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IWU's Ott Honored as CL Male Athlete of the Year

JACKSON, Mich. – The Crossroads League announced on Tuesday that Steven Ott of the Indiana Wesleyan University cross country and track programs has been named the 2021-2022 CL Male Athlete of the Year.

Ott led the Wildcats throughout the 2021-2022 year in each of their cross country, indoor track and outdoor track seasons, piling up a host of awards and accomplishments along the way and helping IWU to several strong team performances during his senior year.

“Steven always puts God first and team second,” commented IWU head men’s cross country coach John Foss. “His gift to run far and fast is amazing and his attitude is humble and coachable. I am very proud of Steven.”

During the cross country season in the fall, Ott raced to NAIA All-American honors, finished runner-up at the Crossroads League Championships and helped Indiana Wesleyan to a third-place finish at the NAIA National Championships.

The move into track season did nothing to slow Ott, who was a member of IWU’s national championship 4x800-meter relay teams during the indoor and outdoor seasons and picked up four additional NAIA All-American awards to go with his cross country accolade.

In addition to his pair of NAIA National Championships and five NAIA All-American honors, Ott also raced to a CL Championship in the mile and finished the three seasons with five All-Crossroads League honors during his senior season.

The Crossroads League Male Student-Athlete of the Year award is nominated and voted on by the 10 Athletic Directors from the Crossroads League and announced each summer.

Crossroads League Male Student-Athlete of the Year Recipients

2021-2022 – Steve Ott, Indiana Wesleyan (cross country/track and field)

2020-2021 – Kyle Mangas, Indiana Wesleyan (basketball)

2019-2020 – Kyle Mangas, Indiana Wesleyan (basketball)

2018-2019 – Kyle Mangas, Indiana Wesleyan (basketball)

2017-2018 – Erik Escobedo, Bethel (track and field)

2016-2017 – Lane Mahurin, Indiana Wesleyan (basketball)

2015-2016 – Austin Fox, Saint Francis (basketball)

2014-2015 – Matt Schauss, Bethel (basketball)

2013-2014 – Riley Swanson, Mount Vernon Nazarene (baseball)

2012-2013 – Brady Klotz, Bethel (golf)

2011-2012 – Caleb Kennedy, Huntington (basketball)

Marian's Oleksak Takes Third-Straight CL Female Athlete-of-the-Year Nod

JACKSON, Mich. – The Crossroads League announced its 2021-2022 Female Athlete-of-the-Year honor on Tuesday, with Marian's soccer and track standout, Erin Oleksak, claiming the recognition for the third time in as many years.

Oleksak was a force for Marian on the pitch once again during her junior season, playing to NAIA First-Team All-American and Crossroads League Player-of-the-Year honors, after helping the Knights to a 17-5-1 record and a trip to the NAIA National Tournament Quarterfinals. Oleksak closed the year ranked No. 11 in the NAIA with 22 goals scored and as the MU all-time career leader with 156 points, 63 goals, 30 assists and 18 game-winning strikes.

"Erin's athletic achievements from the past year are unprecedented," said MU women's soccer head coach Justin Sullivan. "What occasionally goes unnoticed however, is Erin's work rate and diligence in the classroom. To merge the academic and athletic prowess takes strong character. The Marian women's soccer family is very proud of Erin and what she has been able to accomplish as a Knight."

Oleksak continued her dominance into the indoor and outdoor track and field campaigns, winning the NAIA National Championship in the indoor pentathlon and piling up three NAIA All-American honors, six individual CL Championships, nine All-CL honors and two school records. Oleksak's efforts helped Marian win the Crossroads League Championships as a team in each of the indoor and outdoor seasons.

"Erin is a once-in-a-generation athlete, but her athletic accomplishments only define part of all that Erin is and does for Marian University," reflected MU women's track and field head coach Michael Holman. "Erin's athletic accomplishments are well documented. The full breadth of her impact on MU is further defined with her academic excellence, 4.0 grade-point average, her tutoring of fellow students, and her multiple leadership roles on campus and with her teams. With all of Erin's individual honors, she puts team first and foremost, and is willing to do what it takes to help her teammates and team excel. Erin is a very special young lady that Marian is blessed to have, and I am blessed to have the opportunity to coach."

The Crossroads League Female Student-Athlete of the Year award is nominated and voted on by the 10 Athletic Directors from the Crossroads League and announced each summer.

Crossroads League Female Student-Athlete of the Year Recipients

2021-2022 – Erin Oleksak, Marian (soccer/track and field)

2020-2021 – Erin Oleksak, Marian (soccer/track and field)

2019-2020 – Erin Oleksak, Marian (soccer/track and field), Hannah Stoffel, Huntington (cross country/track and field)

2018-2019 – Bethany Balcer, Spring Arbor (soccer)

2017-2018 – Bethany Balcer, Spring Arbor (soccer)

2016-2017 – Bethany Balcer, Spring Arbor (soccer)

2015-2016 – Bethany Balcer, Spring Arbor (soccer)

2014-2015 – Alex Berends, Taylor (cross country/track and field)

2013-2014 – Geandra Almeida, Bethel (golf)

2012-2013 – Paige Smith, Indiana Wesleyan (basketball)

2011-2012 – Kelsey Pritchard, Taylor (volleyball)

Dates and sites for the various Missouri Valley Conference sports championships for the 2022-23 athletic season, as voted on by member institutions, have been announced by the league office. Notably, seven different MVC institutions have been selected to host at least one championship. The Conference will provide television coverage for 13 of the league's 17 championships.

