

Cook happy to give back to hometown



Former Kansas State wide receiver and quarterback Kody Cook works with a camper in a footwork drill during the Kansas Gridiron Greats Football Camp on Saturday at Louisburg High School. Cook, an LHS graduate, came back to his hometown to run the camp along with former K-State players Tramaine Thompson, Morgan Burns and Chris Harper.

Area youth gathered on the Louisburg High School practice football field Saturday to learn the sport from a few former Kansas State football players who have played in some pretty big games.

One of those players competed in a few large games in Louisburg history as well.

LHS and Kansas State graduate Kody Cook returned home as the Kansas Gridiron Greats Football Camp made a stop in Louisburg. Former K-State football players Tramaine Thompson, Morgan Burns and Chris Harper joined Cook to help teach the young players how to compete on the football field, and in life.

“It was a good time,” Cook said. “It was the first time I have been able to come back in a long time and being on the field really brought back a lot of memories. I got to talk to the high school kids about what is getting ready to happen this season and try to help them out in any way I can. Plus, seeing

the little kids laugh and smile a lot – it was just a good time and it was great to give back.”

Athletes from kindergarten all the way up through high school had a chance to learn from the four K-State players. Each player conducted position specific drills such as passing and catching and also defensive drills.



Tramaine Thompson holds the bag as he teaches a camper how to run through contact.

Cook then had a chance to talk to the athletes and tell them his story of perseverance. His story of quarterbacking Louisburg to a state title in high school, not getting many big college offers and eventually landing in junior college.

It was during his time at Hutchinson Community College where he saw time as a wide receiver just so he could get on the field. Then during his final game at Hutch in the Salt City Bowl, Cook was asked to come in and quarterback the Blue Dragons without taking any snaps at the position all season.

Cook came in and played like a veteran as he recorded six touchdowns in three quarters on his way to being named the game's MVP and K-State took notice. He earned a spot as a walk-on the next season and eventually made his way onto

scholarship as one of the team's wide receivers.



Morgan Burns works with an older group of players on a defensive drill.

It was a bit of déjà vu for him during his senior season at K-State as he saw several snaps at quarterback for the Wildcats due to an injury and Cook eventually became just the third player in Big 12 history with 100 yards passing, rushing and receiving in the same season.

The story is one Cook loves to tell. Not to gloat on his own accomplishments, but to give kids hope that their dreams can come true.

"I just told them to push through adversity and to never give up in life," Cook said. "Just because you are from a small town doesn't mean you can't do something that you put your mind to. Everything is earned through hard work and dedication. I know it sounds cliché, but that is what it boils down to at the end of the day. I know there are plenty of guys in the NFL right now that outwork people instead of necessarily being more talented."

Following the completion of the camp, Cook also met with some members of the LHS football team and gave them some advice on how to prepare for the upcoming season and enjoy the ride.

“Hopefully these high school kids just cherish these moments,” Cook said. “I have played at K-State and done things in front of thousands of people, but every memory I have had of football, my favorite ones are playing here and under the Friday night lights.

“Winning a state championship with all those guys that you grew up with is just special. It is not to say those K-State memories don’t mean a lot, because they do, but the high school ones are the ones that stick with you.”

Saturday was the final day in what was a busy week for Cook. Along with Thompson, Harper and Burns, he conducted camps for six straight days that included stops in Wichita, Newton, Osborne, Topeka and Garden City.

“It has been a lot of fun,” Cook said. “It has been pretty crazy but it has been good to stop at different places and see how people do things. I just enjoy getting a chance to talk to the kids and let them know they can achieve whatever their dream is if they work hard for it.



LHS grad Kody Cook talks to a group of current Wildcat football players and gives them some advice on their upcoming season.

Cook is looking to heed his own advice as he is still looking

to accomplish his ultimate dream, which is to play in the NFL. Despite not getting invited to a team's minicamp, he is still working out in hopes of one day getting a shot to do what he loves.

Till then, Cook is hoping to earn a graduate assistant job with the K-State football program and possibly tryout for the Canadian Football League in March.

"One of the things I want to do is coach, so hopefully I can get that opportunity," Cook said. "At the same time, I still want to prove that I am good enough to play and maybe something works out up in the Canadian league. I am just going to work as hard as I can and see where that takes me."

Wildcat football finishes off busy month



Louisburg's Mason Koechner wraps up a Blue Valley Northwest defender during the Wildcats' scrimmage on June 29 in Louisburg. The Wildcats scrimmaged Blue Valley Southwest the week before and just finished up a busy month of June.

It scrimmaged with Class 5A and 6A programs, traveled to Paola every Monday in June for 7-on-7 workouts and also held its

team camp.

Add in the fact players hit the weight room several days a week and it was a busy month of June for the Louisburg High School football team. The Wildcats have put in a lot of work as they prepare for the 2016 season and try for a Frontier League title and a spot in the playoffs.

The Wildcats have taken the right steps to get there, and although Louisburg coach Kyle Littrell has liked what he has seen on the field, he is looking for even more from his team in the month of July.

