

Cook lives the dream at K-State



K-State senior, and Louisburg High School graduate, Kody Cook waves to the fans at Bill Snyder Family Stadium as he was introduced during the senior day ceremony on Dec. 5, prior to the Wildcats final home game against West Virginia.

MANHATTAN, Kan. – As Kody Cook gazed out into the sea of purple and white at Bill Snyder Family Stadium for the final time, little pieces of him still wondered if this was a dream.

You see, Kody had been planning this moment for most of his young life. Whether it was practicing in the front yard when he was little, or working hard in high school and junior college – playing football for Kansas State wasn't just a fantasy like it is for most children around the state – it was a goal.

So as he made his way down the line of seniors before the Dec. 5 home contest against West Virginia, Kody waited patiently to greet the coach he had always wanted to play for. Yes, for the last two years he has been living his dream of playing K-State football and now it was all coming to an end.

“It hasn't quite sunk in yet that it is almost over,” Kody said. “It is weird, especially with everything that has

happened to me along the way, that there are times where I still can't believe it. One thing I can say is that it is a blessing from God that I am here. I have prayed and thought about this opportunity my whole life and all I can say is that I am blessed. I couldn't have written a better end to the story."

Kody's story is one of faith. It is one of hard work, dedication and sacrificing himself for the betterment of the team.

After all that, he turned into a starting wide receiver for the school he has loved since he was a little boy, then was thrown into a little quarterback duty, back to receiver and then quarterback again.

It was a whirlwind of a final year for Kody, but he couldn't have asked for a more memorable one. It was one filled with moments he and his family will treasure for the rest of their lives.

The story isn't quite over yet, but Kody has made sure his chapter in Manhattan has a happy ending.

FANTASY FOOTBALL

As a young father, Jim Cook loved watching Kansas State football with his son Kody. Their passion for Wildcat football was one of a kind.

So as the game would be about ready kickoff on the television, Kody would sit next to his dad in utter excitement. However, like with every game, the excitement became too much for Kody.

"I don't think he ever watched a football game from start to finish," Jim said. "About midway through the first quarter, he would get so excited about the game that he would gear up and go out in the yard and start playing. He would come in and

check the score, and if they were ahead, he would watch a little then go back out and play. If they were losing then he would just go right back outside because he hated to see them lose. He hated to lose.”



Little Kody Cook would dress up in full gear to play

outside in the front yard as a Kansas State football player. Photo courtesy of the Cook family

That gear featured a purple K-State jersey and a vintage gray helmet with 'Cats' written on the sides. It was all business for Kody.

As he walked out into the front yard, Kody gathered himself into the imaginary huddle for the play, broke the huddle and took the imaginary snap from center. He dropped back to pass, read the defense, threw it and then ran under the ball to score the touchdown.

"He would even do the crowd noise," Jim said.

Why stop there?

"He was everything," his mother Anita said. "He was the crowd and even pretended he was in the band – everything."

As much fun as being in the crowd and band were, Kody's dream was to be on the field in Manhattan and play for his favorite coach – Bill Snyder.

Those dreams took a hit in 2005 when Snyder announced his retirement from coaching. As a 13-year old die-hard Wildcat fan, he was crushed.

"I took Kody to a book signing after coach Snyder retired the first time and he was a little less excited than I thought he would be," Jim said "When we left I asked what was wrong and he told me now that he would never be able to play for coach Snyder."

It was disheartening for Kody, but a coaching change didn't stop him playing in those pretend games in the front yard. It didn't stop him from throwing touchdowns, or catching them.

Nope, his true love was for the game of football and that continued as he got older.

HIGH SCHOOL CHAMPION

The pressure was always on Kody from the day he stepped into the halls of Louisburg High School.

Considered one of the school's next best athletes, Kody had a lot to live up to and he certainly did his part to meet those expectations.

As a sophomore, he was named the starting quarterback on the varsity football team and guided the Wildcats to the playoffs that season. Later in the year, Kody was Louisburg's top starting pitcher on the Wildcat baseball team.

He pitched a complete game in the regional championship game and helped the program reach the state tournament for just the second time in school history.

His junior season wasn't quite as memorable as he tore his ACL before the start of football season and was out of sports for an entire year.

