01. LETTER FROM THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR  2
02. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  3
03. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS  7
04. POINTS OF PRIDE  13
2017-18 was another banner year for the Kent State Golden Flashes, as the athletic department continues to hit high benchmarks in the classroom, in the community and on the playing field. Through the leadership of President Beverly Warren and our strategic vision, “The Game Plan”, we have been able to build on our ongoing mission, vision and core values:

**Mission**  
Graduate student-athletes and win championships  
#FlashesForever

**Vision**  
We are nationally recognized for the exemplary character, achievements and contributions for our student-athletes to better our society.

**Core Values**  
Student-Athlete Well-Being: We are committed to the health, safety, academic, athletic and personal growth of each student.  
Integrity: We do the right thing and hold each other accountable.  
Respect: We respect all people, their culture, beliefs, identity and thought.  
Stewardship: We are responsible guardians of the university’s resources, relationships and reputation.  
Family: We are a collaborative team supporting one another.

The 2017-2018 year brought many record-breaking academic numbers to KSU Athletics. KSU teams ended the year with a cumulative GPA of 3.303, with 95 students earning a perfect 4.0 term GPA (Fall and Spring combined). For the 13th consecutive semester the Golden Flashes finished the term with a GPA above a 3.0. In addition to GPA, 103 student-athletes walked the graduation stage this academic year.

While the academic achievements from this past year are certainly impressive, our competitive success in the Mid-American Conference was evident as we won five MAC Championships. In addition, we garnered four MAC Coach of the Year and eight MAC Player of the Year recipients.

Off the field, we are thrilled to see the MACC Annex Basketball/Volleyball Development Center and MACC Videoboard/Audio system projects materialize. Upon completion, not only will we enhance the game day experience but we will provide first-class student-athlete facilities for personal growth and well-being.

The “team” in athletics looks forward to many more successful years ahead, as we continue to uphold the values and mission of Kent State University.

Go Flashes!

Joel Nielsen  
Director of Athletics
Flashes on the National Stage

The 2017-18 season was another outstanding year for the Golden Flashes on the national stage. The Golden Flashes had 16 All-American honors and five sport programs made NCAA appearances. Holly Speers is the first player in the softball program’s history to receive All-American First Team recognition and just the second player in MAC history. She led the country in batting average (.483), slugging percentage (1.033), on-base percentage (.656), walks (60), walks per game (1.20) and RBIs per at-bat (.491). Baseball made its first trip to NCAA post-season play since 2014, when they competed as the three seed in Lubbock, Texas. The Flashes concluded their season at the NCAA Regionals with their fifth 40-win season in the last 10 years. Joey Murray was selected as a Golden Spikes Award Semifinalist and was named All-American by two different organizations. Jalen Avery, men’s basketball, was recognized by the NCAA as the 2017-18 Division 1 statistical champion for assist/turnover ratio. Avery becomes the program’s first statistical champion recognized by the NCAA. Four wrestlers represented Kent State at the 88th NCAA Division 1 Wrestling Championships at the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland. Kyle Conel completed an improbable third-place finish at the NCAA Wrestling Championships, which included two victories over Ohio State’s Kollin Moore, the nation’s top-ranked 197-pounder. Gabrielle Figueroa, Craig Stevens, Jr., Riak Reese and TJ Lawson all qualified for the Track and Field NCAA Outdoor Championships in Eugene, Oregon. Three out of the four Flashes, Riak Reese, Gabrielle Figueroa and Craig Stevens Jr., finished in the top nineteen. Both the women’s and men’s golf teams competed at the NCAA National Championship in Stillwater, Oklahoma. The women’s team tied for fifth place overall and was the first program outside of the “Power 5” conferences to advance to match competition two-straight years. The men’s team finished in tenth place overall.

