CELEBRATING
12
YEARS
OF COUGAR
ATHLETICS

INDIANA UNIVERSITY KOKOMO
LEGACY

WINTER 2023
A MAGAZINE FOR
ALUMNI AND FRIENDS
In this Issue

In this issue, we take a look back on the history of Cougar athletics, and celebrate the legacy and impact of our many former student-athletes.

We'll walk through a timeline of IU Kokomo sports from the very beginning, sharing fun facts and memories from the archives, as well as “then and now” profiles of Cougar alumni who once graced the court or field.

Our new interim athletics director, Heather Hayes, will discuss the remarkable evolution and growth of IU Kokomo athletics over the past 12 years, and share her thoughts on the powerful blend of vision, unwavering determination, and commitment to excellence that led the program to its current success.

We’ll highlight past Cougar athletes who have returned as coaches – like Grant Gaylor, a member of IU Kokomo’s first track and field throwing team. Grant won the campus’ first NAIA championship in shot put in 2021, and today, he’s coaching the next generation of Cougar track and field competitors.

And of course, an issue celebrating all things athletics wouldn’t be complete without a rundown on our successful fall seasons – including our first-ever national championship win in women’s cross country by IU Kokomo junior, Hannah Wells.

Athletics Enhances IU Kokomo Student Experience

College is more than a diploma. It’s also an experience – ideally a transformative one. That’s how I hope you view the Indiana University degree you earned on our campus.

An important part of the IU Kokomo experience is our athletics program. Sports brings people together (as you surely have seen if you have attended one of our volleyball or basketball games in our fine Student Activities and Events Center). Good things happen when IU Kokomo students, alumni, staff, and faculty come together – camaraderie, yes, but also support, brainstorming, and collaborations.

Athletics also enhance the college experience by unifying people around a common goal and inspiring them with demonstrations of ability, hard work, and teamwork. Excellence, after all, is an inspiring thing, and our teams have achieved excellence both on and off the court, from numerous conference championships and tournament appearances to Champions of Character recognition and beyond.

In both respects, our outstanding athletics program contributes to the spirit that makes IU Kokomo an outstanding public liberal arts college – that is, the spirit of excellence, belonging, personal relationships, and commitment to one another.

By the way, in case you have not seen the news, IU Kokomo recently became the only permanent member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges. This membership provides important external validation of our status as a public liberal arts institution.

Now, it’s time to see for yourself! Come attend one of our games on campus and, while you’re here, soak up some of the COPLAC atmosphere by visiting the art gallery, attending a lecture, or joining a friend or favorite faculty or staff member at the Ground Up Café. I hope to see you soon!

Mark Canada, Ph.D.
Chancellor
WOMEN'S SOCCER The IU Kokomo women's soccer team defeated Rio Grande at home with a score of 2-0 to clinch the River States Conference regular season title, and finish its season with a record of 10-3-5 with a 8-0-2 mark in conference play. The team's first-ever RSC championship gave the Cougars home-field advantage in the conference tournament.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL The IU Kokomo volleyball team swept Brescia in its final home game of the season to go undefeated in the conference. The game marked the team's 10th sweep in a row. The Cougars were ranked #14 in the NAIA.

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY The Cougar's second-place finish at the Midway University Cross Country Invitational was a highlight of the season. Junior Hannah Wells placed second individually and was named RSC women's cross country athlete of the week.

MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY The Cougars set a program record in total team time and average time at the NAIA Great Lakes Cross Country Challenge. Sophomore Bryce Stateler led the way with a personal record time of 26:24:80, making him the third-fastest individual in IU Kokomo history.

WOMEN’S TENNIS The Cougars picked up a 5-2 win over Trine University in the home opener of its short fall season.

CO-ED eSPORTS The Cougars had a strong start to its first season, with a 13-7 record as of November 1. Our newest team defeated opponents including Anna Maria College, University of Missouri, Robert Morris University, University of North Dakota, Stevenson University, and Missouri State.

WOMEN'S GOLF The women's golf team tied for fourth at the RSC conference fall preview tournament. Senior Sarah Williams led the team to a second-place finish at the Brescia Bearcat Invitational by winning individual medalist honors. She was also named the RSC Golfer of the Week after winning the tournament.

