

P&D Male Athlete Of The Year



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Irene-Wakonda senior Gabe King stands in the Wakonda gym after practice on Monday. King, a football and basketball standout who has committed to playing basketball at Northern State University, has been selected as the Press & Dakotan Male Athlete of the Year.

King Stands Tall For Eagles



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Gabe King slams the ball home during a game earlier this season. King, recruited collegiately for basketball, is also a standout quarterback and track and field athlete for the Eagles.

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WAKONDA – When you do the things Gabe King does for a small-town Class B school, it tends to attract attention.

When you stand 6-foot-6 and can throw down highlight reel alley-oop dunks during a game, it doesn't matter where you live, people are going to take notice.

That's the thing about King. He's far from a secret.

"We're in a rural area where kids like this stand out," said father Mike, the athletic director and boys' basketball coach at Irene-Wakonda High School where Gabe is a 3-sport senior standout.

"You go to a big town and more kids play that way," Mike added. "You just know that all that time he put in is paying off."

That's the other thing about Gabe. He was, from an early age, destined to be one of those kids that would find success because of the way he approached sports.

Mike remembers at one point many years ago being asked about his son, "What if he doesn't like sports?"

"I had to laugh," Mike said during a basketball practice last week in Wakonda. "There was no chance of that."

"He's going to be around it all the time."

All those years later, Gabe — a second team all-state basketball player and state runner-up in the triple jump, not to mention a prolific quarterback — has put together the kind of calendar year to earn him *Press & Dakotan* Male Athlete of the Year honors for 2015.

Previous Winners

- 2006: Adam Broders, Bloomfield
- 2007: Riley Reiff, Parkston
- 2008: Earv Archambeau, Avon
- 2009: Robert Kokesh, Wagner
- 2010: Cory Jacobsen, Viborg-Hurley
- 2011: Kyle McKelvey, Beresford
- 2012: Alex Kocer, Wagner
- 2013: J.J. Hejna, Yankton
- 2014: Brady Hale, Yankton

The son of a coach, Gabe really had no choice but to learn early on what it takes to succeed in multiple sports. His entire life has come with Mike as the basketball coach.

Not only was he surrounded — literally — by the game he would eventually fall in love with, Gabe was constantly reminded to learn the game.

"He always told me, 'Make sure to watch. Don't be one of those kids messing around. Watch and learn,'" said Gabe, who was the team's water boy from third grade on up to the days when he began playing himself.

"And that's what I tried to do."

Those early moments eventually led to early signs that Gabe was a future standout in the making. It was all just a matter of him wanting to work to that point, according to his father.

"I knew he had the skills and I knew he had the drive to get better," Mike said. "He's a pretty complete kid."

Though he stands 6-foot-6 — certainly taller than most Class B players (only four are taller than 6-6) — right now, it wasn't though Gabe suddenly shot up. He has always been one of the taller kids in

his grade, his father said.

On travel teams, Gabe played as a post, but at high school — where he was typically playing with older, bigger kids — he was more of a guard. In other words, "the best of both worlds," Mike said.

"I always told him, there are two things you always have to do as a kid destined to be tall, you've got to be able to handle the ball and you've got to be able to jump," Mike said.

"If you can do those two things, you've got a chance to play at the next level."

That realization especially set in last basketball season, when Gabe averaged 23.1 points and 13.7 rebounds to earn second team Class B all-state honors.

And that jumping advice?

Gabe qualified for the state track meet in the triple jump (finishing second) and high jump (finishing 24th).

And that handling-the-ball advice? That also came in handy during football season this fall.

Gabe, in his senior season, passed for 2,357 yards and 34 touchdowns for an Irene-Wakonda team that advanced to the quarterfinal round of the playoffs from the first time since 2009.

Yes, being 6-6 certainly helps when you're the leader of a passing team, but it was more than just height that made Gabe valuable, according to his football coach.

"However, it is what he sees and how he reacts that makes him a great quarterback," coach Brent Mutchelknous said. "He is very intelligent in addition to having very accurate passing skills."

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