Academic Excellence

The Kent State athletic department continues to deliver on its mission: “Graduate Student-Athletes and Win Championships”. For the 13th consecutive semester our student-athletes had a term GPA above a 3.0, with 64% of our student-athletes above a 3.0 and 46% above a 3.4. In addition to GPA, 103 student-athletes graced the graduation stage this academic year. Our athletic teams also continued to be academically competitive among our MAC peers and nationally. KSU student-athletes outperformed the general student body by 14 percent, with three teams calculating a 100% Graduation Success Rate and 7 teams either improved or maintained their score from the previous year. Our overall Graduation Success Rate stands at 86%. KSU teams continue to excel in the Academic Progress Rate as well, five teams (Women’s Cross Country, Women’s Gymnastics, Women’s Golf, Softball and Women’s Volleyball) all received NCAA accolades for perfect multi-year scores of 1,000. KSU teams lead the MAC in Academic Progress Rate with seven teams ranked 1st, nine teams ranked in the top 3 and 13 teams ranked in the top 5. Kent State’s women’s cross country team is among the elite teams in the nation, being recognized in each of the 13 years of the program.
Wrestling Garners National Recognition
The National Wrestling Coaches Association honored Kent State for having the nation’s second highest team grade point average (3.49783) – the number one spot claimed by Harvard. Additionally, five Golden Flashes were named to the NWCA All-Academic Team. This marks the team’s highest academic ranking in program history for the third straight year.

Competitive Success in the MAC
Kent State once again displayed competitive dominance in the Mid-American Conference, winnings five regular season and/or tournament championships. Baseball has claimed the last 11 of 12 regular season or tournament championships. Men’s golf and women’s golf both won tournament championships, with the women’s team claiming the title for 20 consecutive years, and the men’s team winning the title for the 25th time. The Flashes earned eight MAC Player of the Year and four Coach of the Year accolades. In addition, a total of 68 Kent State competitors were honored with All-MAC accolades.

Facility Upgrades
Two major athletics projects, The Basketball/Volleyball Development Center and MACC Video Board/Audio System replacement were approved during the 2017-18 academic year. The Basketball/Volleyball Development Center project will renovate space in the Memorial Athletic and Convocation Center (MACC) Annex that was recently vacated by the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. The proposed project would create a new 10,000 square foot multi-sport development center with multiple practice court configurations to support Men’s and Women’s Basketball and Volleyball programs. Additionally, it will allow for flexibility in practice scheduling around student-athletes’ class schedules as well as unfettered access for the student-athletes to train. The space will utilize a new athletic wood floor to match the performance characteristics of the competition court in the MACC. The projected completion date is April of 2019. The scoreboard and audio system upgrade is the first phase of the MACC Center renovation plan. The upgrade will enhance the visual and acoustic experience, with a new center hung videoboard and sound system that will display large flat screens for viewing graphics and game replay. The project has a November delivery date and will be ready for the 2018-19 men’s and women’s basketball seasons.
Women’s Lacrosse

Women’s Lacrosse will begin competition during the 2018-19 academic year. Head coach Brianne Tierney and newly hired assistant coach Amanda Glass will welcome 26 student-athletes on campus this fall. This will be the first addition of a varsity sport at Kent State since women’s golf began competition in the 1998-99 academic year. In alignment with our strategic plan, a new locker room space was fully renovated, providing a first-class experience for the team and its players. The Golden Flashes will begin ASUN play immediately in the 2019 season, bringing the ASUN’s membership up to seven teams.
Flashes Make Global and Local Impact
This past year the department continued to arrange service opportunities within Portage County. The Kent community is a large supporter of KSU athletics, and it’s our responsibility to give back to those who have given our department so much over the years. KSU student-athletes contributed 3,245 hours to community service. Impacting elementary school students was a priority this past year. Our largest elementary school event featured 70 KSU student-athletes (from all teams) participating in the 6th annual Moving with the Flashes, a full day consisting of several different physical activity stations taught by Kent State student-athletes. Partnering up with the 2nd and 7 Foundation our student-athletes read and distributed 800 children books at 10 elementary schools. In September, Kent State student-athletes collected new clothing and donated over 40 large boxes of clothing for Hurricane Harvey relief.

Achievements in Advancement
The Spring was highlighted with the annual Kent State Athletics Scholarship Auction, which raised over $120,000, breaking the seven-year auction record for net proceeds. The Golden Flashes Club finished the year with the highest number of donors with 1723 donors, a 26% increase from the previous year. In addition, the entire athletic department bought into the mission and vision of furthering student-athlete success, with 100% participation in the annual staff giving campaign. This is the first time the athletic department achieved 100% staff giving. The Varsity K Club had 413 former student-athletes donate to The Golden Flashes Club and the annual Varsity K All-Sports Reunion doubled in attendance from the previous year.

