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## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / March 10, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU ATHLETICS RECOGNIZED BY NEW PERFORMANCE METRIC UNDER STEWART'S DIRECTION**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics was recognized nationally Monday in a new performance metric for its improvement under Director of Athletics Todd Stewart.

[In a new performance metric from AthleticDirectorU](#), WKU under Stewart's leadership ranked fifth in the country among institutions who have rated at least 5.0 points higher in the metric under an athletic director hired since 2010 than their 15-year institutional average.

Under Stewart, who was hired in 2012, WKU's AD performance rating is a 75.9, which is 12.7-point increase over the university's 15-year average rating of 63.2.

According to AthleticDirectorU, "this data set acts as an identifier of the strongest positive influences that new athletic directors have had on their institution's athletic successes."

"This recognition is the result of many special people working together and achieving successes in numerous areas," Stewart said. "I believe it validates that WKU Athletics is currently producing one of the nation's best success stories based on championships, academic accomplishments, and budget. No one in America leads their conference in total championships while ranking in the bottom 25 percent of their league in overall budget. Our student-athletes, coaches and administrators deserve tremendous credit for their efforts in maximizing our resources and achieving team superlatives on the field of play and in the classroom which have resulted in shining a bright light on our entire university."

AthleticDirectorU created a ratings system to assess athletic director performance, largely based on Directors' Cup results from 2005 to 2019.

The ratings system combines national ranking, conference ranking and total Directors' Cup appearances into one metric which scales from 0 to 100.

WKU is tied for 69th in this season's current Directors' Cup standings, which would be the university's highest finish on record if maintained.

Since Stewart took the helm in 2012, WKU has won 39 overall conference championships, including 27 since joining C-USA in 2014-15, which is nine more than the next closest league member. Since 2012, WKU has reached 13 NCAA Tournaments, 1 NIT Final Four (men's basketball) and six football bowl games (winning four).

Off the court, WKU has continued to shine with more than 700 student-athletes obtaining their degrees since 2012 and the department devoting more than 3,000 hours annually to community service.

In the NCAA's most recent Academic Progress Report, every Hilltopper and Lady Topper program exceeded the NCAA's mandated 930 APR minimum with 11 programs (out of 14) posting an APR of 970 or higher. WKU has also maintained the highest Graduation Success Rate in program history, with a Federal Graduate Rate that is 12 percent higher than the university's general student body.

All of this success has come while WKU ranks 12th out of 14 schools in Conference USA in total budget and 11th of 12 in revenue produced from student fees.

**WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / March 12, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

**ALL CONFERENCE USA SPRING SPORT COMPETITION SUSPENDED INDEFINITELY**

Effective immediately, all Conference USA spring sport competition is suspended until further notice.

WKU Athletics will provide any relevant logistical information as it relates to its sports programs and the COVID-19 pandemic when appropriate.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

### **MEDIA ADVISORY // WKU Athletics – COVID-19 Updates Page Now Available**

*Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations*

All Conference USA spring sport competition is suspended until further notice.

WKU Athletics has created a webpage to distribute any relevant updates related to the COVID-19 pandemic. That page can be accessed at all times on the top navigation bar of [WKUSports.com]WKUSports.com, as well as at the following direct link: <https://goto.ps/COVID19>

See below for the most up-to-date information from WKU Athletics.

### **PRACTICES/WORKOUTS**

All formal, informal and voluntary workouts for WKU Athletics are prohibited through Friday, March 20 to coincide with the university's extended spring break.

We understand there are extenuating circumstances for some student-athletes that require them to be here next week, and athletic training will provide rehabilitation and medical treatment services as needed.

We will reassess our plans for practices and organized activities over the coming week.

### **HAF/TICKET OFFICE**

As we all continue to monitor and assess the situation surrounding COVID-19 and its impact on higher education, the Hilltopper Athletic Foundation and the WKU Ticket Office will be closed through Friday, March 20.

Our staff will be working remotely from home as we ensure the needs of our fans are met. Throughout the week we will be monitoring email and voicemail.

Should you have any questions or concerns related to your tickets or HAF donation please send us an email or leave a voicemail and one of our staff members will reach out to you directly.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / March 16, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **CONFERENCE USA CANCELS ALL SPRING SPORT COMPETITION/CHAMPIONSHIPS**

**DALLAS** — Effective immediately by a unanimous vote of the Conference USA Board of Directors, all spring sport competition and championships have been canceled.

WKU Athletics has created a webpage to distribute any relevant updates related to the COVID-19 pandemic. That page can be accessed at all times on the top navigation bar of [WKUSports.com]WKUSports.com, as well as at the following direct link: <https://goto.ps/COVID19>

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / March 18, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

*Ryan O'Connor headshot is attached.*

### **O'CONNOR HIRED AS WKU HEAD CHEERLEADING COACH, SPIRIT PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Director of Athletics Todd Stewart announced Wednesday the hiring of Ryan O'Connor as Head Cheerleading Coach and Spirit Program Coordinator.

O'Connor comes to The Hill from Ole Miss, where she served as head cheer coach and mascot coordinator. At WKU, she will be the head coach for the All-Girl and Coed Cheer squads, as well as oversee operations and financials for the Topperettes and Mascot Program in coordination with their coaches.

"I am so excited to be returning back home to Kentucky where cheerleading is in our blood," O'Connor said. "I am looking forward to coaching the WKU Spirit Programs and becoming a part of the Hilltopper community."

"We are very excited to announce Ryan O'Connor as our new Head Cheer Coach and Spirit Program Coordinator," Stewart said. "The addition of someone with her experience at the highest level leading programs who compete annually for national championships marks a huge step forward for our program. Ryan and her family will be a tremendous addition to our Athletics staff and the Bowling Green community."

A native of Lexington, Ky., O'Connor began her cheer career as a five-time KAPOS state champion and five-time National High School Cheerleading Champion (UCA) as a team member at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School.

She was a cheerleader at the University of Kentucky from 2008-09 and then at the University of Alabama from 2009-12, where she was a 2011 UCA College National Champion and graduated in 2012.

She was also a part of Team USA Coed in 2011 and 2012 (ICU Gold Medalist) and Team USA All-Girl in 2013 (ICU Gold Medalist).

O'Connor was previously the spirit coordinator at UAB, where her squads produced four top-10 finishes at UCA College Nationals and in group stunt.

At Ole Miss, her All-Girl team claimed a Gameday National Championship, as well as two third-place finishes, and a fourth-place finish and a seventh-place result in the D1A Division. In Coed, her squads finished third and fourth in Gameday, and seventh and 10th in the DIA Division.

Other notable highlights included Group Stunts (4th, 7th place) and Partner Stunts (10th, 11th place).

O'Connor and her husband Kyle have one son, Michael.





## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / March 19, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

*Letter also attached in PDF form.*

### **A LETTER FROM WKU DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS TODD STEWART**

Hilltopper Nation,

As circumstances change rapidly throughout our nation, I wanted to provide an update on WKU Athletics. This has been an unprecedented period, one in which an hour feels like a day and a day feels like a week. Given the magnitude of the challenges our country faces, we all know it is imperative that we alter our lifestyles immediately.

As most of you are probably aware, WKU will be moving to alternative delivery formats for all in-person spring 2020 classes beginning March 23. The vast majority of students, including all student-athletes except those with extenuating circumstances, will not be on campus for the remainder of the semester.

Additionally, all in-person events at WKU for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester have been postponed, canceled or virtualized. This includes the cancellation of spring football and all spring sports competitions and championships, as well as all formal and informal athletic practices and workouts until further notice.

Our athletes make many sacrifices in order to compete for a championship, and when this opportunity no longer remains it is a sad and unfortunate outcome. However, our first priority is always the well-being of our student-athletes, and we are working diligently to ensure their health and academic success once they depart campus.

We are making sure those leaving have all of the resources needed to transition into a different learning environment and succeed remotely in an online classroom setting. While these truly unique circumstances have been impossible to prepare for, sports constantly provide life lessons in dealing with and overcoming adversity. This is not the first time our coaches, athletes, staff and fans have had obstacles to overcome, and we will come through this the same way we always have – by sticking together.

The 2019-20 athletic calendar featured tremendous success on the field of play, in the classroom and in the community for WKU Athletics, making it even more disappointing to see it end prematurely. Our final record for our eight team sports (baseball, softball, tennis, men's and women's basketball, football, volleyball, and soccer) was 129-51-1, an outstanding .715 winning percentage. In addition, our current 85% graduation success rate is the highest in WKU Athletics history.