MEN'S GOLF Sophomore Hayden Williamson won the RSC Preview in West Virginia, leading the Cougars to a fourth place finish at the tournament. He was honored as RSC Golfer of the Week for his accomplishment.

Fall is my favorite season. It brings with it so many interesting things – like the changing of the leaves, the start of a new school year with new students and experiences, the many opportunities I have to meet and interact with our fellow alumni, and homecoming events. We brought Soul Revue from the IU Bloomington campus as part of our homecoming festivities. This group is America’s first and finest Black popular music ensemble. Many of the students who participate in this program for academic credit aren’t even music majors! Their performance was incredible; their live band was full of rhythm and deep talent, and the vocalists hit every note to perfection.

Typically, homecoming centers around a football game, but since we do not have a football team, we center our homecoming around our nationally ranked women’s volleyball team. Prior to the homecoming match against Oakland City University, our volleyball team was on a 23-game winning streak. Not only are they fun to watch, but the way they support and communicate with each other is inspiring.

This issue focuses on our athletics program. Our teams have grown and changed over the past several years we have had sports. Sports and the arts contribute to the rich experiences that IU Kokomo offers and has offered to many of us. They teach valuable lessons about teamwork, communication, and passion, and help to prepare students for what comes next after they graduate.

We do our very best to create opportunities for alumni to return to campus and enjoy the IU Kokomo legacy that links us. What would you like to see that we aren’t offering? How can we improve the alumni experience? The valuable feedback you provide is important. If you have ideas for an alumni event, let's talk about it. I'm always happy to meet with alumni over coffee, for lunch, or even via Zoom to hear about your IU experience, as well as what you would find beneficial in an alumni event or program.

We hope you will join us for some of our spring programs. On February 3, we will have an alumni lunch and after will attend the women’s and men’s basketball double-header at the Student Activities and Events Center. And on March 5, we will celebrate the achievements of alumni from the School of Nursing and Allied Health Professions at its distinction event.

We hope to see you back on campus soon!

Benjamin Liechty, B.A. ’06
Director of Alumni Relations
IU Kokomo celebrated Homecoming 2023 in late October. The theme of “Linked by Legacy” honored the relationship between the campus and alumni.

Events included a swag giveaway event for students, faculty, and staff that featured yard games like cornhole, Jenga, and Connect Four; a movie night in Kresge Auditorium; and participation in Make a Difference Day, a nationally recognized day of service. Students, faculty, staff, and the Kokomo community also participated in the annual Angel Walk, raising approximately $15,000 for the Family Service Association (FSA) of Howard County’s domestic violence shelter.

Homecoming also featured a performance by the IU Soul Revue, a vocal and instrumental group famous for dynamic performances of R&B, soul, funk, and contemporary Black popular music.

We also saw exceptional performances from the women’s volleyball team, which swept its three sets against Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, Oakland City University, and Brescia University, cementing a 22-game winning streak.

IU Kokomo’s new eSports team also took home a victory against Illinois State University in “Overwatch” play.
12 YEARS OF COUGAR ATHLETICS

First women’s volleyball home game at the Student Activities and Events Center, 2020

Student Activities and Events Center dedication, 2021

Women’s soccer team RSC champions, 2022

Women’s tennis team

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - RICHARD OLSON

COUGAR GYM

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACK THARP

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY FOR COUGAR GYM - JACOB BERNSTEIN
Coaching Legend Reflects on IU Kokomo Athletics

HEATHER HAYES IS A COUGAR ATHLETICS LEGEND.

She made an almost immediate impact when she joined the program in its third year as volleyball coach, leading the team to a third-place finish in conference and its first winning season. Entering her 11th season with the Cougars, she held a 291-86 record, including a 131-16 conference mark.

Under her leadership, the volleyball team has won seven of the last eight River States Conference tournament championships, including the last six in a row. They’ve qualified for nine straight NAIA National Tournament appearances, making it to the final site in 2016, 2019, 2020, and 2023. She’s been River States Conference Coach of the Year six times, and scored her 300th career win this season.

Because she’s been here for most of IU Kokomo’s athletic history, we asked her to reflect on the evolution of the program from its beginnings.

