Texas Student Media Application Form
Managing Editor of the Daily Texan
Term of Office: January 1, 2017 - May 31, 2017

This application and supporting materials must be submitted to the TSM Business Office (HSM 3.200 / William Randolph Hearst Building, 2500 Whitis Avenue) by Monday, November 14, 2016 at 12:00 p.m.

This position is due to be appointed at the TSM Board meeting scheduled for Friday, November 18, 2016 at 10:00 a.m.
Please plan to attend and discuss your application with the Operating Trustees.

Applicant Information

Akshay Mirchandani
Name
Omm6349
UT EID
aksamg @gmail.com
Email Address
Journalism
Major

Applicant Attestation / Authorization for Release of Information

1. I am currently enrolled as a UT-Austin student.

2. By the start of my term of office, I will (if an undergraduate) have completed 12 hours at UT-Austin with a GPA of at least 2.0 or (if a graduate student) have completed 9 hours at UT-Austin with a GPA of at least 3.0.

3. I agree to complete and pass a media law and libel test administered by the Editorial Adviser prior to taking position.

4. I have obtained and included signatures from at least five staff members of The Daily Texan supporting my application.

5. By the start of my term of office, I will have completed at least two semesters as a permanent-staff member of The Daily Texan in an area other than opinion.

6. By the start of my term of office, I will have served in a Daily Texan management position with supervisory and design responsibilities (as defined by the Daily Texan Handbook) for at least one semester.

Note: if no qualified applicant has filed by the deadline, the Board shall make an appointment using the Handbook qualifications, each of which shall be waivable by an affirmative vote of two-thirds majority of the voting members present.

I certify that to the best of my ability I have given true and accurate information concerning my scholastic and experience qualifications, and hereby grant permission for the Office of the Director, Texas Student Media, to verify said information. Further, I understand that this information will be provided to the TSM Board of Operating Trustees and will become part of the public record of TSM.

Akshay Mirchandani
Signature of Applicant

11/14/16
Date
Supporting signatures from at least five staff members of The Daily Texan:

[Signatures]

My experience at The Daily Texan consists of (list positions and dates):

- Senior Sports Reporter (Fall 2015)
- Social Media Editor (Spring 2016 - Summer 2016)
- Associate Sports Editor (Spring 2016)
- Sports Editor (Summer 2016)

It is recommended that you include supporting materials such as:

- A résumé
- A letter outlining your qualifications, goals, plans for the position
- Letters of recommendation
- Samples of published work (on 8.5" x 11" paper)
AKSHAY MIRCHANDANI
aksamq8@gmail.com
1415 McClure Drive, Allen, TX, 75013
972-757-9949
Twitter: @amirchandani41

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
Aug. 2015-May 2017 (Expected)

EXPERIENCE

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

One of five incoming graduating high school students selected to the Dallas Morning News’ internship program. Assisted in writing content for SportsDay of the Dallas Morning News. Was published in both the print and online product.


Live scored high school football games for the Dallas Morning News for the 2014 season.

NORTH TEXAS DAILY

Wrote 4-5 sports stories a week for the print and online editions of UNT’s student newspaper, the NT Daily.

Sports Editor Aug. 2014 – May. 2015

Managed the sports section of the NT Daily during my sophomore year. Assigned content, managed a staff of writers, edited stories and designed the sports pages on production nights.

DAILY TEXAN

Covered men’s basketball and assisted with production once a week for the Texan.

Social Media Editor/Associate Sports Editor Jan. 2016 – May 2016

Ran all social media accounts for the Daily Texan with a staff of 15+ people. Also assisted in overseeing the sports department while still covering men’s basketball.


Ran both the sports and social media departments during the summer 2016 semester. Duties included managing all social media accounts, brainstorming sports content and running a staff of sports writers.

RIO 2016

Selected by the UT Journalism School to travel to and cover the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Wrote eight stories from the games for various papers and outlets across the United States.

Sports Illustrated

Fact checked stories and features for Sports Illustrated in the New York City for the fall 2016 semesters. Contacted sources, and worked with editors and writers to make sure every fact in a story was correct. Also had bylines in print and online.

SKILLS
Adobe Indesign, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Social Media, Leadership, Writing, Editing
To the Texas Student Media Board of Trustees,

My name is Akshay Mirchandani, and I am applying for the spring 2017 managing editor position for the Daily Texan. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to apply for such a prestigious position. I am a journalism senior, and am currently spending the fall semester interning at Sports Illustrated in New York City, but previously served two long semesters and one summer at the Texan. In this letter, I will explain my qualifications and my plan for the Texan moving forward.

