

Season-ending injury fuels Caplinger as he joins Washburn track program



Louisburg senior Caden Caplinger recently signed with the Washburn University track and field program.

It was supposed to be a senior year to remember for Caden Caplinger.

Caplinger, who had won the state title in the pole vault his sophomore and junior years, was excited for a chance at a 3-peat. That chance, unfortunately, never came.

A torn meniscus ended Caplinger's senior track season before it really got going and he was forced to miss his final year with the Wildcats.

Even with that bad news, Caplinger's future in the pole vault

is far from over. He saw his dream become a reality when he signed with Washburn University to join the track and field program.

“It means a lot to me that I was able to sign with such a good school like Washburn,” Caplinger said. “They have an amazing pole vault program and I feel very blessed to be apart of it. Ever since freshman year, I got to start pole vaulting with Luke Faulkner and being at practice with him really started my love for vaulting even more and I wanted to continue it through college.”

Caplinger will get that opportunity with the Ichabod program. Winning two state titles certainly provided him options for after high school, but Washburn gave him everything he was a looking for – both on the track and in the classroom.

He also gets to learn under pole vault coach Rick Attig, who has coached All-Americans and a national champion during a career, where he also coached at the University of Kansas and the University of Nebraska. Attig is also a member of the National Pole Vault Hall of Fame.

“In my process of picking Washburn, I was looking for a few things, the coaching, schooling, and things that would make the process smoother and more enjoyable,” Caplinger said. “They have one of the best pole vault programs, led by one of the best pole vault coaches ever. They also just got a new school of business and I know about bunch of the track athletes there already. Plus I’m rooming with (Louisburg grad) Declan (Battle), so all of that will make it easier to get settled in.”



Louisburg's Caden Caplinger signed his letter of intent to compete for the Washburn track and field program. Seated next to Caden are his parents Tracie and Lane Caplinger, and his sister Carli. Standing is Louisburg head coach Andy Wright.

It has been a rough few months for Caplinger, who has been recovering from his knee injury. The loss of his senior season was a tough one to deal with as he was hoping to avoid losing the whole year.

After the first meet, however, Caplinger knew something wasn't right. He couldn't ignore the pain any longer and decided to get it checked out.

As tough as the news was to hear, Caplinger couldn't have been happier to see the pole vault title stay in Louisburg as teammate Cooper Wingfield won the gold medal at the state meet last May.

"From the beginning, I knew something was wrong cause I think it happened sometime in February, but I put it off because I

didn't want to be out for the season," Caplinger said. "Then it started getting really uncomfortable after the first meet and I ended up no heighting for the first time in my career. My dad told me we were going to get an MRI.

"When we figured out I tore my meniscus it was honestly really hard because I love every part of track and I knew I probably wouldn't be able to come back. Even though I didn't get to go to state, I was so happy that Cooper won it. I knew he could win it and he did exactly that."

Even before high school, Caplinger knew pole vaulting was something he wanted to do. As he grew, so did the love of the sport and he is very appreciative of everything he has accomplished up to this point.

"I started pole vaulting in sixth grade because my dad did it when he was younger and asked if I wanted to try it," Caplinger said. "I ended up winning league my seventh grade year and started really enjoying it. When I got into high school, the thing that separated it from other sports is that there isn't anything like it. Once you go over the bar and are falling onto the mat, the feeling is just indescribable. Also the people I've met through the sport have been nothing but kind and supportive, and I've made some really good friends through it."

Like in high school, Caplinger has high expectations for himself when he steps onto the Washburn campus.

"I'm going to absorb as much information as I can and figure out exactly what I have to do to become the best vaulter possible," he said. "My goals are to break the inside and outside pole vaulting records and become the best vaulter at Washburn."