

Even headed for bowl game in Florida

Written by Jim Ecker

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Nate Even had modest goals when he graduated from Xavier High School in 2011 and headed to Loras College, but he set all sorts of school records with the Duhawks and now is headed to a national all-star football game in Florida.

Even will play in the 2015 National Bowl this Sunday in Miami, joining fellow All-American and All-Conference seniors from Division II, Division III and NAIA schools.

Even finished his remarkable career at Loras with 220 receptions for 3,314 yards and 26 touchdowns, which are all school records. He caught 77 passes for 1,282 yards and 11 touchdowns in 2014 and followed that outstanding performance with 74 catches for 1,151 yards and 12 TDs this year.

Even was a four-sport athlete at Xavier in football, baseball, soccer and wrestling, but never dreamed about the types of numbers he accumulated in college. Loras ran a power-I offense that featured the running game his first three years in school before changing head coaches and installing a spread offense that featured the passing game.

Loras won only a handful of games during his first three years on campus before making the change.

"It was kind of a struggle the first couple of years," Even said Monday. "To get where I am now, I didn't think was really a possibility."

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Even had modest numbers as a freshman and sophomore, with a combined total of 55 catches for 680 yards. He caught 13 passes for 199 yards as a junior in 2013, but broke his collarbone and ended up taking a medical redshirt season.

That injury turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because it gave him an extra year to play for new head coach Steve Helminiak and new offensive coordinator Jake Olsen in 2014 and 2015 and catch all those passes.

"I have to thank our offensive coordinator and head coach for doing a great job of getting our offense back to a level it should be at," he said. "I'm just glad I could be a part of it."

Even, who stands 5-foot-11 and weighs 185, broke single-game school records for receptions (16) and receiving yards (265) as well as single-season marks for receptions (77) and receiving yards (1,282).

Even thanked his coaches and teachers at Xavier High School for preparing him for college. He starred for Coach Duane Schulte's football teams at Xavier and was a year-round athlete.

"Really it's just the work ethic," said Even. "I feel like the thing I learned the most at Xavier was just working hard and trying to earn your spot."

"Coach Schulte preaches it every day: Work hard and it will all pay off for you. That goes on the football field and all aspects of life, too. I can't thank the coaching staff at Xavier enough."

Even has pursued a double-major at Loras in Accounting and Management Information Systems. He'll graduate in December and began a full-time job with an insurance company in Dubuque a few weeks ago following the football season.

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Even will leave Thursday for Florida and the bowl game. He received an 80-page playbook Sunday night and has been studying his pass routes. There will be only two days of practice in Miami before the game at Florida International University.

"The playbook looks fairly simple," he said. "I don't think it will be too bad. I've skimmed over it a lot. I'm probably halfway through it."

There will be scouts from the National Football League, the Canadian Football League and the Arena Football League at Sunday's game. Even said he would entertain an offer from pro football if somebody wants to give him a chance.

"If something comes up I'd definitely take a look at it," he remarked. "I love football, so there wouldn't be anything wrong with that. I'll learn a lot more once I get down there. We'll see the best players down there, so I'll really be able to see where I'm at.

"Naturally I'm pretty excited," he said. "I can't wait to get down there and kind of showcase what I can do. I'll be able to go down to Miami and get some warm weather and play in front of the pro scouts.

"I think it will be pretty cool for me."