I may not have been at the Texan long, but my campus media experience goes back much further. I spent my first two years of college at the University of North Texas, and spent all four of my semesters at the North Texas Daily student newspaper. I was the sports editor during my sophomore year and the youngest editor on staff.

At the end of my sophomore year at UNT, I decided I needed to make a change. Rather than continue to move up the ranks at the Daily to managing editor, and, potentially, editor-in-chief, I decided to transfer to the University of Texas at Austin. I wanted to go to a bigger school with more opportunities.

Last fall, I immediately joined the Texan as a senior sports reporter covering men’s basketball. I took control of the section’s social media presence on Twitter, and worked the sports desk once a week. In the spring I moved into a department head role, taking over the social media editor position. I revamped our social media department, increasing the size of the staff and stressing interaction and engagement. As social media editor, I became heavily involved in the digital side of our paper. I stressed getting breaking news up as quickly as possible, engaging with our audience and utilizing tools such as Snapchat, Periscope and Facebook Live. I was able to set a foundation for the department’s future.

In addition to social media editor, I stayed involved in sports and was the associate sports editor while still covering men’s basketball. I helped lead the sports department, mentor younger writers and covered one of the bigger sports beats on campus. During the summer, I remained the social media editor and also became the sports editor, running two departments simultaneously.

My short time at the Texan led to two incredible opportunities for me. I was one of the four UT journalism students selected to travel to last summer’s Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. This
potential once in a lifetime opportunity would not have happened without my experience at the Texan to bolster my candidacy. Immediately following the Olympics, I came to New York to begin my internship with Sports Illustrated, which I wouldn’t have without my clips and experience with the Texan. At SI, I primarily fact check stories and do some editing. I’ve gotten an inside look at the editorial and editing process of one of the most notable magazines in the country, and have appeared in print and online. This, combined with Rio, my student media experience and a previous internship with the Dallas Morning News, has helped me become the journalist I am today.

But one thing I still want to do is lead the entire paper. Becoming the Texan’s next managing editor is the next logical step for me, and I can bring a lot to the table with my past experience.

As managing leader and one of the leaders of the publication, I have a few goals in mind that I want to implement, from our online content to the general atmosphere around the office. But the Texan print product remains at the forefront of my mind. We are lucky enough to work for one of the few college papers that prints five times a week. I can’t say enough about how valuable that is to me personally. During my time at UNT, our paper printed bi-weekly in a tabloid format, with online content mixed in throughout the week. Going from that to a paper that prints a broadsheet five times a week was incredibly refreshing.

But I do think we can do more to make our print product standout. Sometimes I think our paper gets too stale in our content and design. Last spring and in the summer, we experimented a lot with special pages and packages, which I would love to see more of. I enjoy seeing various departments collaborate each other to create an interesting, engaging content in our paper. I also don’t see the need for our cover to look the same every day. This fall, the paper played around with story placement to mix up how the cover looks from time to time. I would love to see more of that next spring.

I also believe we need to do a better job of diversifying our content, and being creative with it. Our staff at UNT was small, with only 40 people at most including the editors. Our staff at the Texan is more than twice that. We have the capabilities and resources to cover this campus with so much depth and tell stories that might get lost. Instead of constant stories about potential lectures or talks on campus, I’d like to see investigative or long form work to get to the heart of the people on campus.

There are so many possibilities. This is an interesting time to be a journalist in Austin, and even around the country. In the wake of the presidential election, journalism has become more important than ever. UT students have taken strong, emotional stances on the issues of the country and world. Our place as a student newspaper in the UT community is already important,
and will continue to grow with the issues going on today. It is up to us to take risks and find the stories that needs to be told. It takes fostering an environment of creativity and outside-the-box thinking. As sports editor at UNT, it was tough to find interesting stories at a school not known for athletics. I pushed a small staff of writers to think outside-the-box and find stories that might capture our readers. Some of the things we wrote about that year dealt with poor attendance at sporting events, interesting sporting clubs and the ramifications of decisions the athletics department was making. I tried to instill that same mindset in the social media and sports departments here at the Texan, and can say with confidence that I was successful.

While our print product comes first, a large amount of my time will be devoted to revamping the online product. Frankly, I believe the Texan lags so far behind digitally, and it starts with our website. The current version of the website is old and in dire need of an upgrade. It’s organized poorly, too compacted and not very user friendly. It’s not equipped to handle blending in our social media platforms and creating interactives. We’ve done interactives in the past, but I believe the website has strapped us to only doing certain kinds of interactives. Creating a new website is no easy feat, especially in a four month term. My goal from the outset will be to start a dialogue with my staff, our editorial adviser and the board about what initial steps we can take. So many people have expressed their disappointment in our website, but so far, it seems like no progress has been made. The first step is getting the ball rolling. After I left UNT, my old colleagues decided to scrap their website and created a new one from scratch. On their own will, they decided to go from printing a tabloid twice a week, to a broadsheet once a week, and make their new website the face of the paper. That is not what we will become at the Texan because of the strength of our print product, but I know that a website redesign can be done. It would be a big step to legitimizing our digital presence.

