

DARK HORSE COMMITMENT REPORT

The story behind the commitments of the longest-tenured Dark Horse athletes

Written by Brandon Ruggles January 9th, 2018



South Bend, IN: Nearly two years after joining Dark Horse as the company's first independent clients, Minooka High School twin brothers Keegan and Kyle Graebner officially wrapped up their recruitments with matching commitments to play college basketball at Benedictine University (D3) in Lisle, Illinois. Over the past 20+ months, the Graebner brothers became highly-coveted targets for small colleges all around the Midwest because of the unique combination of their athletic abilities, academics, and character. This is the story behind the Graebner brothers' decision to play out their college basketball careers at Benedictine:

Keegan & Kyle Graebner: It was February of 2016 – the winter of the Graebner twins' sophomore year of high school – when the boys began their recruiting journeys. The manner with which the pair approached the recruiting process was strategic, with a stated focus on individual skill development while gradually moving themselves onto the radars of division three and NAIA coaches. While many families begin with unrealistic aspirations motivated solely by a desire to play at the highest level, the Graebner family instead chose to focus on the levels that they felt would ultimately offer Keegan and Kyle the ideal fits – in terms of playing time, academics, and social scene.

This thoughtful approach to the process became especially valuable when the pair suffered serious injuries in a golf cart accident prior to the AAU summer of 2016 that took them off the circuit for the entirety of July. Rather than missing out on an opportunity to attract the attention of college coaches, however, the Graebners' proactive approach to landing on the radars of college coaches early on made the injury a non-issue from a recruiting perspective. In fact, when the boys returned to the court in the fall after not playing a minute of live games in the summer, several schools were ready to pick up their recruiting efforts directed at the brothers right where they had left off.

By the time the boys completed their 17U AAU seasons in the summer of 2017, they had become two of the most desired small-college prospects in the state. Keegan and Kyle ultimately visited Cornell College (D3), Aurora University (D3), North Park University (D3), Blackburn College (D3), St. Ambrose University (NAIA – both received scholarship offers), Rockford University (D3), North Central College (D3), and Concordia University IL (D3) along with Benedictine. Each of these schools put tremendous effort into the twins, coming to see them at the Dark Horse Exposure Workout last fall, visiting them at Minooka, and attending games regularly. By the end of the process, the entire Graebner family was faced with a high-class problem: choosing between several schools that they were convinced would be excellent fits for Keegan and Kyle.

In the end, though, it was Benedictine University (D3) that captured the commitments of the Graebner boys. The Eagles' recruiting efforts were led by Head Coach Keith Bunkenburg and Assistant Coach Nick Radenkovich, both

of whom played instrumental roles in landing the two commitments. In fact, after announcing their commitments, both Keegan and Kyle pointed to the Benedictine coaching staff as one of the most significant drivers behind their decision. “I really developed great relationships with the coaching staff during the process, and it felt like home when my family and I visited the campus”, said Kyle. Keegan added, “I had a great feeling when I took the visit, and that feeling never went away”.

The decision was not entirely based on the coaching staff, though, as the Graebners built tremendous relationships with coaches from several schools throughout their recruitments. Rather, it was the educational opportunities offered by Benedictine that helped push them over the top. Kyle’s goal is to study radiation therapy – a major not offered by most of the schools that took part in his recruitment, but one that is available at Benedictine. Keegan is also considering radiation therapy, but he currently aspires to study education and his desire to remain in Illinois post-graduation necessitates an Illinois teaching certificate. These educational considerations made Benedictine an excellent option for both of the brothers.

Now, the Graebners have the opportunity to live out a long-time dream: playing college basketball together. When asked what it means to be able to go to school with his twin, Keegan put it best, “We’ve played together on the same team since second grade, and to continue that in college will be special. I cannot wait to begin this experience with him.”

