

## **By any measure, Tiger athletes are champions**

What an incredible year it has been for Tiger Athletics! Back-to-back MIAA football championships, men's soccer makes it to the final four – and fights through eight penalty kicks with fierce grit and determination.

And this last weekend, our women's basketball team won the MIAA tournament championship and the right to host the NCAA II Central Region championship this coming weekend.

Also last weekend, wrestler Brandon Ball, a junior from Great Bend who was competing for a national championship in Cleveland, Ohio, ended up with a 28-2 record for the season and his second All-America honor.

And in Pittsburg, Brett Meyer, a Scott City senior, earned his fifth All-America honor in the mile run while competing for the national championship. Kolt Newell, a Plainville senior seeking the national high jump championship, also was named an All-American.

WOW!

I am inspired by our student-athletes. As a university, we rely on our student-athletes to tell our institutional story by how they practice and play, their character on and off the field, as well as their success in the classroom. They work hard to hone their skills – often making sacrifices in other areas of their life to excel as an athlete, and they must be good time managers to ensure their commitments to their educations and to their sports are in balance.

The office of the president affords me many ceremonial privileges for which I feel very grateful – from shaking every student's hand as they cross the stage at commencement to standing with our four-time national champion shotgun team as they were introduced and applauded on the floor of the Kansas House of Representatives and Senate.

This year, I got to hand the MIAA trophy to Coach Chris Brown (Coach of the Year, for the second consecutive year) for the football team championship as well as to Coach Tony Hobson (also Coach of the Year) for the women's basketball team's regular-season MIAA championship – and to congratulate Tony himself as the winningest women's basketball coach ever for FHSU!

I love those moments of saying, "Great job" and "I am so proud of you." Those moments warm my heart and fill me with joy, and lately I have had lots of opportunities to celebrate our student athletes.

In February, we recognized more than 300 student athletes for their academic success. These were students who, despite the long hours they put into their sports activities, earned a 3.0 cumulative GPA in either the spring 2018 or fall 2018 semesters. We call every student athlete to the floor of the basketball arena to line up with their parents for recognition and applause from our fabulous fans.

Speaking of fans – ours are passionate about Tiger Nation. Love that! Our success has been fueled by many, many donors, as well as those who purchase tickets to our events. The financial support has enabled us to get stronger and be better. Alumnus Peter Werth flew the women's basketball team to Connecticut so they could meet and compete against the legendary UConn team. What an incredible life-memory he created!

Alumnus Russ Pfannenstiel created the Distinguished Tiger Leadership Award to recognize one male and one female student-athlete who practice the extraordinary volunteerism and community involvement and exemplify hard work, teamwork, endurance, a positive attitude, dedication, sacrifice and commitment, and who always exhibit an uplifting personality.

Tatyana Legette, a senior basketball player from Topeka, is the 2019 Female Distinguished Tiger.

Wrestler Micquelle Robinson, a senior from Wichita, is the 2019 Male Distinguished Tiger.

It is thrilling to have all these outstanding student athletes – each with a personal story, source of motivation and inner strength, and each a champion in their own right. I am awed by these young people, who are firmly rooted in who they are and who positively engage with our campus and our community.

I am proud of them, their coaches, their faculty, and their families and friends who helped shape the hearts, minds, and characters of these champions.