



Brian West, Taahir Kelly, and Dominick Yancy

Track trio found their home at Texas State

In a sport where success or failure can come down to the matter of tenths of seconds – or less – and the swiftness of a stride, it is often the bonds formed between athletes that contribute to the level of success. Brian West, Taahir Kelly, and Dominick Yancy are all set to graduate this coming May, but not without a fight to finish out their final season strong.

The trio of Bobcats have been running track together for the past three years and their closeness off the track has helped them achieve greatness, including breaking a 34-year-old school record.

West, Kelly and Yancy all compete in the 400, 200, 4x400 relay and 4x100 relay. It is in the 4x4 where the closeness, trust, and dedication to one another really plays a vital role. West, described by his teammate as “the workforce,” was named the 2022 Sun Belt Indoor Newcomer of the Year and earned the All-Sun Belt Indoor First Team. He runs the third leg in the 4x4. West speaks to how important it was to form a relationship with his teammates after he transferred to Texas State from Memphis.

“We have to be able to have trust in one another and know that everyone will do their job in their part of the relay, we have each other’s back,” West said. Running as a team has also helped everyone’s personal development and growth. West speaks to how every day in practice is a competition and this has helped push his speed resulting in impressive results such as placing second in indoor conference in his first year with the Bobcats and winning the 400 in this year’s 2024 conference. Since running with fellow teammates and the arrival of track assistant coach/sprints and hurdles coach Trent Edgerton, Kelly has dropped a second every year in his 400 and achieved personal bests in the 200. Without the team and the people who surround you, push you and build you up, achieving greatness is hard. It takes an army. All three of these athletes speak to how their achievements would not have been possible without one another’s support. “Being able to see myself on that stage has made me feel like the sky’s the limit,” said Kelly. The relationship of these three track athletes is special

because some would say it came full circle. West and Kelly have known each other since high school, they competed in the same competitions, due to them growing up in the Washington D.C and Maryland area.

Prior to Texas State, Kelly took a trip to Australia with one of West’s old teammates from high school and this sparked a closer relationship between the two of them.

Avery Veiseh and now alumni Ashton Callahan competed in the 4x4 with these three, most recently joining them is Graduate transfer Shawn Collins, known by his fellow teammates as “Chuck”. When Collins was looking to Transfer from his previous school, Jackson State, he reached out Yancy whom he knew vaguely through social media. Immediately after speaking with Yancy Collins knew this was the right fit for him. Collins describes the trio as very “Goofy” which helps them all get along so well. “Chuck brought into what we do straight away,” said Kelly. “He knew what he wanted to do as well as what we expected.”



RISING STARS

Loveard leads second place Bobcats after two rounds in Jonesboro

Ben Loveard fired a second-round 64 to lead three Bobcats in the top 10 after two rounds at the Bubba Barnett Intercollegiate hosted by Arkansas State at the RidgePointe Country Club in Jonesboro. In his first tournament as a Bobcat, Loveard (71-64-135) carded an 8-under 64 second round to secure the lowest round of the tournament so far and finish 36 holes at 9-under and tied for third place. The junior transfer registered 11 birdies over two rounds and an eagle on No. 10 in the second round to help lead the Bobcats on day one of the event. Loveard climbed 20 spots on the leaderboard between rounds. The Bobcats (285-274--559) are tied for second at 17-under after improving five spots on the leaderboard between rounds. Both rounds came in under TXST’s low round of 286 in the season opener. Host Arkansas State leads the event at 28-under, while Austin Peay sits tied with TXST. Joining Loveard in the top 10 are

junior Sakke Siltala (67-69--136) and senior Jack Burke (72-67--139). Siltala led TXST after the first 18 with a 67 and followed it up with his second round in the 60s on the day, a 69. Siltala now has 13 rounds in the 60s over three seasons as a Bobcat. Burke shot even par in the first round before going on to fire five under over the second 18, which included a team-best 12 birdies over two rounds, the second highest total of the tournament. Harrison Jaeger (+5) and Jaxon Donaldson (+12) rounded out the TXST lineup, while Brannan Cox is competing as an individual and shot +4 on the day. The third and final round of action takes place Tuesday with Texas State teeing off starting at 8:40 a.m. CT from No. 1. The Bobcats are paired with Arkansas State, Austin Peay and Oklahoma Christian. Cox will tee off from No. 10 at 9:10 a.m. Follow live scoring on GolfStat.



Ben Loveard

“I love the individual side of being a jumper, while still feeling like you are part of a team,”



Precious Okougbonu

Freshman Precious Okougbonu makes a mark

After making her debut for the Texas State Bobcats, the young freshman Precious Okougbonu continues to strive for success in triple jump and long jump.

The freshman brings a spark of positivity and optimism to the Texas State track and field team with her enthusiastic yet humble persona. In her first ever indoor meet as a Bobcat she placed second in the women's triple jump with a jump of 12.49 meters/40-11.75. This mark put her 10th in the country and made her one of two freshmen ranked in the nation's top-10 this year. She currently ranks third in the Sun Belt conference. She has since jumped twice in other meets, with her second-best jump of the season only falling one inch short of her personal-best. Before being recruited to Texas State, Okougbonu already had impressive jump numbers in middle and high school which attracted the attention of Texas State jumps and multi coach, Kendall Gustafson.