“I like how our summer is going so far and what we have accomplished, however I think we have not reached our expectations in our conditioning portion of our workouts,” Littrell said. “Workouts get tougher in July and it’s going to be interesting to see who responds. We still have a lot of work to do.”

In in the final two weeks of June, Blue Valley Southwest and Blue Valley Northwest ventured to Louisburg to compete in a controlled scrimmage at the Wildcats’ practice field. Louisburg had a chance to see where it stood against bigger programs and it held its own.



**Louisburg running back
Thomas San Agustin spins**

**away from a Blue Valley
Northwest defender on June
29.**

Littrell especially liked what he saw from his group against Blue Valley Northwest as he had more players in attendance.

"I thought the scrimmage with Northwest was the better scrimmage, probably because our whole offensive line was there and we were able to start the gelling process with that group," he said.

Louisburg also participated in several 7-on-7 workouts throughout the month of June, and while those are geared to improving a team's offense, Littrell thought those workouts really helped the Wildcat defense.

He is still looking to see improvement from his offense before the team hits the field for the first day of practice on Aug. 15.

"I thought we got better defensively at 7-on-7," Littrell said. "We did some nice things offensively, but we have a ways to go throwing the ball and the only way to get better at that is by grabbing guys and throwing and catching on your own."

The Wildcats appear to be one of the favorites in the Frontier League this season as they return several starters on both sides of the ball. Senior lineman Dustyn Rizzo, who was an all-league first team player on defense, returns to lead the Wildcat line.

Fellow seniors Mason Koechner and T.J. Dover, who earned honorable mention, will also help anchor the line of scrimmage with junior Garrett Lowry.

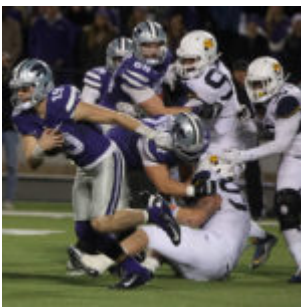
Senior running backs Thomas San Agustin (second team offense last year) and Korbin Hankinson hope to take advantage of the experienced offensive line, while senior Grant Harding will

step in to the quarterback spot after serving as the team's backup last season.

Despite having a number of spots already filled, there are still plenty of positions to be had and Littrell is looking forward to seeing how it shakes out.

"We are having some really nice battles and it is fun to watch these kids compete for something that they love and care about," he said. "We have battles right now at center, tight end, wide receiver, linebacker and defensive tackle. It will be fun to watch and evaluate these kids as we go along. Every year when we put on the pads, the separation usually takes place."

K-State's Cook to host football camp in Louisburg



Kody Cook served several different roles for the Kansas State football team last season, including a few games at quarterback. Cook, a Louisburg High School graduate, will join former K-State players Tramaine Thompson, Chris Harper and Morgan Burns and will host the Kansas Gridiron Greats Youth Football Camp on July 16 at the LHS football practice field.

Kody Cook spent most of his high school years on the Louisburg High School football practice field.

Cook used that opportunity to get better as a player and person. Then in his final year of high school all that hard work paid off as he led the Wildcats to their first state football championship in 2010.

That success catapulted him to the junior college ranks and he eventually earned a scholarship to play for Kansas State and legendary head coach Bill Snyder.

Six years later, Cook is returning to that same practice field where it all started.

Cook, along with former Kansas State players Chris Harper, Tramaine Thompson and Morgan Burns, will be in Louisburg on July 16 to conduct the Kansas Gridiron Greats Youth Football Camp.

"I really excited to get back home," Cook said. "I have been so busy that I haven't had a lot of time to make it back, but I am looking forward to giving back to the community that helped me out so much and working with the kids and not just teach them about football, but about life as well."

The camp, which will be held on the LHS practice field, will be held in two sessions. The cost for one session is \$50 or it is \$80 to attend both sessions. The first session will run from 9 a.m. to noon and the second session will go from 1 to 4 p.m.

All four former Wildcats will be on hand to teach young athletes from kindergarten all the way up through 12th grade to work on fundamentals on both sides of the ball. Those interested in the camp can visit www.kansasgridirongreats.com to download a registration form.

Cook quarterbacked Kansas State for part of his senior season in 2015 along with seeing time as a starting wide receiver. He became just the third player in Big 12 history with 100 yards passing, rushing and receiving in the same season. Cook was also named to the All-Big 12 second team this past season.

Burns finished his Wildcat career as was on the top kick returners in Kansas State history and finished the season as a first team All-American and broke numerous school and Big 12 records.

Thompson was a big target at wide receiver for Kansas State as he helped the Wildcats to a Big 12 championship in 2012. He is eighth in school history in all-purpose yards and was also an All-Big 12 player.

Harper transferred from the University of Oregon to Kansas State in 2010 and led the Wildcats in receptions in his final two years with the program to earn All-Big 12 second team honors.

The camp tour begins Monday in Wichita, followed by stops in Maize, Newton, Garden City, Osborne, Topeka and ends with Louisburg.

As for the camp itself, it will feature specific position training for quarterbacks, running backs receivers, tight ends and linemen along with some defensive work. Mixed in with all the football lingo, Cook is looking forward to working with the campers on more than just their game.