During my tenure as the volleyball coach for the past 11 seasons, and my current role as the interim athletic director, I have had the privilege to witness the remarkable evolution and growth of IU Kokomo athletics over the past 13 years. This transformation stands as a testament to the powerful blend of vision, unwavering determination, and a commitment to excellence exhibited not only by our university, but by all those who have played a role in our journey.

IU Kokomo athletics established its first intercollegiate sports teams in 2011 with the introduction of men’s basketball and women’s volleyball, giving birth to the IU Kokomo Cougars. Those initial seasons were no walk in the park, marked by formidable challenges as we often competed against more established programs. Nevertheless, the sheer determination to succeed and the unyielding resilience displayed by our athletes, coaches, and supporters fueled our progress.

As time has marched forward, IU Kokomo athletics has continued to undergo significant developments and now proudly embraces 15 varsity sports, nurturing and supporting a total of 273 student-athletes. Our campus now stands united in its support of the following programs: baseball, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s and women’s cross country, coed eSports, men’s and women’s golf, women’s soccer, women’s tennis, men’s and women’s indoor and outdoor track and field, and women’s volleyball. Each new addition has enriched our athletic program, infusing it with both strength and depth, and has drawn talented athletes and dedicated coaches who understand the immense potential that lies within IU Kokomo athletics.

A defining moment in the evolution of IU Kokomo athletics materialized in 2020 with the grand opening of the Student Activities and Events Center. This state-of-the-art facility now serves as the proud new home court for basketball and volleyball, symbolizing the unwavering commitment of our university to the pursuit of athletic excellence.

In our brief 13-year history, our teams have achieved considerable success. We’ve clinched an impressive 14 team conference championships, and proudly celebrated numerous individual conference champions. On the national stage, our teams and individuals have consistently graced the national tournaments, with two of our teams achieving top 16 finishes nationwide. Notably, we’ve also had the distinct honor of crowning a national champion in shot put.

While these athletic achievements serve as a powerful source of inspiration, we have remained steadfast in our dedication to academic excellence. Our student-athletes skilfully juggle the demands of their sports with the rigors of their studies, embodying the essence of the student-athlete. This firm commitment to both academics and athletics has cultivated a culture of well-rounded excellence that truly sets IU Kokomo apart.

The journey of IU Kokomo Athletics is a narrative that continues to be written with every game, every practice, and every student-athlete who proudly wears the Cougar uniform. It is a story that reminds us all that with vision, hard work, and a sense of purpose, the possibilities are limitless, and the future is bright.
When IU Kokomo hosted its first-ever women’s volleyball game, Lael (Burrus) Larrick was part of that moment in history.

“It’s wild to even think about it now,” said Larrick, who graduated in 2015 with a degree in communication. She played four years for the Cougars, helping build the foundation for a team that has now won six straight conference championships and made nine straight NAIA tournaments.

It’s a far cry from that first 9-28 season, with practices at Northwestern High School and games at Maple Crest Middle School, before IU Kokomo’s Cougar Gym opened downtown.

Larrick, who came to IU Kokomo from North Miami High School, is among hundreds of student athletes who have competed for the Cougars in the nearly 15 years since its intercollegiate athletic program began. Join us as we highlight her story, and share updates on several other former Cougar athletes who have played a role in growing the program.

From the Beginning

Larrick, who now lives near Brownsburg, returned to campus last spring for the volleyball alumni game, played in the Student Activities and Events Center, which opened several years after she graduated.

“It’s amazing to see that not only did IU Kokomo start athletic programs, but it’s also continued to grow with other teams and other sports,” she said. “I love seeing how amazing the volleyball program is, and just continues to be.”

She married Brandon Larrick, a Western High School graduate who was on IU Kokomo’s first men’s basketball team, and they have sons Banner, 4, and Boden, 1.

After completing her degree, Lael Larrick earned a master’s degree in school counseling, and worked in that field until Banner’s birth.

“I felt led to stay home with him and be with him as a baby,” she said. “That was a big shift in what we had pictured. I had always pictured myself being a working mom.”

About three months after she left her school counseling career, her grandmother passed away. A desire to do something to honor her grandmother led to a new business venture named after her, June Ellen Clothing.

