

## Homegrown football players

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

Identifying local talent and helping it to succeed: That's part of the formula for successful local economic development. It's also part of the formula for building a successful collegiate football program. Today we'll learn about some of the in-state talent which is part of the bowl-bound Wildcat football team. It's today's Kansas Profile.

The K-State Wildcats are headed to a seventh consecutive bowl game. As they prepare for the bowl, it is interesting to look at K-State's 120 man roster. It includes high profile recruits from around the nation, as one would expect on a power five conference team, but by far the largest number of players on the roster from any state come from Kansas itself. Forty-nine of the 120 players list Kansas as home.

They come from cities small and large. Their hometowns span the alphabet from Atchison to Wamego, and geographically from Kansas City to Ulysses. As one would expect, several come from the Wichita and KC areas.

No doubt some are walk-ons and some are scholarship players. Some are starters and regular contributors. For example, running back Alex Barnes from Pittsburg has been a major factor during Big 12 play in 2016.

Trent Tanking from Holton, population 3,334, has been a force on special teams and as a reserve linebacker. Against TCU he had five tackles in a single game. That was also the game where he intercepted a pass to stop the opponent's drive in the final minute.

Trey Dishon is a defensive tackle. He has recorded 16 tackles on the season in 2016. Trey was an all-stater at the rural community of Horton, population 1,935.

Speaking of regular contributors, Nick Walsh has been huge for K-State. Nick comes from the rural community of Lyndon, population 1,038 people. He led Lyndon High School to a league championship and a state playoff appearance. He earned all-state honors as both a running back and a punter, but it is in punting that he has made his mark at the collegiate level. In 2014, Nick became the primary punter in just the second game of the season and has not relinquished that position since.

In 2015, Nick averaged 41.2 yards per punt on his way to All Big 12 Honorable Mention accolades. Against Oklahoma State, he averaged 47.5 yards per punt on six attempts.

During 2016, Nick had 45 punts during the regular season. He has increased his season average to 42.8 yards per punt. Against Texas Tech he averaged 50.3 yards per punt on three attempts, one of those a career-best 58 yarder. On the season, eight of those punts have gone 50 yards or more. With such a record, it is no wonder he is on the Ray Guy watch list.

Another contributor is Sean Newlan. At Phillipsburg High School, Sean was a four-year letter-winner and an all-state performer as a junior and senior. An outstanding athlete, he also lettered in basketball and was a state champion hurdler in track and field.

Sean is a defensive back and special teams standout for K-State. In his first year on the field in 2014, he appeared in all 13 games and had six tackles. In 2015, he had 52 tackles and several starts, including post-season.

In fact, he got the starting nod for the Liberty Bowl when K-State played SEC opponent Arkansas. Imagine getting the start at a game where there are more people in the end zone stands than in your entire home county. Of course, that would have been true at Bill Snyder Family Stadium as well.

2016 will mark Sean's fourth-consecutive bowl game as a player. That's impressive for a young man whose hometown is the rural community of Prairie View, population 138 people. Now, that's rural.

Identifying local talent and helping it to succeed – that's a strategy for good economic development and for good football teams as well. In the case of economic development, it means encouraging entrepreneurs. In the case of football teams, it means attracting and developing in-state talent to go with the best of recruits from anywhere. We commend these Kansans for making a difference with home-grown talent.

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