

## NEWS RELEASE

Nov. 17, 2011

Contact: John Shultz (913) 758-6165  
Email: shultz35@stmary.edu



### USM Spires Student Athletes Named 'Champions of Character' by the KCAC

(Leavenworth, Kan.)—The Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference (KCAC) has named five University of Saint Mary Spires athletes as “Champions of Character,” student-athletes who best exemplify the core values of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics’ (NAIA) Champions of Character Program.

The winning Spires are:

- Men’s Cross Country runner **Cameron Avilez**, a junior from Escondido, Calif.
- Women’s Cross Country runner **Emily Gripka**, a senior from Tonganoxie, Kan.
- Volleyball libero **Amelia Noll**, a junior from Nortonville, Kan.
- Men’s Soccer goalkeeper **Preston Becker**, a senior from Hays, Kan.
- Women’s Soccer midfielder **Kathleen Hermes**, a senior from Lawrence, Kan.

The Spires’ respective coaches praised the efforts of their student-athletes.

“Emily and Cameron are the kind of student athletes that we want in our program,” said David Dominguez, USM’s cross country coach. “Emily puts in as much work in the classroom as she does on the course. And Cameron provides the kind of leadership we look for in our students.”

USM Volleyball Coach Conan Salanoa said “Amelia has overcome so much over the past few months. And to achieve the amount of success she's had is special. She works so hard on and off the court and demonstrates all the core values of the champion of character that she was an easy choice for the award this year.”

And Derek Mazeitis, USM’s head soccer coach, said “Preston and Kathleen are both very deserving of this award. They both live moral and value-driven lives while working hard on the field and in the classroom. They’re both Academic All-Americans and each play integral roles on their perspective teams. They set a fine example for other student athletes to follow.”

The NAIA Champion of Character program honors students who display five core values: integrity, respect, responsibility, sportsmanship, and servant leadership.

Saint Mary has 12 varsity sports programs—football, volleyball, baseball, softball, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's soccer, cross country, and track & field—along with co-ed cheerleading and dance. Visit [www.gospire.com](http://www.gospire.com) to learn more about USM athletics.

*The University of Saint Mary is a Catholic co-educational applied liberal arts university founded and sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. The University of Saint Mary is located at 4100 South 4th Street, Leavenworth, Kan., with additional locations in Overland Park and Kansas City, Kan. Visit [www.stmary.edu](http://www.stmary.edu) for more information.*

###