I also want to take a long, hard look at the way we cover breaking news. There are instances when the Texan is late on a big story that happens on campus or in Austin. It’s hard for a college newspaper to cover breaking news at times. We are students, with lives and classes outside the walls of the Daily Texan office. But there is a way to cover breaking news properly. If something happens, I would like a post immediately on our website with what the news is, after confirming it, and that the post will be updated as the story develops. There’s no reason we shouldn’t do anything until we have the full story hours later. We can then update the post with developments throughout the day, and add social media elements to it as well. Unfortunately, part of the problem is that the Texan doesn’t have an official web editor. We have a technical manager, but they are more responsible for interactive creating and backend work. We really don’t have someone for the day-to-day operations. That’s why, if selected as the new managing editor, I want to create the position of web editor, with a staff under him/her that would help create blog posts, curate breaking news updates and maintain the site. The other option is combining that job description to that of the social media editor, to create a one-stop shop for all things digital.
Social media and engagement is also something I feel very strongly about, especially being a past social media editor. Revamping the department was not an easy task, but I felt very proud of what we were able to accomplish during my tenure, and I’m happy to see it continued. I began utilizing tools like Facebook Live and Periscope to cover breaking news and events, which went really well. The social media department has continued the use of these tools this semester, and it has clearly enhanced the Texan’s coverage of breaking stories. As managing editor, I will make sure our focus on social media does not decline. We have one of the biggest Twitter followings in the country for a college paper, and I see no reason it can’t continue to grow. I want us to be the first place people go for UT news, and social media plays a big part in that. During my social media editor tenure, I tried to instill creativity in our staff with what we posted. I didn’t want what we did to just be generic, robotic posts with a link. But, I think that mindset also has to come from the top. I will allow our social media team to take more risks with engagement and what is posted. I want us to show that there are humans behind our paper.

Finally, I want to continue to build on the environment in the newsroom. We have such a diverse staff, with many different views and skills. I can’t stress enough how important a diverse newsroom is. The more different views of the world people have, the better. I also know how big the Texan is, and understand how easy it is to get lost in the crowd. I will make sure I pay equal attention to every department in our staff. Departments such as social media and video often go overlooked, but their contributions are so immense. I will constantly check in with each department of our staff, and stress the importance of creativity and thinking outside-the-box. I will always be available to any staffer that would like to talk or pitch an idea. No idea, as long as it is well thought out, will go unheard.

These goals are lofty, but I feel confident and passionate about all of them. The common theme is to move the Texan forward in print, digital and the newsroom. I have not been an associate managing editor at the Texan, which most of the past managing editors have. But, I have been involved in campus media since my freshman year at UNT, most of it as an editor of some sort. I know what it takes to successfully lead a paper after watching my past colleagues and friends. I have learned a lot from them and hope to build on what is already in place at the Texan. I am so excited about everything this paper has the capability of doing, and believe I have what it takes to lead it forward. I thank you for this opportunity and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Akshay Mirchandani
To the Texas Student Media Board:

I am delighted to recommend Akshay Mirchandani for the position of managing editor of The Daily Texan.

I’ve known Akshay since early 2015, when we met to talk over career prospects and his interest in sports journalism. He impressed me with his ambition, enthusiasm and awareness of an ever-changing industry. A few months later, he applied to join a team of student journalists who would travel with me to Rio de Janeiro to report from the 2016 Summer Olympics. Akshay composed a dynamic letter of interest. We chose him with no hesitation.

Akshay rose to every occasion in Rio. He reported eight stories from the games, worked a grueling reporting and editing schedule for the Rio2016.com website and conducted himself in both roles with professionalism and maturity. We shared accommodations for more than three weeks, and I got to know Akshay on a very personal level. I can tell you unequivocally that he is a strong, level and decisive leader who cultivates trust and respect among his peers. I saw it happen in Brazil. I believe it will happen in The Daily Texan newsroom.

Akshay has the perspective and even temperament expected of a newsroom manager. He also is a tremendous young journalist.