This past Wednesday, I walked the upper concourse of Diddle Arena. The lights were dim and it was eerily quiet. While that seemed to symbolize the moment, at the same time I envisioned a future date with a sold out Diddle Arena exploding with energy as all of you passionately celebrated another great moment. Those days will return to Diddle Arena and all of our other venues. And when we resume play in 2020-21, together we will celebrate all of our programs, athletes and successes like never before!

Go Tops!

Todd Stewart

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / March 27, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

*Beyond the Hill, Episode 1 with Tyson Helton — [wkusports.com/podcasts]wkusports.com/podcasts*

### **WKU ATHLETICS LAUNCHES HILLTOPPER NATION PODCAST NETWORK**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics is pleased to announce the launch this week of the Hilltopper Nation Podcast Network.

Powered by Learfield-IMG College, the Hilltopper Nation Podcast Network will be a new home for digital audio content from WKU Athletics that will take you beyond the games and in-depth with all of the people who make Hilltopper Nation special.

Content on the Hilltopper Nation Podcast Network is now available at the following link:  
[wkusports.com/podcasts](http://wkusports.com/podcasts)

It will soon be available through all major streaming platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and Spotify.

This is especially important to WKU Athletics in today's world. With the issues we're facing globally, and in-person contact limited even between our staff and coaches and student-athletes, it's important that we continue to find compelling ways to tell their stories and share them with you.

One of those new platforms is a program called "Beyond The Hill" – a new longform interview series on the Hilltopper Nation Podcast Network, where host Tyler Eaton will speak with WKU coaches, players, alumni and others in the Hilltopper family to explore their lives, their commitment to their craft, and currently, how they're navigating these uncertain times.

The first guest on "Beyond The Hill" is WKU Football head coach Tyson Helton. Tyler and Coach Helton discuss how he and his family are handling the COVID-19 pandemic, how the Hilltoppers are adjusting and continuing to grow despite the cancellation of spring football, what to expect from the 2020 roster and more.

The first episode of "Beyond The Hill" is now available to stream and download. In the coming weeks and months, the Hilltopper Nation Podcast Network will also house additional digital audio content such as classic games, coaches' shows, weekly wrap-ups and press conferences.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / April 10, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU ATHLETICS TO RE-AIR RECENT CLASSICS IN WKU RADIO REWIND**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics will take a stroll down memory lane over the next eight weeks with the WKU Radio Rewind, presented by Meijer.

Over the next eight weeks, the radio calls of classic victories from recent memory representing Hilltopper Football, Hilltopper Basketball and Lady Topper Basketball will air at 7 p.m. CT Saturday.

The games will air on 102.7 ESPN in Bowling Green and 104.7 The Score in Glasgow. They will also be available on-demand to stream after the broadcast on the Hilltopper Sports Podcast Network.

Each classic game will feature introduction and commentary from the “Voice of the Hilltoppers,” Randy Lee.

WKU Radio Rewind, presented by Meijer, will begin this Saturday at 7 p.m. with a replay of Hilltopper Basketball’s victory at Oklahoma State in the 2018 NIT quarterfinals.

### **The full schedule is available below:**

*\*All broadcasts begin at 7 p.m. CT*

- Saturday, April 11 – Men’s Basketball vs. Oklahoma State (2018 NIT Quarterfinals)
- Saturday, April 18 – Football vs. Marshall (2014)
- Saturday, April 25 – Women’s Basketball vs. UAB (2018 C-USA Championship)
- Saturday, May 2 – Men’s Basketball vs. Arkansas (2019)
- Saturday, May 9 – Football vs. Louisiana Tech (2016 C-USA Championship)
- Saturday, May 16 – Football vs. Kentucky (2012)
- Saturday, May 23 – Men’s Basketball vs. #15 Wisconsin (2018)
- Saturday, May 30 – Football vs. South Florida (2015 Miami Beach Bowl)

For on-demand listening, the Hilltopper Sports Podcast Network can be accessed anytime at [wkusports.com/podcasts]wkusports.com/podcasts. It’s also available on all major streaming platforms, including [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), [Google Play](#) and [Stitcher](#).

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / April 29, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **AN UPDATE ON SEASON TICKETS AND HAF FROM WKU ATHLETICS**

To Hilltopper Nation,

We are all in the middle of unprecedented times in our country. Our hope is that you and your family are staying safe and healthy. We understand that there is a great deal of uncertainty as we try to look forward to this fall. We are currently making plans for all fall sports as scheduled; however, we understand many things remain fluid. We have been working on options for fans and donors to provide assurance to their season tickets and HAF contributions.

The changes are designed to provide our fans additional flexibility for football season and all fall and winter sports at this time. Fans will have three refund options if there are any changes to our ticketed sports as a result of COVID-19. These changes include payments for your season tickets as well as your HAF contribution.

- 1. Fans will have the option to transfer your payments to the following season.**
- 2. Fans will have the ability to change the allocation of their payments to a 100% tax-deductible athletic donation.**
- 3. Fans may receive a full refund for any canceled games.**

The current season ticket and HAF deadline is May 31. Season ticket upgrades will take place during the month of June.

WKU Athletics is offering payment plans that are available online at WKU Account Manager and by calling the WKU Ticket Office at 1-800-5-BIGRED. With payment plans, fans are able to renew their seats and set up their HAF donation with no money down and flexible payment dates. Don't forget to lock in your payment plan before the May 31 deadline.

As we continue to work on several contingency plans for all our sporting events and the return of our student-athletes to campus, we encourage you to consider the renewal of your support to HAF and purchasing season tickets. We hope the flexibility of these refund options will give you the confidence you need to invest and support our student athletes this season.

We will always remain committed to providing flexible payment options for our fans. We appreciate every single supporter of Hilltopper Athletics and this community, as we continue to rally behind each other in this time of need.

Go Tops!

WKU Athletics

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 7, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **163 WKU STUDENT-ATHLETES NAMED TO C-USA COMMISSIONER'S HONOR ROLL**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — A total of 163 WKU student-athletes earned Commissioner's Honor Roll recognition from Conference USA for maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better during the 2019-20 academic year, the league announced Thursday.

WKU's 163 honorees are its most since 2015 and its second-most overall since joining C-USA.

Student-athletes with a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or better will also receive the Commissioner's Academic Medal. Those recipients will be announced Friday.

Over the 2019 calendar year, 72 student-athletes have earned their degrees from WKU with a combined grade point average of over 3.15.

WKU Athletics has also maintained the highest Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in program history at 85. Its 64 percent Federal Graduation Rate is also the second-highest in program history, and 12 percent higher than the university's general student body (52 percent).

#### **Baseball**

Price Adams

Sean Bergeron

Richard Constantine

Michael Darrell-Hicks

Aidan Elias

Hunter Evans

Joe Howard

Tanner Johnson

Jake Kates

Alec Kubik

Jack Lambert

Collin Lollar

Sam McElreath

Dalton Mesaris

Matthew Meyer

Matt Phipps

Eric Riffe

Dalton Shoemake

Davis Sims

Connor Stephens

Bailey Sutton

Jackson Swiney  
Brandon Tucker  
Mason Vinyard  
Jack Wilson

**Football**

Beanie Bishop  
Ta'Corian Darden  
Wes Dorsey  
Steven Duncan  
Jaylon George  
John Haggerty  
Mitchell Harralson  
Rex Henderson  
Parker Howell  
Juwuan Jones  
Carson Jordan  
Antwon Kincade  
Marcelis Logan  
Trae Meadows  
Cory Munson  
Jared Nash  
Daylen Powell  
Jack Randolph  
Joshua Simon  
Cole Spencer  
Malik Staples  
Ty Storey  
Steven Witchoskey  
Tyler Witt

**Men's Basketball**

Charles Bassey  
Kenny Cooper  
Jackson Harlan  
Camron Justice  
Carson Williams

**Men's Cross Country**

Dylan Duckworth  
Luke Hoover  
Miles Huff  
Will Perrone  
Clint Sherman



Jacob Skillman  
Zach Skillman  
Jacob Steppe  
Dedrick Troxell  
Emerson Wells

**Men's Golf**

Tom Bevington  
Chase Landrum  
Linus Lo  
Dawson McDaniel  
Caleb O'Toole  
Jack Poole