“My brand mission is to show grace, give hope, and express love,” she said. “We do that through our donation commitment on one shirt for every 10 pieces sold,” she said, noting that donated clothing goes to children in foster care and in public schools.

For now, she hosts booths at area markets, with hopes of opening a storefront. She has a supplier for her pieces but hopes to design her own work in the future.

“It’s just a lot of dreaming and planning and taking it one step at a time,” Larrick said. “I’m learning a lot from mistakes and gaining wisdom from those mistakes. It’s very challenging, especially being a stay-at-home mom, but it gives me the best of both worlds. I can stay home with my boys and work on this at the same time.”

Playing volleyball at IU Kokomo played a role in how she developed her brand.

“At the start of the program, I remember there was a tailgate, and people were so excited,” she said. “Not only were we the start of athletics, but we were also the first sport to start their season. There was so much excitement from everyone.”

Looking Back, Moving Forward

Where are our athletes now?

Lela (Crawford) Gillman, 2015

Gabby Orlando, 2020

Javier Vasquez, 2014

kokomo.iu.edu/alumni

kokomo.iu.edu/alumni
campus leaders, faculty, staff, and students, and it made me feel so special.

“Then my junior year we started winning, and that was such an amazing feeling, and it made me feel like it was something I wanted to be part of,” she continued. “It made me want to encourage others and do something more. That really helped me as I was building my business. Anytime someone comes in contact with June Ellen, I want them to feel encouraged. I want them to feel loved.”

First Athletic Program Graduate
Jacobi Faust made his mark in IU Kokomo athletics, even with only one-year on the men’s basketball team.

He transferred to IU Kokomo after playing a few seasons at the College of Mount St. Joseph (now Mount St. Joseph University) in Cincinnati, where he could live at home and work at a factory between classes to earn his degree at a more affordable cost.

“There were rumors that they were going to develop an athletics program, ” he recalled. “I wanted to see if I might play another year before I was done. “There were rumors that they were going to develop an athletics program, ” he recalled. “I wanted to see if I might play another year before I was done. “There were rumors that they were going to develop an athletics program, ” he recalled. “I wanted to see if I might play another year before I was done.

He appreciated the opportunity to be a student worker in the facilities department, which allowed him to play basketball. More importantly, it connected him with Dave Hawkins, who started as his supervisor and became a mentor and friend.

“One of the big things that got me to be able to play basketball was, there was a little bit of scholarship money, and my coach worked it out for me to get a job on campus,” he said. “Most of the time I worked with Dave. We had a pretty good friendship over those years, and we’ve stayed in touch.”

He especially recalled that Hawkins, who performs with barbershop ensembles, used to practice singing during drives to take vehicles for service or pick up furniture.

His career goal since high school had been to become a CPA, because “I’ve always been a big math person,” and he was interested in business. After graduation, Faust took additional credits at IUPUI for his CPA exam, and completed an internship at BBBC Partners, an accounting firm in downtown Indianapolis. He accepted a full-time job with the firm after the internship, and currently is an assurance manager there.

“I enjoy the people and the clients,” he said. “There’s definitely some interesting, complex work that’s fun, and a lot of good people there. I enjoy being part of that team.”

Faust lives in Franklin Township on the south side of Indianapolis with his wife and three children, ages 8, 6, and 2, and anticipates a return to basketball next year — this time as a coach.

“My oldest is interested in playing in a league, and they need some volunteers,” he said.

First National Qualifier
When Javier Vasquez came to IU Kokomo from Franklin High School, he assumed his cross country days were behind him, since the campus didn’t have a team.

“I had wanted to continue, but IU Kokomo was close to all the people I love, my family members,” he said. “I went there without any athletic pursuits my first year, and it was a surprising bonus when they started the cross country team my sophomore year. I joined immediately.”

He made a big impact, qualifying for the NAIA national championships his junior year (2013) and senior year (2014) — and earned his place in campus athletic history as the first national qualifier.

Even more important than his success on the field was what being part of the team added to his student experience.

“It took away some stress,” he said with a laugh. “But it gave me quite a few friends I still talk to. Friends who came to see me when I lived in Reno and now in Austin. I learned a lot of time management skills. I feel ever prepared when it comes to time management skills, because I had a job, I had school, and I had cross country.”