I can think of no one more deserving of your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kevin Robbins
To the members of the Texas Student Media Board of Operating Trustees:

I write this letter to strongly support Akshay Mirchandani’s candidacy for spring 2017 Daily Texan managing editor. Having worked closely with Akshay since the beginning of his tenure at The Daily Texan, I know him to be a diligent, passionate, and dedicated journalist who wants to see the Texan grow and succeed to its fullest capability. I have no doubt in his qualifications to be an excellent managing editor, and you should feel confident in him if you decide to select him for the role.

Akshay transferred from the University of North Texas to the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2015, to begin his junior year. Akshay spent both of his years at UNT on staff at the North Texas Daily, serving as a sports writer his freshman year and sports editor his sophomore year. Additionally, he already had experience working for several other publications, both online and print, among them the Dallas Morning News. While he was primed for larger leadership positions at the North Texas Daily (where he was already being paid enough to cover his apartment’s monthly rent in Denton, I might add...), he chose to pursue his interests at UT-Austin, and immediately wanted to get involved with the Texan in a significant capacity once he was admitted. He contacted our then-editor-in-chief to see if he could put him in touch with the right people to find out more about senior staff applications, and applied for all three senior sports positions once he received the application.

His ambition took the fall 2015 managing editor, Jack Mitts, and me (serving as associate managing editor at the time) off guard, given that we thought we knew all the applicants who would be applying for sports editor, but his application was in-depth enough for us to take him seriously from the very beginning. When we had our interview with him to evaluate his candidacy for sports editor over Skype, we were impressed with not only his credentials, but also his attitude and determination to get involved in a large capacity with a department — and a newspaper — where he didn’t know a single person. While Jack and I ended up selecting a different person for the sports editor position, we were confident that Akshay wouldn’t take it personally, as he would be an excellent candidate for another role in the sports department — and indeed, he was hired as a senior sports writer, one of the most historically competitive permanent staff positions at the Texan.

Undoubtedly, deciding to attend another university is a huge personal decision, and moving to a new city in the middle of college must be difficult — however, Akshay handled the transition impressively well. He introduced himself to person after person, and quickly adjusted to the differences between the North Texas Daily and the Daily Texan. He was selected to co-write one of the biggest beats in the spring, men’s basketball, and did an excellent job covering the team. He made friends, particularly within the tight-knit sports
department, and began spending more time in the basement, like so many of us who take larger roles at the Texan. He never hesitated to lend a hand, whether it meant staying later than he needed to, driving people home on cold and/or rainy days (or to make sure they got home safely), and never minded a joke or two at his own expense, if it would give people in the newsroom a chuckle — ask him to tell you about Ms. Wendi (or Ashley) Mirchandani.

When I was selected as the spring 2016 managing editor later that fall, I already knew that the fall’s social media editor would be graduating, and I would need to find a replacement for her — she had previously discussed with me her uncertainty in finding someone to fill the role, since no one on her social media team seemed ready or willing. She had Akshay in her mind already though, and so did I — thankfully, Akshay soon approached me about his interest in the social media editor position, given his experience running the @texansports Twitter in the fall, where he was an essential part of revitalizing the department’s Twitter presence. During his formal interview, although he had great ideas for how we could expand the Texan’s social media, he also insisted he was capable of handling being social media editor and associate sports editor, if I was alright with it — he also wanted to continue his work in the sports department and take a larger role, in addition to continuing to cover the men’s basketball beat. Not one to be daunted by a busy schedule myself, I told him I was fine with him doing both roles if my eventual sports editor hire was fine with it and wanted him as an associate — and sure enough, Akshay did both roles in the spring.

Naturally, it was a ridiculously busy semester. We had a lot of important stories, many of them breaking news, all of which required a quick and reactive social media presence. Akshay increased our posts to Facebook, a network we hadn’t tapped the full potential of, and pushed for expanded uses of Snapchat and Instagram, all while improving our Twitter presence, retweeting and promoting our reporters to diversify our content. I helped Akshay conduct a giveaway over Twitter and Snapchat for free Lonely Island meet & greet tickets, and was impressed at how engaged our audience became when given the chance to meet Andy Samberg. More seriously, we began experimenting more with social media tools like Periscope and Facebook Live — these proved invaluable during coverage of the death of a fellow student by homicide in April, and our coverage — largely enhanced by how quickly we got things up on social media, in addition to our live broadcasting of important press conferences — was applauded by several members of the community, members of this board included.

