

Small-town athlete enhances his team

By Ron Wilson

Director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University

The basketball player drives in for a layup and scores as the crowd goes wild. That might sound like the description of a winning basket in a championship game, but the outcome of this particular game was decided much earlier. So why is there such a strong response from the fans? Perhaps it is their appreciation for the role players on their team, or for a Kansas kid who is working hard. Maybe it is a product of the fact that the home team is winning big. But this player from rural Kansas has found a special place in

the hearts of his team's fans.

Alex Potuzak is a freshman on the K-State basketball team and a product of the high school basketball team at Clifton-Clyde.

Two things struck me about Potuzak: One, he comes from a truly rural area of Kansas, and two, he is tall. He stands 6 feet, 9 inches tall and weighs 190 pounds -- if that much.

Potuzak's dad is quite tall also. He had a growth spurt early. When he was in the sixth grade, he stood 5 feet, 10 inches. By the 8th grade he stood 6 feet, 3 inches and by his freshman year in high school he was 6 feet, 6 inches. Now he stands more than 6 feet, 9 inches in his stocking feet and plays in size 17 basketball shoes.

So Alex got into basketball. He joined the varsity during his high school freshman season and started the next three years. In his senior year, he led his team to the sub-state championship game.

In his career, he scored the third-most points in his school's history and set school records for most blocked shots in a game and field goal percentage. He was also a track athlete, winning first place in the 1,600 meter run at the Kansas State Track and Field Championships.

Yet relatively few successful high school athletes have the chance to play at the collegiate level. Potuzak had been talking to Cloud County Community College about playing basketball near his home, but he finally decided he wanted to study

at K-State whether or not his basketball career continued. Then the community college coach contacted the basketball staff at K-State and they arranged a tryout. In the fall of 2010, Alex Potuzak joined the team as a walk-on.

Walk-on players don't receive the free-ride scholarships, playing time, and adulation from the fans as do the starters. But the scholarship was not an issue, because Potuzak had earned academic scholarships in the classroom. In fact, he had a perfect 4.0 grade point average in high school and was a class officer and valedictorian of his class of 31 students. Now he is majoring in civil engineering at K-State and got another 4.0 in his first semester of college. Wow.

Meanwhile, he is working out, practicing with the team, and playing in spot duty. In the process, he has become a fan favorite. The students will call his name late in games and cheer his every rebound and shot attempt.

How did this happen? "I think it goes back to Midnight Madness," Potuzak said. "The announcer couldn't get my name quite right and then my teammates got me into it and let me make a couple of dunks. Now some people say I'm a fan favorite, and it's a wonderful feeling. I'm going to do everything I can to help my team prepare, in games or in practice."

His layup against Alcorn State brought the crowd to its feet with applause. Not bad for a kid from rural

Kansas. After all, Potuzak went to high school at Clifton-Clyde, and he went to grade school at Agenda, population 73 people. Now, that's rural.

"I would not trade my small-town upbringing for anything," Alex said.

The crowd goes wild as the player drives in for a layup in the game's final seconds. No, it's not the last-minute winning shot, it's the work of a Kansas kid who is helping his team succeed.

We commend Alex Potuzak and all small-town athletes for making a difference by enhancing their teams - and their communities.

Complaints, money recovered drops

Kansas Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger's office helped thousands of Kansas consumers settle disputes with their insurance companies in 2010, recovering more than \$10 million in insurance claims for policyholders.

The recovery amount, \$10,216,516.21, was lower than in previous years, but so was the number of complaints filed by consumers, according to department records.

Since Commissioner Praeger took office in 2003, the department has recovered nearly \$97 million for



sandy praeger

• insurance comm.

Kansas Consumers.

"The hard work of our consumer assistance representatives makes this possible," Commissioner Praeger said of the recovery total.

"Kansas Insurance Department works to resolve disputes between companies and Kansas Consumers in a fair and timely manner."

Recoveries are funds returned to policyholders through settlement of claims disputes with insurance companies, based on inquiries and formal complaints filed with the department. These funds are above and beyond what companies had originally offered consumers to settle the claims.

The number of formal complaints (3,820) decreased by nearly 447 in 2010, while the number of inquiries (1,517) remained steady. Commis-

sioner Praeger said that in tight economic times, consumers are more educated and companies are more mindful of how claims are handled.

"We take our role as consumer advocate very seriously," Commissioner Praeger said, "but it all begins with savvy insurance consumers who are willing to pursue what's right."

Consumers with insurance questions or concerns are encouraged to call the consumer assistance hotline at (800) 432-2484. Complaints or inquiries can be made in writing to

the Kansas Insurance Department, 420 S.W. 9th St., Topeka, Kan. 66612 or online at www.ksinsurance.org.

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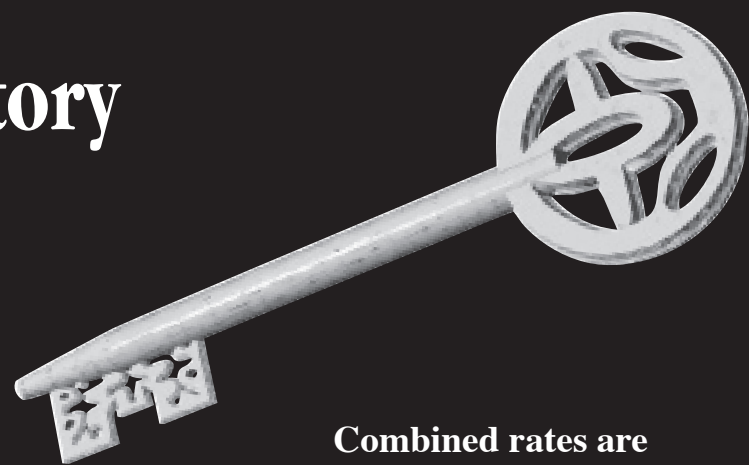
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