

Sports

HOMEGROWN



Abby Hooven

Luke Lyons snags a pass in Henry County's home football opener against Atherton. Lyons played a key role in helping the Wildcats to a 7-4 record.

Lyons reflects on time at HCHS

BY ABBY HOOVEN

There's no place like home for Luke Lyons.

Born and raised in Henry County, Luke Lyons has undoubtedly left his mark on the community that has shaped him into who he is today through his various athletic and academic endeavors.

"The community is unlike any other. Everyone is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that people are successful and have the things that they need," said Lyons.

At HCHS, Lyons was a three-sport athlete until his senior year, when he added track to his repertoire.

He played year-round,

starting with football in the fall, followed by basketball in the winter and ending with baseball in the spring.

Lyons has played football for 10 years and began playing basketball and baseball around the same time. However, he noted his basketball career may have started slightly after the others as Henry County had not started its youth program until he was in the third or fourth grade.

"Then baseball has been little league, since I could hit off of a tee, so I've been playing sports my whole life," said Lyons.

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Photo submitted

Luke Lyons received both the Outstanding Senior Male and the Ross Wallace Award during Henry County's awards night in May.

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This past fall, Lyons was a key component of the Wildcats' 7-4 season that featured a 5-0 start, earning district runner-up honors and hosting a playoff game.

Playing on both sides of the ball, Lyons came up with several crucial receptions to extend drives when the Wildcats needed a play before turning around and halting momentum on the defensive end.

As a senior, Lyons rushed for 29 yards and hauled in 22 passes for 223 yards and a touchdown. He also returned a kickoff for a touchdown against Mercer County when the Wildcats won 41-38 in overtime to clinch the district runner-up spot.

On defense, he accounted for 58 tackles, 23 solo and 35 assisted.

The high-achieving season was a stark difference from his freshman year when the Wildcats won just one game.

"Anyone who's been around the program knows that my freshman year in 2019 was really rough," said Lyons. "To go from that to where we are now, it's just super special and it makes me feel good about myself as a person."

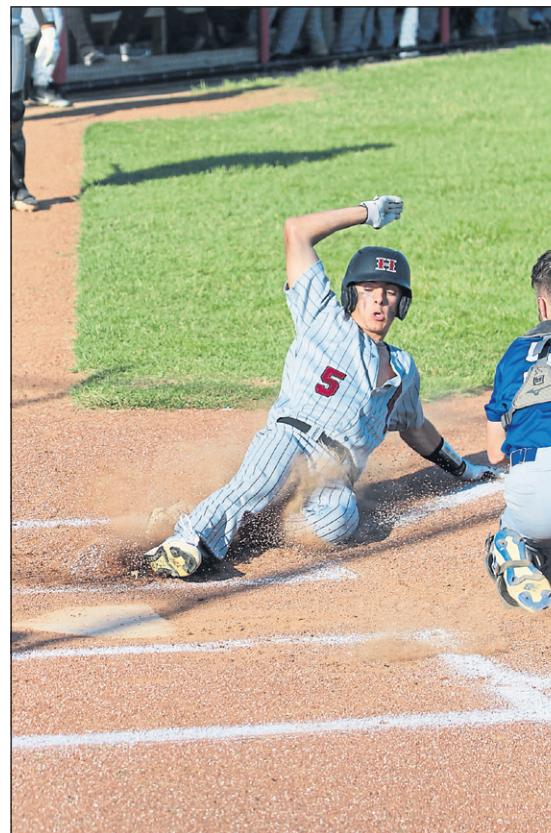
True to his roots, Lyons also expressed his gratitude for his hometown to rally around the program and support them through all the highs and lows.

Elevating the program from one win to seven and a home playoff game is one thing, but having a loved one on the sidelines for every moment makes the process even more special.

Lyons was fortunate to have his father, Tres', on the football coaching staff to share in the remarkable turnaround.

"It was really special to share the triumphs and the low points with someone that has been so close to me for so long and to make him proud and make everybody proud," said Lyons. "Then it's a little extra something you're playing for too if you think about it because no one wants to perform badly in front of their parents."

Described as a "huge sports guy," Tres' played in high school



Photos by Abby Hoover

Left: Luke Lyons puts up a shot in the paint against Eminence in the 31st District Tournament in February. **Right:** Luke Lyons slides into home plate against Walton-Verona on senior night.

and college and coached his son since he started playing sports.

