

# DARK HORSE COMMITMENT REPORT

*The story behind the commitment of one of the most sought-after small college prospects in Illinois*

Written by Brandon Ruggles January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018



**South Bend, IN:** Prior to taking his team onto the court Wednesday night for what would eventually be a conference victory, Pat Juckem received a call for which division three head coaches around the midwest had battled for well over a year. Eric Peterson – the lengthy and athletic 6’5” guard out of Batavia High School in Illinois – was calling Coach Juckem to announce his commitment to play his college basketball career for the coach at the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh (D3). Peterson, who has long been described by college coaches as an “immediate impact” player, will join a Titans team that has consistently been ranked among the top-15 teams in the nation this season come next fall. This is the story behind Eric’s decision to spend his college career in Oshkosh:

**Eric Peterson:** From the moment Eric first stepped onto the court with his Tri-City Thunder AAU team this spring, college coaches drooled at the combination of his existing skillset and his physical and athletic upside. It wasn’t long before his phone started ringing with inquiries from small college coaches around the midwest, with Oshkosh among the first to make contact. However, Peterson did not enter the recruiting process blind to his ambitions: he knew that his ideal college experience wasn’t going to involve him being within an hour commute of his Batavia home, and this immediately eliminated nearly a dozen interested schools from contention. Even still, there was no shortage of high-powered division three suitors, and by the time the summer circuit came to a close, several division two programs had begun seriously monitoring Peterson’s recruitment.

Then came the wrinkle. After a breakout senior season on the football field that ended with a ten-catch, two-touchdown performance in Batavia’s state championship victory, the calls from college football programs began pouring in. Though Peterson had every intention of playing basketball rather than football at the collegiate level, his family and coaches encouraged him to consider all options available to him. Eric agreed to keep an open mind, and as a result, Batavia High School was transformed seemingly overnight into a revolving door for football coaches from around the midwest. As opportunities appeared, some of them at relatively high levels, Eric’s decision-making process was further complicated.

But with Eric’s return to the basketball court came mental clarity. He soon realized what he had suspected to be true all along: his heart was in basketball. “I just truly like basketball more than football”, explained Peterson. “Even though I was presented with some high-level football opportunities, I felt that I would enjoy my college experience more if it included playing basketball.” With this decision behind him, Eric and his family began focusing their attention on the ultimate decision: selecting a collegiate home.

In the end, Peterson chose the program and the coaches that had actively recruited him the hardest for the longest

period of time. Led by Head Coach Pat Juckem and Assistant Coach Matt Lewis, Oshkosh consistently made Peterson feel like a priority from the first time they watched him all the way through his final commitment. The efforts of the Oshkosh coaching staff included not only hosting Eric and his family on multiple visits, but also inviting him to join in their post-game locker room celebration after taking down then-top-five-ranked Augustana and commuting to Batavia for the fall Dark Horse Exposure Workout, where they actively conversed with Eric and his family for well over an hour. Matt Lewis and his fiancée even went so far as to stop by one of Eric’s football games to show him support on their way to a friend’s wedding. In Eric’s words, “the coaches and the team care more about being a family than anything else. The coaches are very down to earth people who like to joke around, and I’ve always been comfortable talking to them about anything”.

At the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Eric will study as a member of the school’s exclusive Business Scholar program, which is in the University Honors College.

