

# ALL WORK and NO PLAY

## Sophomore team manager finds a way to be part of sports teams without playing

Written by Jeri Freirich | photo illustration by Christian Wiles

Two hours in the gym. Forty minutes in the weight room. Thirty minutes in the training room. At 5 p.m., sophomore Zach Conklin finally heads home in his car after a long day of basketball practice—not as a player, but as a manager.

Every day after school from 3 to 5, Conklin is either setting up equipment for the team or helping the trainer, Ron Wollenhaupt. Even though he doesn't play, Conklin still goes to every practice, and puts in the same amount of time and energy that the players do.

Conklin is the team manager for basketball, baseball and football. He chose this role, rather than playing these sports, because it was a better fit academically and he wanted to work directly with the coaches—which has led him to a job with the ground crew at the Royal's Stadium.

"I wanted to be the team manager so I could work with the coaches and be part of the team," Conklin said. "I have known Coach Hair since I was in elementary school and I especially wanted to help him with the games."

According to Conklin, being a team manager requires a lot of initiative and hard work, which he has demonstrated. According to Coach Hair, Conklin does a great job and always thinks ahead. Hair never has to tell him to do anything: Conklin just does it on his own.

"He has a good feel for what to do," Hair said. "He knows right away if a player needs a towel, a water bottle or a Gatorade."

In addition to getting things ready for the game, Conklin is positive and encourages the team to do their best. He doesn't just get things ready for the boys' team, but sometimes he gets equipment ready for the girls'

team. According to Hair, his main focus is getting the games ready on time so the players can play their best.

"He has a tremendously positive attitude," Hair said. "I have known Zach since he went to elementary school with my son, so I know he is a great kid."

According to Conklin, Hair is his role model because of the way he leads his team and how much he knows about basketball. The dedication and time he puts into it has inspired Conklin to be like him, which led him to be the manager.

"This is one of the reasons I wanted to be the manager," Conklin said. "I think Coach Hair shows how he loves basketball through how he coaches."

According to Conklin, being the team manager isn't an easy job. It requires staying after school a few hours every day and can take up an entire weekend if there are tournaments to attend. When the team went to McPherson, Conklin had to load the buses up, fill the water coolers and get the equipment ready, which took up a few hours before the trip.

"You have to be dedicated to be a manager because it requires a lot of time during and after school," Conklin said. "I really enjoy it, though, because I like being part of the team. I get included in all of the events."

Conklin said it was hard getting cut from the three teams knowing that you have spent years playing it. On the last day of tryouts, the coaches put the final list online. Conklin hurried frantically to his computer, refreshing the baseball website three or four times before the results were posted. All he could think of is "what if I didn't make it and did I work hard for nothing?"

"You never know if you're going to make it or not because there is a list posted," Conklin said. "It hurt to go on the website and find out I didn't make it, but you have to say you're going to work harder next year."

Even though he spends a lot of his time making sure all of the players have everything they need, he also gets the chance to scrimmage with them during practice.

"I have become close with the players on all three sports by always being at games and practices," Conklin said. "Being the manager, I feel like it's important to gain their trust and their friendship."

One way that Conklin gains relationships with the players is by always being at practice and by giving a small speech before each game. Before the game, Conklin usually tells the players to go out there and do the best



This is Conklin's first year as the basketball team manager.

they can. Afterwards, if the team doesn't do their best, Conklin will tell them to never give up.

According to senior baseball player Brady Forbes, Conklin has done a lot for the baseball team the past few years by fixing up the field, gathering supplies for practices and games, and just being a big supporter of the team by being there all the time.

"He goes to every single game and does so much on the field that it makes our practices so much easier," Forbes said. "Usually we would have to stay an hour after practice, but since he does it, it makes it a lot easier on us."

The players aren't the only friendships that Conklin has built by being the manager. He has built a friendship with Wollenhaupt. According to Conklin, Wollenhaupt is at almost every game for baseball, basketball and football. The two of them have built a bond because of the time they spend getting water and towels ready for the players.

Conklin looks up to Wollenhaupt because he is a great guy and is always there for all of the players whenever they need something. He has become really close with him by spending time in the training room after school and at games.

According to Wollenhaupt, Conklin is always on task and gets everything done on time. He stays after school to run errands, set up water, makes ice bags and gets the tape ready for the athletes.

"Conklin's interest is in how everything is

being run in the trainers office from filling up ice bags to helping wrap an athletes foot and how he can help me with making sure the athletes are in great physical shape," Wollenhaupt said.

Conklin and Wollenhaupt have become close friends because of their mutual interests. Conklin recently got a job working for the ground crew at the Royals Stadium. According to Ron, it is interesting because he had a job similar to that when he was in college.

"We always talk about Conklin's job at the Royal's Stadium because it is something we both have in common," Wollenhaupt said. "I think it is really neat that a high school kid can get a job like that."

Wollenhaupt enjoys having someone to talk to when athletes are in the training room. Sometimes athletes think that only injured people go to the trainer, but he just wants to make sure everyone is in great physical shape.

"When you come in to the training room, you want to create an atmosphere that is OK to be in," Ron said. "If there is a peer in there it kind of eases the tension."

Conklin looks up to the three coaches and Wollenhaupt because of the difference they make in the lives of the team members.

"It's nice to have people to look up to and show you what it's like to do things for others," Conklin said.

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When Connie's health began to decline for the last time in Jan. of 2011, Maddie quit her four-year-long tenure at "The Pulse" dance studio to spend more time with her mom, a decision she says was very difficult to make. But now, her love for dance has rekindled.

"It's just my escape," Maddie said. "It's a way to get away from everything."

But dancing and ignoring can't rescue Maddie from inevitable thoughts about her parents.

"There are so many amazing things about them," Maddie said. "My dad was really wise and would always give us advice, and my mom was really sweet and would just love on you and hug you. She was the best at giving hugs. I really miss that"

Though their physical presence is lost, Maddie's parents aren't completely absent from her life. Every so

often she goes up to their graves at Newcomers Cemetery to see them. She tried talking to them once but found it too weird, so usually she just goes to think. She thinks about what she's going to do with the rest of her life. Thinks about what she'd be doing that day if her parents were still around. Thinks about their absence in general.

The last two times she's visited them were on Jan. 3 and Jan. 16. Their birthdays.

"I just went up and sat and cried and thought 'I just miss them so much,'" Maddie said. "It's just a place where I can cry and be by myself."

On Sept. 26, 2004, the entire Cardell family signed a B-There contract. The contract is a promise made between the parents to the children that when one of them dies, the other will be waiting for them in Heaven for, "A glorious family reunion without an end," it reads.

It even lists directions where to find each other.

"If I see Heaven before you, I will wait for you inside the Eastern Gate. If you see Heaven before me, I know you are waiting for me there. This is an appointment I will not miss!"

The contract is framed and hangs in the Cardell's kitchen. "My mom wrote me a letter for my seventeenth birthday and, in it, it said she'd be watching me from Heaven," Maddie said. "So that and the B-There contract reassures me that I will see them again and doesn't make me so sad."

You can always find Maddie's parents with her too-around her neck.

Soon after Connie's passing, Maddie found a necklace in her mom's closet. She showed it to Ken and he told her she could keep it. The locket opens up, she plans on filling it with a picture of her parents.

She likes to tuck it under her shirts. It's closer to her heart that way.