

Beyer joins Kennedy basketball team

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kennedy Cougars have a new player on the basketball team who looks vaguely familiar, but it's hard to tell without his helmet and shoulder pads.

He's a phenomenal athlete who can jump out of the gym, a 6-foot-7 high jumper during the track season and a kid who can play just about any spot on the football field and play it very well.

Yes, it might be, it could be, it is -- Shaun Beyer, the captain of the Class 4A all-state football team and the proud recipient of a football scholarship to the University of Iowa.

Beyer has never played basketball at Kennedy before, but he's decided to give it a try this season as a senior to see if he can help Coach Jon McKowen's club and have some fun.

Beyer rested for a week after the football season and practiced for the first time Monday with the basketball team. He does not plan to play in this weekend's games in Sioux City and Spirit Lake due to a family affair, but he plans to be in uniform next week for the Cougars.

Beyer had a tremendous season with the Kennedy football team and helped the Cougars reach the 4A state finals for the first time in school history and finish with a

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13-1 record.

Now he's traded his cleats for sneakers.

"The first practice was yesterday," Beyer said before Tuesday's workout in the Kennedy gym. "I was a little rusty ballhandling and what-not. I got my shot down pretty well, I guess. A few mechanical things I can still work on."

Beyer, who is 6-foot-5 and a great leaper, has not played organized basketball since he was an eighth grader at Regis Middle Middle School. He spent a year after that in Germany and played some basketball over there, then enrolled at Kennedy as a ninth grader and never played for any of the Kennedy basketball teams until now.

He spent a few weeks with the basketball team last summer, but his top priority at the time was attending college football camps and hitting the weight room to get ready for the football season.

Beyer does not have a class during the sixth hour at Kennedy, so he'd spend time shooting baskets in the gym before football practice, visiting with Kennedy basketball coach Jon McKowen, who is a physical education teacher at the school.

"He asked if I would go out for basketball," Beyer related. "I said, why don't we wait until after the football season and see what happens with recruiting and what-not and then maybe I'll come out, maybe I won't."

"I'm glad I've come out," he said.

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Beyer accepted a football scholarship from Iowa last week, so now the pressure is off. He can relax and play hoops and have some fun.

"Once he got that Iowa scholarship, I think everything relaxed for him a little bit," McKowen said Tuesday. "It (playing basketball) was something he wanted to do and now he has that ability to do it."

McKowen is confident Beyer will be a good addition to the club.

"He's going to help the team, Number 1, by his competitiveness, his leadership, the type of person he is off the floor," McKowen said. "Those are the top-3 things we want in every kid."

"Just in practice you can see how hard he goes and how quick of a study he is. His teammates have been great. They grab him every chance they get and explain what the drill is, how it goes and what we're trying to get out of it."

"He probably won't come flying out of the blocks, but you just don't know," McKowen said. "I wouldn't put any restraints on Shawn, because if you watch him on the football field, every time they give him a new assignment he just thrives on it."

"Maybe we're just giving him a new assignment here, too."

Beyer understands that you cannot tackle the guy with the ball in basketball and you're not allowed to straight-arm a defender to get him out of the way, but he does bring a football mentality to the basketball floor. "Yeah, he makes practice a little more physical," McKowen said with a smile.

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Beyer was a member of the wrestling team at Kennedy last year, but he suffered a neck injury last season and does not want to risk getting hurt again. "I almost broke my neck in wrestling, so I decided not to do that this year," he said. "It was kind of scary."

He does plan to perform with the Kennedy track team this spring. He placed third in the high jump at the Class 4A state meet last year and also in an accomplished hurdler.

Beyer hopes to help the Kennedy basketball team as a rebounder and defender, but McKowen has encouraged him to play an important role on offense as well. "He said maybe I can hype up the crowd a little bit with a few dunks."

Beyer said he's catching on "pretty quick" in basketball.

"It's fun. It's definitely fun," he remarked. "I've always liked basketball. The sport is fun. I'm excited to play."

"I had a great time yesterday at practice and I'm looking forward to today in practice and taking it day by day."