**Men's Track and Field**

Brett Brannon  
Devon Montgomery  
Devon Montgomery  
Rafael Teodoro da Silva

**Women's Basketball**

Alexis Brewer  
De'Myla Brown  
Whitney Creech  
Dee Givens  
Sherry Porter  
Fatou Pouye  
Sandra Skinner

**Women's Cross Country**

Kaia Enevoldsen  
Savannah Heckman  
Morgan Kannapel  
Abby Luce  
Carley Maskos  
Lauren Roby  
Jenna Vaughn  
Haley Webb  
Heather Whitlow

**Women's Golf**

Sarah Arnold  
Caroline Cavin  
Megan Clarke

Mary Joiner  
Lizzie Loy  
Abigail Smee

**Women's Soccer**

Chandler Backes  
Logan Barber  
Ambere Barnett  
Tally Bishop  
Christina Bragado  
Kaylyn Bryant  
Ansley Cate  
Sydney Ernst  
Katie Erwin  
Avery Jacobsen  
Ashley Kobylinski  
Aleksandra Kožović  
Ashley Leonard  
Lucy Lyon  
Victoria Mayo  
Chelsea Moore  
Kerragan Mulzer  
Isidora Pekez  
Lyric Schmidt  
Afton Schraml  
Emily Speidel  
Taylor Stanley  
Jordan Strauss  
Anne-Marie Ulliac

**Softball**

Kelsey Aikey  
Paige Carter  
Carli Crowder  
Taylor Davis  
Katie Gardner  
Madeline Harris  
Morgan McElroy  
Macy Murphy  
Shelby Nunn  
Madeline Rider  
Jordan Ridge  
Taylor Sanders  
Kendall Smith

Kennedy Sullivan  
Jordan Thomas  
Maggie Trgo  
Princess Valencia

**Women's Tennis**

Laura Bernardos  
Tristen Bryant-Otake  
Cora-Lynn von Dungern  
Lisa Friess  
Lauren Joch  
Zoe Wende

**Women's Track and Field**

Shelby Chobot  
Audrey Griffin  
Nicole Ogorek  
Mary Claire Redden  
Samyza Sears  
Alexis Thacker  
Grace Turner

**Volleyball**

Taylor Bebout  
Paige Briggs  
Sophia Cerino  
Avri Davis  
Nadia Dieudonne  
Ashley Hood  
Katie Isenbarger  
Kayland Jackson  
Emma Kowalkowski  
Jennifer Rush  
Hallie Shelton

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 8, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **45 WKU STUDENT-ATHLETES RECEIVE C-USA COMMISSIONER'S ACADEMIC MEDAL**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — A total of 45 WKU student-athletes have earned the 2019-20 Conference USA Commissioner's Academic Medal for maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.75 or better during the 2019-20 academic year, the league announced Friday.

Twelve WKU sport programs were honored by the conference, with Lady Topper Soccer leading the way with 11 honorees.

On Thursday, 163 WKU student-athletes earned Commissioner's Honor Roll recognition from Conference USA for maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher. That was WKU's most honorees since 2015 and its second-most overall since joining C-USA.

Over the 2019 calendar year, 72 student-athletes have earned their degrees from WKU with a combined grade point average of over 3.15.

WKU Athletics has also maintained the highest Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in program history at 85. Its 64 percent Federal Graduation Rate is also the second-highest in program history, and 12 percent higher than the university's general student body (52 percent).

#### **Baseball**

Sam McElreath  
Dalton Mesaris  
Jackson Swiney

#### **Football**

John Haggerty  
Jared Nash  
Malik Staples

#### **Men's Basketball**

Charles Bassey  
Camron Justice  
Carson Williams

#### **Men's Cross Country**

Jacob Skillman  
Zach Skillman

#### **Men's Golf**

Tom Bevington  
Jack Poole

#### **Women's Basketball**

Alexis Brewer  
Dee Givens  
Sandra Skinner

### **Women's Cross Country**

Kaia Enevoldsen  
Lauren Roby  
Jenna Vaughn  
Haley Webb

### **Women's Golf**

Caroline Cavin  
Megan Clarke  
Mary Joiner  
Lizzie Loy

### **Women's Soccer**

Logan Barber  
Kaylyn Bryant  
Ansley Cate  
Sydney Ernst  
Katie Erwin  
Aleksandra Kozovic  
Ashley Leonard  
Chelsea Moore  
Kerragan Mulzer  
Isidora Pekez  
Afton Schraml

### **Softball**

Jordan Strauss  
Paige Carter  
Morgan McElroy  
Macy Murphy

### **Women's Track and Field**

Audrey Griffin  
Nicole Ogorek

### **Volleyball**

Paige Briggs  
Sophia Cerino  
Katie Isenbarger  
Jennifer Rush

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 14, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU ATHLETICS SET TO GRADUATE 53 STUDENT-ATHLETES WITH HIGHEST GPA SINCE 2013**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — A total of 53 WKU student-athletes, representing the department's highest cumulative grade point average for a graduating class in several years, will have their degrees conferred this spring and summer.

In lieu of in-person Commencement this spring, WKU will confer degrees to nearly 2,700 spring 2020 graduates virtually Friday, including 48 student-athletes. Another five student-athletes are set to receive their degrees this summer.

WKU Athletics' graduating class has a cumulative GPA of 3.29, which is the highest for a Hilltopper graduating class since 2013.

Nine of the 53 student-athletes will be receiving their graduate degrees or a graduate certificate, while the others will be earning their bachelor's degrees or receiving a certificate of completion in a new area.

Among the nine receiving graduate degrees, five will graduate with a GPA of 3.96 or better, including four perfect 4.0s. Seventeen of WKU's total graduates boast a GPA of 3.70 or higher.

Degrees obtained include management, finance, economics, biology, sport management, criminology, mechanical engineering, physical therapy, education, entrepreneurship, marketing, recreation and sport administration, social work, speech pathology, accounting, biochemistry, interior design, nursing, healthcare administration and public health among others.

During the weekend of Sept. 18-20, WKU tentatively plans to host Commencement celebration activities. The weekend coincides with the annual Parent & Family Weekend. As plans develop, dates and times will be provided.

During the 2019-20 school year, 78 student-athletes will have earned their degrees from WKU – including 25 who graduated in December – with a combined grade-point average of 3.23.

WKU Athletics has also maintained the highest Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in program history at 85. Its 64 percent Federal Graduation Rate is the second-highest in program history, and 12 percent higher than the university's general student body (52 percent).

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 18, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU NAMED FINALIST FOR OPERATION HAT TRICK 2020 EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE AWARD**

**HAMPTON, N.H.** — Operation Hat Trick, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting wounded U.S. combat veterans, has recognized Western Kentucky University's outstanding efforts in aiding the recovery of wounded U.S. combat service members and veterans by naming the school a finalist for its 2020 Excellence in Service Award.

In recognition of the school's impact, OHT will make a donation to the Fisher House of Fort Campbell on the university's behalf. Operation Hat Trick Founder and President Dot Sheehan presented the Excellence in Service Awards via video conference last week.

"Western Kentucky has shown the kind of devotion and commitment to our veterans we're hoping to inspire all over the country," Sheehan said. "Raising funds is a critical part of meeting their needs, but just as important is raising awareness of their struggles so we never forget our obligation to help them overcome their injuries and enjoy full lives."

WKU was one of nine finalists that included Arizona, Clemson, South Florida, Utah State, Texas A&M, North Dakota State, Virginia Tech and Nebraska. The finalists were chosen based on their efforts to fully integrate OHT on their campuses through a presence in their bookstores and other retail outlets, promoting veterans' causes through their social media properties and advertising campaigns, and generating additional revenue that will be used to support the recovery of wounded service members and veterans.

In conjunction with the football program's home game against Army last October, WKU Athletics released a series of apparel products bringing together the Hilltoppers and OHT, as well as a social media campaign to promote both the products and the organization's cause.

WKU's efforts generated thousands of dollars in donations to help veterans recover from the visible and invisible injuries suffered in combat.

"It's a great honor for our institution to support an organization like Operation Hat Trick," said Olivia Higgins, WKU's Assistant Athletic Director of Marketing. "We have always wanted to get more involved with OHT, and this year we were able to pull that off. We are located in Bowling Green, Kentucky, surrounded by army bases at Fort Campbell and Fort Knox with a very big veteran population. It was the perfect time to bring Operation Hat Trick gear on to our campus, and we can't wait to continue our partnership to help further their mission of helping American service members recover from their past traumas of battle."