Kody more than made up for it his senior year, as he, and the rest of his Wildcat teammates put themselves in the school history books. Kody led Louisburg to the school's first football state championship in 2010 as the Wildcats defeated Holton 24-16.

It was Kody who threw two touchdown passes in the game and also had an interception return for a touchdown to seal the undefeated season. For a player who was responsible for all three touchdowns in the school's biggest game ever, Kody didn't let his excitement get in the way of the game

"I always told him no showboating," Jim said. "I always told him no showboating until you win the state championship. If he was high-stepping in the front yard all by himself in his imaginary game, I would go out and scold him."

It was the perfect end to his high school career and now he was ready for that next step – college football.

He had opportunities to go play smaller Division I football out of high school, but Kody wanted to make himself better to have that opportunity to keep his dream alive.

A BOWL MIRACLE

Kody was offered a scholarship on the Hutchinson Community College football team and got the opportunity to earn a shot at playing the position he loves – quarterback.

He quickly found out college football is a lot different than high school. Kody was no longer one of the best athletes in school and the Hutch coaches scoured the country to find their next quarterback.

The competition was fierce and Kody soon realized that his shot to see the field wasn't going to be as a signal caller. Frustrated, he called home to his parents Jim and Anita, in hopes of getting a little advice.

He got it.

“There were times at Hutch when I thought I was getting worked over a little bit because I wasn't from a certain school or because I was from a small town and I didn't feel like they gave me a chance to do what I wanted to do,” Kody said. “So I would call home for support and they (his parents) were always there. Whenever I doubted myself or when I think I couldn't do something, they always told me I could do it.”

Kody cared more about seeing the field than playing the quarterback spot. So he told his coaches he was willing to do anything to see the field.

As a freshman, Kody served as one of the team's long snappers

before eventually getting moved to wide receiver. It would be his permanent spot at Hutch, and although he saw some playing time, he didn't get a lot of balls thrown his way.

Even then, Kody knew he was destined for greater things – maybe he was a little psychic.

Jim took his son into a Hutchinson sporting goods store to buy receivers' gloves before the start of his sophomore season.

"I was frustrated that I had to buy them because they supplied him gloves, but they weren't good enough for him and he needed another kind," Jim said as he shook his head.

So as they walked up to the counter to pay, Kody saw a stack of K-State football schedules. With his grandmother by his side, he tapped on the stack of schedules and made a bold prediction.

"Grandma, I am going to play there one day," Kody said.

Jim, on the other hand, turned around with a puzzled look on his face.

"At the time, I was thinking in my mind, 'Yeah I hope so, but I am not seeing it,'" Jim said. "At the time he wasn't gathering many stats. He was doing his job, but didn't have a lot of results. If you want to play college ball you have to have the stats for colleges to look at you and he had none of them."

Those stats would come – and at the most crucial time.

Hutchinson qualified for the Salt City Bowl and faced off with Iowa Central, but the Blue Dragons were faced with some adversity early as starting quarterback Luke Barnes had to leave in the first half with a hand injury.

Instead of going to their backup quarterback, coach Rion Rhodes decided on a gut feeling to go with Kody. He had not

taken any snaps at practice and hadn't thrown a ball in several games.

It didn't seem to matter.

Kody led the Blue Dragons to a win as he passed for 272 yards and had five touchdown passes to go along with another rushing score. Cook was named the Salt City Bowl MVP and broke four bowl records and tied another.

It was like he had never stopped playing quarterback.

"After it was over his mom and I just sat there and bawled," Jim said. "He just came out and played like he had been doing it all year. We were just so happy for him."

That one game opened several doors for Kody, including one he had been waiting for his entire life.

LIVING THE DREAM

As he was thinking what to do after Hutch, the offer to walk-on at Kansas State presented itself to Kody and he really didn't take a lot of time to think about it.

He accepted the offer and actually began to work out with the quarterbacks when he first arrived there. It didn't last long as soon-to-be quarterback Jake Waters stepped on campus as he would go on to have a good career with the Wildcats for the next two years.



Kody Cook was thrust into several different roles for the K-State football team this year.

Kody would go on to redshirt his first season as the coaches tried to find a spot for him on the field. He spent a brief time with the running backs before they finally moved him over to receiver.

“I have been a huge K-State fan since I was a kid, so to be able to come here and play is obviously a dream come true,” Kody said. “I am just willing to do whatever for the team. If I can help them at receiver, I am going to do that.”