"We are definitely going to help them with the fundamentals, but I just want to let them know how there is more to life than just football," Cook said. "Education is so important because football is going to end for everyone sometime, whether it is high school, college or in the pros. I just want to help mentor the young kids and tell them things I wish someone would have told me when I was their age.

"All these guys coming with me are good people and kids are going to learn a lot from them. I hope to see a lot of people out there."

Griffin thankful for opportunity with Saints



Garrett Griffin (left) is all smiles as he chats with fellow Louisburg High School graduate Jason Spradling as he watches the Louisburg High School scrimmage last Wednesday. Griffin is currently trying to make the New Orleans Saints roster.

In early June, Garrett Griffin received his diploma from the Air Force Academy and shook hands with the President of the United States.

That event alone is enough to top most people's list of accomplishments. Four days later, Griffin fulfilled a life-long dream.

Following his graduation from the Air Force, Griffin was signed by the New Orleans Saints and his dream of playing professional football became a reality. It was a whirlwind of emotions for the Louisburg native in what was a short period of time.

“To be honest, those moments haven’t really hit me yet,” Griffin said. “There is just so much going on, whether it was with graduation or signing with Saints, to really sit back and think about what just happened. Once I graduated, I hopped on a plane to New Orleans, signed my contract and then went out to practice. It is crazy to think about how fast everything happens, but it is going well so far.”

Signing with the Saints was no surprise to Griffin. New Orleans offered Griffin a contract in May, but he was unable to sign until after graduation.

Griffin, who played tight end at the Air Force Academy, was invited to participate in rookie minicamps with the Kansas City Chiefs and Saints. He attended the Chiefs minicamp first and got a good idea of what the coaches were looking for.

He left Kansas City without a contract and then traveled to New Orleans the following weekend for its rookie minicamp. The Saints had scouted Griffin since his pro day and were impressed by what they saw and offered him a contract before he left town.

“When they told me they were going to offer me a contract, it was a childhood dream come true for me,” Griffin said. “Going to Kansas City for their camp was a good experience for me because playing in the NFL is a lot different than at Air Force, so it helped me catch up on what I needed to know.

“But going to New Orleans, I could just tell it was a better fit for me. They know me as a player and have followed me since the draft process began. The team is just one big family and they take care of each other. It has been a great experience so far.”

After Griffin signed his free agent contract, he immediately hit the practice field to take part in the team’s four-day OTA offseason workout and then followed that up with a three-day mandatory minicamp on June 14-16.

Griffin got a lot of work in at the tight end spot during that time and had several eye-opening experiences, but none were much bigger than when he caught passes thrown by All-Pro quarterback, and Super Bowl MVP, Drew Brees.

“That was pretty cool,” Griffin said. “When you are doing drills, you just line up and do what you are supposed to and don’t think about it too much. But after I caught my first pass from him, time kind of slowed down and I realized what had just happened. It was awesome.”



Photo taken by Michael C. Herbert / New Orleans Saints

Garrett Griffin goes through a drill during the Saints offseason workouts in June.

The Saints signed Griffin as a tight end/long snapper, but he has his work cut for him in making the roster as there are several veterans currently ahead of him, including Coby Fleener, who spent the last four seasons with the Indianapolis Colts. Fleener signed with the Saints in the offseason and is the favorite to be the team’s starter.

"He and the rest of the vets have been really great at helping me and making sure I am in the right spots," Griffin said of Fleener. "They like to give the rookies a hard time, and that happens no matter where you go, but they have been good about it."

"The Saints are just a great organization and they have a great fan base. There is a family atmosphere around the whole team and the city just embraces them. In some ways it is kind of what Louisburg is like. They really love football and they love their team. It is great to be a part of."

Griffin's immediate future will begin to take shape later this month when he travels to West Virginia with the rest of the Saints for the team's training camp that begins July 27.

That also includes a trip to Foxborough, Mass., where the Saints will take part in two joint practices with the New England Patriots before the two team's square off in the exhibition opener on Aug. 8.

"I think that will be pretty cool, just getting a chance to go up there and practice against the Patriots," Griffin said. "Then to have a chance to watch one of the best tight ends in football in Rob Gronkowski and see how he prepares, it will be a great learning experience for me."

Although most of his time is dedicated to the tight end spot, Griffin is also spending some time working as a long-snapper, a position he held the backup role on at Air Force. When it comes time to make cuts as training camp winds down, being able to play two different roles could be a positive for Griffin.

"Tight end is my main focus, and if I am going to make it in the NFL then that is what I have to spend most of my time on," Griffin said. "But if I can work on my long snapping a little, and it comes down to me and another tight end, then the team might decide to go with the player that can play two spots,

and that can only help me. I am just trying to do everything I can right now and I am working hard.”

As excited as Griffin would be to make the Saints roster, he knows there is another obstacle in his way. Currently, he is on a 60-day leave from the Air Force before he is set to begin his two-year military obligation.

That obligation would prevent Griffin from playing in the NFL until that two years is complete. Still, there has been precedence that the Air Force could allow Griffin to play and complete his military requirements in the reserves.

