

Ward steps onto Ouachita, prepares to build team

By **Katie Steele**
SIGNAL WRITER

Finding himself rapidly beginning a new chapter of his life, Kevin Ward arrived in Arkadelphia last Thursday with "two bags and a dog" to start something not only new to him, but something new to Ouachita and to the state of Arkansas — a Division II wrestling team.

Ward began his wrestling career at the age of 5 and continued wrestling through the elementary, middle and high school levels, as well as throughout his college career at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater.

While wrestling at OSU, Ward was a two-time NCAA qualifier and 2005 Big XII champion. He was named a three-time Academic All-American by the National Wrestling Coaches Association and named three times to the 1st Team Academic All-Big XII. He also was named to the OSU President's Honor Roll and Dean's Honor Roll.

A fellow OSU Cowboy wrestler and friend of Ward, Jake Rosholt, has only praises for Ward.

"Wrestling with Kevin was an honor," Rosholt said. "He was always someone you could look to every day for inspiration to work hard and give every practice your all. Kevin was a great teammate and was always willing to help other teammates out whenever the chance arose."

After graduating from OSU in 2006, Ward took a position as a graduate assistant wrestling coach. He remained an assistant coach for the 2006-2007 season prior to pursuing a job in another industry, ultimately finding himself at Ouachita.

His discovery of Ouachita developed from a phone call from one of his own assistant coaches as a wrestler at OSU, Pat Smith. After much deliberation on Ward's part, he finally conceded and came to Ouachita for an interview. Unsure of how he would feel about a small town school in

Arkansas, Ward stepped on campus and fell in love.

"There wasn't anything to not like about [Ouachita]," Ward said. "Now I've just got to convince about 30 guys of that."

As he steps into his first head coaching position, Ward looks forward to learning the ropes of building a team.

"I've coached some, but I've never had my own program," Ward said. "[This is] the perfect opportunity to build a team from scratch. We get a chance to build our own tradition."

Rosholt has every confidence in Ward's coaching abilities.

"Kevin will be a successful coach because of his work ethic and his enthusiasm for the sport of wrestling," Rosholt said. "He has the characteristics that it takes to have people look at him as a leader and believe in what he is teaching."

Despite its status as a new sport, fitting a wrestling team into the athletic department has been a fluid process for Ward.

"There's a good feeling here," Ward said. "The support here is just outstanding. A school that sees the value in a sport is really encouraging."

Establishing a place for a wrestling team may have been a cinch, but Ward faces a crucial challenge in the days to come.

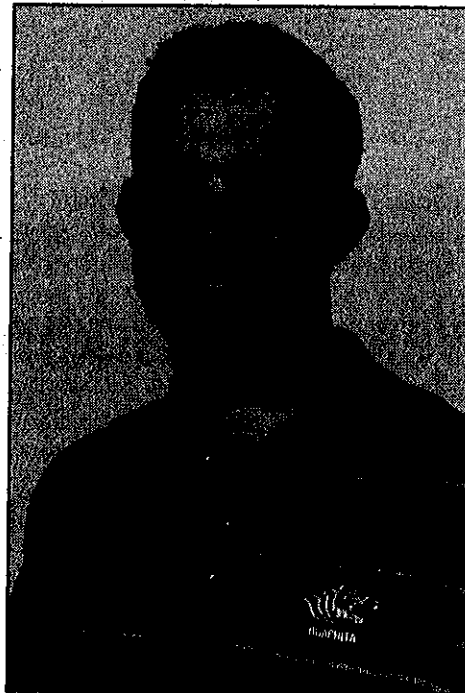
"[My first step] is to build a team," Ward said. "I need to find the right kids with the right attitude that will fit in well with Ouachita. Our goal is to win."

Ward has been allotted scholarship money to aid him in the recruiting process. The recruits will sign with Ouachita on April 14.

"There's a ton of interest," Ward said. "We've got prospects coming, we've just got to get them signed." After a couple of seconds, the daunting task of signing players suddenly hit him.

"Thanks for reminding me," he said with a sarcastic tone and a teasing grin.

Overall, "I'm just pumped to be here," Ward said. "That's all I know." ■



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