

Another year is complete for Panther athletics and we were victorious yet again! Many of our teams set records or got further than they have in a while in playoffs, or just had an excellent year. Allow me a moment to brag on some of the wonderful things our student-athletes accomplished in this year.

Let's start with the most important area, academics, because for Neosho County Community College, it is pronounced STUDENT-athlete, with emphasis on the STUDENT. This year I am thrilled to report that we have 10 NJCAA Academic All-Americans – the most in school history! Those 10 athletes came from 8 different sports, so we were well represented across the board.

Four of our teams were nominated for NJCAA Academic Team of the Year with better than 3.0 team average! That is a college record too.

51 of our athletes were Jayhawk Conference Academic All-Conference team members. In fact, about 48% of our student-athletes had a 3.0 GPA or better – Wow!

I could not be prouder of our academic success. They worked very hard in the classroom to perform at the highest levels, but that equaled their performance on the field of play.

On the field our teams did a tremendous job this year. Five teams finished in the top 21 of their NJCAA National Championships – Wrestling 5th, Men's Outdoor Track 13th, Women's Indoor Track 16th, Women's Outdoor Track 20th, Men's Indoor Track 21st.

Volleyball made it all the way to the District Championship where they lost to the eventual national champion Cowley College. But along the way they set a school record with a 19 match win streak and had a record of 30-7. That's the most wins in more than 20 years and the fewest losses in school history. Way to go ladies!

Men's Basketball advanced to Wichita tournament for the first time since 2004-05 and achieved the second 20+ win season in Jeremy Coombs' career.

Wrestling finished 5th at NJCAA National Championship, best finish since 2nd in 2002. Wrestling has been ranked now in 17 consecutive national polls.

Baseball's No. 15 preseason ranking was the highest preseason ranking in school history. They went on to an impressive 40-19 record. This gives them their 3rd 40+ win season in 4 years and the 7th in Steve Murry's career.

Baseball, Volleyball, and Wrestling combined to be ranked in 19 of 24 (79.2%) possible polls during the 2013-14 year.

Individually the Panthers did some astounding things. We had 18 All-Americans – Women's Track-6, Men's Track-6, Wrestling-5, Baseball-1. Fantastic!

We also had 33 All-Region/All-District awards winners, 43 All-conference winners and 13 Jayhawk Conference Players of the Week.

In fact we had one baseball player, Connor Goedert win the NJCAA National Player of the Week! Connor also won the Maruici Elite Hitter Award with the highest average in this district. In fact, Connor Goedert was selected in the 15th round by the Houston Astros. That makes six former Panthers to be drafted or sign with a Major League Baseball team since 2012.

Basketball player Joseph Acuil won the Jayhawk Conference Eastern Division Defensive Player of the Year as part of this awesome season!

We also had a track National Champion. Sharae Bates bested the nation in the 60-meter high hurdles. Congratulations, Sharae! I couldn't be prouder!

A couple of our coaches were honored as well. Asya Herron won the Jayhawk Conference Eastern Division Volleyball Coach of the Year while Wayne Petterson was elected President of the National Wrestling Coaches Association.

With all of that academic and athletic success, student athletes would have little time for anything other than studying and practice, but you would be wrong. Our student-athletes combined for more than 3,000 hours of community service in this year alone. Led by the coaches, the students helped in so many ways in the schools and with community projects, giving back to the people that support them.

As you might have guessed, I have been very, very pleased with what athletics have accomplished this year. I hope you are too.

Next year will see a new scoreboard installed for the baseball team, and, thanks to another torrential rainstorm, a new gym floor complete with our new Panther emblem at center court. You'll also see a new mascot suit debuted (let's just say the old Panther head was, um, well-used as it does not breath all that well and was about 10 years old. Yeah, it was a bit stinky).

Recruiting for 2014-2015 is all but over now and a new set of student-athletes is preparing to come to NCCC. Together with the sophomores, they will continue this tradition of academic and athletic success and make us all proud to be Panthers.

If you have a question or comment about this article or anything else, please feel free to contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.