“I think a lot of my success came from the work ethic that was instilled by having those three priorities all at the same time.”

Vasquez graduated in 2016 with a degree in business management and a dream to work for Tesla. Soon after, he drove to California for an interview with the electric car maker, “and I planned on staying there until I got a job.”

He got the first job he interviewed for, and worked first in California, then in Reno, Nevada, and now is in logistics at the Gigafactory — a very large factory that produces Tesla vehicles — in Austin, Texas.

“A Two-Sport Athlete
Returns Home to Teach, Coach
Basketball was an important part of Lela (Crawford) Gillman’s life growing up in Tipton.

Her elementary education degree from IU Kokomo allowed her to return home to teach and coach, giving back to the next generation.

How did we become the Cougars?
Before the advent of intercollegiate NAA sports at IU Kokomo, previous club sports teams were first known as Little Red, then the IU Kokomo Knights.

In 2003, the Office of Student Activities invited students, faculty, and staff to submit ideas for a new mascot, with prizes offered for the winner. Pamela Richard, director of the campus day care, submitted the winning idea of the Cougars. An interesting note: Richard is the daughter of Cliff Hunt, who started the Knights men’s basketball team as a club sport, and coached from 1981 to 1991.

Javier Vasquez
2014 NOW

KINGSTON
Our mascot, initially referred to as “the cougar,” became Kingston in September 2011, the result of a naming contest for students. Kourtney Cox suggested the name as a reference to IU Kokomo history, as inventor George Kingston owned the Seiberling Mansion before it became the first IU Kokomo campus in 1946. George Kingston was known for inventing the Kingston carburetor.

First National Qualifier
Javier Vasquez
2015 NOW

INDIANA UNIVERSITY KOKOMO ALUMNI MAGAZINE  winter 2023
Continuing to Play After IU Kokomo

May 2023 graduate Gabbie Orlando is continuing her tennis career after four seasons at IU Kokomo, using her extra year of COVID eligibility to play for LIFUE while earning a Master of Public Affairs.

It’s been a jump going from NAIA to NCAA play, but she’s enjoyed the opportunity to play one more year collegiately, at the suggestion of IU Kokomo Coach Kristine Miller.

“She knew I was going to graduate school there and encouraged me to reach out to the coach,” Orlando said. “We played them last spring, and I was able to contact the coach beforehand. He watched me play and it all worked out.”

“It’s been a jump going from NAIA to NCAA play, but she’s enjoyed the opportunity to play one more year collegiately, at the suggestion of IU Kokomo Coach Kristine Miller.

“I love that the kids are mature enough that you can start seeing them become independent, but they are still little kids who are fun-loving and learning to read,” she said. “That’s the big thing for me — when they are finally able to read. That gets me every time. I love that part of my job.”

She’s coached multiple sports through the years and is in her second season as the Tipton High School girls’ varsity basketball coach. She also leads middle school co-ed golf.

“My own experience taught me perseverance and time management and things like that,” she said. “I feel like when you are an athlete, you really learn how you would like to be coached. Just keeping in perspective how I learned and how I play basketball, I understand what these athletes are going through now.”

Gillman enjoys teaching second graders and has been successful, receiving the Early Career Award from the School of Education in 2022. This honor is granted to alumni who have shown outstanding work and effort in the first four years of their careers.

“That really put it all together for me that this was something I should be doing,” she said. “I’ve always known I wanted to be a teacher, but that was the cherry on top that I’m doing the right thing, I’m doing what I love, and I’m doing it really well.”

Gillman’s future goals include continuing to learn and grow as a teacher, and to not get stagnant as a teacher. She also hopes to start soon a family with her husband, Austin Gillman, after getting married in October 2022.

“I just want to learn and grow every day,” she said.

“She knew I was going to graduate school there and encouraged me to reach out to the coach,” Orlando said. “We played them last spring, and I was able to contact the coach beforehand. He watched me play and it all worked out.”

“She knew I was going to graduate school there and encouraged me to reach out to the coach,” Orlando said. “We played them last spring, and I was able to contact the coach beforehand. He watched me play and it all worked out.”