Akshay was reliable whenever I texted him — and I texted him often. He was quick to take responsibility and correct any errors whenever I asked him to confirm a typo in a tweet, or a strangely worded Facebook post — he always indulged my attention to detail, and always apologized and strove to improve the next time, regardless of whether the post had been
written by him or a member of his team. I always knew I could count on Akshay to answer my questions, whether they were regarding social media or sports. His talents were recognized when he was selected as a member of the journalism school team that traveled to Rio de Janeiro to cover the Rio 2016 Olympics, and newspapers across the United States that couldn’t afford to send their own correspondent were lucky to have his well-written, timely, and personal coverage. If that wasn’t enough, Akshay was also selected for an internship at Sports Illustrated through UT-Austin for this fall, where he is currently working for them in a fact-checking capacity. I have full confidence that if Akshay is selected to be managing editor, he will be back in the spring brimming with new and exciting ideas, and continually thinking of ways to improve the Texan.

The Daily Texan has never been perfect. In fact, we make mistakes fairly often (despite our best intentions) — sometimes in larger and more harmful ways than we would have liked. Akshay stood by me through a ridiculous amount of conflicts, and was always willing to lend an ear if I needed to talk to someone about any kind of situation — this made him not only a valuable coworker, but also a wonderful friend. In a country where a new president has shaken and/or frightened a plurality of voters, where the effects have especially resonated within UT-Austin’s community, where the media has been frequently lambasted by critics (some of whom will need a lot of convincing to change their stances), journalism will be more important than ever — and the role of a student newspaper will only grow, as it will need to, to adapt to the needs of its audience. Even without first serving as associate managing editor, like most managing editor candidates, Akshay understands this, and I have full confidence in his ability to lead the Texan in a way that will make it an even more valuable asset for the UT-Austin community and beyond.

I’m really grateful to have gotten the opportunity to work so closely with Akshay, and I’m even more grateful to count him as one of my friends. I look forward to witnessing his accomplishments in the future — among them hopefully, a successful tenure as managing editor of The Daily Texan. If you have more questions on any aspect of his candidacy, please do not hesitate to ask — I would be happy to speak further on his behalf.

Sincerely,

Amy Zhang
Daily Texan Managing Editor – Spring 2016
Writing Sample No. 1

Davis, Smart develop close bond

Original publication date: The Daily Texan, March 9, 2016

A skinny, 6-foot-2-inches guard tells Shaka Smart to go shake North Carolina head coach Roy Williams’ hand in December in the aftermath of a signature win. Sometimes he tells him to remember his own messages.

In January against Vanderbilt, Smart threw up his hands when the same guy launched a three and enthusiastically got in his face when it inevitably swished in.

But this isn’t a rapport between the head coach and a senior, junior or even sophomore. No, this comes from a freshman who oozes confidence and walks with his chest up — Eric Davis Jr.

“That’s just who I am,” Eric said. “Even off the court, I’m a confident guy. I like to walk around with my chest up. Just show everyone that you’re confident. I think everyone should do that.”

Smart has preached confidence throughout the year and has discussed how this isn’t a naturally confident bunch. But as the Longhorns head into their first postseason of Smart’s tenure, Davis has become a microcosm of the attitude Smart craves.

“He’s always telling me what to do — it’s comical to me,” Smart said. “I love the kid. He’s a guy you’d like to coach because he comes back to me and our staff with our own message sometimes.”

Eric’s conviction was instilled long before he enjoyed his first balmy Austin winter, in the stark cold of Saginaw, Michigan.

His uncle, Tony Davis, coached Eric through middle school and high school and helped lay the foundation for Eric’s attitude.

“Everything in our household was a competition thing as far as washing dishes or folding clothes — it was always a ‘I could do it best,’” Tony said. “And that’s something I tried to implement with him and my son — that whatever you do, do it to the best of your abilities.”

It worked. Eric has become a key cog to Texas’ rotation and has thrived under Smart with his shooting and energy.

“You always need that one guy who can give you that kind of energy,” Eric said. “I just happen to be that guy.”

But he almost didn’t become that guy — at least not in Austin. Eric committed to Texas when Rick Barnes was at the helm. After Smart was hired, he immediately spoke with Eric.

What he said was a surprise. Look at other schools, Smart said. Smart wanted Eric in Austin but didn’t want him to reaffirm his commitment without exploring other options.

Tony, who played collegiate ball at the University of Minnesota, helped guide Eric through the process. They tried to think of the best coaches and fits, but once they sat down with Smart, Tony knew it was a perfect marriage.

“He believed in Rick Barnes, but with coach Smart it was almost a hit-it-off perfect thing,” Tony said. “It was phenomenal that he got the job, and it was almost like this was the perfect fit for you.”
The relationship between the two has grown stronger. Eric has responded with a few big showings, and Smart fuels his demeanor.

“I look at him as a coach, as a father-figure, a teammate even though he’s not on the floor,” Eric said. “I look to him for answers. We’re really close.”

