

Dan Meers – KC Wolf

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

The stunt went horribly wrong. The team mascot was to drop 20 feet on a bungee cord above the stadium, bounce back up to a zip line, and ride down to midfield. But something must have malfunctioned, and instead of the bungee cord bouncing down 20 feet, the mascot fell 75 feet and crashed into the stadium seats below. This excruciating incident marked an important point in the life of this costumed mascot, who is making a difference in the lives of others. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Dan Meers is the Kansas City Chiefs football team official mascot, the costumed character KC Wolf. A group of rabid Chiefs fans began calling themselves the Wolfpack during the 1980s. In response, the Chiefs created the KC Wolf mascot position in 1989.

Dan Meers grew up near St. Louis and attended the University of Missouri where he served for four years as the school mascot, Truman the Tiger. In 1989, he was crowned the National Collegiate Mascot Champion. After graduation, he became the mascot Fredbird for the St. Louis Cardinals. In 1990, he was hired for the position of KC Wolf.

A mascot's job is to entertain and "rev up" the fans and to be an ambassador for the team. On game days, KC Wolf does a pregame skit and participates in the player introductions and coin toss. He will visit designated tailgates, deliver birthday wishes, and even help couples get engaged at the stadium. He engages in various antics, such as teasing people with a giant rubber spider on a fishing line or dangling Twinkies above their heads for them to try to grab.

Of course, this is all done inside a giant furry costume with 85 inch hips. Dan quickly learned that he would have to stay in great shape in order to keep performing as a mascot, and he has done so.

What about the man inside the costume? Dan said, "My priorities are faith, family, and making a positive difference in the lives of others – in that order." When he interviewed with the Chiefs, he indicated that, in addition to games and appearances, he wanted to speak at schools, churches and other youth events – a request to which the Chiefs enthusiastically agreed.

He is a highly sought after inspirational speaker. Dan has spoken in states from New Mexico to Virginia and even Hawaii. Of course, he is in high demand in Kansas and Missouri. In Dan's book, he has written about speaking in rural Kansas communities such as Chanute, Paola, Tonganoxie, Humboldt, Iola, and Wellsville, population 1,853 people. Now, that's rural. He enjoys conveying positive messages to youth and adults. In 2006, he was inducted into the Mascot Hall of Fame.

Then came November 23, 2013. Dan went to Arrowhead Stadium to practice a new stunt, which had him bungee jumping over the stadium and then riding a zip line to midfield. Dan got in the harness and leaped from his perch on the stadium lights.

But something went wrong. He fell 75 feet and crashed into the stadium seats, knocking two seats out of the concrete. He was rushed to the hospital where he was found to have a collapsed lung, seven broken ribs, fractured vertebrae and more. Two titanium rods were surgically inserted into his back.

Dan was inches away from dying or being paralyzed. Many consider his survival a miracle. After surgery, a long, painful rehabilitation ensued. Dan wrote about his experiences in a book titled “Wolves Can’t Fly” with proceeds being donated to a non-profit ministry. On August 7, 2014, he returned to Arrowhead Stadium as KC Wolf.

“My accident was a reminder that I have a limited number of days on this earth,” Dan wrote. “Life is a gift from God. Life spent selfishly is gone, but invested in helping others will bear fruit for eternity.” For more information, see www.characterthatcounts.org.

The stunt went terribly wrong, but Dan survived and has an amazing message to share with people. We salute Dan Meers for making a difference with his uplifting message. He is a costumed character with high character.

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