Gillman played on IU Kokomo’s first women’s basketball team, starting in 2014, and then, in 2016, joined its first women’s golf team as well. She played both sports one year before transitioning into just playing golf.

“That was an interesting year,” she recalled. “Golf was fall and spring, and basketball was a winter sport. Our last golf tournament for the fall was a Monday and Tuesday, and then we had a basketball game the next Thursday. I went from one sport to the next, but it was something I loved so much.”

Her best memories from college athletics are the road trips, visiting different parts of the country with her teams. She says her experiences as a student-athlete have impacted the way she coaches and teaches.

After graduating in 2018 with degrees in elementary education and special education, she began teaching second graders at Tipton Elementary.

“I just want to learn and grow every day,” she said.

“I feel old sometimes because it’s a young team and I’m a graduate student, but they’ve been really great,” she said.

Her team only plays two tournaments in the fall, giving her time to acclimate to graduate school and begin the prestigious Peterson Fellowship she, along with two other graduate students, was selected to complete. The three-semester fellowship provides financial support for talented graduate students to gain experience with city government.

The fellowship allows her to work a semester each at IndyGo, the Indianapolis mayor’s office, and the Indianapolis International Airport, working on projects that address a specific challenge in Indianapolis, while supporting the City’s strategic plan and vision.

“It’s a great opportunity to learn in several public sectors, and to meet people,” she said, adding that her career goal is to work in sustainability policy development for a local government.

Orlando said she was happily surprised to be chosen for the tennis team and the fellowship.

“While I was applying for graduate school and applying for the Peterson fellowship and aiming at the tennis coach, I thought, I’d be so happy if one of those things happened. For all of them to happen, it makes me very busy, but very happy. I’m very thankful.”

Her IU Kokomo experience, both on the tennis court and in the classroom, prepared her for what she’s doing now.

“My undergraduate work, especially in science and humanities, prepared me for the discussions and the difficult questions we discuss in graduate school,” she said. “My four years of tennis made me the player I am today. The small-class sizes were beneficial. It gave me the confidence to talk in my class and speak up, because I had a connection with the people in the room. It made it a lot easier when I was applying to grad school and I could easily think of five professors I could ask for a letter of recommendation, because I had that personal relationship with them.”

When you participate in Kokomo Experience and You (KEY), the world is your classroom! The Kokomo Experience and You (KEY) program opens up a world of new experiences for our students! This year, Cougars have traveled to present at conferences across Indiana and the Midwest, have been exposed to treasured works of art at The LUME, explored the battlefields and sites of World War II, met with Kokomo-area business leaders, and interacted with Native groups from across the country at the National Pow Wow XVIII.

IU Kokomo also continues to expand the KEY Academy, inviting area residents and alumni to take part in lifelong learning opportunities.
Grant Gaylor

As a student athlete, Grant Gaylor earned his place in IU Kokomo history. Part of the first track and field throwing team in 2021, he won the campus's first NAIA championship in shot put.

After he graduated with his nursing degree, he returned first as a volunteer throwing coach, and now is an assistant coach, enjoying the opportunity to help students become better people.

"It’s really rewarding to see people improve, and to see them maturing and growing up," he said. "Athletics is about learning life lessons, not just how to be a better thrower or better athlete.

"I feel like the most important thing about college athletics is not whether you’re an all-time leading scorer in basketball, or have the most recognition," he said. "It’s about being a champion in your own right. It’s about doing what you need to do every day consistently to become better. That’s something a lot of people miss and don’t apply to life. If you give what you have and do what you need to do, at the end of it you will know and understand you are a champion in your own right."

Gaylor, BSN ’21, is in good company as a Cougar alumni returning to coach. Brandi Jones, BS ’21, MBA ’23, in her first season as head women’s golf coach. Other alumni coaches include assistant coaches Andrea Saylor, BS ’23, tennis; Tre’Quan Spivey, BS ’21, basketball; Jordan Fivecoate, BS ’19, track and cross country; Erinn Adam, BS ’21, volleyball; and Justin Reed, BS ’21, MBA ’23, baseball (pitching).

Andrea Saylor

"I always had a leadership role even from my first year on the team."

When Andrea Saylor joined IU Kokomo’s tennis team, she immediately found a mentor in Coach Kristine Miller.