Even with the highlights, Eric has had some clunkers, hampering his usually-poised demeanor. But Smart is working on making him more even-keel.

“All these things are new to your body and your mind — you just got to try to hang on and try and follow the process,” Smart said. “Eric’s done a nice job with that. The best is yet to come.”

Still, Eric claims to be the most confident freshman and always feels good letting the ball fly.


No surprise from the freshman guard who walks with his chest up.

Link: https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/03/09/davis-smart-develop-close-bond
Texas has no answer for Kansas, drops senior night

Original publication date: The Daily Texan, March 1, 2016

This night was far from normal.

Just for tonight, the lines to enter the Frank Erwin Center were so long that people had to enter in waves. Just for tonight, Colt McCoy, Tony Romo and Jason Witten sat courtside. And just for tonight, the numbers of six seniors hung in the rafters.

The only thing that was normal was the one thing that no one wanted — the outcome. No. 23 Texas had no answer for the No. 1 Kansas Jayhawks, falling 86-56 on senior night, dropping to 8-27 all time against Kansas and 0-for-9 against AP No. 1 teams.

“I’ve seen senior nights go both ways; tonight it went the wrong way,” head coach Shaka Smart said. “And I’m not talking about the result — I’m talking about in terms of what it did for us psychologically.”

After the senior night pageantry and the pregame pyrotechnics were through, the sellout Erwin Center crowd had an electricity about it. But when the game tipped off, it wasn’t what the seniors, or anyone, hoped.

Texas began the game 0-of-14 from the field as the Jayhawks ran out to 15-0 lead. A floater from senior guard Javan Felix finally got the Longhorns on the board more than six minutes into the contest.

The other seniors answered the call as well, combining for 16 first-half points, but the Jayhawks shot 63.3 percent in the first half and bombed two 3-pointers in the closing minutes to take a 47-23 lead into the break.

“We didn’t come out and guard tonight,” Felix said. “Just plain and simple.”

The seniors attempted to spark something and scored the first six points of the second half to pump some much-needed life into an otherwise dead arena.

But it was evident who was the Big 12 champion and No. 1 team in the land. The Jayhawks shot a sizzling 64 percent from the field for the game and had three players in double figures.

In cruel irony, it was Kansas’ senior star that stole the show. Forward Perry Ellis, the man who has been the nemesis of Texas’ seniors for four years, had 20 points and consistently sucked the life out of the Erwin Center crowd.
Once the Jayhawks went up 65-34 with 13:08 remaining, the fans started making their way to the exits.

The seniors have a chance to make postseason noise, but the chance to beat Kansas on the Erwin Center floor on senior night won’t return.

“It’s very tough. For me, the most important thing is not to dwell on it,” senior center Prince Ibeh said. “Realize it’s not the end of the season.”

But as history suggests, it was just a normal outcome against Kansas on an abnormal night.

Link: https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/03/01/texas-has-no-answer-for-kansas-drops-senior-night
As season goes on, Smart sees confidence improve

Shaka Smart has the same outfit on game days.

The head coach typically takes off his jacket when the game tips off, and goes with the long-sleeved button-down and tie look.

But he also has something else on every time the Longhorns take the court — a plus sign written in marker on the top of his hand.

“It just reminds me to be positive,” Smart said. “I really think with all this stuff, you can see the glass half empty or half full.”

Some of Smart’s players, unprompted, have taken to writing a plus sign on their hands before games. The problem was, it took some time for the Longhorns to get to the point where they were naturally confident and positive.

When Smart took the job last April, the Longhorns were coming off a disappointing 20-14 campaign that led the program to part ways with head coach Rick Barnes. As he started working with the players, Smart noticed they blamed the former coaching staff for some past disappointments.

“That was a real red flag to me,” Smart said. “Because I knew that at some point we were going to have to take a level of accountability, all of us, for our own results.”

Smart initially stayed quiet, choosing to listen to what his players had to say rather than call them out immediately. But eventually, the team began the journey to instill a new sense of confidence and positivity, something Smart said is still a work in progress.

“It was just a weird dynamic because it was like a fake confidence, and everything’s fine now because we made a coaching change,” Smart said. “And I’m, like, ‘No, no, it’s not. You’ve got to address some of this stuff.’”

Still, the season hasn’t been without low points that hurt the team’s psyche. When senior center Cameron Ridley fractured his left foot, Smart said he had to pick the team back up again.
“I remember the day after Cam got hurt, me trying to cheer up [junior guard Isaiah Taylor],” Smart said. “And, you know how Isaiah is. He can be dramatic. But he basically had this look and this sentiment that this is really, really, really bad.”