It didn’t take long for Kody to make a name for himself. During last year’s season opener against Stephen F. Austin, he caught his first touchdown pass as a Wildcat from Waters late in the contest.

“I jumped about four feet in the air and I about killed myself

on the bleachers,” Jim said. “It was cool because that was another level for him. He fulfilled another goal and it was the next step on the stair step. I was probably glowing when I walked out of there. I know he was.”

During the 2014 season, Kody caught 20 passes for 251 yards and was ready to take that next step as a senior.

“He did what he had to do to play and that is the same thing he did at Hutch,” Anita said. “He is a good boy and he has worked really hard. It prepares you for life. He has overcome the challenges that he has been dealt and he knows how to work through him. “

During the offseason, Kody was listed as a starting receiver for the 2015 season while the Wildcats tried to figure out their quarterback situation as it was a fluid one.

Starting quarterback Jesse Ertz was injured early in the team’s season opener, while incoming quarterbacks Alex Delton and Jonathan Banks were deemed unfit to play.

The job then fell to fourth-string quarterback Joe Hubener, a small-town Kansas player himself from Cheney. Hubener took the job and ran with it, but it changed when the Wildcats played in their Big 12 opener in Stillwater, Okla.

Kody’s number was going to be called once again.

RALLY TIME

Jeff and Connie Ewy have always been big Oklahoma State fans. They attend several games a year and they also live in Louisburg.

The Ewys are close friends with the Cooks and their son Tyler, who played at Washburn himself, was on the state championship team with Kody out of high school and have been friends since

they were little.

Kody always told the Ewys that one day they were going to have to root against him.

"I am going to play at Oklahoma State's field one day," Kody told Connie when he was a young boy. "And I am not going to be wearing orange."

Connie, of course, played along.

"Well, I will tell you what," she said. "If you do, I am going to wear your jersey."

So when the Wildcats made the trip to Stillwater, Connie kept her word and wore Kody's No. 19 jersey in a crowd full of Oklahoma State fans. Needless to say she encountered a lot questions.

"You have the sea of orange and then Connie with this purple jersey on," Anita laughed. "They were asking her if she knew No. 19 and she told them that she was like a second mom to Kody."

Well Kody's second mom and his actual parents were about to become prouder by the minute.

Hubener had to leave the contest two minutes in with an injury, and just like the Salt City Bowl three years earlier, Kody was going to get another chance to play quarterback.

He led the Wildcats to a touchdown on the opening drive when he scored on a 3-yard run to put K-State on top.



Kody Cook has sparked the Wildcats this year from the quarterback spot against Oklahoma State and West Virginia.

After the touchdown, the Oklahoma State fans started to congratulate Connie as they acted like it was Kody's only time he was going to play quarterback.

"Oh no," Connie said. "I know Kody and he is not done."

Kody sparked the Wildcats in the first half and helped the offense to 28 points and couldn't be stopped. Kody rushed for 87 yards and a touchdown, and also completed 10 of 16 passes for 122 yards and two more scores.

Unfortunately, Kody had to leave the game with an injury in the second half and the Wildcats fell 36-34 in what would be their first of six straight losses in Big 12 play.

Kody and the Wildcats entered their senior day matchup with

West Virginia one win shy of becoming bowl eligible.

It was a game he and his family will never forget.

SENIOR DAY

After all the games in the front yard, hard work and obstacles he has overcome, Kody was realizing that his dream was almost over.

Kody suited up for the final time on Dec. 5 at Bill Snyder Family Stadium with all sorts of emotions going through him.

“I am just not ready for this to end yet,” Kody said. “I love this place, I love coach Snyder, the fans and everything that has to do with K-State football.”

It set in a little bit as Kody and the rest of the 18 Wildcat seniors waited in line to say thank you to the man who brought them this far – Bill Snyder.

Soon it would be Kody’s turn. Ten years ago, Kody met Snyder for the first time at the book signing in Kansas City after he retired the first time.

Thirteen-year old Kody was upset and disappointed. Ironically, the two converged once again 10 years later.



Kody Cook gives K-State coach Bill Snyder a hug before going out onto the field for the final time in Manhattan.

“He told me he loved me and thanked me for everything I had done for the program and to keep it going,” Kody said.