"I always had a leadership role, even from my first year on the team," said Saylor. "I felt like becoming a coach was a natural transition, especially because I already had a few experiences when she allowed me to step in and coach when I was injured."

She had worried about making the transition from player to coach, but having a young tennis team helped. Now, she thinks her recent experience makes her relatable to her athletes.

"The only girls I spent significant time with were two of our current 10," she said. "It would be more challenging if they were older, and I’d spent a lot of time with them as a teammate. It’s been easier to take this role and run with it. They see me and know I was in their position just a few years ago. Sometimes when you’re going through the stress of school and balancing the rest of your life and athletics, you need someone who understands. They know I was in their shoes not even a year or two ago."

Saylor said the possibility of coaching has always been on the horizon for her, growing up as the daughter of Mike Saylor, a well-known basketball coach in Terre Haute.

IU Kokomo alumni coaches

ERINN ADAM, BS ’21, volleyball, assistant coach

BRANDI JONES, BS ’21, MBA ’23, women’s golf, head coach

JORDAN FIVECOATE, BS ’19, men’s and women’s cross country and track & field, associate head coach

JUSTIN REED, BS ’21, MBA ’23, baseball, pitching coach

Grant Gaylor’s senior year was the first year that the team included throwing, and as the most experienced athlete in that area, he’d already been informally coaching his teammates.

"Naturally, I wanted to help the other athletes," he said. "I’d give them pointers and cues as we were practicing. It was something I wanted to continue doing after I was done competing."

He enjoys coaching because it gives him an opportunity to help students become better people.
“Because of his influence, I’ve had a natural coaching instinct,” she said. “My freshman year roommate also was a coach’s daughter. We had a lot of conversations about how we thought our fathers’ coaching influenced us and how we showed up on the court. We both had a seriousness about us, and a knowing of what we needed to do. Coaching has always been in the background, but I never knew if there would be an opportunity. I’m glad there has been one here.”

coaching aspirations

As an IU Kokomo basketball player, Tre’Quan Spivey first considered trying to play pro ball, or managing an athletic facility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he found himself training younger teammates, and discovered a love of coaching.

Now, he’s learning on the job, returning to the Cougar bench as an assistant to Coach Eric Echelbarger — an opportunity he couldn’t let pass.

“When I considered coaching, I didn’t think it would be where I graduated,” said Spivey, from Indianapolis. “I thought I’d have to go to a middle school or high school and work my way up. This puts me in a faster framework on learning.”

He found the leap from teammate to coach-easier than he thought it might be.

“It was a smoother transition than I expected,” he said. “I tell people I was a little hesitant due to how recently I had played with these guys. Running with you and making you run are two different things. I think the guys took in my coaching style pretty well.”

He’s learned that while playing basketball is a physical challenge, coaching is more of a mental challenge, handling recruitment, budgets for travel, managing the right balance of players on a roster, and being able to discuss tuition and financial aid with athletes.

Spivey’s goal is to coach someplace like Butler University, or a Big 10 or SEC school. He feels like IU Kokomo is a good place to start, noting that the last Division 1 school he coached at was University of Evansville, a school he knows well.

Spivey values being able to discuss tuition and financial aid with his players, and managing the right balance of players on a roster.

“We were able to discuss things. I think the guys took in my coaching style pretty well.”

As an IU Kokomo basketball player, Tre’Quan Spivey first considered trying to play pro ball, or managing an athletic facility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he found himself training younger teammates, and discovered a love of coaching.

Now, he’s learning on the job, returning to the Cougar bench as an assistant to Coach Eric Echelbarger — an opportunity he couldn’t let pass.

“When I considered coaching, I didn’t think it would be where I graduated,” said Spivey, from Indianapolis. “I thought I’d have to go to a middle school or high school and work my way up. This puts me in a faster framework on learning.”

He found the leap from teammate to coach-easier than he thought it might be.

“It was a smoother transition than I expected,” he said. “I tell people I was a little hesitant due to how recently I had played with these guys. Running with you and making you run are two different things. I think the guys took in my coaching style pretty well.”

He’s learned that while playing basketball is a physical challenge, coaching is more of a mental challenge, handling recruitment, budgets for travel, managing the right balance of players on a roster, and being able to discuss tuition and financial aid with athletes.