A portion of each sale of OHT branded merchandise is donated to select organizations that support the recovery of wounded service members and veterans. Through the sale of branded

merchandise and member donations, Operation Hat Trick donations have helped dozens of organizations that provide direct services and support to wounded service members and veterans. They include Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Veterans Count, the Navy SEAL Foundation, the Travis Mills Foundation, Liberty House, Project Sanctuary, Semper Fi Fund, Warriors Ice Hockey Programs, Hero Flights and the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

### **About Operation Hat Trick**

OHT generates awareness, support and funding for the recovery of America's wounded service members and veterans. The organization pursues these goals through the sale of OHT branded merchandise, proceeds of which are distributed to selected organizations supporting the OHT mission. Operation Hat Trick is supported by more than 500 universities and colleges, 130 high schools, 21 National Hockey League teams, 15 NBA teams, more than 80 Minor League Baseball teams and over 90 companies. For more information, to give online or to purchase OHT apparel and merchandise, visit [www.operationhattrick.org](http://www.operationhattrick.org).



## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 19, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU RECEIVES STRONG MARKS IN LATEST APR PROGRESS REPORT**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics continues to earn strong marks in the classroom in the latest Academic Progress Rate (APR) Annual Progress Report released by the NCAA on Tuesday.

The APR provides a real-time look at a program's academic success each semester by tracking the academic progress of each student-athlete on scholarship. The APR accounts for eligibility, retention and graduation and provides a measure of each team's academic performance. This year, the APR score was a multi-year average of the 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years.

Every Hilltopper and Lady Topper program exceeded the NCAA's mandated 930 minimum and eight programs surpassed that threshold by 40 points or more. Seven topped the 930 threshold by at least 50 points.

Last week, WKU Women's Soccer and Women's Tennis received NCAA APR Public Recognition Awards for having multi-year APR scores in the top 10 percent nationally through the 2018-19 academic year. WKU has had multiple programs honored for five consecutive seasons for the first time since the APR recognition program began.

Over the course of this spring and summer, 54 WKU student-athletes are set to graduate with a cumulative grade-point average of 3.31, which is the highest for a WKU graduating class since at least 2013.

Ten of the 54 student-athletes will be receiving their graduate degrees or a graduate certificate, while the others will be earning their bachelor's degrees or receiving a certificate of completion in a new area.

Among the 10 receiving graduate degrees, six will graduate with a GPA of 3.96 or better, including five perfect 4.0s. Eighteen of WKU's total graduates boast a GPA of 3.70 or higher.

During the 2019-20 school year, 79 student-athletes will have earned their degrees from WKU – including 25 who graduated in December – with a combined grade-point average of 3.24.

WKU Athletics has also maintained the highest Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in program history at 85. Its 64 percent Federal Graduation Rate is the second-highest in program history, and 12 percent higher than the university's general student body (52 percent).

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 21, 2020

Athletic Hall of Fame / Contact: Paul Just, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL CLASS OF TEAM INDUCTEES**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — The WKU Alumni W-Club announced Thursday the 16 great athletic teams that will make up the multi-year inaugural class of the WKU Athletic Hall of Fame Teams.

The W-Club expanded the Athletic Hall of Fame last year to for the first time induct great teams, not just individuals.

Recognition of the 16 teams considered as the “Inaugural Class” began in November when the 2002 and 1952 football teams were honored on campus.

The W-Club Board of Directors elected to select multiple teams to be honored as the Inaugural Class when faced with the daunting task of recognizing the long list of great teams in the tradition-rich history of athletics on The Hill. As a result, the 16 teams listed below will comprise the first class.

“I am so very proud of the rich athletic tradition at WKU,” W-Club Board Chairman Bryan Baysinger said. “Our history dictates and deserves a large Inaugural Class. The W-Club looks forward to honoring these teams and the others that will follow in decades to come.”

The 14 additional members of the class will be recognized on campus three or four squads at a time over the next four years. The order and dates of the recognition celebrations are yet to be determined.

The complete 16-team Inaugural Class includes the following great Hilltopper and Lady Topper teams (listed alphabetically by sport):

#### **Baseball**

1980 — 47-13-1 overall (most wins in school history); NCAA South Region runner-up; Ohio Valley Conference regular season and tournament champion; ranked 18th in the final Collegiate Baseball poll

#### **Men’s Basketball**

1941-42 — 29-5 overall; NIT national runner-up; Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association champion; Kentucky Intercollegiate Athletic (KIAC) champion

1947-48 — 28-2 overall; NIT 3rd place; KIAC champion; best record in the nation

1953-54 — 29-3 overall; NIT 4th place; OVC champion; ranked 6th (UPI) and 8th (AP) in the final polls

1965-66 — 25-3 overall; NCAA Sweet 16; OVC regular season and conference champion; ranked 10th in final AP poll

1966-67 — 23-3 overall; NCAA Tournament; OVC regular season and tournament champion; ranked 6th (AP) and 7th (UPI) in the final polls

1970-71 — 24-6 overall; NCAA Final Four (3rd place); NCAA Mideast Region champion; OVC champion; ranked 7th by both AP and UPI in the final polls

### **Women's Basketball**

1984-85 — 28-6 overall; NCAA Final Four (semi-finalist); NCAA Mideast Region champion; ranked 14th in the final AP poll

1985-86 — 32-4 overall (most wins in school history); NCAA Final Four (semi-finalist); NCAA East Region champion; Sun Belt Conference (SBC) regular season and tournament champion; ranked 3rd (USA Today Coaches) and 5th (AP) in the final polls

1991-92 — 27-8 overall; NCAA Final Four (runner-up); NCAA Mideast Region champion; SBC tournament champion and regular season co-champion; ranked 3rd (USA Today Coaches) and 15th (AP) in the final polls

### **Men's Cross Country**

1974 — NCAA National runner-up; NCAA District III champion; OVC champion; undefeated heading into national championship meet

### **Football**

1952 — 9-1 overall; Refrigerator Bowl and OVC champion; 1st Hilltopper team earn a bowl bid

1963 — 10-0-1 overall; Tangerine Bowl and OVC champion; only undefeated team in WKU football history

1973 — 12-1 overall; NCAA Division II national runner-up; Grantland Rice Bowl and OVC champion

1975 — 11-2 overall; NCAA Division II national runner-up; Grantland Rice Bowl and OVC champion

2002 — 12-3 overall; NCAA Division I-AA national champion; Gateway Football Conference co-champion; ranked #1 in the nation in the final I-AA poll

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 28, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

*University's proposed Big Red Restart plan available here — <https://www.wku.edu/restart/>  
WKU Athletics proposed Restart Plan available here — <https://goto.ps/WKUAthleticsRestart>*

### **WKU ATHLETICS ANNOUNCES PROPOSED RESTART IN CONJUNCTION WITH UNIVERSITY PLAN**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — In conjunction with other committees on campus, WKU Athletics announced Thursday its portion of a comprehensive university proposed restart plan draft.

The university's full proposed plan was released Thursday in order to receive feedback from the public. The final approved plan will be released in the coming days.

Athletics represents one of four committees the university has charged with restarting WKU. The Athletics Restart Committee members have been working diligently for weeks to create plans to safely and efficiently return student-athletes and staff to campus this summer, while also sharing in the full university's common goal of a safe resumption of the on-campus experience this fall.

Utilizing a staggered approach to best ensure the safety of all involved, WKU Athletics' proposed plan will begin with a partial return of the WKU Football team for voluntary workouts starting June 8.

Additional football student-athletes and other fall sport athletes are slated to return to campus to begin workouts in early July, followed days later by men's and women's basketball, with other sports returning later in August.

"We are excited to welcome back portions of our student-athletes and staff to campus this summer under safe, strategic guidelines set forth by numerous governing bodies and medical advisors," WKU Director of Athletics Todd Stewart said. "We understand that Athletics will lead the way in many respects in our university's restart, and it's a responsibility we take seriously. We feel very confident in the plan we've set forth as we begin a staggered restart this summer and work toward regularly scheduled fall activities on campus."

WKU Athletics' proposed plan has been crafted in collaboration with government, conference and NCAA input, as well as discussions with in-state, regional and national peers. That includes the full inclusion of and strict adherence to the guidelines set forth by the state of Kentucky for the healthy reopening of businesses, fitness centers and athletic activities.