Crowdfunding Campaign
On Oct. 10, 2017, Kent State Athletics launched its first crowdfunding campaign. Sixteen teams requested funding for various projects to meet needs within their programs. With an initial goal of $80,000, the 16 micro-campaigns started by The Golden Flashes Club raised over $128,000, totaling 842 gifts from 498 unique donors. One of the most successful micro-campaigns came from the Kent State wrestling team, generating over $25,000 from 201 donors. The crowdfunding campaign utilized Classy, an online and mobile fundraising platform, in partnership with The Division of Institutional Advancement.
A. **Students First** – *Provide an inclusive and engaged living-learning environment where all students thrive and graduate as informed citizens committed to a life of impact*

- Average team GPA rose to 3.269 term and 3.303 cumulative
- 13th consecutive term 3.0+ department GPA
- A record high 95 student-athletes boasted a 4.0 GPA (Fall/Spring combined)
- 64% of KSU student-athletes finished the year with a 3.0 or higher GPA
- 46% of KSU student-athletes finished the year with a 3.4 or higher GPA
- 10 members of the KSU football team, a record high 10%, were pursuing their master’s degree during the 2017-2018 academic year.

**APR**

- NCAA Public Recognition – Women’s Cross Country, Women’s Golf, Women’s Gymnastics, Softball, Women’s Volleyball, APR scores were publicly recognized in the NCAA Top 10% nationally of their sport.
- Seven teams ranked 1st within the MAC, including football for the second straight year.
- Eight teams with a single year APR of 1000; Five teams with multi-year APR of 1000
- KSU leads the MAC with seven teams ranked 1st, nine teams rank in the top 3 and 13 teams rank in the top five.

**Graduation Success**

- Three teams with 100% graduation success rate (Baseball, Women’s Golf, Gymnastics)
- Student-athlete graduation rate is 14% higher than the general student-body.
- Overall, KSU student-athlete graduates have an 83% placement success rate.
MAC/NCAA Recognition

- 3 CoSIDA Academic All-Americans.
- 8 CoSIDA Academic All-District selections.
- 148 Academic All-MAC selections.
- Wrestling was recognized by the NWCA for being ranked second in the nation in team grade point average.
- The men’s and women’s cross country teams were both honored as USTFCCCA All-Academic teams.
- 20 field hockey student-athletes were named to the NFHCA Division 1 National Academic Squad, 2nd most in the nation & a program record.
- Baseball and Gymnastics led the MAC, with 11 and 10 Academic All-MAC selections respectively.
Student–Athlete Well-Being

- For personal development, KSU Athletics invited Dr. Derek Greenfield to speak on “Motivation for Success”. Dr. Greenfield spoke about how attitudes are contagious – make yours worth catching! In his dynamic interactive presentation, participants experienced powerful and proven strategies for maintaining a positive attitude, strategizing for success, and achieving their dreams.

- In April, junior and senior student-athletes welcomed Cason Brunt and Aaron Grossman for “Career Night”. The night was organized for student-athletes to learn the value of building and managing a personal brand, along with the best interviewing and dress practices.

- With the social, political, economic and environmental issues of today’s society being both unique and challenging, Athletic Director Nielsen started a new student-athlete organization called “Game Changers”. This group prepares student-athletes to be leaders in the community during their time on campus and after they graduate - by sharing their thoughts and gaining perspectives of their peers and outside guest speakers on issues impacting today’s society.

- The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee’s main initiative this year focused on Mental Health Awareness Week. As part of the Mental Health Awareness Week, a video (produced by KSU student-athletes) was featured at every sporting event. They also created a wall of kindness, posted in the academic center, for all student-athletes to take a positive message to help them through the day.
B. A Distinctive Kent State – Drive innovation, idea generation and national distinction through top-tier academic and research programs including the recruitment and support of talented faculty and staff.

- This year the athletic department sponsored the “SHE WILL” campaign, bringing awareness of gender equity issues and Title IX to our student-athletes. The “SHE WILL” events provided opportunities to interact with our women’s teams and listen to their athletic experiences.

