



Scholar/Athletes (from left, front row) Mahogany Hanks, Kari Brown, and Taylor True.
(from left, back row) Garrett Butcher, Thomas Weakley, Derek Bailey, Hayley Chrzastowski,
Andrew Huck, and Ben Stancombe.

OUR PRIDE

The Area's Top Scholar/Athletes

By **Ron Eid** Photography by **Steve Raymer**

Picture a vibrant city whose limestone buildings are the cornerstone of its architecture: a city whose scholars engage in lively debate and whose athletes strive for excellence. While this city could be in ancient Greece, the cradle of Western civilization, it could also be present-day Bloomington.

Just as the ancient Greeks regarded both mental and physical development as keys to a balanced life, the people of Bloomington have created an environment that nurtures and honors both intellectual pursuits and athletic achievements. Nowhere is this more evident than in our high schools.

Bloom recently asked administrators at Bloomington North, Bloomington South, and Edgewood high schools each to choose their three top scholar/athletes—students with GPAs of at least 3.5 who also play on school-sanctioned athletic teams.

The nine young men and women chosen are quick to assert that they cannot take all the credit for their accomplishments, both in and out of the classroom. They are motivated and inspired, they say, by their mothers and fathers, siblings, teachers, coaches, and friends. Their role models have taught them the value of hard work and sound priorities. And they express gratitude for living in a community that nurtures and supports both academics and athletics.

Like the ancient Greeks who honored their outstanding citizens, we take pride in the achievements of our students, in the classroom and on the playing field.

“You have to work hard to get anywhere. If you work hard, something good is going to happen.”
—Derek Bailey

DEREK BAILEY

Bloomington South

Sports: baseball, basketball

Favorite subjects: math, science

Derek Bailey might sound like a typical born-and-bred Hoosier. “Growing up in Indiana you’re around basketball all the time,” he says. “High school basketball is great. The team aspect is more emphasized at our school than in college or the pros. I enjoy that style of play.”

But since he was five years old, his dream has been to play major league baseball. “Baseball is something that is a part of me,” he says. “It’s just natural for me to play.”

Two pro athletes have influenced Derek’s approach to life: baseballer Albert Pujols and basketball legend Michael Jordan.

“Pujols has his priorities straight,” Derek says. “God, family, and baseball—in that order. Pujols says you can’t [play baseball] without the other two in front of it.” From Jordan, Derek learned that with hard work you can do anything you want—on and off the court. “You have to work hard to get anywhere,” Derek says. “If you work hard, something good is going to happen.”

Because Derek gets extra half-points for honors classes in math, science, and English, his GPA (4.2) is above perfect. He also sings bass in South’s show choir, Sounds of South. But that is more of a “relaxing” diversion for this scholar/athlete.

Derek feels blessed having parents and a younger sister who have given him “so much time and support,” he says. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to pay them back.”

BEN STANCOMBE

Bloomington South

Sports: football, track (discus & shot put)

Favorite subjects: math, chemistry

At least three generations of Ben Stancombe’s family have helped to motivate him. His older brother played varsity football at South. “I always wanted to follow in my brother’s footsteps,” Ben says. “I always went to his games. It motivated me to work hard and become good enough to play varsity. It has always been my dream to play under the lights on Friday nights.”

Ben credits his parents with encouraging him “to keep a balance between sports and school,” he says. “They always understood that sports were important to me, but they were sure to help me understand that school is an important aspect in my life, too.” As a result, he says, “I enjoy pushing myself to be the best I can be.”

His ideal career as an orthopedic surgeon stems from his “fascination with bones and joints.” It’s a profession that would allow him to help athletes do what they love doing, he says, “to help them get back on the playing field.”

To accomplish his goals, Ben draws inspiration from his grandfather, Tony McMillan. “I can’t remember the last time my grandfather missed one of my athletic events,” Ben says. “He calls me every Thursday before a game. He’s been through two open-heart surgeries and has really bad arthritis. What he goes through in a normal day really inspires me.”

TAYLOR TRUE

Bloomington South

Sports: soccer, basketball

Favorite subject: Spanish

It seems Taylor True has been ahead of the game for a long time. Her high school curriculum has included honors classes in English, world studies, math, and chemistry. In sports, while still in middle school she trained with the high school basketball team.

“I had a busy schedule, even before high school,” she says. “I’ve played intense basketball ever since I was six years old. I played everything when I was little—flag football, softball, swimming. I tried everything. Once high school started, it was nonstop sports all the time.”

Taylor is another scholar/athlete who condones balancing school, social, and athletic activities. She wishes she had more time for other interests, such as photography and music. “I’d really like to be in choir,” she says. A self-described “book nerd,” Taylor goes to the library to relax. “My favorite writer is Augusten Burroughs,” she says. “I read everything I can get my hands on by him.”

Her ideal career would be a writer, but, she says, “Whatever career I choose later, knowing a second language will help.” With Spanish as her favorite subject, Taylor hopes to study and travel abroad some day.

