



PRESS RELEASE

Oklahoma State wins inaugural RUSSELL ATHLETIC 'Together We R' Team Award

DENVER (April 2, 2012) – The Oklahoma State women's basketball program has been honored by RUSSELL ATHLETIC and the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) as the recipient of the inaugural RUSSELL ATHLETIC "Together We R" Team Award. OSU was presented with the award at the second annual WBCA Awards Show.

In its first year, the "Together We R" Team Award honors programs that have strived to succeed in the face of adversity, overcoming extraordinary circumstances such as an unforeseen team crisis, barrier or unfortunate situation that caused extra stress. The team must exemplify strong commitment to core values of togetherness, courage, unparalleled work ethic and heart, and must personify the "Together We R" belief that teams are stronger than individuals.

From the initial submissions, a committee composed of WBCA past presidents narrowed it to three finalists – Indiana Wesleyan, Middle Tennessee State and Oklahoma State. Each institution submitted a video telling their story which was posted on the WBCA's YouTube channel. Fans were asked to watch the videos and show their support by voting for who they believed should be the winner of the award. Oklahoma State garnered the most fan votes with more than 6,000 views and 400 "likes" on their video, and received one additional vote when the selection committee met to determine the winner.

For the second time in just a single decade, Oklahoma State faced the unthinkable in mid-November when then head coach Kurt Budke and assistant coach Miranda Serna, along with two others, were killed in a plane crash. A mentor in the Stillwater community and the Cowgirls' leader, Budke was talking about making an impact during the 2011–12 season just days before the tragedy. Assistant coach Jim Littell, who assumed the heading coaching duties, stood strong for the team, taking the reins and leading the Cowgirls to remarkable upset wins over Oklahoma and 2011 national champion Texas A&M.

Below is an excerpt from the submission made on the team's behalf:

"The Oklahoma State University women's basketball team lost their leader and a father figure in head coach Kurt Budke and a mother figure and friend in assistant coach Miranda Serna. These two people were the main reasons why many of them chose to attend Oklahoma State. The way they play the game, the passion and effort in which they step out on the court with is not only admirable, but also a sign of strength."

Despite the horrific start to the season, the Cowgirls persevered in 2012, landing a

spot in the Women's National Invitation Tournament with a 16–12 record, marking the sixth straight year the program has competed in postseason play – a school record. Oklahoma State (22–12) won the WNIT for the first time in program history after defeating James Madison 75–68 in Stillwater, Okla. The team vowed to honor their lost leaders and held that promise true by allowing Budke's wife, Shelley, to cut the final piece of net from the hoop.

"It's unfortunate that everyone associated with the Oklahoma State University program experienced such a tragedy. However, the determination and perseverance of the Oklahoma State Cowgirls is a perfect demonstration of what one can overcome when working together as a team," said RUSSELL ATHLETIC Executive Vice President Gary Barfield. "Everyone associated with the Cowgirls program -- coaches, players, administration, family, friends, alumni and fans -- came together to ensure that this team had the support it needed to continue. It's a pleasure to recognize Oklahoma State University with the "Together We R' Award."

"The Cowgirl nation and Oklahoma State family have been through so much and so many emotions with this unfortunate tragedy," said WBCA CEO Beth Bass. "I think it is special that Jim and OSU were selected by his peers as an example of what coaching is all about – teamwork no matter what, sticking together as a team and family, even through the worst of circumstances."

About RUSSELL:

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About the WBCA:

Founded in 1981, the Women's Basketball Coaches Association promotes women's basketball by unifying coaches at all levels to develop a reputable identity for the sport and to foster and promote the development of the game as a sport for women and girls. The WBCA is pleased to join the women's sports community in commemorating the 40th anniversary of Title IX, which was passed by Congress on June 23, 1972, and provides females with equal opportunities in athletics in the U.S. For more information on the WBCA, please visit wbca.org.