

From Filley to the number one track team in the nation *Zimmerman follows dream straight to Arkansas*

By April D. Refior

"He's a young man who knows it's about focusing on the process and the results will come. He's also a great student and a tremendous person. Those are the type of student-athletes we want as Razorbacks. Success breeds success and Derek Zimmerman is successful at everything he does. We want quality young men like him to help continue our strong jumps tradition here at Arkansas." - Travis Geopfert, Assistant Coach - Field Events, University of Arkansas

Nine years ago, at the Cornhusker State Games in 2005, Derek Zimmerman began competing in track as a fifth grader. Derek joined the Lincoln Jets Track Club in 2006 and joined the Tachyon Athletik in 2011.

Now in his senior year at Freeman High School, Derek signed a letter of intent to become part of the University of Arkansas Razorback track team.

"I chose Arkansas because I loved the track and field atmosphere, and the coaches and athletes there," Derek said. "Arkansas was the best place for me to continue to improve my track and field career. I also liked the opportunities academically in their engineering program."

Derek competed at the University of Arkansas High School meet on January 18. "After I was done competing, Coach Geopfert stopped me and showed me the facilities and a little of the campus," he said. "He also encouraged me to come back down for an official visit."

Dean and Karen Zimmerman, of Filley, are Derek's parents. They are excited for this next step in their son's career. "Derek will do his best," said Karen. "He sets goals, studies the competitors of the sport and will work hard to accomplish his goals. We are proud the number one track team in the country wants him."

Dean said he has many favorite memories of Derek's career. "The

first one is when Derek placed first in the 100 meter dash at the State Games of America in Colorado Springs at the Air Force Academy in 2007," he said.

Derek has also placed seventh in the Nation in the triple jump in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 2009; placed fourth in the Nation in the triple jump in 2013 in Greensboro; and won the All-Class Triple Jump last year at the Nebraska state track meet, setting the state record in the triple jump as a junior.

"Derek has won many state titles since we started working together," said Tachyon Athletik coach Wisdom Loh. "We also competed in many USA Junior Olympic summer meets and Derek finished fourth place last year at the USA Junior Olympic meet. Our goal for 2014 is to break the long-standing state triple jump record of 50 feet and are working very hard towards that."

Life as a Razorback

As a Razorback, Derek will mainly be competing in the triple and long jump events. But, he has also competed in high jump and the 100m, 200m and 400m dashes in the past.

How does a young man from small town Nebraska get noticed by the number one track team in the nation? "I first heard about Derek from one of my former athletes, Nii Ayi," said Razorback field events coach Travis Geopfert. Ayi is the nephew of Derek's coach, Wisdom Loh of Tachyon Athletik.

"I believe Derek is a very talented young man and will be tremendous asset to our program at both the SEC and NCAA levels," said Geopfert. "He's truly a student of the sport. With his size, speed and work ethic, the sky is the limit for him. We are excited to help him develop into a national caliber athlete."

It was Derek's work ethic, coupled with his physical ability, that caught Geopfert's eye.

"First and foremost he's a great kid with a tremendous work ethic," Geopfert said. "I want (to recruit) kids that are motivated, and Derek

is certainly that. Secondly, his physical ability is extremely impressive to me. He's a big kid who can run fast and is naturally strong. He and his coaches have done a tremendous job of laying a great fundamental foundation for the jumps. When he gets into our speed and strength programs, it's going to be very exciting for him and us.

"That coupled with being around other tremendous jumpers day in and day out will make him push for a higher level daily," Geopfert continued. "We have the most storied program in NCAA history. To keep us at that level and a consistent contender for SEC and NCAA championships, we need quality student-athletes like Derek Zimmerman."

Far from home

Although Fayetteville, Arkansas, is six and a half hours away, Derek's parents are excited to visit new places. "It will be difficult for a while," said Dean and Karen. "But with new technology, we can talk with him as much as we like. And, it is only six and half hours away - you could be that far away in Nebraska."

"His hard work in athletics and in the classroom (he has a 4.0 GPA) made Derek a highly recruited jumper in 2014," said Loh. "There were very good universities interested in him and which heavily recruited him."

Other schools Derek considered included UNL, University of Kansas, Kansas State, and the University of Wisconsin. Derek looks forward to the winning tradition and the competition in the SEC he'll have at the University of Arkansas.

"We visited four other universities and we feel Arkansas is the best fit academically and athletically," added Dean and Karen. "Derek has been a 4.0 student during high school, and he plans to major in mechanical engineering. We are very proud of what he has accomplished academically by being selected by the NSAA as a Believer and Achiever, a state finalist in the Wendy's Heisman, and Academic All-State six times in football, bas-

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ketball and track. In all sports Derek has been successful. “

“This is a remarkable feat for a farm kid from Filley, Nebraska, who had nothing but a goal and memory to be the best and worked so hard to achieve,” added Loh.