The plan has also been formulated every step of the way under the advisory of WKU Athletics' team physicians and sports medicine/athletic training staff.

WKU Athletics' Restart Committee has also been careful to note that its plan is a living document that will constantly evolve as medical advances, procedures and treatment plans are developed. Contingencies will be created to help provide flexibility as guidelines from these supervising entities develop.

This plan is meant to engage and impact the entire athletic department and anyone that would be included in providing care, or have access to the department and its facilities.

The full details of WKU Athletics' plan to restart activities this summer can be found at the following link: <https://goto.ps/WKUAthleticsRestart>

Available in the full plan are WKU Athletics' strategies for:

- Personal protective equipment
- Student-athlete/staff education
- Travel back to Bowling Green
- Initial return screening
- Ongoing screening and temperature checks
- Facility screening, participant logs, contact tracing and testing
- Facility entrance/exit plans
- Cleaning procedures
- Mental health protocols

The plan also includes sport-specific return logistics, as well as other relevant details for academics, housing and dining.

WKU Athletics has also created a subcommittee that will help plan and implement gameday event operations, particularly as it relates to football. That committee will work through the summer as guidelines and plans for fall sports become clearer, and its work will be shared at the appropriate time.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / May 30, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **STATEMENT FROM WKU ATHLETICS**

The recent injustices in our nation continue to show that we have to change as a society.

We know many of our student-athletes, our staff, our fans and others in our campus community and beyond are hurting. We see and feel that pain, but know we all cannot understand it the same way through the same lived experiences.

We will listen to each other, stand up for each other, love each other, treat each other the way we want to be treated, and never stop trying to improve ourselves and those around us.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / June 5, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU ATHLETICS SETS NEW RECORDS FOR SEMESTER, CUMULATIVE GPAs**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics continues to set new standards in the classroom after wrapping the spring semester with record marks.

Despite transitioning to an online, alternative-learning format because of the COVID-19 pandemic, WKU student-athletes finished the term with a combined semester GPA of 3.27 – the highest in department history.

Additionally, the cumulative career GPA of all current student-athletes is 3.14, which is also the highest in the history of WKU Athletics.

Twelve of WKU's 14 sport programs have a team cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher, and every program has a team cumulative GPA of 2.8 or higher. Better than 77 percent of all WKU student-athletes had a semester GPA of 3.0 or higher in the spring.

"These record marks are a testament to the commitment to education within WKU Athletics," Director of Athletics Todd Stewart said. "To continue to set a new bar through the adversity presented this semester speaks volumes about the perseverance and character of our student-athletes."

During the 2019-20 school year, 79 WKU student-athletes earned their degrees with a combined grade-point average of 3.24.

A total of 54 WKU student-athletes graduated in the spring and summer with a cumulative GPA of 3.31, which is the highest for a Hilltopper graduating class since at least 2013.

WKU Athletics has also maintained the highest Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in program history at 85. Its 64 percent Federal Graduation Rate is the second-highest in program history, and 12 percent higher than the university's general student body (52 percent).

A total of 46 WKU student-athletes earned the 2019-20 Conference USA Commissioner's Academic Medal for maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.75 or better during the 2019-20 academic year.

Additionally, 163 WKU student-athletes earned Commissioner's Honor Roll recognition from Conference USA for maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher. That was WKU's most honorees since 2015 and its second-most overall since joining C-USA.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / June 25, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **MEDIA EXPOSURE OF 2019 WKU FOOTBALL SEASON VALUED AT \$35 MILLION**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Football’s remarkable turnaround season in 2019 brought tremendous exposure to the program, athletic department and university. A new analysis has valued that media/marketing exposure at nearly \$35 million.

The study completed by Joyce Julius and Associates, Inc. – which takes into account national television, television news coverage, print media, internet news and social media from Aug. 1, 2019, through Jan. 15, 2020 – valued the exposure generated by WKU Football in that window at \$34,880,591.60.

That valuation is based on how much the exposure would cost in the open market if purchased at current marketing rates.

“This study brings great perspective to the positive impact of WKU Athletics in many areas,” Director of Athletics Todd Stewart said. “We often call Athletics the ‘front porch’ of the university, and that’s never been more evident than this marketing exposure valuation, particularly in regard to our bowl game victory – one of four in the last six years. Considering this analysis looked at just one of our 16 programs and that the total number for our full department would be significantly higher, it becomes clear how bright the spotlight of WKU Athletics shines on Western Kentucky University.”

After going 3-9 in 2018, the Hilltoppers went 9-4 in the 2019 season under first-year head coach Tyson Helton for the third-best improvement in the nation.

The season included a 45-19 blowout win at SEC foe Arkansas and concluded with a 23-20 victory over Western Michigan in the SERVPRO First Responder Bowl, the program’s fourth bowl title in six seasons. It was also WKU Football’s sixth bowl appearance overall in the last eight seasons.

According to the valuation, WKU Football generated nearly \$19 million in exposure through internet news, fueling more than 18,000 mentions/articles and over 670 million impressions. Some of the top outlets within that coverage were Yahoo!, MSN, Business Insider, the New York Times, USA Today and Forbes.

Two of the season’s top moments that were a primary focus of the study were the Hilltoppers’ road win at Arkansas on SEC Network and its walk-off victory in the First Responder Bowl on ESPN. The nature of both victories was a catalyst toward significant exposure through other media as well.



Quarterback Ty Storey's triumphant return to his former school at Arkansas drew notable buzz, and freshman kicker Cory Munson's 52-yard, game-winning field goal in the First Responder Bowl was a talking point throughout bowl season.

The national TV exposure alone from the bowl game was valued at \$6.8 million with nearly 1.3 million impressions. The study uses a scientific approach to quantify graphics, mentions, helmets, logos, coach apparel, highlights, mascot time, jersey identity, bottom line graphics and sideline personnel/equipment.

In total, Joyce Julius puts a conservative estimate on the media exposure value of the First Responder Bowl alone for WKU in excess of \$13 million.

Additionally, the Hilltoppers' win at Arkansas was valued at about \$500,000 in national TV exposure.

The program generated more than 84 million social media impressions during the 2019 season, with that exposure valued at \$2.4 million.

WKU Football also produced nearly \$2.4 million in television news coverage, led by mentions on outlets such as CBS, CBS Sports Network, ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNNews, ESPNU, Fox Sports 1 and NFL Network.

The season generated nearly \$3.8 million worth of print media coverage from leading outlets such as USA Today, the Washington Post, Chicago Tribune and Los Angeles Daily News.

Joyce Julius and Associates, Inc. is an independently owned and operated research company. It has provided independent sports, special event and entertainment program evaluation since 1985, including programs from the top levels of college athletics.

The firm's national television exposure value is based on Recognition Grade (RG) methodology, which takes into account elements such as size of the identity, screen position, brand clutter and any applicable brand integration. When directly comparing on-screen time and mentions to the program's 30-second commercial rate (without applying RG methodology), a national television exposure value of \$9,959,877.98 is realized.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / June 30, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU'S STEWART NAMED NO. 15 ATHLETIC DIRECTOR IN NATION BY STADIUM**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Director of Athletics Todd Stewart was named the No. 15 AD in the nation Tuesday by the media outlet Stadium, based on past football and men's basketball coaching hires.

The rankings, compiled by Stadium national reporters Brett McMurphy and Jeff Goodman, assigned grades to every athletic director's football and men's basketball hires during their entire career, and then assigned an overall grade.

The grades were based on the success of the coaches hired, difficulty of opponents in their respective conferences, bowl appearances, NCAA Tournament trips, conference titles and national championships won.

Stewart's four football coaching hires received an A-minus grade, with his hire of men's basketball head coach Rick Stansbury receiving a B. Overall, Stewart was granted a B-plus grade for his hires.

His ranking places him ahead of 52 Power Five athletic directors and first among C-USA ADs. Last week, Stadium ranked Stewart the No. 2 non-Power Five athletic director in the country behind UCF's Danny White.

"It is certainly an honor anytime you are recognized favorably among a distinguished group of your peers," Stewart said. "However, when a hire proves to be successful, what it really means is the head coach you hired, their staff and that program's players achieved at a high level. We have been fortunate to have a very dedicated group of coaches and players at WKU, and this is validation that their achievements are being recognized and respected nationally."

