

Durant, Wilton form first soccer team

By Gus Thoma

More than 20 Durant and Wilton athletes will form the first soccer team in the school's history. The team will be coached by Durant parent Austin Williams, father of sophomore Nolan Williams.

"I have wished for a team here since 2015 when I started playing soccer on an adult recreation team and wished there was an easier outlet for the kids in our area," said Coach Williams.

The soccer team, which will be affiliated with the Muscatine High School soccer program, will play at a JV level.

"It's [JV level] a great place to start because we can evaluate what we need to work on without the pressure of getting to state," said Coach Williams. "Durant and Wilton are the only two schools in the River Valley Conference who do not offer a high school soccer program, so coming in at a JV level seems like a great introductory route for our new team."

The name of the team will be Durant United.

"United is a common suffix for English teams that have combined clubs together including Newcastle United, my favorite team, and Manchester United," said Coach Williams. The team will consist of 22 players, including 15 from Durant and seven from Wilton, and the team will be co-ed made up of both boys and girls.

"I have seen girls that outmaneuver

and shoulder check boys off the ball at the club level," he said. "I have no doubts that if a person is determined enough to play hard enough and aggressively enough at the JV level, being co-ed shouldn't be too much of an issue."

A soccer starting lineup consists of 11 players, so there will be enough players to field two scrimmage teams during practice.

"This is a great number," he said of his 22 players.

"If everyone is at practice, we can have full-sided scrimmages to work on our shape on the field to see how everyone can work together."

Some players are in two sports this spring, so even if not all 22 are at practice, the team can still work on drills and footwork.

Coach Williams has been coaching soccer since 2013. He has been an assistant coach with the Muscatine Soccer Club for kids aged 10-18 and is currently an assistant coach for his son Nevin's team, which is U14, kids 14 and under.

The idea for a soccer team in Durant started after Coach Williams said he was approached by a lot of parents and kids in Durant asking if high school soccer was even a possibility in Durant.

"The more I got asked the question, the more I realized how many Durant students were interested in soccer," he said. "With the help of other parents and Durant

students, we started investigating the possibility."

Coach Williams compares Durant's new soccer program to one that has already started in West Branch.

"Their path is similar to ours; a couple of kids played club soccer and didn't have a place to continue locally, so they approached their athletic director and figured out how to make it work," said Coach Williams. He was inspired by West Branch's team to approach the Durant athletic department about starting a team here.

"After a year and a half of organizing and figuring out what we need, we're here," he said. When the soccer sign-up sheet went up earlier in the year, Coach Williams was a little nervous because he wasn't sure how many students would sign up.

"Seeing so many names on there has been inspiring," said Coach Williams. "Seeing the support for the little kid's soccer that is happening locally also has really motivated the parent group and me to keep the momentum going, so they have a program to grow into."

Coach Williams likes soccer because it is a dynamic sport.

"Winning is cool, but watching the team play as a unit is what makes soccer a beautiful game," he said.

"Seeing kids move from toe poking the ball, or just booting it down field and everyone runs towards the ball, to seeing the

game for what it is and being patient, waiting for the perfectly timed and weighted pass is what drives me," said Coach Williams.

One Durant junior, Fred Hansell, is looking to make his return to soccer after playing the sport through junior high. Hansell played soccer for six years and is excited to see what the season brings.

"My goals for the season are just to have fun and improve as a player," he said. Hansell is going to play goalie and defender and doesn't know what the year will hold for him.

"I know many people on the team this year and also know that they are really good," he said. "In the end, it doesn't really matter to me if we do good. I'm just happy to play."

One Durant senior, Madeline Utter, will be doing two spring sports, golf and soccer.

"Golf will be my major sport and because this is the first year of soccer, the practices will be flexible with the other spring sport schedules, so I will be able to make it to both sports," said Utter.

She started playing soccer in third grade then stopped playing until last spring when she subbed for an indoor rec soccer team to work on her skills. She is currently playing for the same team.

"I had a lot of fun, so when Durant talked about starting a team, I thought playing again would be fun," she said.

Jake Willkomm wonders what could have been

By Lauren Callison

Jake Willkomm is wrapping up his college career at Iowa State University studying finance and sales. But he can't help but think of what might have been as a senior at Durant High School four years ago.

The COVID-19 pandemic wiped out Willkomm's senior track season for the Wildcats in 2020. In turn, it was current boys' Head Track Coach Daniel Knipfel's first season at the helm. He recalled that the 2020 team had a lot of natural talent.

"That season had a lot of athletes, freshmen to seniors, that anticipated having a lot of fun and competing," said Coach Knipfel.

"We probably would have had some of Durant's best male athletes in recent years on that team. From that perspective, it was a huge downer to see the season canceled."

