

## **Heart of a Tiger: FHSU Shotgun Team Continues Dominance in Fall Season**

The FHSU Shotgun Team once again proved its prowess in the shooting sports, achieving remarkable success during the fall 2023 season. Notably, the team comprises 36 members, with 20 on the varsity team and 16 on the junior varsity team. With a rich history and a roster of talented athletes, the team has solidified its reputation as one of the finest in the nation.

The team traces its roots to 2005 when six enthusiastic freshmen approached Dr. Duane Shepherd, who then organized and established the FHSU Shotgun Team as a recognized student organization. Since then, the team has amassed an enviable record of accomplishments, including 120 competition wins in the past 18 years.

Under the guidance of Dr. Shepherd and his wife, Teresa, the team has become a force to be reckoned with in the Prairie Circuit Conference, which they created in 2011. This conference has grown to include teams from Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, North Dakota, and South Dakota. FHSU has remarkably won 11 out of the 13 conference championships.

Moreover, the team has shone brightly on the national stage, clinching ten national championships since 2013. These victories span Collegiate Shooting Sports Organizations such as ACUI, SCTP, and NCSSAA, attesting to the team's well-rounded skillset.

Throughout its history, the team has also produced around 40 All-Americans, a testament to the dedication and talent nurtured within its ranks.

The team's success is not without support. For example, in partnership with the Hays City Sportsmen's Club and inspired by a generous lead gift from Lorena Kellogg and her late husband, Wilmer, the University recently celebrated the opening of the Kellogg Training Center. Other individuals and businesses followed suit and contributed to bringing the project to fruition.

The Kellogg Training Center provides additional resources to build upon the team's accomplishments. An on-site office provides head coach Jerrod Lies, an FHSU Shotgun Team alum and former assistant coach, a space to meet with and mentor team members and potential recruits. In addition, the new reloading room allows multiple members at a time to reload shells efficiently. With the team firing approximately 90,000 rounds in practice and 75,000 rounds in competition during the fall semester alone, the commitment and investment required for success cannot be understated.

The Fall 2023 season is a testament to the team's unwavering dedication and exceptional talent. The varsity team maintained an impressive record of 6-1, earning first-place honors in six competitions and second place in another. The junior varsity team also displayed outstanding performances, with several second and third-place finishes.

FHSU consistently demonstrated its superiority throughout the season, boasting the highest male and female shooters in most competitions. At five varsity competitions, FHSU's team members claimed the highest scores among female participants, and at six events, they secured coveted spots as the top three female shooters.

True “road warriors,” the team traveled more than 10,000 miles to compete in Kansas, Nebraska, Texas, and Colorado while always representing Fort Hays State University with professionalism and strong values.

Personal records were shattered, new personal bests were achieved, and individual team members made their mark on the sport. One such standout athlete, Alex Hunter, a senior from Hickman, Nebraska, discovered his passion for shooting in the sixth grade. Hunter credits the FHSU Shotgun Team and their continuous pursuit of improvement for shaping his outlook on life and shooting. He plans to graduate with a construction management degree and hopes to become a project manager for a construction company.

Another influential team member, Logan Smith, echoes the sentiment of personal and team growth within the FHSU Shotgun Team. Originally from Burwell, Nebraska, Smith found his passion for competitive shooting at an early age, leading him to choose Fort Hays State University for its outstanding shooting program. The dedication and resilience required to excel on this team helped Smith develop invaluable life skills that he hopes to leverage to turn his degree in Criminal Justice into a job as a Game Warden after graduation.

Lexi Wickham, a senior from Houston, Texas, illustrates the team's impact on personal and academic success. Growing up hunting on her family farm, Wickham had a natural affinity for shooting sports, ultimately choosing FHSU to continue her shooting career. As a six-year senior, Wickham acknowledges the dedication and sacrifice required to excel in this sport and believes these lessons will translate into a successful career in the agriculture industry.

As the team prepares for their future endeavors, they carry the memories, friendships, and life lessons that only a journey with the FHSU Shotgun Team can provide. Plans for their upcoming spring competitions will take them to Las Vegas, Nevada; San Antonio, Texas (twice); Lincoln, Nebraska; and Stillwater, Oklahoma. Driven by their past successes and aiming for even greater achievements, the team is eager to push its limits and represent Fort Hays State University with unparalleled excellence.

The FHSU Shotgun Team's dedication, discipline, and competitive spirit have established them as a powerhouse in collegiate shooting sports. Supported by the university and enthusiastic sponsors, this exceptional team continues to make Fort Hays State University proud.