Stewart's four football head coach hires – Bobby Petrino (2013), Jeff Brohm (2014-16), Mike Sanford (2017-18) and Tyson Helton (2019) – have won a combined 56 games in seven years, an average of eight wins per season, with back-to-back Conference USA championships in 2015 and 2016.

Those 56 wins include three victories over the SEC's Kentucky, Vanderbilt and Arkansas. WKU also achieved its first top-25 ranking at the FBS level in 2015 at No. 24.

The Hilltoppers have been bowl eligible in six of the seven seasons under Stewart's hires and have won four of the five bowl games they've competed in since 2014. The latest of those victories in the 2019 First Responder Bowl was recently valued in excess of \$13 million in media exposure for the school, with the full season valuing at nearly \$35 million.

The Hilltoppers have had nine NFL Draft picks since 2014 with other undrafted free agents also making an impact in the league, including 2019 Super Bowl champion Deon Yelder.

On the men's basketball side, Rick Stansbury has won 82 games in four seasons since his hire in 2016 while rejuvenating the fan base with Diddle Arena's largest season attendance since the venue's 2002 renovation.

In the 2018-19 season, Diddle Arena sold out of season tickets in the preseason for the first time since opening in 1963.

The Hilltoppers reached the C-USA title game in both 2018 and 2019, and entered the 2020 tournament as the No. 2 seed before all play was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WKU is one of 44 teams in the country to win at least 20 games in each of the last three seasons, and its 67 wins over the last three years lead Conference USA.

WKU has done its best work against the best competition, going 8-4 against Power Five opponents in the last three seasons. That includes a run to the NIT Final Four in 2018 that helped the Hilltoppers defeat opponents from the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac 12 in the same season for the first time in program history.

Under Stewart, WKU has never employed a search firm for any hire.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / July 14, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **UPDATE ON WKU ATHLETICS' COVID-19 TESTING PROTOCOL**

With a large volume of sport programs returning this month, WKU Athletics in conjunction with its medical partners opted to perform COVID-19 antibody testing on returning student-athletes, coaches and staff last week.

Of the 293 antibody tests performed – which included 183 student-athletes and 110 staff – six returned positive, including four student-athletes and two staff members. Each of those individuals with a positive antibody test result then received a follow-up PCR swab test. One of those two staff members' PCR tests returned active asymptomatic positive this week. WKU Athletics is following the lead and guidance of the local health department in regard to isolation, quarantine, contact tracing and eventual return to physical activity and sport for positive cases.

The antibody test was administered to identify those individuals who have potentially come in contact with the virus and therefore may be at risk for cardiopulmonary side effects. Those who test positive will receive further cardiopulmonary testing and clearance by a specialist before being cleared for physical activity and sport. WKU Athletics and its medical partners consulted with several infectious disease specialists and medical staffs at other institutions both in the state and nationally before finalizing this change in protocol.

All student-athletes, and staff in direct contact with student-athletes, making their first arrival to campus between July 4 and the beginning of the fall semester will undergo this protocol. The WKU Athletics portion of the Big Red Restart Plan will be updated to reflect this change as it is a living document, and testing protocols will remain fluid as more information becomes available.

Consistent with the process outlined in our Restart Plan, WKU Athletics will also continue to perform an acute COVID-19 test on any individual who shows or reports symptoms, as well as any individual who specifically requests an acute test. All PCR tests performed by WKU Athletics on individuals who had returned to campus and reported/showed symptoms or requested a test over the last two months have returned negative.

With acknowledgement from the university and the athletic department that returning requires us to learn to live beside this virus, our plan since its inception has included a protocol for the thorough care and support of any student-athlete or staff member who required testing or who had a positive test, as well as diligent contact tracing and quarantine contingencies to mitigate the risk to others. That's in addition to ongoing daily education, temperature screenings, mask requirements, social distancing and proper hygiene. The well-being of our student-athletes and staff has been and always will be our chief concern.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / July 27, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **COVID-19 UPDATE FROM WKU ATHLETICS**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — One student-athlete from the WKU women's soccer program recently displayed symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19. This is the first student-athlete to test positive since the return to campus in June.

WKU Athletics' restart plan since its inception has included protocols for the thorough care and support of any student-athlete or staff member who required testing or who had a positive test, as well as diligent contact tracing and quarantine contingencies to mitigate the risk to others.

WKU is following the lead and guidance of the local health department in regard to isolation, quarantine, contact tracing, and in the case of athletics, the eventual return to physical activity and sport for positive cases.

The women's soccer program had a regularly scheduled break from activity planned for later this week and extended that break to begin today as a precautionary measure.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / July 31, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **UPDATE ON WKU WOMEN'S SOCCER PROGRAM**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — In consultation with the Barren River Health Department and WKU Athletics' medical partners, the women's soccer program has paused activities for two weeks following additional acute PCR swab COVID-19 testing.

The program was already set to begin a regularly scheduled break from activity this week and began that process Monday.

WKU has launched a new website, [wku.edu/healthyonthehill](http://wku.edu/healthyonthehill), to support the reopening preparations underway across the institution. With the launch of this site, WKU also launched a new COVID-19 [case dashboard](#) that will be updated weekly to include confirmed cases within the whole campus community as reported by the Barren River Health Department or reported to WKU's COVID-19 Response Team. Moving forward, as PCR results within WKU Athletics are received, any positive case counts will be included in the University dashboard updates. Athletics will provide any relevant updates from its area as deemed appropriate.

WKU Athletics' restart plan since its inception has included protocols for the thorough care and support of any student-athlete or staff member who required testing or who had a positive test, as well as diligent contact tracing and quarantine contingencies to mitigate the risk to others.

WKU is following the lead and guidance of the local health department in regard to isolation, quarantine, contact tracing, and in the case of athletics, the eventual return to physical activity and sport for positive cases.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / August 21, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **UPDATE ON WKU ATHLETICS' FALL SPORTS COMPETITION**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — As announced earlier this afternoon, the Conference USA Board of Directors has announced the postponement of fall team sports (with the exception of football), as well as fall C-USA championships in those sports, to the spring of 2021.

This move comes following the NCAA Division I Board of Directors' decision to move Division I fall championships to spring. The sports affected for WKU Athletics are women's soccer and volleyball.

A decision is still being made on the C-USA competition timeline for cross country in the 2020-21 school year. More information will be provided when available.

Other C-USA sports that participate in the fall but hold their championship in the spring, such as golf and tennis, can compete this fall at each member institution's discretion. WKU will still pursue fall competition opportunities for men's golf, women's golf and women's tennis.

WKU Football will announce its full, updated 2020 schedule Monday.

The move to the spring for soccer and volleyball allows C-USA schools to not only compete for a C-USA Championship, but have an opportunity to play for a spot in the NCAA Championships.

"We value the opportunity for our schools to compete at the highest level and play for championships" C-USA Commissioner Judy MacLeod said. "Moving these sports to the spring maintains those opportunities for our student-athletes, coaches and fans."

Dates of competition and formats for the fall sports moving to the spring will be announced at a later date.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / September 3, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **WKU ATHLETICS ANNOUNCES APPROVED FOOTBALL GAMEDAY GUIDELINES**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics announced Thursday its capacity and guidelines for the 2020 Hilltopper Football season as approved by the Governor's office.

WKU will have a 20 percent capacity for home games at Houchens-Smith Stadium with less than 5,000 fans total. A minimum of 1,000 seats will be held for WKU students.

"We are excited to have football returning to The Hill in the coming weeks, and we will move forward in a safe and cautious manner," Director of Athletics Todd Stewart said. "Gameday will not look the same as it has in years past and attendees will need to adhere to the mitigation policies that have been implemented. We appreciate the Governor's office working with us to allow a 20 percent capacity, and we are hopeful that can increase as the season progresses. We are committed to being as flexible as possible to ensure our fans have a comparable season ticket location to prior years. It will take everyone's cooperation to make gameday the best experience it can be, and we greatly value your patience and support."

All seats will be reassigned to create social distance throughout the stadium. Tickets will be assigned next week using WKU's Hilltopper Athletic Foundation priority ranking and will be available to view in the tickerholder's account at that time.

WKU Athletics is transitioning to mobile ticketing this year. More information on the logistics of mobile ticketing will also be made available next week.

Fans who choose to opt out of their tickets for 2020 can move their ticket credit to 2021, convert the total to a tax-deductible gift to the HAF, or request a refund.

