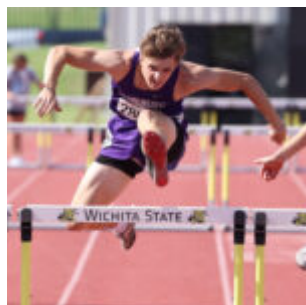


Tom Koontz named 2022 Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year



It was the middle of December, with the temperature near freezing, and Tom Koontz was at the track.

Yes, the outdoor track at Wildcat Stadium. As you might expect, there weren't many people around on that frigid day.

Almost six months earlier, Koontz won a state title in the 110-meter high hurdles as a junior, but it was the 300 hurdle race that haunted him. He just couldn't get over finishing as a state runner-up.

"All I could think about was winning state and winning the 300s this time around," Koontz said. "It drove me so much, so winning that race, when it came down to the inches, was basically the definition of achieving a dream."

The hard work, and practicing his craft, all paid off as he got his revenge and won state in the 300 hurdles along with defending with 110 hurdle title in Wichita back in May.

It was Koontz's drive that helped him become one of the pillars of a team that finished as the state champion in 2021 and also one that took third at state this past May.

It was also one of the reasons why Koontz was chosen as the Louisburg Sports Zone Male Athlete of the Year.

“To win this is a huge honor because it adds me to a list of former Louisburg athletes like Blue Caplinger and Weston Guetterman, both people I looked up to for a long time,” Koontz said. “Now it feels like I can be one of those people to be looked up at, and it’s an amazing feeling.”

There weren’t a lot of people necessarily looking up at Koontz on the track – a lot of them were trying to catch him from behind.

Koontz dominated both hurdle races all season long and only lost on a few different occasions. It is a sport, and event, that is a passion of his and it started as freshman.

He came out of nowhere and qualified for state in the 300 hurdles and that lit the spark for what he was to become.

“Track started simply as another sport, but as I started to get better and impress myself with what I was capable of, I felt the need to devote more and more time to it,” Koontz said. “I changed so much for it, like my diet and sleep habits, where I went and who I hung out with, what I did after practice, etc... It was the most important thing to me for a long time.”

Still, as much as he wanted to win a state title in the 300 hurdles, he wasn’t exactly loving it.



The Louisburg High School head coaches voted Tom Koontz and Delaney Wright as the Louisburg Sports Zone Athletes of the Year.

“Since I started running the race freshman year, I never really liked it,” Koontz said. “In fact, I despised it and only liked it for the feeling of finishing it. But coach (Leanna) Willer knew I had potential to be great at it.

“It was the only event I qualified in freshman year, and I was the only freshman on the list for it. So to come back my junior and just barely lose, stuck with me and it was my focus to win this year.”

Not only does Koontz have three state titles under his belt, he has eight career state medals, including four as a member of the 4×100 and 4×400 relay teams. He was a member of the 4×100 that broke the school record at the Frontier League meet last month.

As much love as he has for track, football is right up there for Koontz.

He found himself as one of the Wildcat starting cornerbacks this past season. Koontz finished the year with 46 tackles, four deflections and a forced fumble.

“Football was a sport for me to be a part of a team, that really made me feel like a part of something,” he said. “So finally getting to play the field the whole season was exhilarating, and I wish I could do it again. Having to say goodbye to it was difficult, just ask any of them who saw me after the St. James (playoff) game.

“Playing a sport that creates such powerful emotions like football and track and anything else helped me grow as a person and an athlete, and each one sharpened my ability in and out of the classroom. It’s hard work, but the work is rewarding.”

After four years of competing at the high school level, Koontz doesn’t really have a favorite moment. It is the overall experience that he will remember most.

“It’s hard for me to pick just one thing that sticks out about high school,” Koontz said. “I couldn’t just pick one day. What does stick with me is the idea that one day, I’m not sure when, I went from someone admiring those who could do amazing things, to being the person doing those things. Being able to win homecoming king or be a state champion. It’s unreal that it happened.

“So I would say if anything sticks out the most, it’s the surrealness of it all, and how I was able to make a name for myself, in high school at least. But I’m also glad I could make such good friends and have such great coaches and teachers to support me.”

Previous winners:

2018: Austin Moore

2019: Blue Caplinger

2020: Garrett Rolofson

2021: Weston Guetterman