

# sports

## AUTF ends indoor season on top of podium

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For the first time in Ashland University history, the men’s indoor track and field team have brought home a national title. On Saturday, March 9, the team had completed all their events and ended with a final score of 38 points, just one more than their closest competitor, Adams State.

The AU track and field teams began their indoor season in December of 2018, with high expectations to make it to nationals in March.

Once at nationals, the goal was for both the men’s and women’s team to improve on their previous years’ finish.

“On the men’s side, we’ve been the national runner-up four times, while on the women’s side we were national runner-up twice,” AU associate head coach Ernie Clark said.

Clark, in his fourth season as a coach and first season as an associate head coach, was extremely confident in the track team because he knew they were capable of achieving something great.

“It’s been a goal for head coach Jud Logan for a while to win a national title,” Clark said. “I came here on a mission to help this program and finish what Logan had started, which was to win a national championship.”

The start of the season brought a No. 4 preseason national ranking for the men and a No. 7 ranking for the women from the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association (USTFCCCA).

From the beginning of the season, the AU throwers knew that they were going to make an impact on the season and the team’s overall performance as they carried that success with them to indoor nationals.

“We had a pretty heavy squad



AU ATHLETICS

Eagles pose for a picture as they celebrate their new national title.

and we knew that we could do some damage,” junior thrower Nick Zak said. “It wasn’t just me, we had a pretty deep squad in the throws, including Brent Fairbanks, Alex Hill and Jim Toth who all scored a lot of points for the team.”

Zak became an All-American for the third time in his career after he took third in nationals in the weight throw with a distance of 21.06 meters. His throw was 0.08 meters away from stealing the second place finish from Fairbanks.

While the men’s side of the throw team was looking strong at the start of the season, the women’s throwers knew they were going to be able to compete as well as other groups on the Eagles squad.

Redshirt freshman thrower Lindsay Baker set a new AU women’s indoor freshman record after she shot-putted 16.73 meters during her event at the Tiffin Alumni Open. That shot-put gave her a first place finish and an automatic qualifying spot for nationals.

Senior sprinter Myles Pringle won both the men’s 400-meter dash and men’s high jump at the Youngstown State Icebreaker and

automatically qualified for nationals in both events.

After crossing the 400-meter finish line in 46.14 seconds, Pringle set a national meet record and the AU record. He is also the 7th fastest in the U.S and the 11th fastest in the world in 2018-2019.

Fairbanks won the men’s weight throw with a facility record-breaking throw of 21.92 meters/71-feet-10¾ at Youngstown State College Invitational.

Senior thrower Natalie Helenthal bested several Division I competitors with a new automatic mark of 19.88 meters/65-feet-2¾ as she won the women’s weight throw at Penn Nationals on Jan. 26.

At the GLIAC Championships, Baker was named both the GLIAC Women’s Field Athlete of the Year and Freshman Field Athlete of the Meet.

Fairbanks became the GLIAC Field Athlete of the Meet and Field Athlete of the Year on the men’s side.

Sophomore sprinter Trevor Bassitt became the Men’s Track Athlete of the Year while freshman sprinter Keshun Jones became the

Men’s Freshman Track Athlete of the Meet.

The Eagle coaching staff earned the GLIAC Men’s Coaching Staff of the Year honor.

Then there was the NCAA Division II nationals for indoor track. When all was said and done, the Ashland men came up on top, with nine men becoming All-Americans. The Eagle women came in 11th place by scoring 16 points and only having four athletes compete overall, with two earning All-American honors.

“Honestly, once we got there, there were so many things that just weren’t going our way, that the picture of doing this for a national championship just left my mind,” Zak said.

The team ended the indoor season with 11 All-American athletes. Pringle, Helenthal and thrower Mackenzie Leigh were those named in the senior class. Junior class athletes were Zak, Hill, sprinter Paul Murray and jumper Ellie Jindra. Fairbanks and sprinter Channing Phillips were among the sophomores named. Baker and sprinter Brayden Chaney both re-

ceived their first honors as freshman.

“I’ve qualified multiple times and I know what it takes to get here,” Zak said. “Personally I felt like it was my worse nationals meet last year, so for me coming into this meet this year, I kind of wanted to redeem myself for I knew what was capable of.”

In the end, Zak redeemed himself in the weight throw but he had to overcome some adversity after dropping down to seventh place but he put it all out on the line in his final throw to earn him third place overall.

The only thing missing at the national competition was Logan who was absent due to health reasons.

Upon seeing the trophy for the first time, Logan tweeted, “It exceeded all expectations.”

Logan was named the USTFCCCA Men’s Indoor National Coach of the Year. This year’s honor was his third time receiving the award and the second time receiving it during the indoor season. Logan credited winning the award on Twitter to his “incredible staff at Eagle Nation.”

With the indoor season ending at the top of the podium, the outdoor season is just getting ready to begin.

Clark has little to no worries that the track and field team will do just as well in the outdoor season as they did in the indoor season.

“In track, we are constantly training to be a more superior athlete, and that has different levels with recovery days, intensity days, strength days, speed days and technique days,” Clark said.