At this time, no single-game tickets will be available this season.

Masks will be required for entry into the stadium and must be worn at all times within the stadium. WKU Athletics' Clear Bag Policy will also still be in effect.

Temperature checks will also be required for all fans. Individuals with a temperature of 100.4 F or higher will not be admitted.

WKU Athletics will engage in increased cleaning and sanitization in all public areas of the stadium before, during and after the game.

HAF designated parking lots will remain the same this season. General public tailgating is discouraged. No tents or grills will be allowed on campus on gameday.

WKU opens its 2020 Football season at Louisville at 7 p.m. CT Sept. 12 on ACC Network. The first home game is against Liberty at 11 a.m. Sept. 19 and will air on ESPN.



## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / September 15, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **HAF LAUNCHES TOPS TOGETHER RECOVERY FUND TO OFFSET COVID-19 RELATED ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — The Hilltopper Athletic Foundation (HAF) announced Tuesday the launch of a new athletics emergency support fund designated to offset departmental COVID-19 related economic challenges.

Departmental expenses include: student-athlete, coaches and staff testing; safety measures to provide a safe, sanitary and healthy environment in all athletics facilities; as well as mental and physical student-athlete healthcare support. The Tops Together Recovery Fund will also help support additional budgetary expenses related to COVID-19 financial and economic damages, including but not limited to: reduced ticket revenue, budget reductions and potential drop in Conference USA and NCAA revenue.

“The countless financial challenges related to the pandemic, coupled with our university’s campus wide budget reductions that also impact the Athletics department have created enormous budget obstacles for us,” Director of Athletics Todd Stewart said. “Our student-athletes, coaches, and staff have remained diligent and dedicated over the last six months, and our goals have not changed. However, our ability to succeed at the high level we have all become accustomed to is now dependent more than ever on the support of our fans. Everyone within the Athletics department has made significant sacrifices to get us to where we are now, but in order to sustain our current momentum we need enhanced philanthropic support to help us navigate a very complicated landscape.”

Donors can support the fund by making an outright gift online, in-person or via phone, or convert the full cost or a portion of your season tickets to a donation designated to the Tops Together Recovery Fund.

All gifts to the fund are 100% tax deductible, and for every dollar donated, donors will receive 3X priority points (\$1 = 3 points). HAF priority points are used to determine the order in which WKU fans have access to tickets, seating, parking and postseason events, which could prove to be especially valuable for as long as capacity remains limited at venues due to COVID-19 safety protocols.

For more information about the Tops Together Recovery Fund, please call 270-745-5321 or visit [hilltopperathleticfoundation.com](http://hilltopperathleticfoundation.com)

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / October 2, 2020

Athletic Hall of Fame / Contact: Paul Just, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

*Action Photos/Headshots of Inductees Available Here – <https://goto.ps/2GwmB68>*

### **FOUR HILLTOPPER GREATS SELECTED FOR INDUCTION INTO WKU ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — Four great names in the history of WKU Athletics have been selected as the 30th class for induction into the WKU Athletic Hall of Fame.

However, the 2020 Class will not be inducted at the annual W-Club Homecoming Brunch this fall as has been the custom for decades. The brunch and inductions ceremony have been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is believed to be the first cancellation of the Homecoming Brunch, which dates back to the mid-1930s, since World War II. The 2020 Class will officially be inducted at a later date to be determined.

The 2020 class includes Sherrod Coates (Football), Chuck Eneix (Men's Track), Janet Jesang (Women's Cross Country and Track) and Chris Marcus (Men's Basketball).

When inducted, the 2020 class will bring the number of former WKU athletes and coaches to earn berths in the school's Athletic Hall of Fame to 160 since its founding in 1991.

More about the members of the 2020 WKU Athletic Hall of Fame class:

#### **Sherrod Coates – Football, 4 letters (1999-02)**

A three-time All-America linebacker (2000, '01 and '02) and two-time All-Gateway Conference selection ('01 and '02), Coates was named a member of the WKU Football All-Century Team in 2018. He set WKU season (31) and career (75) records for tackles for loss and both season (13) and career (30) records for sacks as well as the career record (14) for forced fumbles. As a junior he ranked 17th in the nation in tackles for loss (1.64 per game). Then in 2002, he was 12th in the nation in tackles for loss (2.07/game) and 16th in sacks (0.87/game). His last three Topper teams won two conference crowns, going a combined 18-3 (85.7%) in league competition and 31-9 (77.5%) in overall competition. A key factor in the Hilltoppers' run to the 2002 NCAA I-AA National Championship, Coates went on to play three seasons of pro football with the Cleveland Browns and a fourth in the Canadian Football League. He now resides in Charlotte, N.C.

#### **Chuck Eneix – Men's Track, 4 letters (1970-73)**

A three-time Ohio Valley Conference discus champion ('71-73), Eneix finished fourth in the event at the 1973 NCAA Championships to claim All-America honors. His throw of 179-2 in the '73 OVC meet still stands (thru 2020 – 47 years later) as the league record in the event -- the oldest OVC track & field record in a currently competed event. He had the ninth best throw in the nation in '73 and his 192-2 toss in '73 stood as the WKU standard for 32 years (until broken in 2005 by Hall of Famer Raigo Toompuu). Eneix swept the weights events in the 1972 OVC meet, taking top honors in both the discus and the shot put. His league title throw in the shot in '72 was, at the time, the second longest in OVC history (behind only former teammate and Hall of Fame member Eugene Smith's 56-9.25 throw in 1971). In '73, Eneix threw the shot a career-best 59-10. All four of the Topper teams he competed with won the OVC Track Championship – four of 12 in a row for WKU. Eneix currently lives in his hometown, Washington, Pa.

#### **Janet Jesang – Women's Cross Country, 4 letters (2006-09) and Track (2007-10)**

A three-time All-American as a senior — cross country, indoor 5,000 meters, outdoor 5,000 meters — Jesang was dominant in the distances in the Sun Belt Conference during her career on The Hill. She reached NCAA national championship meets in cross country her last three years, in indoor track in both '09 (5,000m) and '10 (in both the 3,000

& 5,000m events) and outdoors (in the 5,000) in '09. Her WKU teams won all 12 SBC crowns (4 each in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track) in her 4 years, she was the SBC Meet's Outstanding Performer outdoors 3 times, and she was named the indoor MOP in '08 & '10. She was the league champ in cross country three times after finishing as the runner-up her freshman year. For her career, she earned All-SBC honors in 16 events (four in cross country, seven indoors and five outdoors). A native of Uganda, she set school records in four indoor events (mile run, 3,000m, 5,000m and distance medley relay — 3 of which still stand) and 2 outdoor events (5,000m and 10,000m; the 5,000 mark also remains). Jesang is married to former Topper track athlete Daniel Kipsiro and they live in Chesapeake, Va.

### **Chris Marcus – Basketball, 3 letters (2000-02)**

Named to the WKU All-Century Team in 2019, Marcus enjoyed an outstanding career cut short by injury. As a freshman in '99-00, he was 14th in the nation in rebounding (9.5 rpg) and 22nd in blocked shots. His sophomore season, he led the nation in rebounding (12.1 rpg) and became the first Topper since 1989 to average a double-double, scoring 16.7 ppg. As a junior, he averaged 15.9 ppg and 8.9 rpg in his 15 games. He suffered a foot injury Nov. 27 that sidelined him for two months. Then, in the five games prior to the NCAA Tournament, he averaged 23 ppg and 9.6 rpg to finish strong. The injury bug limited Marcus to just four games as a senior. He finished his career with 1,113 points, 795 rebounds and a school record 214 blocked shots after playing in only 19 of the Toppers' 65 games his last two years. His '01 and '02 teams combined to go 52-11 (82.5%) and win two SBC East Division crowns, two league tourneys and make two appearances in the NCAA tourney. Those teams were 27-3 (90%) in SBC action. His list of honors include: All-America ('01, '02), SBC Player of the Year ('01), SBC Defensive Player of the Year ('00, '01), SBC Tournament MVP ('01), SBC Newcomer of the Year ('00), All-SBC Team ('00, '01), All-SBC Tourney Team ('00, '01, '02), NABC & USBWA All-District ('01, '02), NABC Classic MVP ('01), Sports Illustrated National Player of the Week (Feb 27, '02). Marcus passed away in April 2020, in his hometown of Charlotte, N.C.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / November 11, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **COVID-19 UPDATE FROM WKU ATHLETICS**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Athletics is very pleased with the commitment of its student-athletes, coaches and staff to fostering a safe environment on campus this semester.