Most recently, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus gave Naval Academy grad Keenan Reynolds permission to play with the Baltimore Ravens. Reynolds was drafted in the sixth round by the Ravens in the NFL Draft.

“I don’t want to say, the rules have gotten a little bit more relaxed. That’s not the right term but, if a player like (Griffin) has an opportunity they’re going to work with him where maybe 20 years ago it may have been a little bit different,” Saints head coach Sean Payton said during a press conference last month. “I know in his case, he won’t miss anything. We like him as a young prospect and because of graduation he was one of the guys that got here a little late but that was really more of the graduation rules. Fortunately for us he will be involved with everything we do.”

Until training camp arrives, however, Griffin is currently back in Louisburg where he is enjoying some time off. Last week, Garrett made his way back to where it all started for him – the Louisburg High School practice field – where he took in the Wildcats’ scrimmage with his father Gary, who is an assistant coach.

“It was great to be back out there again,” Garrett said. “I watch every game on film, but it was great to be able to see them in person and see what this team is going to be like. It

was fun to be able to be with those coaches again and kind of stand back and learn a little bit from there. I wouldn't mind being a coach one day so there are always things that you can learn, no matter how much football you play."

Still, he is focused on making his dream come true.

"I don't want to think a lot about it because I don't know exactly what is going to happen yet, but I can only do what I can control and that is to work hard and be prepared," he said. "If for some reason the NFL doesn't work out, I have a great Plan B with the Air Force and I know a lot of guys don't have that. At the same time, I don't want to have any regrets. So, we will see how it goes. Whatever happens is fine with me."

Vance competes for Kansas in all-star game



Anders Vance (52) jumps out of his stance as he prepares to block a Missouri defender Thursday during the Greater Kansas City Football Coaches Association Kansas vs. Missouri All-Star Game at Blue Springs (Mo.) High School.

BLUE SPRINGS, Mo. – Anders Vance traded in his purple and

white jersey of Louisburg for one of the red and white variety.

No, it wasn't a Pittsburg State one – at least not yet anyway.

Vance donned the Kansas all-star uniform for the Greater Kansas City Football Coaches Association Kansas vs. Missouri All-Star game on Thursday at Blue Springs (Mo.) High School. He wore his usual No. 52 as Vance took the field with Team Kansas in hopes of snapping a Missouri winning streak.

Kansas nearly stopped Missouri's winning ways, but came up short in a 28-24 loss. Vance still enjoyed his team practicing and playing with his new teammates.

"I really had a good time," Vance said. "I had a chance to see a lot of great players from around the metro and I got to meet some cool coaches. It was a lot of fun and I got to learn some new stuff."

The game featured some of the best players from the Kansas City area and Vance saw a lot time on the offensive line. He played several snaps at right guard, while also seeing time on special teams for punts and extra points.



Anders Vance listens to the Kansas coaches during a timeout Thursday.

Kansas took a 15-14 lead at halftime and held a 24-21 advantage in the fourth quarter before Missouri scored a touchdown with five minutes left in the contest to all but seal the win for the sixth consecutive time.

"It's always disappointing to lose, but it is a different feeling because you are wanting to beat another state instead of a school and there isn't that family aspect there so it is a lot different," Vance said.

"They moved me to guard the day before the game," said Vance, who usually plays center. "It was a little different for me, but I think I did alright."

Vance spent the last two weeks before the game practicing with his Kansas teammates in the evenings at Mill Valley High School and had a chance to work with some different coaches.

He also saw several familiar faces as he teamed up with four other Frontier League players. Paola's Nate Staats and Alex Wilson, along with Baldwin's Jake and Joel Katzer, also participated in the game

The contest was a culmination of what was a great high school season for Vance. He earned a lot of recognition in the offseason as he was selected to the Class 4A all-state first team by the Kansas Football Coaches Association, Topeka Capital-Journal and Wichita Eagle. He was also an honorable mention selection to the all-metro team by the Kansas City Star.

Vance, who has signed to play football at Pittsburg State this fall, has one more high school game left to play. He will represent the East quad in the Kansas Shrine Bowl on July 30 at Emporia State University.



Louisburg High School graduate Anders Vance takes on a Missouri lineman Thursday in Blue Springs.

“I am excited for that one,” he said. “It is going to be fun and a little more intense I think.”

Wildcats get work done during team camp



Louisburg running back Brayden Gage looks for a hole while

lineman Matt Rison (right) tries to block Dalton Frazier during the Wildcat team camp last week. The Wildcats will hold two scrimmages later this month against Blue Valley Southwest and Blue Valley Northwest.

Ever since last November, the sting has stayed with several members of the Louisburg football team and its coaching staff.

That feeling has been hard to shake, but they are out to use that as motivation. Close to 60 players hit the Louisburg High School football practice field every evening last week hoping to erase the memory of the way last season ended.

Louisburg went through the regular season winning seven of its nine games before getting upset in the first round of the playoffs to Basehor-Linwood. The Wildcats are out to make another run at the state playoffs and they started that journey during last week's team camp.

The Wildcat players took the field for two-and-half-hour sessions during the five-day camp that ended Friday.