"He gives it to me worse than he gives it to anybody else because I'm his kid, and he'll tell you that," said Lyons. "I don't mind it. I know at the end of the day it makes me better. It makes me more well-rounded and more responsible, knowing that he's gonna hold me to a high standard."

Lyons pivoted from a football program on the up and up to a basketball program growing under head coach Derek Tingle.

With a young team, Lyons served as a leader for the underclassmen but also knew his perspective on the season was to "have fun."

"Every day, we kind of came in with the mentality that we're here to have fun and then to develop the guys that are with us because, at the end of the day, all you can do is try and get better every day," said Lyons. "So having that mentality going into practice and games every day just helped keep the team's spirit kind of alive and give us something to work for."

His positive outlook on sports situations has been reinforced by those in his life, including his parents, who have similar stories to his own.

"I've learned a lot from my dad and his dad and my mom (Tina) and how they always say that you only get this time in your life once really to go out and just have fun, so why waste it worrying about stuff you can't control, why not just have a good time," said Lyons.

Lyons carried this mentality into baseball season under first-year head coach Zak Yates, but he also expanded his horizons to run track along with playing on the diamond, something that wasn't possible until this past year.

Former varsity baseball coach Stuart Dill had a rule that players were unable to run track and play baseball at the same time. With a new coach, Lyons and a couple others broached the subject with Yates, and he allowed them to participate in both.

"I was really grateful for that, and I had a great time. It was kind of a last-minute decision when we figured out we could do it," said Lyons.

In his first and only track season, Lyons nearly qualified for state with a third place finish in the 400-meter dash in the region meet. His time of 54.57 ranks fifth in HCHS track history as well.

With his success and baseball teammate Jerred Slone reaching state in triple jump, Lyons shared that he sometimes wonders what could've been if they had participated for all four years.

"I would have loved all four years to be able to compete because the atmosphere around track meets and track period is just different," said Lyons. "I told (track coach Leah Klempner) and looking at our times, if we'd been doing this for a while, we could have done something special here and she kind of laughed it off as well... But at the end of the day, I don't have any regrets."

Along with his athletic endeavors, he was a member of Beta Club, National Honor Society and FBLA. Outside of school commitments, Lyons also works with his father in construction.

For his achievements, Lyons received both the Outstanding Senior Male and the Ross Wallace Award during Henry County's awards night.

"It's a huge honor to be recognized by the place I've grown up at and spent so much time and effort towards it," said Lyons. "It feels really good to know that what I did amounted

to something that's significant."

With all his extracurriculars and interests, Lyons credits his parents for helping him stay motivated and focused on each task.

"They are huge motivators. My parents and my family in general give me a reason to do what I do every day and without them, there's no way I could have done anything," said Lyons. "It takes a village and the village that I got was super supportive and has made me into the person I am today."

Lyons' parents said they are proud of all their son has accomplished.

"We have been truly blessed by the Lord in our lives, and our children are the biggest blessings. Of course, we are so proud of Luke's accomplishments. Naturally, we are biased as he is super special to us, but it is nice when others recognize his hard work," said Tina and Tres' Lyons.

His parents also took time to share how Lyons' character helps set him apart from others.

"Luke has always been a hard-working person with a kind soul. As a natural-born leader, he has so many qualities exhibiting leadership: self-awareness, gratitude, empathy, courage and mostly integrity. He is steadfast in his course of doing things the right way," Lyons' parents said. "I think sports have played a big role in his life helping him navigate thus far. One of our favorite things is to watch our children compete and learn from these lessons, good or bad."

Along with his parents, Lyons said coach Dill was one of his biggest supporters throughout high school.

"I give a lot of credit to coach Dill. He kind of took me under his wing and I learned the best from him on how to stay composed and have a good time and give it everything I got," said Lyons.

In each sport, Lyons said each coach took time to support him and encourage him to pursue his dreams.

"It's a huge confidence booster knowing that the people that are coaching you are taking care of you and really do care and really do believe in you," said Lyons.

This fall, Lyons will head to Franklin College to continue his

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football career and looks forward to bonding with his teammates. Leaving the only town he's ever known will bring its set of challenges, but Lyons is ready for the chance to explore somewhere new.

"It's gonna be nice to experience something different and I'm super excited about that," said Lyons.

While his next chapter will take him beyond the borders of Henry County, Lyons knows his path will always be rooted in his hometown.

"I wouldn't trade anything in the world for my experience that I've had growing up, and I would like to think that most people who are from here would say the same," said Lyons. "I'm so happy with where I'm at and the experiences I've had to get here."