Then the public address announcer introduced Kody to the crowd.

“A wide receiver, from Louisburg, Kansas...No. 19...Kody Cook,” he shouted.

It was then Kody pointed up to the sky and ran onto the field as he waved to the crowd. With a pink flower in hand, he found his parents Jim and Anita, along with his brother Konnor and girlfriend Diann.

Tears became almost impossible for any member of the Cook family to hide.



Members of the Cook family pose for a picture during senior day ceremonies at Bill Snyder Family Stadium. Pictured (from left) are Konnor Cook, Kody’s girlfriend Diann Edelen, Kody, father Jim Cook and mother Anita Cook.

“It has been surreal at times, but other times it is like it is according to plan,” Jim said. “Kody was adamant about his plan his whole life that he is going to pull this off. It has

been a great experience for him and he has grown up a lot. I think his football career has been tougher than a lot of things he will experience the rest of his life and has prepared him for that. We are really proud of him.”

Kody and the Wildcats had another obstacle in front of them that night as they trailed West Virginia 13-3 and the K-State offense was sputtering. Then in the third quarter, Hubener had to leave the game with an injury, leaving Kody as the next man up – again. The crowd let out a big cheer when he was announced at quarterback.

“It was a great moment for me and I appreciate the fans,” Kody said. “I took maybe a second to really let it soak in, but then you have to focus on what is going on.”

And just like at Hutch, and at Oklahoma State, Kody once again proved he was ready for the challenge. He completed 4 of 12 passes for 121 yards, including a 77-yard touchdown strike and also rushed for 37 yards and a touchdown.



Kody Cook gets some warm up throws in early in the second half before coming in at quarterback against West Virginia.

Kody's play lifted K-State to a thrilling 24-23 win on senior day as they earned a spot in the Liberty Bowl, a Jan. 2 game in Memphis.

It was a performance coaches on both sidelines had to recognize.

"When we knocked their quarterback out, I thought we were in pretty good shape," West Virginia coach Dana Holgorsen said. "That kid (Kody) comes in and plays a thousand times better than the other one. I shook No. 19's [Cook] hand out there and told him he is a gutsy kid. He was hurt too but battled through it and threw the ball a lot better than we thought he could."

Kody's coach couldn't have agreed more.

“You know, I admire Kody so much,” Snyder said. “He is a tough young guy – tough-minded young guy. He is competitive as of anybody, I think. Our players recognize that and that is uplifting to them as well.”

As much success as Kody has had at K-State, he realizes he couldn't have done any of it without the support of his hometown of Louisburg.

“It adds significance because it just shows that no matter where you live that you can go out and be successful in whatever you want to do,” Kody said of his hometown. “The town breeds a never-give-up, hard-working attitude. You have that engrained in you from day one, and to continue to build off that and to have that in your arsenal when things get tough has been big for me.

“There is not enough that I can say about how that town developed me and made me who I am today. It is a great feeling to be one of the few that has made it this far and made a name for himself.”

It became obvious how important Kody was to the K-State offense as he was named Co-Offensive Player of the Year a week later during the team's award ceremony. Kody finished with 27 catches for 417 yards and three touchdowns as a receiver. At quarterback, he accounted two scores on the ground and three more through the air.

“When he was a little kid that is all he talked about,” Jim said. “He would go out front and go up and down the yard and throw himself passes. He has made it all come true and we are all extremely proud of him. I almost can't talk about it without crying.”

Following the senior day contest, Kody worked his way around Bill Snyder Family Stadium high-fiving fans and trying to soak everything in.

“I just didn’t want it to end,” Kody said. “I have been dreaming about this since I was a little kid and I have been a K-State football fan my entire life. It was just an unbelievable experience.”



Kody Cook gives the fans at Bill Snyder Family Stadium high-five, including Louisburg resident Mark Hildreth, his daughter Liz and sons A.J. and Zach, following the

Wildcats come from behind win over West Virginia on senior day.

Chants of "MVP" rained down on Kody as he took one more lap around the stadium. The band played "Wabash Cannonball" and the crowd went crazy for No. 19.

It was just like Kody drew up in the front yard all those years ago.

Make sure to check out a full photo gallery from Kody Cook's senior day here. You can click the download link under the photo to download a high-resolution version of the photo for free. Unfortunately you can not do it from mobile devices.