"I really liked everything about the camp, except for maybe Friday," Louisburg coach Kyle Littrell said. "Monday through Thursday I thought we did some really nice things. I thought we executed well and saw improvement. But Friday was just a rough day. I am not sure if it was because we started a couple hours earlier or what it was, but it just wasn't a good day. We just weren't as crisp as I would like us to be."



Korbin Hankinson hauls in a catch during the Wildcat team camp last week.

Littrell said he used a majority of the camp to install 80 to 90 percent of the team's offense, along with portions of the team defense. The camp was also used to see who would be able to fill the holes left by the 12 Wildcat seniors from a year ago.

The Wildcats have to replace their starting quarterback, center, wide receivers, fullback, middle linebacker, two defensive linemen and several parts of the secondary. Littrell believes the team took a step forward.

He really liked what he saw out of the running back group at camp, including seniors Thomas San Agustin, Korbin Hankinson and Jake Hill. Returning starters T.J. Dover, Garrett Lowry, Mason Koechner and Dustyn Rizzo provided some lanes to run through on the line.

"I think we were able to get all the basics down and I think we showed that we are going to be a good running team," Littrell said. "On the offensive line, we have four guys that are 2 to 3 year starters for us and then whoever wins the center battle. We just need to fix some little things there,

but I feel that is going to be a strength for us.

"We just need to develop some more offensive lineman and backups to give us a little more depth there. I was definitely happy with the running back group this past week. I thought they did a really good job."

As good as the running game was for the Wildcats, Littrell knows his team has to show more balance if they want to be successful this season. Senior Grant Harding returns to take over the quarterback spot for Austin Terry and Littrell said his team needs to improve its aerial attack.

"We are going to have to be able to throw the ball some," Littrell said. "We might be a running team, but if we don't show that we can throw the ball and be successful at that, teams are going to stack nine or 10 guys in the box and we won't be able to do much. If we can become a balanced offensive team then I think we have a chance to be pretty successful."

Although the Wildcats didn't have the best final day of camp, it did end on a good note as approximately 40 moms took the field with their sons to take part in a simulated practice.

Each mother played their son's position and the coaches walked them through what a day of practice is like.

"It was a lot of fun," Littrell said. "I am surprised at how many moms actually showed up, but it was good to see that many out there. It gave the coaches a chance to put some names with faces and it let the moms become a little more familiar with us and what we are trying to do."

Even though camp may be over, team activities are just beginning.

Along with the normal summer weight sessions, the Wildcats will travel to Paola the next two Mondays for 7-on-7 workouts

to go up against several area teams.



Quarterback Grant Harding releases a pass during a drill last week.

Something new for the Wildcats this season is they will get the opportunity to scrimmage against two different teams.

Louisburg will host Blue Valley Southwest for a scrimmage from 9 to 11 a.m. on Wednesday. The Wildcats will host their second scrimmage a week later when Blue Valley Northwest comes to town from 10 a.m. to noon on June 29.

Both scrimmages will be held on the school's practice field.

"It will be nice to go up against defenses that don't necessarily know what we run," Littrell said. "That is the problem with camp is we know what the other is going to do. Plus, it will give us a chance to go up against different formations, that maybe we wouldn't normally do until two-a-days start so this will give us a little jump start. Plus, I know the players look forward to going up against someone different."

Griffin invited to Chiefs, Saints minicamps



Air Force senior Garrett Griffin was recently offered rookie minicamp invitations by the Kansas City Chiefs and New Orleans Saints.

His name might not have been called during the final rounds of the NFL Draft on Saturday, but Garrett Griffin's aspirations of playing professional football is still very much alive.

Following the conclusion of the draft, teams from around the league made phone calls to those who weren't drafted to offer free agent contracts or rookie minicamp invitations. Griffin was one of those players.

The Air Force senior tight end, and Louisburg High School graduate, was offered invitations to take part in rookie minicamps with the Kansas City Chiefs and New Orleans Saints.

Those invitations are a chance for Griffin to showcase himself in front of both teams with the hopes of earning an opportunity to compete for a roster spot and take part in the team's training camp.

Griffin's road is a little different than most, however. He

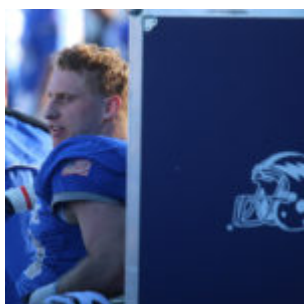
must first receive permission from his commanding officer in the Air Force to leave and compete in both minicamps. The Chiefs camp begins this Saturday, while the Saints camp starts the following week.

Should Griffin be allowed to compete in both camps, he will then compete for a spot. If a team offers him a contract, he will then sign and be placed on the military reserve roster so that team will have his rights until he gets put into the Air Force reserves, which is two years following his graduation in June.

Despite missing some games in his senior season, Griffin finished his final year at Air Force strong with 12 catches for 208 yards and three touchdowns. He ended his Air Force career with 41 catches for 678 yards and eight touchdowns in an option offense.