The Longhorns’ newfound confidence has translated into big wins this season, including upsets over ranked opponents North Carolina and Iowa State. Texas is coming off a 1-1 road trip where it beat then-No. 6 West Virginia but fell to then-No. 3 Kansas.

But another shot to Texas’s nerves came on Jan. 9 when it lost on the road to TCU — the same team that visits the Frank Erwin Center on Tuesday night at 7 p.m. Since then, the Longhorns are 3-1, including two wins coming against ranked foes.

“Ever since then, we’ve made a conscious effort to come out aggressive,” senior guard Javan Felix said. “Not just in games, but everyday in practice so it can be a habit for us, and that’s been the biggest difference.”

Smart tried to make sure the team didn’t get down after losing to Kansas, telling them to be angry instead. But he doesn’t view the rematch with TCU as a “huge game” on the schedule.

“Someone said something a few weeks ago about a must-win. What does that even mean?” Smart said. “Does that mean if the team doesn’t win, we’re all going to go out back and be executed?”

Link:
https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/01/26/as-season-goes-on-smart-sees-confidence-improv e
RIO DE JANEIRO — A bronze medal wasn't J'den Cox's goal. He refused to admit that.

But after winning one Saturday in 86-kilogram freestyle wrestling at Olympic Park, he jumped into the stands to his family. His mother, Cathy Cox, cried. Michael Cox, his father, was overjoyed.

"There was a lot of tears," J'den Cox said. "I think the whole first row where my family is at is flooded at this point."

As he put the American flag around him, the MU senior and Columbia native walked around Mat B and screamed with joy. He beat Reineris Perez Salas of Cuba 3-1 for one of two bronze medals.

"I'm not ever going to say I accomplished my goal, because my goal was to win gold," Cox said. "But I'm not bitter about it. I'm happy; I'm proud. I accomplished a great feat, a great feat that a lot of people never even get a chance to come close to tasting."

His final match Saturday was the culmination of a long day in Rio. Late in the match, Cox came up with a two-point takedown, which was confirmed upon review with 6 seconds left. Salas, upset with the result of the review, left the mat and refused to return, giving Cox the victory.

Cox called to Salas to finish the match. Salas left without shaking his hand.

"It's (Salas') choice," Cox said. "It's his decision. The thing that I think will haunt him is he won't know what could've happened in those six seconds."

Cox, meanwhile, made an effort throughout each round on Saturday to help his opponents up, something that seemed rare on the other mats.

"It matters to me because this is a tough, grueling sport," Cox said.

He was calm and loose on and off the mat all day. In the morning, less than an hour before his first match of the day, he went to the stands to greet his family and friends who made the trip to Rio.

Some wore Mizzou caps. Some wore white shirts with a silhouette of Cox from the Olympic Trials on the front.
Cox admitted he was nervous, but to him, that just meant he cared. He accepted it.

This was the biggest stage Cox has ever wrestled on. Even after the two NCAA championships in the 197-pound class and other international competitions, his first experience at the Olympic Games trumped all of them. But in the end, he was just there to wrestle.

"He's like this all the time," said his mother. "In NCAAs, there have been time where they've had to wake him up right before his matches because he's laying down sleeping somewhere."

He steamrolled through his first two matches of the tournament, looking more like a seasoned pro than a 21-year-old Olympic rookie.

World No. 4 Selim Yasar of Turkey awaited him in the semifinals, and brought the first controversial finish of the day. The matched ended in a 1-1 tie, but Cox thought he had the criteria to break the tie. It was Yasar who held the criteria over Cox due to a caution in the first period. Cox's gold-medal goal had evaporated.

"Failure is always going to happen. It's a part of life," he said after the match. "Disappointment is something you can choose whether or not happens. Failure happens all the time, but disappointment is lingering afterwards, and I don't have time for that."

His family and coaches attempted to tell him that he, in fact, wasn't leading in the match. But Cox is partially deaf in his left ear. That, along with the loud atmosphere, made it difficult to hear.

"I'm pretty sure he couldn't hear his coach's voice," Cathy Cox said. "The fans are yelling and everything. He just didn't know."

Cox was placed in the repechage (a "wrestle-back" bracket.) Because he lost in the semifinals, he already had a spot in one of the two bronze-medal matches of the repechage bracket.

He said there is no one to blame for the ending of the semifinal match but himself. But he did the only thing he thought to do — move forward.

"I haven't learned to go back in the past yet," Cox said. "Time traveling is not invented. Until that day comes, I'm just going to have to learn to accept it, and I have."