Derek will also be joined by a familiar face as a Razorback. Kenzo Cotton, from Papillion-LaVista High School, also signed to the University of Arkansas. The two were both members of the Lincoln Jets track club.

“I am looking forward to being back on the same team as Kenzo,” said Derek. “As an athlete, you want to train with the best and Kenzo is one of the best in the country. It will help a lot already knowing someone who is going through the same things.”

“I always believed he was going to be great and do well and make Nebraska proud of him,” said Loh. “He is a great student and a very respectful young man who overcame a major career-ending hip injury in his sophomore season to go on and win the state title. That was the most remarkable thing about Derek’s hard work – dedication, determination and resilience. That will stay with me for the rest of my life.”

Memories at Freeman

Though Derek is excited for the next chapter in his athletic and academic career, he’ll never forget the good time and great friends he has made during high school.

“I’m going to miss the team being so close as friends, the accomplishments of the team placing second at state in 2012, and third in 2013, and all the support from teammates and coaches,” Derek said.

“Derek is the kind of young man any parent would be proud to have as a son,” commented Nich Herrington, one of Derek’s coaches at Freeman. “He has overcome many obstacles and stayed focused on accomplishing his goals. He is very deserving to be a part of an elite program such as the University of Arkansas track and field team.”

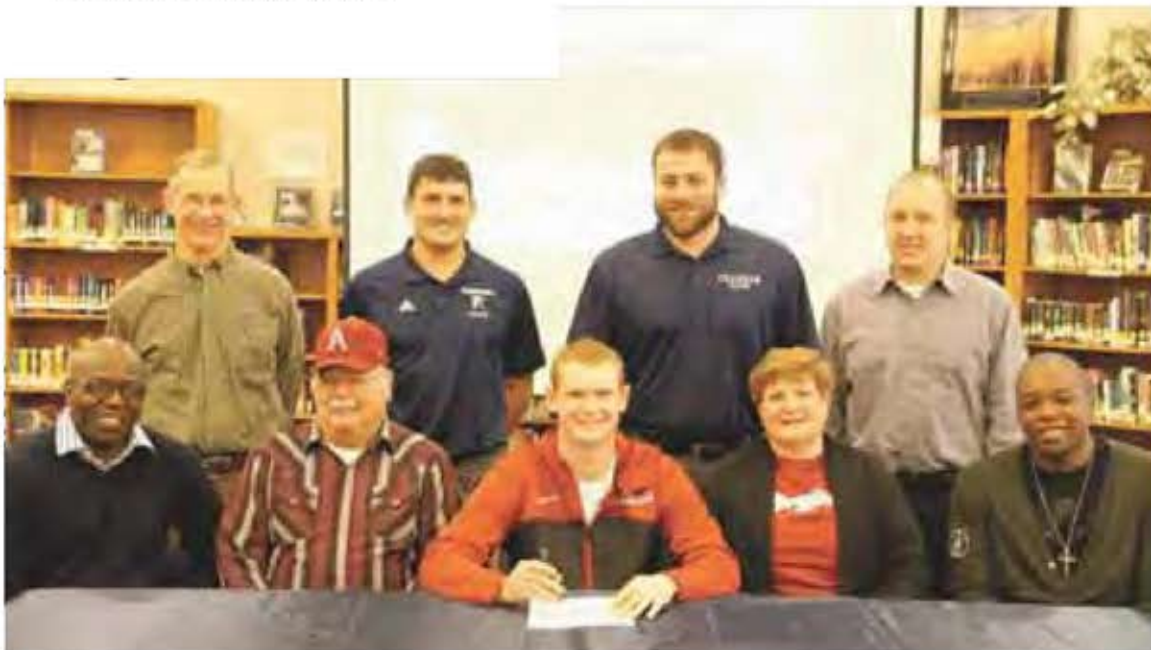
“I would like to thank all of my teammates and coaches Mr. Hottovy, Mr. McLaughlin, and Mr. Herrington for helping push me to do my best and always being there for me,” Derek continued. “I would also like to thank them for understanding the goals I have. I would like to thank Coach McLaughlin and the school for taking me and Cole Schuster, one of my teammates, to the Kansas Relays, a great competitive experience.”

“I would like to thank Wisdom

Loh and Steve Gordon from Tachyon Athletik, and Steve Morrison from the Lincoln Jets for all their knowledge and support,” said Derek. “And, I would also like to thank my parents for taking me to all the practices and competitions.”



Falcon junior Derek Zimmerman won two gold medals at the NSAA Track and Field Championships held at Burke Stadium in Omaha last year.



Derek Zimmerman, middle, Freeman senior, signed a letter of intent to the University of Arkansas with the support of (from left, front) jump coach Wisdom Loh, father Dean Zimmerman, mother Karen Zimmerman, jump coach Steve Gordon, (back) Freeman track coaches Tom Hottovy, Jim McLaughlin and Nich Herrington, and Freeman Athletic Director Scott Anderson.

Photo submitted