Griffin, who is listed at 6-feet, 4 inches and 240 pounds, ran a 40-yard dash in 4.75 seconds and had a vertical jump of 36 inches at his Air Force pro day in March. He also had a broad jump of 9 feet, 9 inches and 15 bench reps at 225 pounds.

Griffin hopes NFL dream becomes reality



Air Force senior, and Louisburg High School graduate, Garrett

Griffin has a big weekend ahead of him as he hopes to be selected in the NFL Draft or possibly sign on with a team via free agency.

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – Hundreds of college football players will be sitting in front of the television this weekend, with their phone within reach, watching the National Football League draft.

It is a weekend where dreams come true for several athletes across the country.

Garrett Griffin hopes to be one of those players.

However, as the final round of the draft gets underway Saturday morning, the Air Force Academy senior won't be in front of a television. Nor will he have a phone to get updates about what is going on.

Nope, Griffin will be out in the wilderness with no way to know if his dream is about to become a reality.

"I will be out in the woods on military exercise till like 6 or so," Griffin said. "So I could get drafted and I won't even know anything until I get back. It is kind of weird, but that is what I signed up for.

"I have people calling and asking if they can come out and be with me while the draft is going on. I have to tell them 'Guys, thanks but I am kind of busy.'"

Still, Griffin, a Louisburg High School graduate, is hoping for good news when he returns.

It sounds like it could be the case as a lot more teams have taken interest in the Air Force tight end. He is projected as a late-round pick or will perhaps sign with a team as an unrestricted free agent.

Although Griffin had his highlights throughout the season, it was his pro day at the Air Force in early March where things started to heat up for him.



Air Force tight end Garrett Griffin reportedly has several NFL teams interested in drafting or signing him as a free agent.

Griffin, who is listed at 6-feet, 4 inches and 240 pounds, ran a 40-yard dash in 4.75 seconds and had a vertical jump of 36 inches. He also had a broad jump of 9 feet, 9 inches and 15 bench reps at 225 pounds.

Those numbers seemed to please the scouts in attendance and word of his workout made its way to other teams across the league.

"I had a pretty good pro day," Griffin said. "Teams just wanted to see if I was athletic enough to play and that is one of my strengths. I am pretty light compared to other tight ends in the NFL who are about 255 or 260 pounds, so I still have to get stronger. I thought I ran well in the 40 and a lot of the jumping drills went well too."

Scouts from the Detroit Lions and New Orleans Saints were on hand for the Air Force pro day and have stayed in touch with

Griffin and told him they liked what they saw.

Since then, Griffin's phone has been ringing more and more. He estimates he has talked with representatives from 15 to 20 teams and it became so hectic that he needed some help.

After what Griffin did on his pro day, Air Force head coach Troy Calhoun, who was also an offensive coordinator in the NFL, gave him some advice.

"He told me I needed to get an agent," Griffin said. "So I went out and started looking. It took me a while to find the right person, but I eventually found him and he has done a great job. I was getting calls all the time from general managers and other people asking me to send them film or asking other questions and it was getting a little overwhelming.

"The whole process is weird because I don't know if I ever saw myself hiring an agent and had no idea what that was going to be like. It was actually a pretty surreal moment, but it was exciting at the same time because it is looking more like playing in the NFL could happen."

Following that hire, reports started to emerge at the different teams interested in Griffin. Along with the Saints and Lions, the Denver Broncos, San Francisco 49ers, San Diego Chargers – and yes – the Kansas City Chiefs were also reported to have interest in him.

Griffin's name took a while to get out there as he didn't have the stats that would catch a team's eye during his senior campaign. After missing part of the season with an injury, Griffin finished the year with 12 catches for 208 yards and three touchdowns.

He was a part of a run-first Air Force option offense where Griffin's main responsibility was to block – but he did it well and was a big part of their attack.

When he came back from his injury, Air Force won five out of its next six games and the Falcons won the Mountain West Mountain Division title.

“I knew when I came to Air Force that I wasn’t going to get a lot of targets and I was fine with that,” Griffin said. “I knew I wasn’t going to have big numbers, but I just wanted to do whatever I could to help the team win and that is what I did.”

What seems to have a lot of teams interested in Griffin is his ability to play multiple positions. He has shown he can block from the tight end spot, he can also line up as a receiver and he can even do a little long snapping.

“Some of the scouts that saw me asked me to do some long snapping and I think that went pretty well,” Griffin said. “The fact that I can do multiple things can only help me. I can play tight end, I can lineup as a wide receiver and I can even play a little fullback. I was actually the backup long snapper at Air Force so I have worked at that as well.”

However, the one thing that could work against Griffin is the fact he plays for Air Force. Griffin is required to serve in the academy for two years following his 60-day leave after graduation – and therefore cannot be on an NFL roster until that two years is up.

That fact could prevent him from getting drafted, but teams could still sign him as a free agent following the draft.

“A lot of people have come up to me and said that it stinks and that they should allow you to play,” Griffin said. “At the same time, I knew what I signed up for when I got here. Playing in the NFL has always been my goal, but not very many people have the chance and I needed a good backup plan and the Air Force has given me that. I think the lifespan of an average player in the NFL is like 2 to 3 years and players are always moving in and out of the league.

