

# DARK HORSE COMMITMENT REPORT

*The story behind the commitments of a Chicagoland big-men duo to Loras College*

Written by Brandon Ruggles December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017



**South Bend, IN:** Christmas has started early for the Loras College Men's Basketball program, as head coach Chris Martin landed commitments from not one, but two Chicagoland Dark Horse prospects Thursday evening. Jared Crutcher – a 6'5" shot-blocking forward with an insane 7'3" wingspan out of West Aurora High School – was the first to deliver the good news to Coach Martin, while versatile 6'5 forward Ryan Barker of Lyons Township High School announced his commitment to the school only two hours later.

**Jared Crutcher:** like many prospects, Crutcher landed on the radars of college coaches while playing summer travel ball on the AAU circuit. However, unlike the average prospect, the early stages of Crutcher's recruitment had to overcome the fact that his first name was somehow misprinted in the player information books used by college coaches scouting the first tournament of the spring. So, while Jared dominated on the NY2LA Association Circuit (serving as one of the league's leaders in rebounds and blocks per game), he received media coverage under an entirely different first name. Because of the deluge of inquiries received from college coaches, though, the issue soon corrected itself, and Crutcher's recruitment expanded rapidly to include the likes of North Central College, Cornell College, Monmouth College, Rock Valley Community College, and Wartburg College along with Loras. Several other interested schools were politely informed by Crutcher early in the process that they were not in play, as his steadfast commitment to pursuing an engineering degree narrowed his search to schools with traditional engineering programs.

Crutcher ultimately visited Loras and North Central while also taking the time to meet with coaches from Cornell College at West Aurora prior to the beginning of his senior high school season, but in a move surprising coaches who expected his recruitment to continue into the spring, he pulled the trigger with a Loras commitment prior to Christmas. In Crutcher's own words, his decision was based on a feeling that "Loras will make me a great player, but more importantly, a better person. The school has the major I want, and the coaches have proven that they can develop talent. I want to be the best all-around player that I can be, and I believe that these coaches can help me get there".

**Ryan Barker:** after a summer in which he averaged a double-double for a competitive and scrappy Mercury Elite 17U Tiknis team, the college interest Barker received from the division three level was sizeable. Prior to that point, though, several schools already had Ryan on their radars. The credit for this accumulated early interest belongs solely to Barker, who was a humble yet relentless self-promoter throughout every stage of his own recruitment. Because of Ryan's proactive approach to the process (sending his own film to coaches, using social media to build

his personal brand, scheduling visits with coaches by himself), his recruitment had a strong foundation upon which to sit as interest grew. The interest generated by Barker quickly turned into a series of visits: he saw Loras, Elmhurst College, University of Wisconsin – Platteville, North Central College, Lewis University, and University of Illinois – Springfield among others while also meeting with coaches from Wartburg College at his high school.

Then, just before the beginning of his senior season at Lyons Township High School, adversity hit as Ryan suffered a torn ACL in a fall league basketball game. Naturally, Ryan and his family were not only devastated by the injury, but they were also concerned with its implications for his recruitment. None of the coaches who had been recruiting Ryan left his side – a true testament to the character of each of them – but one coaching staff in particular went above and beyond to show the Barkers continued support. The night before Ryan’s surgery to repair his ACL, Loras head coach Chris Martin and assistant Gabe Miller made the three-hour trip from Dubuque, Iowa to LaGrange, Illinois to take Ryan and his family out to dinner. As Ryan put it “(that dinner) was huge to me, because it made me feel like they genuinely cared about me not only as a player but also as a person. They just wanted to see how I was doing and to cheer me up”. Martin and Miller did not stop there, though. A few days after his surgery, Ryan received “get-well” cards from every member of the current Loras basketball team – twenty-four, total. Such a gesture did not go unnoticed by Ryan and his family, and he committed to Loras only two hours after Crutcher on Thursday night. “I wanted a place where there was a family feel on and off the court”, Ryan expressed after announcing his decision. “Loras felt like a school that I could call home for the next four years – without a doubt”.

Following the commitments of Crutcher and Barker, seven members of the Dark Horse 2018 basketball class have now committed to continue playing the game they love at the college level.



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