

Measuring Up... and Up

By Athletic Director
Rob Fournier



I recently read that a couple of school districts in Kansas City and Denver are eliminating “letter grades”. The argument in favor of that proposition is that the “old system” (and I know I have to be careful here as I am starting to resemble that reference) is not effective in our modern high-tech, interactive student population. The concept is that a system that is tailored to students’ individual interests will better advance children’s development. The “old” method based partly on chronological age and measured success (obviously through testing) is outdated and inconsistent with a modern society which should advance creativity and learning differences/interests. I am certainly no K-12 expert but I am confident my former sixth grade teacher Miss Souter is not living in either of the aforementioned cities.

If you are intrigued by the “no letter grade” argument you will soon realize most of the rest of this quarter’s edition of the *Warrior Within* contradicts that proposed initiative. Athletics is all about measured outcomes. Not surprisingly, so is most of society – from the company “bottom line”, to the stock market, to what we purchase. Folks just don’t get overexcited by the “next best”.

We are evaluated by results – successful outcomes. We want to be graded. In athletics we measure everything...and then compare it, rank it, analyze it, and ultimately, try to better “it”.

A few years ago (nine to be exact) we started to select and rank the top 100 accomplishments each year in the department. A few pages

beyond this article you can see top accomplishments of 2010. It is impressive. You can also go back and look at those past years through our website. I have always been driven by goals and objectives. Set them, work constantly to achieve your aims, (with some refinement along the way) and then assess (grade?) your ability to meet those ambitions. And make sure you have some “creativity” in there too...they like that in Kansas City.

After all, it is one thing to set an agenda; it is an entirely different work effort to satisfy those objectives. It is frustrating to sit through endless committee meetings and “devise” strategic plans simply to put them away until the next re-organization.

Review this past year’s Top 100. You will quickly get a sense of what we are all about and how we accomplish our plan. Nine years ago when we started this process, some people doubted we had 100 achievements each year to identify and champion. They were right... we have more, many more. And now coaches, staff, and student-athletes look to see how they

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“measure-up” and fondly reflect (I hope) back with pride on some hard work and perseverance. It is never easy but it is always fun.

And speaking of measurements, the fall 2010 academic report for athletics is another measurement. That grade information has some significant results. It evidences that 62% of all our student-athletes achieved at least a 3.00 grade point average (or better) in the classroom (with a minimum of 12 hours). Thirteen (13) of sixteen (16) athletic teams had a cumulative GPA of 3.00 or better with two other programs

at 2.96 and 2.91. Men’s tennis led all teams with a mark of 3.61. Not surprisingly men’s tennis (along with nine other WSU athletic teams) qualified for NCAA postseason play. Maybe there is a correlation between smart young men and women and competitive success. The overall grade point average for all student-athletes is 3.11. And remember, that’s at a Carnegie I Research institution. Those academic achievements look good in Detroit, Denver or Kansas City. Keep those numbers in mind when you pick up a newspaper and read about “student-athlete academic success” (or the lack thereof). I am glad we are evaluated...and keeping score.

And finally, a well deserved acknowledgment to the Hall of Fame Class of 2010. They too are about measurement and goal-setting which is partly reflected in their short biographical snapshot. This quartet brings to 204 the number of inductees into this most honored recognition. That’s select company when you reflect on 93 years of proud athletic history. Their achievements go beyond statistical marks. Each dramatically changed the face of a particular athletic program, and in one case, an entire university. Their successes span years but their lasting impact will be much longer. Well done.

Finally, in retrospect, I hope we never lose that drive, that enthusiasm, that importance to want to be the best that is the foundation of this country and academia. We cannot dismiss the values learned through competition and how to integrate that into our education. Not everyone will ultimately get the top prize -- but we will also not be diminished by the effort to set that as our objective. It is what makes America so singular...it is what makes athletics so special. Miss Souter knew that. She would have been proud. 