continue to work toward the ultimate goal of winning that last game of the season. Individually 38 student-athletes earned All-Conference honors with 11 earning All-Region or All-District awards. And two Panthers were named All-American!

We have a relatively new tradition at NCCC called the Panther Cup. Here points are award to each team based on academic and athletic performance as well as community support. The goal here is to award the team that has the NCCC Athletic Department's mission most in mind, "to successfully develop the student-athlete as a person, student, and athlete." It is highly competitive among the coaches as to who is going to win this, I promise you. This year the Panther Cup was awarded to Volleyball. I could not have been more proud of them!

With the exception of our javelin thrower, NCCC did not win any national championships. In several cases we made it to the finals only to lose. If second place is first loser I should be greatly disappointed in the athletic department, right? On the contrary, I could not be more proud of all that we won.

Our community has won through the volunteer hours the teams provided and through the excitement of attending one of their games.

Our coaches have won in helping to shape the well-rounded young men and women who will go on to be successful in life.

Most importantly, our students have won through the many athletic and academic awards and accolades they have received. And they have won in graduating from student-athletes to educated, productive citizens.

Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing – another sports cliché attributed to UCLA Bruins football coach Henry Russell "Red" Sanders. And I agree. It just comes down to what a “win” means. For a community college, it's not about trophies (or shouldn't be). It's about students.

If you have any questions or any sports clichés you want to share with me, please write me at binbody@neosho.edu.