Athletics
Champion Hurdler Ends on a High

As a student at St. Charles East High School, Kyle Decker (CSH ’19) was initially drawn to gymnastics. Then he discovered his true calling: running. The Illinois All-State finisher caught DePaul’s attention, and he was quickly recruited on the Patrick J. Savage Endowed Scholarship for Track & Field. During his time at DePaul, Decker distinguished himself as a seven-time individual BIG EAST champion and the four-time defending champion in the 60-meter hurdles, setting an 8.12-second personal record in the championship finals, which made him the eighth male athlete to win four BIG EAST Indoor Championship titles, the first since 1997 and the first for the Blue Demons.

“DePaul has always been a school that caught my eye. There was just something different about the experience here,” recalls the 22-year-old Decker, noting its urban setting, diverse student body and Catholic roots.

“Hurdling, in particular, has been a challenge he has taken on enthusiastically.

“One thing that really stuck with me with hurdles was the technical aspect. Flat running is a little boring for me, and I really like having these barriers. I think technique is one of my strong suits. Once I learned how to deal with the barriers, it really made me enjoy the sport and the event more,” he says.

“One takeaway from hurdling is learning from your mistakes and constantly making little adjustments to improve your technique,” he continues. “In the classroom, I had to learn how to study properly and how to be more efficient, and I think the technical tweaking of track, and especially hurdling, has helped me a lot in my academics and time management.”

Decker maintained stellar grades and a 4.0 grade point average every quarter.

Decker has taken to heart DePaul’s Vincentian mission. He helped organize a variety of service projects, produce a video about sexual assault awareness and launch a social media campaign promoting diversity and inclusion.

“I think those service initiatives really define who I am,” he says.

He also volunteered at Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s emergency department and has gone on several service-learning trips through DePaul to different countries, including one to the Dominican Republic, where he and other student-athletes worked with orphaned and disadvantaged children. In recognition of his work, Decker has received numerous leadership and student-athlete awards, including being the unanimous choice for and first DePaul recipient of the BIG EAST Michael Tranghese Postgraduate Leadership Award.

This fall, Decker began medical school. “Practicing medicine has always been a goal for me. I want to really make a difference in people’s lives, and I like to think that DePaul had a lot to do with that,” he says.

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—Kyle Decker
17th Consecutive NCAA Tournament for Women’s Basketball

A winning women’s basketball tradition got even stronger as DePaul won its fourth BIG EAST tournament title in the last six years and earned its 17th straight NCAA tournament berth. Junior Chante Stonewall’s three-point play with five seconds left to play lifted her team to a 74-73 comeback win over Marquette. Stonewall was voted the tournament’s Most Outstanding Player and was selected to the All-BIG EAST team along with senior Mart’e Grays, who was also named Honorable Mention All-American by the Women’s Basketball Coaches Association. Grays and Kelly Campbell made the BIG EAST All-Tournament team. Lexi Held was voted onto the BIG EAST All-Freshman team, and senior Ashton Millender won the Sportsmanship Award. Campbell was a national semifinalist for the prestigious Wooden Citizen Cup, while Grays was a repeat selection to the Athletic Directors Association national Scholar-Athlete team.

Briefs

- **Turnaround Year for DePaul Men’s Basketball**  Coach Dave Leitao, Eli Cain (CMN ’19) and All-BIG EAST Second Team selection Max Strus (BUS ’18) along with BIG EAST Most Improved Player Paul Reed sparked men’s basketball to a winning record and runner-up finish in the Roman College Basketball Invitational postseason tournament. It set up a return to the program’s glory years, as the nation’s No. 17-ranked recruiting class is headed to Lincoln Park featuring consensus top 35 national recruit Romeo Weems, top 100 national recruit Markese Jacobs and No. 59-ranked center Nick Ongenda. They will be joined by former California standout point guard Charlie Moore, who transferred in after playing at Kansas last season. The Blue Demons also welcome transfer Darius Hall, a national top 50 recruit coming out of high school.

- **Comebacks in Women’s Tennis, Softball**  Trailing 3-0 in the third set of the singles match that would decide the BIG EAST champion, sophomore Alina Kuzmenkova rallied for a 6-3 win and propelled the Blue Demons to a 4-3 victory over Xavier at the BIG EAST Women’s Tennis Championship. The win secured Coach Mark Ardizzone’s team automatic entry in the NCAA tournament.

- **Historic Accomplishment for Women’s Track and Field**  The Blue Demons women’s track and field team had their highest finish in program history as the runner-up at the BIG EAST Indoor Championships. Senior Jade Nolan won the long jump and triple jump en route to becoming the unanimous choice as the meet’s Most Outstanding Field Performer. Classmate Alexia Brooks smoked the competition in her 60-meter hurdles win, while sophomore Kiersten Walker captured the 400-meter dash title.

- **Golf History**  Charlie Spencer-White had the best finish in program history when he came in second at the BIG EAST championship golf tournament in May. The senior’s score of 217 led DePaul to a runner-up finish, equaling a program best set in 2015.