Spivey’s goal is to coach someplace like Butler University, or a Big 10 or SEC school. He feels like IU Kokomo is a good place to start, noting that the last Division 1 school he coached at was University of Evansville, a school he knows well.

Spivey values being able to discuss tuition and financial aid with his players, and managing the right balance of players on a roster.

“We were able to discuss things. I think the guys took in my coaching style pretty well.”

When I considered coaching, I didn’t think it would be where I graduated, said Spivey, from Indianapolis. “I thought I’d have to go to a middle school or high school and work my way up. This puts me in a faster framework on learning.”

A s brothers growing up near Toronto, Dalton and Brandon Clarke liked to compete with one another.

“Their best baseball seasons, and I learned how to grow up and be a time to be competitive and a time to relax and just enjoy the ins and outs of the daily process at IU Kokomo, so I would be prepared. I also had him as a resource not only to know what to expect, but to have someone to go to with questions or when I needed support. Without a doubt, it enriched my experience. It would have been difficult without his prior experience for sure.”

For Brandon Clarke, playing where his brother played gave him an idea of what to expect at IU Kokomo.

“He set me up for success,” he said. “Dalton gave me the ins and outs of the daily process at IU Kokomo, so I would be prepared. I also had him as a resource not only to know what to expect, but to have someone to go to with questions or when I needed support. Without a doubt, it enriched my experience. It would have been difficult without his prior experience for sure.”

It was also a family reunion for them, as Dalton had married and stayed in Kokomo after graduating.

“We’d been apart for three years, so it was nice to have family gatherings again,” Dalton said. “Brandon had a lot more offers than I did. It was huge to know he would stay with the same host family I did, and he’d be in the same community with me, and we’d look after each other.”
Brandon Clarke and Dalton Clarke as kids

Brandon agreed. “Kokomo is almost 1,000 miles from home. When you’re that far away, it’s nice to have family so conveniently located,” he said. “Knowing he and his new family would be here, it was a no-brainer to go away to school but have him close.”

Their parents also appreciated that they were together. “It was nice for our parents to know we had each other. It gave them a lot of peace of mind,” Dalton said. “They would both say we need to be better at calling them. I’ll take most of that blame. Brandon’s much better at that.”

While both played baseball, each chose a different path through the sport and in college.

Dalton, an infielder, played two years at an Illinois junior college after high school before transferring to IU Kokomo, where he earned a degree in history and political science in 2019. He got married soon after graduating and worked as a middle school teacher for a short time before accepting his current job as a salesman at Button Dodge in Kokomo.

Brandon said his brother’s college career inspired his own. “I remember when he first went away to school,” he said. “I hadn’t even been thinking about going to the U.S. and playing. That sparked it for me. He showed me this other world of possibilities and motivated me to want to be the best I could. I saw how much success he had at IU Kokomo. I wanted to follow in his footsteps but try my best to grow in those footsteps.”

Brandon, a pitcher and outfielder, played at a Texas community college before transferring to IU Kokomo. He earned a degree in exercise science in 2023 and completed the honors program. He’s currently working as a kinesiologist and wants to study kinesiology and exercise physiology, most likely at a Canadian university.

Dalton said Brandon was always a good student, so he wasn’t surprised by his success, “but it still makes you proud.” “He’s always going to be my little brother.”

There are a ton of talented players there, but if you want to push yourself to be the best, you have to go to the U.S.,” he said. “To have any chance of continuing to play past college, you have to play at an American university.”

Brandon Clarke

Dalton Clarke

Brandon Clarke (batting)
Honoring Excellence

Nominate outstanding alumni who go beyond, give back and make a difference in their professions!

The IUAA Kokomo Region partners with the School of Nursing and Allied Health Professions this spring to recognize their own who exemplify the best in what they do. Please consider submitting a nomination and saving the date for this special event!

NURSES OF DISTINCTION
ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS OF DISTINCTION
FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOL OF NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Recognition ceremony
MARCH 5, 2024
5:30 - 7:30 P.M.
ALUMNI HALL
IU KOKOMO

These awards honor alumni and friends who have shown a commitment to the values and support of these professions. More criteria and information can be found on the online nomination form.