Since the vast majority of our sport programs returned to campus on Aug. 7 in preparation for the start of classes, WKU Athletics has had a 1.7% overall COVID-19 testing positivity rate, including a 0.4% positivity rate over the last two weeks.

With WKU Football, Track & Field, and Men's and Women's Basketball now the only sports still competing or preparing to compete this fall, out of an abundance of caution all other WKU Athletics sport programs have ceased activities on campus for the remainder of the semester.

## WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / November 23, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

*Photos of John Oldham throughout his career available at the link. Please credit WKU Athletics – <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/onlkwk5rx8l83vd/AADl7HC2CvNvwYjwnup8F7v8a?dl=0>*

### **HILLTOPPER LEGEND JOHN OLDHAM PASSES AWAY**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — WKU Hilltopper Basketball legend John Oldham — a fixture on The Hill as a player, coach and administrator — passed away Monday morning in Bowling Green. He was 97.

Oldham's impact on WKU was so far-reaching that the court at E.A. Diddle Arena was named in his honor on Dec. 27, 2012.

"We are very saddened to learn of the passing of John Oldham," WKU Director of Athletics Todd Stewart said. "Coach Oldham is one of the all-time iconic figures in Western Kentucky University Athletics history who impacted the Hilltoppers as a player, head coach, athletics director and developer of the Red Towel athletics logo. His outstanding collegiate playing career was interrupted when he left school to serve in the United States Navy during World War II, but he returned to earn All-American honors while leading WKU to national prominence including a No. 5 national ranking in 1949. He won 78% of the games he coached during his seven years as WKU's head coach while leading the Hilltoppers to the 1971 Final Four. His impactful 15-year tenure as WKU's Director of Athletics from 1971-86 trails only Ed Diddle for longest service in overseeing WKU Athletics. A soft spoken and enormously kind man, I truly enjoyed knowing him, visiting with him and learning so much about WKU from him. It was a special evening on December 27, 2012, when we officially named the court in Diddle Arena 'John Oldham Court' with he and his family in attendance, ensuring him the recognition he never sought but certainly deserved. It was an honor to have known him, and our thoughts are prayers are with his family."

Oldham left his mark on Hilltopper Basketball in each of his roles, earning All-America accolades as a player in 1949 and later coaching some of the greatest teams in WKU history.

Oldham, a native of Hartford, Ky., came to WKU in 1942 to play basketball for Coach E.A. Diddle after earning All-State honors at Hartford High School. After his freshman season at WKU, Oldham served in the U.S. Navy for three years during World War II.

In four years as a student-athlete (1942-43 before World War II and 1946-47, 1947-48 and 1948-49 after the war) he earned a place in WKU's 1,000-point club, racking up 1,006 career points, and helped the Hilltoppers to three appearances in the NIT, four conference championships and 102 wins. He was named an All-American by both the United Press International and the Associated Press as a senior in 1949, and he was also named to a spot on the first All-Ohio Valley Conference Team that season.

Oldham was selected to the WKU Basketball All-Century Team in 2018 as a player.

After two seasons for the NBA's Fort Wayne (now Detroit) Pistons, Oldham returned to The Hill to coach at old College High School before moving on to Tennessee Tech as the head coach. He returned to WKU in 1964 to take over the Hilltopper Basketball program from the retiring E.A. Diddle.

In seven seasons at his alma mater (1964-71), Oldham compiled an outstanding 142-40 record and led the Hilltoppers to five postseason trips, four conference championships, a Sweet 16 berth and a trip to the 1971 Final Four.

Oldham's .780 winning percentage as a head coach remains the best in WKU's illustrious men's basketball history by a wide margin, and his number 42 from his playing days hangs in the rafters of E.A. Diddle Arena in tribute. He coached two of WKU's three consensus All-Americans (Clem Haskins and Jim McDaniels).

In all, Oldham had a hand in 244 men's basketball victories, eight postseason appearances and nine conference championships in 11 years as a player and head coach. The overall record of those 11 teams was a remarkable 244-53 (82.2 percent).

Oldham was also a pioneer for social change in the sport, putting the Hilltoppers on the forefront of integration in the south in the 1960s.

One of the truly beloved individuals in university history, Oldham also served as athletics director from 1971-86 and, in 1971, conceptualized the Red Towel logo, which has evolved into one of the most easily recognized and historic athletic logos in the country. WKU's Big Red mascot was also created during his tenure.

His time as AD aligned with the creation of Title IX, the revival of women's athletics and the football program's move to Division I-AA, and his coaching hires included some WKU's best in Paul Sanderford (women's basketball), Joel Murrie (baseball) and Curtiss Long (track and field).

During his tenure as athletic director, Western won six OVC All-Sports Championships and one Sun Belt Conference All-Sports Championship.

Oldham has been inducted into the Lions Club Kentucky High School Hall of Fame (1969), Kentucky Athletic Hall of Fame (1986), Ohio Valley Conference Hall of Fame (1989), Kentucky High School Hall of Fame (1990), Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame (1990), WKU Athletic Hall of Fame (1991) and WKU Hall of Distinguished Alumni (2002).

A private funeral service is set for Monday, Nov. 30, at J.C. Kirby & Son Funeral Chapel on Lover's Lane. Burial, with military honors, will be at Fairview Cemetery. The family is planning a memorial service in the spring.

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / Monday, November 23, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **HILLTOPPER SPORTS PROPERTIES INTRODUCES THE HILL AT HOME**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** – Hilltopper Sports Properties and Learfield IMG College are proud to introduce The Hill at Home presented by Kentucky Fish and Wildlife.

“We’re incredibly excited to bring this unique game perspective to WKU fans,” said Hilltopper Sports Properties General Manager Chris Freeman. “With this new technology provided by Learfield IMG College, our fans can tune in online to see our radio talent call and react to games with live statistics right on screen. We’re proud to partner with Kentucky Fish and Wildlife to bring this in-game experience to our fanbase at home.”

With The Hill at Home presented by Kentucky Fish and Wildlife, fans will be able to watch and listen to the radio broadcast team live in action as they call Hilltopper and Lady Topper Basketball games throughout the season. Home games with The Hill at Home will also have live statistics running on screen so fans can stay in tune with the numbers throughout the broadcast.

Every home men’s basketball game and women’s basketball games, along with select away games, in the 2020-21 season will be featured on The Hill at Home. Away games featured on the platform will require a Facebook account.

The link for The Hill at Home presented by Kentucky Fish and Wildlife will be available on the sport schedule pages as well as the individual game preview on WKUSports.com. The Hill at Home will go live with the regular radio broadcast approximately 30 minutes prior to tip-off.

On men’s basketball broadcasts, Hal Schmitt and Voice of the Hilltoppers Randy Lee will be featured on The Hill at Home. Brett Williams will headline the program on the women’s side.

The first six games on The Hill at Home will be the Hilltoppers’ games in the Bad Boy Mowers Crossover Classic and the Wade Houston Tipoff Classic. Each of these broadcasts will require a Facebook account in order to be viewed.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife: Help us Keep Kentucky Wild. Join today at [//fw.ky.gov/kywild](https://fw.ky.gov/kywild).

## **WKU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA RELATIONS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / December 11, 2020

Athletics / Contact: Zach Greenwell, WKU Athletic Communications/Media Relations

### **27 WKU STUDENT-ATHLETES SET TO EARN DEGREE THIS SEMESTER**

**BOWLING GREEN, Ky.** — Twenty-seven WKU student-athletes, boasting a cumulative grade point average of 3.07, are expected to earn their degrees from Western Kentucky University this semester.

Two of the 27 student-athletes will be receiving their master's degrees, while the others will be earning their bachelor's degrees or receiving a certificate of completion in a new area.

Degrees obtained include marketing, management, exercise science, applied data analytics, special education, mathematical economics, health sciences, accountancy and sport management among others.

As part of WKU's comprehensive COVID-19 restart plan, December 2020 recognition ceremonies will be combined with the spring 2021 Commencement celebration.

The Commencement celebrations for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 graduates will be scheduled the weekend of April 30/May 1, 2021.

Over the 2020 calendar year, 81 student-athletes have earned their degrees from the institution with a combined grade point average of 3.22.