

## Joe Hubener – Kody Cook

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

From Cheney to Louisburg. The distance between those two small Kansas towns is approximately halfway across the state. During the college football season of 2015, there was a key play involving players from those two small towns that made for one of the most exciting finishes in early season games. Can small town athletes succeed at the college level? We'll see on today's Kansas Profile.

Joe Hubener and Kody Cook are key players on the K-State football team. Both were outstanding high school athletes, but like many players from small town Kansas, they did not get lots of recruiting offers from high major colleges.

Joe Hubener comes from Cheney, west of Wichita. His parents both attended K-State. Joe lettered in football, basketball, and track. He even made the top five as a javelin thrower during the state track meet. In football, he played various positions such as wide receiver, defensive back, and backup quarterback, but he never started a game as quarterback during his high school career.

Joe decided to walk-on for football at K-State. The coaches recognized that he was an excellent athlete with that strong arm which had helped him do so well throwing the javelin. Joe became a quarterback and served as the primary backup during the 2014 season.

After a very competitive spring and fall practice period in 2015, Joe lost the starting nod at quarterback to another young man. But on the very first play of the very first game of the fall season, that young man was injured.

As they say in football, Next Man Up. Joe Hubener was suddenly pressed into service as the quarterback. He led the team to victory in that game and the next.

One of his wide receivers is Kody Cook. Kody is also a small-town Kansas kid, having grown up at Louisburg in Miami County south of Kansas City. Like Joe Hubener, Kody's father attended K-State as well.

Kody was also an outstanding high school athlete, having lettered in football, baseball, and basketball. In football, he played quarterback, wide receiver, and defensive back. As a senior, he led his team to an undefeated season and a state championship, becoming the most valuable player of the state championship game.

Kody opted for community college after high school and had two excellent seasons at Hutchinson. In fact, during the Salt City Bowl during his last year, he moved from the receiver position to quarterback during the second quarter and threw for 272 yards and five touchdowns while rushing for another score. He was named the Salt City Bowl MVP.

Even so, he was still not getting scholarship offers from high major schools. Kody decided to walk-on at K-State and became a full-time wide receiver. After a redshirt season, he started 11 games in 2014.

There are several similarities between these young men. Both came from small Kansas towns, both began as walk-ons, both have become key contributors in college and both were voted player representatives in 2015.

On the third weekend of the fall 2015 football season, Joe Hubener and Kody Cook got the start at their respective positions. K-State was playing a surprisingly tough

Louisiana Tech team. The game went back and forth. Kody Cook had a career day with three receptions in regulation but the game went into overtime.

In the third overtime period, K-State was penalized for an illegal block and was facing a third down and 17 yards to go at the opponent's 31 yard line. Quarterback Joe Hubener saw the young man from Louisburg dashing down the middle of the field. He threw a strike to Kody Cook who rolled into the end zone with what would be the winning touchdown.

It had to be a proud moment for those from the rural communities of Cheney, population 1,807, and Louisburg, population 2,668 people. Now, that's rural.

From Cheney to Louisburg. That's not just a journey across Kansas. It was players from those two towns who made the winning play in this remarkable contest. Can small town athletes succeed at the college level? Joe Hubener and Kody Cook's performance suggests that they can.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.