

Heart of a Tiger

It was just a few weeks back when I enthusiastically shared the good news that Whitney Randall, a senior women's basketball student-athlete, was selected as the 2021 MIAA Women's Winter Student-Athlete of the Year. I absolutely loved sharing her moment in the spotlight with Whitney, her parents, coach Hobson, athletic director Curtis Hammeke, and senior woman administrator Dixie Balman. I am still smiling!

Now, weeks later, Ryan Stanley, a junior on the track and field team, has been selected as the 2021 MIAA Men's Spring Student-Athlete of the Year. Incredible.

This award is the MIAA's highest honor for student-athletes. It is based on the athletic, academic, and campus/community service accomplishments of individuals who are juniors or seniors in athletic eligibility and have a grade point average of at least 3.25. This also means that Fort Hays State has two of the four MIAA student-athletes of the year, as well as finalists for the awards for seven consecutive years!

Ryan is our first-ever male recipient of this prestigious award. He is a talented young man, an accomplished student-athlete, and a highly engaged student leader.

Ryan has been near perfect in the classroom these past three years, earning a 3.97 GPA as a management major. He has received many athletic and academic accolades, and most importantly, he has been a friend to many Tigers and an effective campus leader.

Ryan has been a member of our student government association and will serve as the student body vice president this next year. He has been an active leadership team member of Christian Challenge and has participated in multiple community service projects. He was even part of the four-member student team who designed "MeHe," a mobile phone app centered on maintaining positive mental health, that won the 2020 Kansas Startup competition.

This summer, Ryan was on staff with Project Apprentice, a Rock Hill Church-based program that works to develop future Christian leaders. He also helped raise proceeds for Operation Breakthrough in Kansas City, where he coordinated fundraising events and volunteered to help the organization provide a safe, loving, and educational environment for children in poverty. Children in the program are mentored in the arts, sports, or STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). With such remarkable experiences under his belt, I have no doubt Ryan is becoming an amazing mentor. He has the heart, the smarts, and the discipline to help these young students thrive.

Ryan grew up in Bennington, a small town in north-central Kansas, the son of former college athletes and the middle sibling in a family of five. Ryan described growing up as a constant competition with his two older brothers, who he followed to Fort Hays State. Ryan decided to major in business and try his luck at competing in the pole vault at the college level.

The summer between high school and college, Ryan attended a pole vault camp at FHSU, catching the attention of our pole-vaulting coach, Randy Stanley.

“I watched him and thought, ‘Oh, my goodness, this guy has some talent,’” Coach Stanley said. “He’s got really good speed and is so aggressive and has so much potential. I thought that once he got to college and could focus on one sport, who knows how much he could improve?”

And improve, he did. Earlier in the year, Ryan claimed the NCAA Division II National Championship in the pole vault, setting FHSU’s outdoor record mark of 17 feet, 2.75 inches. That’s more than three times my height! Ryan also set the indoor record earlier in the year at 16 feet, 11.5 inches. He went on to be named the MIAA Men’s Spring Student-Athlete of the Year this past June.

Ryan will return to campus in the fall to serve as the student body vice president, take on new challenges as a student-athlete, and earn two bachelor’s degrees – one in business administration and management with a concentration in human resources (HR) and one in Spanish. He then plans to begin work on a master’s in professional studies in HR management.

Brazilian soccer player Pele’ said, “Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice, and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.”

A great quote that I think really captures the essence of Ryan Stanley, an incredible young man for whom I am so grateful for choosing to call Tiger Nation home and for leading our campus with integrity, resilience, and strong character.