## [**Not Your Average Athlete**](https://nhstigertracks.wordpress.com/2017/01/30/not-your-average-athlete/)

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Every storm may run out of rain, but the length of the storm may not be desired. Ken Topps, not your average athlete, went head strong through the storm with full force.Though this quiet, strong man may not stop to make petty conversation, he inspires many when they hear how he was able to accomplish great things by reaching the rainbow.

Ken, number three of five siblings, was raised in a single parent household. His mom worked day in and day out to provide shelter, clothing, and nutrition to put on the table; his sister practically raised him. He grew up in the projects, where young children generally tend to see and experience situations no young one should, however, young Topps’ found an outlet from the chaos. He wanted to play flag football.

Unfortunately, any sport costs money, so Topps’ mother picked up extra hours to help support his passion of football. Little did she know, she planted a seed of something much, much bigger. Topps’, of course, played good, but his mom could not witness very much due to working so much. Because of this, Topps’ sister, Tonja, rarely ever missed a game. He was her favorite player, and she was his favorite fan.

As Ken developed into a teenager, he continued football through grade school and eventually through high school. Still, his sister remained in the stands with his mom’s full support at heart. Practice after practice, he eagerly gave everything he had. Blood, sweat, and tears became more than just a quote. The moment he walked onto the field he would leave all issues on the sideline. Fans and even supporters of the opposite team would watch just to see what Ken Topps would do.

Into the season, despair hit. Ken broke his leg playing football his junior year. With it being a very confusing time for him, he took his time off. He didn’t know what to do, as his mind constantly searched for ways to play football again. However, as the Old English Proverb says, “when there’s a will, there’s way.” Topps got back on the field and wowed everyone. With all the hype, he began to catch the eye of college football teams, where he signed to go to Mississippi State to play as their quarterback.

Topps and his family fully supported the opportunity he had been given. Not many high school players are given a full scholarship to one of the top universities in the state of Mississippi. Everyone couldn’t wait to see what he would do in his newly established football career. With all the build up, Topps hit the field head on, but he had no idea what was soon to come. Though Mississippi State gave him the quarterback position, the coaches changed that. Already discouraged, Ken then sat on the bench for most of the games. He had worked so hard and trained so much to be on the sidelines. This gave Ken a sense of nonaccomplishment and self consciousness.

Miraculously , an Itawamba Community College coach and Topps’ paths crossed, where his life would be changed forever. He was offered to play at the community college, and that he did. He described the years he spent at ICC as the greatest of his football career, where his self esteem built. From ICC, he then played at a very prestigious university, Murray State in Kentucky. There, Topps’ continued to accomplish great things. He helped lead the team with not only his skills, but his determination and enthusiasm as well. He left all his effort and grit on the practice field. He continued to grow in his career practice by practice, day by day, and game by game as he got the attention of many.

Then until the unthinkable happened. Topps’ broke his arm. Being a devastating time for Topps,’ he thought that his entire football career was over.

Academically, Topps did not find Murray State University a fit for him after realizing he could never play football again.. From there, he transferred to Mississippi State as his final schooling. It was a tragic time for not only him, but his family and his team that developed into his family. This was a very sensitive and almost depressing time for Topps. Football had been his life since he played the game he loved at only five, and that’s not a problem that is easy to get over, but he pursued a coaching career at the University.

He doesn’t look at Murray State as just somewhere he ended “going big time,” because at the second round of MSU, he met his beautiful wife, Kenya Topps, and they have two outgoing, healthy children.

Ken now a coaches at the small town Nettleton High School, where he was welcomed with open arms to step up to head coach of football after coaching behind the scenes for years. His wife is more than proud of him, for she knew how much he deserved this. At the high school, one of his football players described as “an amazing, passionate, and dedicated coach.” George, one of his freshman players, continued on to say that he is thankful to have him to push the team to full potential. He and his wife, who also works at Nettleton as the counselor, even though she could have many titles if given, have impacted the high school more than imaginable.

~Jesse Self