MEN'S BASKETBALL: The State Farm MVC Men's Basketball Championship -- the 33rd consecutive men's tournament in St. Louis -- will feature all 12 Conference schools and will be played at Enterprise Center. For the 18th-straight year, the tournament will begin on Thursday and end on Sunday (March 2-5). Thursday and Friday will feature four games each day, with the first game beginning at noon. The semifinals are Saturday, and the title game will be Sunday. All 11 games will be televised with the semifinals airing on CBS Sports Network and the championship game on CBS Sports.

The State Farm MVC Tournament, also known uniquely as "Arch Madness" to Valley fans, will be played at Enterprise Center for the 29th time. Arch Madness is the second-longest neutral site tenured collegiate tourney in the nation (following only the Big East in New York City). The State Farm MVC Tournament site has moved from Kiel Auditorium (1991) to the Saint Louis Arena (1992-1994) to Enterprise Center (1995-present).

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: The MVC Women's Basketball Championship, affectionately known as Hoops in the Heartland, will be in the Quad Cities (Moline, Ill.) The 2023 championship features all 12 Missouri Valley Conference schools and will begin on Thursday and end on Sunday (March 9-12). Thursday and Friday will feature four games each day, with the first game beginning at noon. The semifinals are Saturday, and the title game will be Sunday. The first 10 games will be on The Valley on ESPN, and for the second-straight season, the title game will air on ESPNU.

Notably, the MVC has conducted its women's basketball championship at a neutral site every year since 2008. Next March, the Conference will be the only current Division I stand-alone women's basketball event to be held in the same city seven or more consecutive years, as the MVC has conducted its women's basketball championship at TaxSlayer Center every year since 2016. In fact, Hoops in the Heartland 2023 will match the Atlantic Coast, Southeastern, Big Ten and Big 12 Conference Tournaments, as the only Division I stand-alone women's basketball championships to be held at a neutral site for 15 or more consecutive years. .

WOMEN'S SOCCER: The 2022 MVC Women's Soccer Championship will be conducted at sites of the higher seeds, and eight of 11 teams will qualify for the field. MVC women's soccer will play a single round robin regular-season schedule with matches on Thursday and Sunday. Following the regular season, eight teams shall advance to the postseason tournament, which will be held over two weekends. The opening round (Oct. 27) features the 6 seed playing the 7 seed at the home field of the 3 seed and the 5 seed playing the 8 seed at the home of No. 4. The winner of the 6/7 and 5/8 matches will advance to play seeds 3 and 4, respectively (Oct. 30). Winners of those matches advance to the finals. The 1 and 2 seeds will have byes in the first two rounds. The semifinals (Nov. 3) and finals (Nov. 6) will take place at the site of the No. 1 seed.

MEN'S SOCCER: The 2022 MVC Men's Soccer Championship will feature all seven teams. MVC men's soccer will play eight regular-season conference games, a single round robin plus two additional games. The tournament shall be hosted over two weekends playing Sunday (Nov. 6), Thursday (Nov. 10), and Sunday (Nov. 13). The No. 1 seed shall receive a bye in the opening round. Seeds 2, 3 and 4 will host seeds 7, 6, 5, respectively. At the completion of the opening round, the tournament shall be reseeded, and the No. 1 seed will face the lowest remaining seed, and the four remaining teams will advance to the semifinals. The No. 1 seed shall host the semifinal and final rounds of the championship.

VOLLEYBALL: For the first time, Evansville will host the MVC Volleyball Championship. The 2022 event features eight of the league's 12 teams and will be played Sunday-Wednesday, Nov. 20-23. Home to UE volleyball and women's basketball, Meeks Family Fieldhouse debuted in 2017 and features Taraflex flooring. The No. 1 and 2 seeds shall receive a bye to the Tuesday semifinals, while seeds No. 3 and 4 will receive a bye to Monday. Seeds No. 5, 6, 7 and 8 will play on Sunday. The host is not guaranteed a spot in the field.

SWIMMING & DIVING: For the second-straight year, UNI will host the MVC Women's Swimming & Diving Championship at the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center in Iowa City, Iowa. The facility, which opened in 2010, features a state-of-the-art 50-meter competition pool. The MVC Championship features nine teams and takes place Wednesday-Saturday, Feb. 15-18.

CROSS COUNTRY: Indiana State will host the 2022 MVC Men's and Women's Cross Country Championship on Friday, Oct. 28, at the LaVern Gibson Championship Cross Country Course in Terre Haute, Ind. The site has hosted the NCAA Division I Men's and Women's National Championship 13 times since 2002.

INDOOR TRACK & FIELD: For the second-straight year, the indoor meet will be held at the Dr. Conrad Worrill Track & Field Center at Gately Park in Chicago. UIC and Valparaiso will co-host the event (Feb. 26-27). The Dr. Conrad Worrill Track & Field Center at Gately Park is a world-class track and field facility located in the Pullman community of Chicago. The 139,000-square foot facility features a hydraulically banked 200-meter track, a 4,000-square foot curtained warm-up area, eight sprint lanes, two long and triple jump runways and pits, pole-vault runway and pads, a high jump area, discus area, and scoreboard. The facility has a seating capacity of 3,500 and includes supporting amenities such as a meet management control room, concessions, multipurpose rooms, and locker rooms.

OUTDOOR TRACK & FIELD: Illinois State will host the league's outdoor meet (May 12-14). ISU last hosted the Conference outdoor track & field championship in Normal, Ill., in 2015. Redbird Track & Field Complex is the site for next spring's event; the track is eight lanes wide and 400-meters long.

TENNIS: Six of the nine MVC programs will compete in the championship, played Friday-Sunday, April 21-23. The site and host institution for the MVC team championship will be determined in the coming weeks. The host is not guaranteed a spot in the