- In 2017-2018, the Leadership Institute was composed of 58 student-athletes and included a mentors and mentees program. Each individual completed a DiSC assessment, where they learned more about the impression their leadership and behaviors are having on those around them. The participants utilized their skills and helped their mentees navigate through their sophomore years. Also, Life After Sport is offered as a capstone course option for graduating student-athletes. In addition to a focus on the emotional aspects of retirement from sport, the course also covers resume building, interviewing skills and transferable skills obtained through athletic participation.
C. **Global Competitiveness** – *Advance Kent State’s Impact and reach as a leading international university.*

- The newly resurfaced Murphy Mellis Field was awarded a Certificate of Global Performance. After a series of tests on the surface at Murphy Mellis Field, the Federation of International Hockey awarded the facility and program a Certificate of Global Performance. Kent State joined Northwestern and Pacific as one of three schools in the United States to receive the certification.

- In 2017-18, the Golden Flashes had a total of 34 international student-athletes with 14 countries and 11 sports represented. The countries represented were: Canada, United Kingdom, Spain, Argentina, Germany, Nigeria, Italy, Sweden, Thailand, France, Norway, Brazil, Jamaica and Poland.

- Two-time All-American Pimnipa Panthong (Nakhon Sawon, Thailand) was one of just 10 golfers selected to play for the International Team at the 2018 Arnold Palmer Cup in Paris, France. Kent State was also well represented at the Arnold Palmer Cup by Director of Golf and men’s head coach Herb Page, who served as the head coach for the International men’s team.

D. **Regional Impact** – *Serve as the innovative and engaged partner to meet community needs and enhance quality of life in the region and state.*

- Gymnastics hosted its 11th annual Flip for the Cure event. This year’s meet collected $8,000 in proceeds were donated to the COSA CARES program, a non-profit agency that helps women and their families battling breast cancer.

- Football started pre-season by visiting a local Multi-County Juvenile Center, where they connected with juveniles ranging in age from 12-18. Our football student-athletes took time to talk openly with the kids and share life goals to help them become successful in school. The team also went to a nearby homeless shelter to help prepare meals.

- Also, the baseball and softball teams assisted in creating 130 holiday baskets for the community members of the King Kennedy Center. The baskets were then distributed during the center's holiday party to those in need.
• The men’s and women’s golf programs teamed up with the Ben Curtis Family Foundation in their efforts to service underprivileged youth in the Kent area by giving each student a “Birdie Bag” filled with food and other supplies to help through extended weekends. These two teams also volunteered to ring the bell for the Salvation Army during the holidays.

• Within the university, the student-athletes joined several campus-wide initiatives including The Bridge Project, in which baseball assisted university personnel in feeding the homeless in Akron.

• The KSU athletic department also held its annual adopt-a-family for the holidays. Staff and teams purchased presents for three families registered with the KSU Adult & Veteran Services program.

E. Organizational Stewardship – Ensure a culture of continuous improvement and the efficient stewardship of university and infrastructure.

• Kent State’s athletic department celebrated 100 percent staff giving participation. The campaign was focused on coming together as a group to enhance the experience for over 400 student-athletes.

• Kent State Athletics welcomed back Pittsburgh Steelers’ fullback Roosevelt Nix ‘14 as the guest of honor at the seventh annual Athletics Scholarship Auction. The event included 385 registered guests and raised over $120,000 to benefit student-athlete scholarships. The auction brought the annual tradition’s seven-year total to $625,000.
Kent State Leads MAC in Learfield Directors' Cup Standings Once Again

The Golden Flashes totaled 294.25 points to lead all Mid-American Conference schools and ranked 75th among 351 NCAA Division I schools. Kent State finished ahead of several schools from the Autonomy-5 conferences, including Boston College, Georgia Tech, Pitt, Rutgers and Washington State. This year’s point total is the fourth-most a MAC school has ever posted in the 25-year history of the Directors’ Cup. Kent State set the conference record with 400 points a year ago and is the only MAC school to ever surpass the 300-point mark, having also done so during the 2000-01 competition year.

5 MAC Championships

The athletics department’s mission of graduating student-athletes and winning championships has been instrumental in regularly achieving such high marks. Kent State won five MAC Championships (regular season and/or tournament titles) in addition to three runner-up finishes and 18 individual MAC titles.