Cox said he was disappointed he couldn't win gold for the 11 family members and friends who made the trip to Rio, but the experience will be remembered regardless.

"It's totally different than college," said his father. "When you're here, you can feel and hear the passion."
The medal comes after a long journey to qualify for the Olympics in the first place. Cox had to transition to the freestyle wrestling of the Olympics. He primarily wrestled folkstyle in the U.S. The bronze hanging around his neck represents the potential start of a long international career.

When asked what he sees coming for him next, he didn't hesitate.

"Classes," Cox said. "That's truly what I'm seeing. School starts on Aug. 22 and I'm only missing the first day. They couldn't even give me a break. I'll be back in class and I'll be back with my brothers in the Mizzou wrestling room."

Cox says nothing is changing. He returns to Columbia for his final season with the Missouri wrestling team. He is the second Olympic athlete born in Columbia (Charles Proctor competed in the 1928 Winter Olympics) and the first to medal. Cox is one of nine Missouri athletes to medal in the Olympics.

"I'll be J'den Cox today, I'll be J'den Cox tomorrow, I was J'den Cox in the past and I'll continue to be J'den Cox until the end of my days," he said. "And J'den Cox is from Columbia, Missouri, and that's where he's going to stay and go home and love his family and enjoy his life."

Akshay Mirchandani is reporting from the Rio Olympics for the University of Texas at Austin School of Journalism.

Link:
http://www.columbiamissourian.com/sports/mizzou_sports/j-den-cox-brings-home-the-bronze/article_4c0ec0c2-6741-11e6-a5e6-57e94dc68029.html
Pittsburgh native Leah Smith takes bronze medal in Olympics

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RIO DE JANEIRO — Leah Smith felt the nerves on Sunday at the Olympic Games. She qualified for the the 400-meter freestyle final in the preliminary round in the afternoon, but was jittery.

So, in the hours before the final Sunday night, Smith made some calls.

“I talked to a few friends back home,” Smith said. “One of my best friends, Katie McLaughlin, missed making the team in the 200 [butterfly]. She’s kind of like my buddy and everything, so I asked for some advice. She just said I need to take in the experience, and just getting there was such an accomplishment.”

Smith calmed those nerves in the final Sunday night at the Olympic Aquatics Stadium, finishing with a time of 4:01.92 for a bronze medal — her first medal in her first Olympics.

Smith is no stranger to international competition. She had plenty of exposure as a student at Oakland Catholic High School and collegiately at Virginia. This was different.

“I went to Worlds and I thought that would prepare me, and it did, but nothing compares to this,” Smith said. “It’s unlike any other meet I’ve ever experienced. But it’s a blast and I wouldn’t trade the experience for anything.”

In her heat in the preliminaries, Smith was locked in a duel with Canada’s Brittany Maclean and Great Britain’s Jazz Carlin — Smith edged out Maclean by .04 seconds for second place.

In the final, it was again a race for second or third.

One lane down from Smith was Olympic teammate, Katie Ledecky. The 19-year-old shattered an Olympic record in the prelims with a time of 3:58.71 — nearly five seconds better than the second-place finisher in her heat.

Ledecky jumped out to the lead in the final and never looked back, finishing with a time of 3:56.46 to set a new world record.

Carlin finished in second at 4:01.23.
The result was totally expected. Ledecky has dominated the longer freestyle events since winning gold in the 800 at the London Olympics as a 15-year-old. The only drama was whether she’d take the world record even lower.

“I mean, so impressed,” Smith said of Ledecky. “I could hear the crowd cheering for her the whole time, so it was amazing.”

Smith, meanwhile, began the race in third for the first 50 meters, before falling to fourth for the next 100. At the 200-meter mark, she was tied with Maclean for third before taking control of the bronze spot.

With Maclean and Hungary’s Boglarka Kapas close behind, Smith touched the wall to clinch her first Olympic medal. Her parents, three siblings, Virginia coach and two Virginia teammates were all watching.

“I got to look up in the stands at my family and they’re so, so excited,” Smith said.

This won’t be her only chance at a medal in these Olympics. Smith will compete in the 800-meter freestyle with preliminaries Thursday. She was the ACC champion of the event at Virginia last season.

She has the opportunity to add to her new medal collection — with her nerves in check.

“I think I need to just stick with my strategy of trusting my race plan and trusting my coach’s plan for me,” Smith said. “I think that’s really it. For me, I’m the type of swimmer that needs to be having fun behind the blocks. I need to smile. So I think just not getting too tense before my race is going to help a lot.”

Akshay Mirchandani is reporting from the Rio Olympics for the University of Texas at Austin School of Journalism.

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