“If I do sign on with a team, I can go to their minicamp, OTA’s and part of training camp and find out what I need to work on before I have to report. Then I can use that two years to get bigger and stronger and hopefully be ready when that time is up.”

Still, with his future up in the air, Griffin is trying to not think about football on what could be the most critical time in his life.

“I am just trying to prepare myself for everything,” he said. “I’ve thought about what is going to happen if I get drafted, or if I end up signing as a free agent or if I am done playing football altogether. I have mentally prepared for all three options and I am good with whatever happens. I am in a good place.

“Right now, I am just focused on graduating and staying in the best shape I can. I am trying not to think about football, but it is hard not to think about something that has been a life-long dream.”

A dream that he hopes comes true this weekend.

Paola AD proposes bill to help classification issue



Last October, Paola activities director Jeff Hines went to a Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) regional meeting to get updates on classification issues.

Six months later, Hines found himself in Topeka, in front of the Kansas Senate Education Committee to talk about a bill that could change the way schools are classified.

On Thursday, Hines sat in front of the committee to discuss Senate Bill 464 – a bill that he proposed with guidance of Sen. Caryn Tyson.

Statute 72-130 establishes specific guidelines pertaining to the organizational structure and functions of KSHSAA. Senate Bill 464 would change one part of the statute and strike the line which allows schools to be classified only by student enrollment.

“The total number of students in schools is a great starting point for classifying them,” Hines said. “It makes sense that the largest schools should play the largest schools and the smallest schools should play the smallest schools, but there are other things that need to be considered.”

For several months, KSHSAA has had a classification committee discuss different ways to have a competitive balance with its member schools. They came up with ideas of reducing the number of classifications or changing the number of schools in a division.

“There were no other factors being considered and that bothered me,” Hines said, “All that would do was reshuffle the schools just a little bit but we would have the same problem.”

The problem for the committee was its hands were tied thanks to the wording in Statute 72-130 that specifically states schools can only be classified by enrollment numbers and nothing else.

So Hines went to work and helped create Senate Bill 464, which does not give a specific solution to the problem, but rather would take wording out of the statute to allow KSHSAA to figure out how to classify schools on its own.

Hines gave a 15 minute testimony in front of the committee and then answered questions from the committee members for more than 30 minutes afterward. Before the hearing, Hines received support from every member in the Frontier League, Pioneer League and all but two schools in the Kaw Valley League, as those two didn't respond before the hearing.

Following Hines' testimony, Sen. Vicki Schmidt, R-Topeka, had concerns as to why KSHSAA did not come in front of the committee itself to ask for changes.

Hines informed the committee that it would be redundant for KSHSAA to endorse the plan, because if approved, member schools would still have to vote on it. He believes Bill 464 would let KSHSAA come up with a system and let schools improve it, instead of the legislature.

"KSHSAA wants to be neutral because this proposal would affect different schools in different ways," Hines said. "It could be very beneficial to some schools and others may not like it because they might have to move up a class. So, why should KSHSAA have to pick sides in it and pit member against member? It doesn't have to be that way in my opinion.

"Yes, a school that has to move up a classification might not like it, but is it the best thing overall for the association? They can't look themselves in the mirror and say 'No, this isn't the right thing to do?'

A major problem for some member schools in KSHSAA is they do not believe it is competitively equal the way it is currently structured.

"I am not a believer in participation medals," Hines said. "If

they are kindergartners, sure, but when you start playing, part of being successful later in life is learning how to compete. We all competed for a job when you have gone in for an interview and that is good. You need to have that skillset and I am not saying that we need to give more trophies out and give everyone a shot, but I just want a system in place that is equitable for all so that some don't have an unfair advantage at the expense of the rest and I think that is what is happening."

One of the problems is the lack of balance between championships won between public and private high schools. Hines did research and presented numbers at the hearing at the number of state championships won between private and public schools from 2004 to 2014.

Here is what he found.

- Private schools make up slightly less than 8 percent of the KSHSAA membership.
- Private schools have won slightly less than 32 percent of the state championships.
- Based on membership percentage, private schools should only win approximately 8 percent of the titles, not nearly 32 percent.
- Private schools are winning four times more state titles than should be expected based on their memberships.
- Private schools are nine times more likely to win five or more state titles than their public school peers.

"In that period of time, I looked for who has won five or more state titles," Hines said. "That is a difficult feat. You look at Paola's history and we have won like seven and Louisburg has won three in 100-plus years. During those 10 years, 37 percent of those private schools won five or more during that time and public schools had 4 percent win five or more. Private schools are nine times more likely to become a dynasty or a successful program with strong tradition. You tell me how

we are all the same?"

Another problem they are facing is schools with a high percentage of low socioeconomic status (SCS) students, cannot compete against fellow schools in their own classification in many activities, including football.

"There is a whole bunch of schools in the Kansas City, Kansas school district that are 6A or 5A that have no business competing against those really hard schools," Hines said. "They don't have resources, they don't have the students, there is no interest and they have all those things working against them and I feel bad for those kids. Who wants to trot out against some of those bigger schools and know you are going to get your ears boxed in? That is not fun. Moreover, it is not challenging for the kids those schools are playing against."