“The first thing that stood out to me were her numbers, this is where track recruiting always starts,” said Gustafson. “Precious was getting good results already and on top of this, I saw potential for growth.” Interestingly, Okougbonu was a two-sport athlete. She trained and competed in both track and basketball all the way up until she came to college,

reflecting this enthusiasm young Okougbonu holds. “I love basketball players,” said Gustafson. “I think playing multiple sports is great for an athlete's development and a lot of my best jumpers were actually basketball players.” After being recruited and committing to Texas State, Okougbonu made the decision to only compete in track at the collegiate level.

“I love the individual side of being a jumper, while still feeling like you are part of a team,” said Okougbonu about the decision to stick to one sport.

With extremely impressive athletic abilities and her positive attitude towards life, both Okougbonu herself and Gustafson believe there is huge potential.

Prior to working with Gustafson, Okougbonu trained with Kenny Roseman, a successful private high school jumps coach in the Dallas area, whom Gustafson has become familiar with due to recruiting some of his athletes. “When I first met Precious I loved her personality and her attitude” said Roseman. He describes her as being fierce with a huge competitive spirit.

With aspirations to break records and achieve greatness beyond college, Okougbonu prefers to take a step-by-step approach, taking everything in her stride. “I do have aspirations to jump

professionally but right now it's not really on my mind because first I just want to focus and progress in college, but I do think the time will come where it will be something I will think about,” said Okougbonu with a smile. The climb to the top is a process and having a trusting player-to-coach relationship is important. For Okougbonu and Gustafson, they have quickly established this relationship, which naturally started the recruiting process. Okougbonu appreciated how attentive and considerate Gustafson was throughout the entire process. And for Gustafson, the early payoff has been evident.

“Precious is humble, she's coachable and she cares about what I say,” said Gustafson. “We really do have a great relationship.” Although born and raised in Batch Springs, Texas, Okougbonu's parents, Omon and Juliet, moved to the United States from Nigeria because “they wanted a better life for my siblings and I, and also for themselves,” said Okougbonu. “I had a really good circle of people growing up,” Okougbonu said. Inspired by her bible study teacher, Dawn Ewansiha from the Church of God Mission International in Dallas, growing up with a strong connection to her church has contributed greatly to this humble yet driven attitude of hers.

Tennis Coaches Make Their Mark



Assistant Coach Beth Hayward and student

The Texas State tennis program has been firing on all cylinders so far this year. A team with a strong mixture of experience and talented up-and-comers, the Bobcats have their most team wins in nearly a decade. And much of that success starts with the leadership at the top – and in a combination of coaches that started when the head coach and assistant coach worked together as player-coach beginning in 2016. Kendall Brooks, head tennis coach for the Bobcats, is in her second season leading the program and is already making quite the impact. A true Texan, born and raised in Corpus Christi, she joined the Bobcats in 2020 as the volunteer assistant alongside former head coach of nineteen years, Tori Plunkett. After working as a volunteer, she made her way up the ladder, becoming assistant coach in 2021 before getting promoted to lead the Bobcats beginning with the 2022 season following Plunkett's retirement. Brooks holds many years of coaching experience and is full of expertise and knowledge. The Texan had an excellent playing career herself, where she played at Texas Tech from 2000 to 2004 before immediately jumping into coaching upon graduation where she served as the assistant for the Red Raiders for two years. This marked the beginning of her successful career that includes a seven-year stop at St. Edward's in Austin (NCAA Division II) and a conference championship in 2019, four conference runner-up finishes, five NCAA tournament appearances, and a South Central Regional championship. Alongside Brooks, current graduate assistant Beth Hayward is a native of England pursuing a master's in exercise science. Hayward came to the United States back in 2015 to pursue her tennis career. She played tennis for one season at UTEP before transferring to St. Edward's where she played under Brooks. After graduating in 2019, Hayward returned home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it did not take long for her to realize that the tennis world is where she wanted to stay. “I worked other jobs after graduation because I didn't really know what I wanted to do but I just missed tennis a lot, I missed the environment,” said Hayward.

While Hayward was fresh upon graduation and deciding which

career path she wanted to take, Brooks already had fifteen years of coaching experience under her belt. Despite the difference in age and experience, their joining of forces is not to be reckoned with. The Bobcats are currently 9-5 and 3-3 in conference play. The Bobcats won eight matches in a row at one point – the team's longest winning streak in 12 years – and fought for the program's first ever wins over Coastal Carolina and James Madison. A solid relationship between coaches running a team together is vital for success. Part of the recipe for success is coaches being able to see eye to eye and possess the same passion and vision. This is exactly what these two have and it is being reflected by the team already having its most wins in a season since 2016. The vibe of the team is something that both deem important. “Beth and I have the same drive, similar personalities, and the same expectations in terms of what we like to see from players,” said Brooks. Despite tennis being deemed as an individual sport, in college it is all about the team environment. Being united, invested in one another and playing for something bigger than just yourself is what it is all about and coaches have a huge impact on making this happen. Developing the culture that both Brooks and Hayward desire has been easier on them and on the team because of their similarities in both personality and coaching style. The prior relationship the duo had as player and coach is special and something they both described as “unique.”

Going from playing for Brooks to working alongside her is something Hayward says she always hoped would happen. “College coaching had always been something I wanted to get into and there was always part of me that knew we were going to end up working together,” said Hayward. “I am very glad we are in the position that we are in.” Brooks says that knowing how Hayward was as a player helped her see what she would be like as a coach. She describes her as a hard worker, driven and never taking the easy way out. “I want to have an assistant that is not only a good player but someone who has been through the things that my players are going through,” said Brooks. Hayward fits this description perfectly.