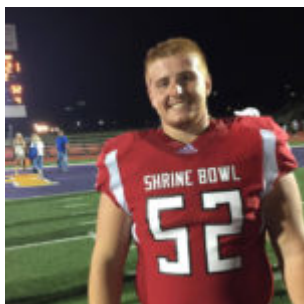


Koechner relishes Shrine Bowl experience



Mason Koechner, a 2017 Louisburg graduate, was a fixture on the offensive line for the East team on July 29 during the Kansas Shrine Bowl in El Dorado. Koechner enjoyed his week-long experience preparing, and playing, in the annual all-star game.

Mason Koechner and the East team may have lost its game in the Kansas Shrine Bowl, but he was a big winner when it came to the experience itself.

Koechner, who was one of several Kansas seniors voted to play in the annual all-star game, had an opportunity to make a difference in a lot of other lives. The 2017 Louisburg graduate took part in the contest on July 29 at Butler Community College in El Dorado and helped raise money for Shriners Hospitals for Children at the same time.

The Kansas Shrine Bowl, and events surrounding the contest, benefited the health care system of 22 hospitals dedicated to improving the lives of children. The Kansas Shrine Bowl is a non-profit charity raising funds and awareness for the Shriners Hospitals for Children.

The Shrine Bowl has been in existence since 1974, and since its inception, it has been promoting Kansas talent and the network of hospitals raising more than \$2.5 million.

The purpose for the Kansas Shrine Bowl is to raise money every year for Shriners Hospitals across the United States. The Shrine Bowl generates close to \$70,000 each year for the hospitals.

They provide pediatric specialty care, innovative research and teaching programs for medical professionals. Children up to the age of 18 are eligible for care and receive all services in a family-centered environment, regardless of the patients' ability to pay.

"It was a lot of fun," Koechner said. "I got to play with a lot of good players and made a lot of good friends in the process."

Koechner spent the week prior to the game practicing with his East teammates, but he also had a few special moments away from the football field.



Several of Mason Koechner's family and friends traveled to El Dorado to watch him compete in the Kansas Shrine Bowl on July 29.

The players had a chance to meet some of the patients from the Shriners Hospitals for Children and Koechner quickly realized the battles he has on and off the football field pales in comparison to what some of those children are dealing with on a daily basis.

“Meeting those kids was really inspiring,” Koechner said. “They can do everything we do, just in a different way. They overcome obstacles every day that I could never dream of having. It was really a great experience.”

Koechner reported to the Butler campus earlier in the week where he worked at left guard and played most of the game on the East offensive line.

It was the first time Koechner had put the pads on since the end of the 2016 season – one where the Wildcats earned a regional championship. He had knee surgery following his wrestling season and a spent a lot of time rehabbing.

All that hard work paid off as Koechner is healthy and he relished his time on the football field again.

“I enjoyed getting back into the pads and practices were fun,” Koechner said. “Going up against all those talented players made practices feel like games, which was very competitive.”

Koechner and the East players rallied from a 14-point deficit to start the game and eventually took a 21-20 lead into the fourth quarter.

“With the players both teams had, you never knew when a big play was going to happen,” he said.

That big play came late in the fourth, as East was called for a penalty, which backed it up to its own 1-yard line. The West team then recorded a safety with a minute left in the game to secure the 22-21 win and left the opposite side a little disappointed.

Still, the experience was a positive one for Koechner that he will take with him to Garden City Community College, as he begins his collegiate football journey.

“I reported to Garden City the day after the game and I am really looking forward to playing at the college level,” he said.