Hines believes competition is important when it comes to the growth of the student athlete and it is beneficial for the school and its community.

"Not only what it does for grades, but for what it does for the human spirit," Hines said.

"When I was the FFA advisor in Paola, we won 10 state championships in nine years and you could tell the interest by the students and the community went through the roof. You can say the same thing about Louisburg and what Jim Morgan does with his FFA kids. People flock to success.

"Naturally, when they are there they feel better about themselves, they want to work harder in the classroom to stay eligible and kids that want to stay involved are going to be more successful in life. It is all about having the chance to be successful."

During Hines' testimony in front of the Senate Education Committee, not all of the legislatures seemed open to the idea. Molly Baumgardner, R-Louisburg, asked Hines if he would

be willing to relinquish state funding if the legislature agrees to release oversight of how KSHSAA classifies schools.

“If we relinquished the funding behind it, (high school activities) would disappear,” Hines said at the hearing.

No action was taken following the hearing, but the committee chairman spent 15 minutes with him and Tyson to help them strategize on what to do next.

One option is to amend the bill to include more specifics that could include a multiplier or a separate division for private schools and a low SCS school de-multiplier.

Another option, Hines said, would be to have the classification committee draft a letter to the Senate Education Committee that states they would like to study these other factors as part of a proposal for revamping the classification system, but not until they feel the legislature is open to changing the law.

Whatever decision comes next, however, Hines wants it to be decided by multiple people within KSHSAA on how to proceed.

“I don’t feel comfortable making that change because I feel a committee needs to do the work,” Hines said. “I shouldn’t be doing it, nor should 11 legislators, you need more. We should let the classification committee work on it and hopefully we can get some things accomplished.

“The only way to allow this to happen is to remove the barrier in place that exists due to the state statute.”

Vance inks with Pittsburg State football



Louisburg senior Anders Vance signed his letter of intent to play football at Pittsburg State on Wednesday at Louisburg High School. Sitting next to Anders (from left) are his brother Alek Vance, his mother Alicia Vance and sister Ainsley Vance. Standing (from left) is Louisburg assistant Gary Griffin, head coach Kyle Littrell, assistant Robert Ebenstein and wrestling head coach Bobby Bovaird. Not pictured is Anders' father, Rob Vance.

To say this football season has been a whirlwind for Anders Vance might be an understatement.

Vance was one of the leaders on this season's Louisburg High School team that led a turnaround from three wins last year, to seven wins and a spot in the playoffs this past season.

Then came the postseason awards and a selection to play in an all-star game. However, there was one more thing to check off his list – and he did it Wednesday.

In front of his family and coaches, Vance signed his letter of intent to play football at Pittsburg State University this fall, which marked the end of what was a memorable season for Vance.

“I have been wanting to play college football since I started playing when I was a little kid,” Vance said. “I am really looking forward to it. I am excited for everything being faster, getting stronger and a higher level of football will be a new challenge for me.”

Going to Pittsburg State was a relatively easy choice for the Louisburg lineman as it had a definite family connection. Not only did he have a few family members attend the school, but his grandfather, Jim Knox, played for the Gorillas before becoming a long-time superintendent for USD 416.

“It was closer to home, which is nice,” Vance said. “Of course that was a big reason why my mom liked it because it was closer and she didn’t want me going too far away. A lot of my family went there too and my grandpa played football there. So I am pretty familiar with it already. Plus they have great facilities there, which was nice as well.”



Anders Vance (52) hopes to earn a spot on the Pittsburg State defense.

Vance, who stands at 6-feet, 1-inch and weighs 285 pounds, has been a fixture on the Louisburg line since his sophomore year and has grown every season under head coach Kyle Littrell. Now, Littrell believes Vance can grow even more at his next stop.

"I am really happy for Anders and his decision," Littrell said. "Anders is the type of kid who is going to go down to Pitt and impress them by his work ethic, attitude and coachability. Anders knows going in that Pitt typically has a lot of pretty good linemen, so I think he has prepared himself mentally for the tough road ahead.

"I think Anders will be just fine at Pitt. They are getting a great student, a great football player, and a great person to represent their university."

Vance earned a lot of recognition in the offseason as well. In December, he was selected to the Class 4A all-state first team by the Kansas Football Coaches Association, Topeka Capital-Journal and Wichita Eagle.

He was also an honorable mention selection to the all-metro team by the Kansas City Star.

Most recently, Vance was selected to participate in the Kansas Shrine Bowl, an all-star game that benefits Shriners Hospitals for Children. Only 68 seniors from across the state are selected to play in the game.

The Louisburg senior was a starting lineman on both sides of the ball for the Wildcats. Vance was the team's starting center and defensive tackle. He recorded 35 tackles, with six for a loss, a sack, fumble recovery, forced fumble and two batted balls.

As for where Vance fits on the Pitt State team this coming fall, that has yet to be decided, but he is ready for whatever challenge comes his way.

"The coaches said I could start out wherever I please and go from there," Vance said. "I will probably start out on defense, and if that doesn't work, then they can move me wherever they see fit. I just want to be able to play and do what I can do to help the team."