

Kansas basketball memorabilia and Scott Ward's three diplomas fill his office walls in the Anschutz Sports Pavilion. Ward always planned for a future in athletics, but not quite the job he has now.

Scooter, as they call him, was a freshman at Hutchinson Community College when he broke his neck in a slip-and-slide accident, resulting in paralysis from the neck down. And with that, his dream of playing Division I basketball disappeared.

Ward now sits behind the scenes of University of Kansas athletics. Although he says he never pictured himself here, he couldn't be happier.

"I love what I do." Ward said, "I love the impact that I can have on a volleyball player, basketball player or any student athlete."

Ward is an academic and career counselor for the volleyball and men's basketball teams. He is also the associate athletic director and teaches Introduction to Physical Education and Sports Studies.

People filter in and out of his office seeking advice or a simple smile. Ward readjusts himself in his wheelchair and looks toward his computer screen. It takes meticulous effort to type because his fingers lack strength and control.

College friend John Heimerman recalls sitting in the hospital with Ward after the accident.

"What I remember was he was very positive from the get-go," Heimerman said. "He was determined to beat it."

Extensive physical therapy allowed Ward to regain some use of his upper extremities, but he will never walk again.

“The fact that he was even able to maneuver himself in a wheelchair was not expected,” Heimerman said.

Ward speaks positively about the situation. He says his parents helped get him through it.

“My dad said something to me early, early on,” Ward said, “something like, ‘There’s a million things a person can do and now that you’ve broken your neck, there’s only a hundred things that you can’t really do.’”

Ward says that basketball is one of the few things he misses since the accident. His dad was a referee and basketball coach, so the sport was a prominent part of his life. With the loss of his arm muscles, however, Ward can't even shoot a basketball.

Ward says that he is sure that he wouldn't be where he is today without the accident. He says that after the accident he felt he needed to be an expert in something to compensate for his disability. Ward completed his undergraduate degree in education, and then went on to earn a master's degree in education and a doctorate in sports psychology.

Heimerman says that before the accident Ward was already a positive person, “but this accident seemed to drive him to be ... to continue to be that same positive person.”

Vince McKamie, a past student of Ward's and now a co-worker, says that Ward's positivity is eye-opening for everyone around him. “Your day can't be as bad as what he probably deals with every day,” McKamie said.

For Ward, his own achievements are far less important than the achievements of his students.

“My sense of accomplishment isn't from anything I do, or anything that comes back on me, it's what comes back on the students and what they get from the experience,” Ward said.

Ward says that his favorite part of his job is counseling students. He says he and his students might discuss next semester's schedule, a class that they're struggling in, or even relationship issues.

“You could walk into my office and it might be ‘my car battery is dead,’” Ward said. “I like to have those answers, too.”

His goal, he says, is to better every student who walks into his office.

McKamie, his co-worker, says students have a great respect for Ward and they trust him. “I think that in his role, those are very important attributes,” he said.

Ward says he enjoys helping students as they earn their degrees. He knows how much work it takes to get a degree — he has three — and he says that he loves being part of so many students' journeys.

“My favorite day on earth, every year, is graduation day,” Ward said.