The outdoor season kicks off with a two day meet starting on March 22 at the Winthrop Adidas Invitational in South Carolina.

# THE 19 POINT THROWERS

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When the Ashland University men’s indoor track and field team won its first ever NCAA Division II Men’s Indoor Track and Field Championship in Pittsburgh, Kansas, all eyes were focused on the 4x400-meter relay team who brought home the winning point for the title.

There was a group of competitors, however, who helped to kick off the team’s quest for glory at nationals. That group was the Eagle men’s weight throwers.

The team composed of sophomore Brent Fairbanks, junior Nick Zak and junior Alex Hill.

Fairbanks and Hill were considered among the best NCAA Division II indoor men’s weight throwers in history while Zak was having a breakout indoor season in both weight throw and indoor shot put as well.

All three share a very personal bond between each other both on and off the field. Fairbanks and Zak knew each other back in high school while Zak and Hill are currently roommates.

“We’re all pretty much family,” Zak said. “I just know that on the track and off the track we’re both friends and competitors.”

It is this connection that helped them push each other to succeed, Fairbanks said.

“We’ve all grown to love each other as brothers and hold everyone accountable while pushing each other to succeed,” he said.

Along with the personal connection, the three also share a common way in which they compete in weight throw and push each other to succeed: with energy.

“I like to be electric,” Fairbanks said. “I like to be as excited as possible. There’s no such thing as too much energy.”

Zak tends to agree that you can never have enough energy, he said. “I do try to keep a clear head and try to completely clear my mind,” Zak said. “But for me, having that energy is also extremely important as well. We all feed off each other.”

For Hill, he finds that once he is in competition is when his energy spikes, he said. “I always give glory to God for everything and ask for peace before the competition,” Hill said. “When I’m in actual competition is when I’ll start hooting and hollering.”

It was the perfect storm going into nationals for Fairbanks, Zak and Hill where they were able to come out strong for the indoor team, finishing 2-3-4 in the country in weight throw.

Fairbanks was the national runner-up throwing 21.14 meters/69-feet-4 ¼. Zak earned third setting a new personal record of 21.06 meters/69-feet-1 ¼ while Hill took

fourth at 20.75 meters/68-feet-1. All earned All-American honors.

For Fairbanks, it felt good to be able to finally compete at such a high level, he said.

“It was really an inspiring moment to be to be able to finish well and get second place especially since there were some things last year that prevented me from competing well,” Fairbanks said. “It was nice to compete at a high level.”

Zak was just happy that he was able to redeem himself from last year where he placed 14th in weight throw, he said.

“To be able to come back and redeem myself from last year was awesome to do,” Zak said.

While Hill didn’t throw as far as he wanted to, he was still more than happy with the results, he said.

“This year, I wanted to come back with a vengeance,” Hill said. “I didn’t throw as far as I wanted to but I was still happy with how I ended.”

While the individual performances certainly stood out for the three, what was more important to them was that they points on the board for the Eagles, Zak said.

“It felt good to set a new PR and be an All-American but what was more important was bringing points to the team and helping us win a national championship,” he said.

The three helped to put 19 crucial points on the board for the indoor team, helping lead the Eagles to gold.

“It felt so good to finally win one,” Zak said. “It just felt great to bring it back not only for us but for the people and coaches that were in this program before us as well.”

For each of the Eagle weight throwers, there was one coach and one person in particular that they wanted to win a championship for. That coach was head track and field coach Jud Logan.

“I actually broke down in tears when I figured out that we won just because that’s been coach Logan’s goal for the last 25 years that he’s been here,” Fairbanks said. “Winning a national championship for the team and being a part of that winning team is just beyond amazing.”

He’s been an huge inspiration for each of them to always do their best, Fairbanks said.

“Coach Logan just always has been like the image of who I want to push me,” he said. “He’s always been such a motivational figure in my head. He’s always been like a father figure to me.”

Zak said that Logan is the perfect example.

“Coach has set the perfect example for us and I just want to live up to that,” Zak said.

He always knows exactly how to get the best out of you, Hill said.

“Coach Logan has this presence that displays excellence and pushes you toward that,” Hill said. “I always know exactly what I have to do.”

While the three Eagles are currently celebrating the indoor team’s national title, they are already looking ahead to the outdoor track and field season.

“We’re just trying to transition right now from thinking indoor to outdoor,” Fairbanks said.

All compete in the outdoor hammer throw while Hill also competes in discus as well. Each have a lofty set of goals for themselves set ahead.

“I’d like to become All-American in outdoor throwing the hammer,” Fairbanks said.

Progression is what will be key for Zak, he said.

“I just want to build off last year and continue progressing,” Zak said. “If I progress from last year, I’ll be happy.”

Hill has his eyes set on a title, he said.

“I think I may have a shot at the national title for hammer,” Hill said. “I want to be at least top three in discus and move up the ranks from what I did last year.”

If the indoor season was any indication for the three Eagle throwers, Fairbanks, Zak and Hill may just have a very good shot at not only meeting but exceeding those goals in the future.