The previous year, Willkomm's junior season, he qualified for the state track meet in the 200-meter dash and placed fourth with a time of 23.21 seconds.

"Jake had some great natural speed that is hard to come by, and it was a lot of fun to watch him compete," said Coach Knipfel.

The three runners that finished in front of Willkomm at the state meet would all return for his final season.

"I did have hopes of getting revenge," said Willkomm, who recalls the energy he felt at the state meet. "The environment was pretty electric at state, and my race went well," said Willkomm.

Willkomm put in a lot of work during the winter months of his senior season to prepare for one last go at a state title.

"I do think if I got the chance to run that last season, I would have had a better chance to win it," he said.

Although it was disappointing for Willkomm to have his senior track season taken away from him, his track career, however, was not over.

"After I got fourth at state, that did start to attract attention from small D3 colleges," he said.

After graduating high school, he ran at Loras College in Dubuque for one year following the pandemic.

"It was a very cool experience," he said. "In my first year, I had tons of PR's and went to run at nationals in North Carolina."

At nationals, Willkomm ran in the 4x400-meter and the 4x100-meter relays and was named all-region and all-conference in both events.

It wasn't easy for Willkomm to get back into running after missing a season, and the COVID regulations that Loras College implemented affected his experience at the collegiate level.

"Running track during COVID was not the best," he said. "We always had to run with our masks on, and the PT only allowed so many people into the training room."

Fortunately for Willkomm, all was not lost his senior year at Durant. A beam of light came out of the dark when, following the vacant track season, the Wildcat baseball team was able to play a summer season and



Photo courtesy Loras College Athletics
Former Durant track star Jake Willkomm competes in a race for Loras College.

made a playoff run to the state tournament in Des Moines. The Wildcats played North Linn and lost in the first round of the tournament, 2-1.

"Making it to state after track was canceled was pretty awesome especially because it was with a lot of my friends that I've played baseball with my whole life," he said.

Pair of Durant siblings share same passion for sport of bowling

By Paige Happ

Two pairs of Durant siblings mirror each other when it comes to their passion for bowling.

Senior Macyn Huston and 2022 graduate Cooper Huston both competed at the state tournament while in high school and now will bowl at the same college in Oskaloosa next year.

Similarly, senior Brooklyn Schlapkohl and 2022 graduate Ethan Schlapkohl qualified for the state tournament in the same year, 2022. Next year, both will be bowling at different colleges in Iowa.

Macyn Huston recently wrapped up her senior year of bowling for the Wildcats and qualified for the state tournament as an individual along with Ashlynn Watkins of Wilton. Macyn finished 25th in the tournament with a 484 series.

"I think that my season ended well with me being able to go to state. However, I did not do as well as I was hoping at the state tournament," said Macyn, who did improve

her average score greatly from her junior to senior year.

Cooper Huston is proud of his sister for qualifying for the state tournament and watched Macyn bowl at state in Waterloo in February.

Growing up, Macyn and Cooper often bowled and shared a connection together through the sport.

"I liked being able to bowl with my sister every weekend to have some competition while growing up, plus I was able to see her grow and become the bowler she is today," said Cooper.

Macyn and Cooper, now a sophomore in college, started bowling at a young age.

"My brother and I have been bowling with each other since I was around five years old," said Macyn.

"My brother and I love competing against each other and seeing who can win. It makes the sport just a little bit more fun for us both."

Cooper qualified for the state tournament his sophomore year in high school as part of the team, and he is now bowling at William Penn University in Oskaloosa. Macyn hopes to follow in her brother's footsteps and bowl at William Penn as well.

"I hope she decided to come to William Penn because of how much I like this school, and I know she will like the team and the environment," said Cooper.

At Macyn's college visit to William Penn, she signed a wall where everyone who is visiting the college can sign. Macyn signed her name next to her brother's.

"It felt really good to see she did that, almost like she was following my steps and wanting to be like me, which made me feel like a proud brother," said Cooper.

Brooklyn Schlapkohl enjoyed her last season as a Wildcat by spending time with her teammates and having fun.

She was the first Durant girl to qualify for the state tournament in 2022 and followed up with another trip to state last

year.

Brooklyn started bowling at a young age and continued to show interest in the sport. Her older brother Ethan also bowled throughout high school.

"I enjoy the fact that bowling is something that me and my brother get to share and bond over," said Brooklyn.

"My brother has been overly supportive when it comes to my bowling. He always wants to go bowling to help me get better."

Brooklyn and Ethan both qualified as individuals for the state bowling tournament in 2022.

"It was a really cool experience to go to state [in 2022] with my brother," said Brooklyn.

Both Ethan and Brooklyn also completed a goal of wanting to bowl in college. Ethan moved on to bowl at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, and Brooklyn will be signing with St. Ambrose University in Davenport.