8 MAC Player of the Year & Four MAC Coach of the Year Honorees

Player of the Year: Joey Murray, Baseball (Pitcher); Ian Holt, Men’s Golf; Pimnipa Panthong, Women’s Golf; Rachel Stypinski, Women’s Gymnastics; Paige Culver, Women’s Soccer (Defensive); Holly Speers, Softball; Riak Reese, Men’s Track (Indoor & Outdoor)

Coach of the Year: Jeff Duncan, Baseball; Herb Page, Men’s Golf; Greg Robertson, Women’s Golf; Brice Biggin, Women’s Gymnastics

Kent State in Top 25 of Helper Helper Leaderboard

This year Kent State University student-athletes finished 24th nationally in the 2018 NCAA Team Works Helper Helper Community Service Competition. NCAA Team Works, which coordinates community service efforts at NCAA championships, and Helper Helper, a volunteer management, and tracking platform, launched the community service competition to recognize student-athletes who give back to their communities. Student-athletes at Kent State earned 24th out of the 100 Division I institutions that competed in the competition. The Golden Flashes completed 3,500 hours of community service with six teams finishing in the top-10 of their respective sport.
Football led the way ranking ninth with 683 total hours serving at the Multi-County Juvenile Attention System and Haven of Rest.

Men’s Golf placed second in the golf category with 170 service hours working with the Ben Curtis Foundation and United Way Charities.

The Volleyball team ranked third in their sport working with the 2nd and 7 Foundation, Campus Kitchen, and Habitat for Humanity for a total of 450 hours.

Women’s Golf finished fifth completing 151 community service hours through Clean up Kent, The Salvation Army, and United Way Charities.

The Gymnastics team completed 200 total hours finishing ninth in the competition and the Wrestling team completed 53 hours for seventh place.

**Men’s and Women’s Golf Programs Swinging for Success**

Kent State was one of just three schools to have both its men’s and women’s golf teams post top-10 finishes at the NCAA Championships (along with Duke & Alabama). Women’s golf tied for fifth after advancing to match play for the second consecutive year. The Flashes extended their own conference record by winning a 20th consecutive MAC Championship. All-American Pimmipa Panthong broke her own school record with a 71.26 stroke average. Men’s golf finished 10th at the national championship, missing the match play cut by just two strokes. Led by All-American Ian Holt, the Flashes won the program’s 25th MAC Championship. Holt’s 71.23 stroke average is the second-lowest in KSU’s storied history, with 2003 British Open champion Ben Curtis holding the record.
Kent State Boasts a MAC High 18 MAC Distinguished Scholar-Athletes
Kent State’s continued success both in competition and in the classroom was noted by a conference-best 18 student-athletes being named Mid-American Conference Distinguished Scholar Athletes for the spring season. The Distinguished Scholar-Athlete is a fourth-year award given to students who have excelled in athletics and academics. Three Kent State teams — baseball, men’s golf and women’s golf — led the MAC or shared the conference lead for their respective sport. Each of the Golden Flashes’ six teams that compete during the spring featured multiple student-athletes who were recognized as the ‘best of the best’ in their sport.

Program Record 20 Flashes Earn NFHCA Academic Honors
The National Field Hockey Coaches Association announced its Zag Field Hockey/Division 1 National Academic Squad for the 2017-18 academic year. Kent State had a program record 20 student-athletes honored, tying for the second most of any school in the country. Brown led all schools with 23 selections.
2017-18 POINTS OF PRIDE

3.30 DEPARTMENT GPA

8 MAC PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

294.25 POINTS 75TH IN THE NATION

13TH CONSECUTIVE TERM OF 3.0+ DEPARTMENT GPA

3 ACADEMIC ALL-AMERICA SELECTIONS
JORDAN KORINEK | WOMEN’S BASKETBALL
INES DELPECH | FIELD HOCKEY
SAM TOLLERUD | TRACK AND FIELD

20 CONSECUTIVE MAC CHAMPIONSHIPS
WOMEN’S GOLF

1946 4 MAC COACHES OF THE YEAR
KYLE CONEL | GABRIELLE FIGUEROA | RIAK REESE
TJ LAWSON | CRAIG STEVENS JR. | HOLLY SPEERS
IAN HOLT | CHASE JOHNSON | JOEY MURRAY
RACHEL STYPSKI | PAIGE CULVER | PIM PANTHONG

16 ALL-AMERICANS ACROSS 11 SPORTS

5 MAC REGULAR SEASON AND TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONSHIPS

NCAA POSTSEASON APPEARANCES
WRESTLING | MEN’S GOLF | WOMEN’S GOLF | TRACK AND FIELD | BASEBALL | GYMNASTICS