Her father, a vice principal at South, and mother are the primary influences in her life. “Dad motivates me, whether I want him to or not,” Taylor says with a smile. “Mom is my inspiration, my role model, and my best friend.”



(from left) Ben Stancombe, Derek Bailey, and Taylor True.

“I think you don’t really benefit unless you struggle.
That’s my philosophy for school and athletics.”
—Thomas Weakley

GARRETT BUTCHER

Edgewood

Sport: basketball

Favorite subject: military history

Having an older brother at Edgewood during his freshman year, Garrett Butcher already knew a lot of people in high school. But it hasn’t stopped him as an upperclassman from easing the fears of incoming freshmen. Garrett has participated in the Mustang Mentor program for the past three years.

“A lot of freshmen think high school is going to be so awful and scary,” Garrett says. “We let them know it’s really not that bad. Other than the hallways being more crowded, it’s not much different than junior high.”

Garrett helps in another key way, as well: by setting an example. The National Honor Society student also works hard to be one of the best basketball players in the state—helping last year’s Mustangs to a 22-1 record. He has made a verbal commitment to play basketball at Butler University in Indianapolis next year.

Keeping his grades high was never an option, Garrett says. “My parents enforced it. It wasn’t a question. It was a matter of doing it.” He admits, though, that excelling in sports and school also requires self-motivation. “Like weight lifting,” he says. “There are times when I’m really tired and I don’t want to, but I know I have to. Some days I want to go do other things, but it all works out in the long run.”

Garrett is especially grateful to the people of Ellettsville for cheering on the basketball team last year. “I would like to thank people for their support,” he says. “The way the town came around last year—people putting signs up in businesses—it was incredible.”

KARI BROWN

Edgewood

Sports: basketball, softball, soccer

Favorite subject: math

The extra-curricular activities alone in Kari Brown’s schedule would seem to be a full-time job: student council, leadership academy, peer counseling, Spanish Club, fundraisers, and other volunteer work. “Those sound like they would take up a lot of time,” Kari says. “But I don’t have many conflicts, except during finals week.”

And then there’s school. This year she is signed up for calculus, advanced-placement chemistry, Brit Lit, advanced composition, and history, among other subjects. She’s at school from 7:15 am to 2:30 pm, which leaves her part of the afternoon to play sports.

Kari has been on the basketball and softball teams, and is playing soccer for the first time this year. “I’ve never played before,” she says, “but it looks fun.” Practice lasts until 5 pm, then it’s home to eat and do homework. It takes mental and physical toughness to endure such a rigorous schedule. “I have three older brothers,” Kari says. “So I guess that’s where I get my strength. They are amazing.”

She says another role model is fellow scholar/athlete Garrett Butcher. “We’re friends,” she says. “He would always tell me I wasn’t good enough. He was trying to motivate me, and since he told me that, I’ve tried harder. Everyone wants to be like Garrett.”

Kari says that managing school and sports “is easier if you’re involved in a lot of activities.” They make high school “a lot more fun,” she says. “And they teach you life lessons.”

THOMAS WEAKLEY

Edgewood

Sport: basketball

Favorite subject: biology

“I grew up in a neighborhood where the kids play basketball all day,” Thomas Weakley says. “I watched my older brothers play, and I wanted to be like them. They pushed me all the time to be better.”

Tommy’s motivation and discipline have come from his mother, too. “She makes sure I do everything I can to the fullest of my ability,” he says. “She never quits. I could argue all night but she’ll find a way to win.” But, he adds, he pushes himself a lot, as well. “I feel good about myself if I really push myself to the point where I’m tired. I think you don’t really benefit unless you struggle. And that’s my philosophy for school and athletics.”

Tommy is a member of the leadership academy at Edgewood and a volunteer basketball coach at Banneker Community Center. “These kids are desperate for attention, given their age,” he says. “It’s very challenging. I have learned a lot of people skills.”

Back spasms plagued him until his sophomore year at Edgewood. Then, the first time he dressed for a varsity game, the coach put him in to play. “My back was so bad,” Tommy says, “I didn’t think I would do anything, but I was determined to forget about the pain.” He hit seven three-pointers in one quarter—a first for Edgewood.

Tommy’s interest in biology stems partly from his back problems. “I really admired the doctors who helped me,” he says. “Ever since then, I’ve wanted to help others.”

(from left) Thomas Weakley, Albert Einstein, Kari Brown, and Garrett Butcher.





(from left) Mahogany Hanks, Andrew Huck, and Hayley Chrzastowski.

“I feel like school is my job and I need to do it to the best of my ability. I have to do a good job for my parents, because they have done a good job for me.”
—Mahogany Hanks

HAYLEY CHRZASTOWSKI

Bloomington North

Sports: volleyball, basketball

Favorite subjects: math, science

“I can’t imagine life without volleyball,” Hayley Chrzastowski says. When high-school volleyball season ends, her club volleyball season begins, as does high school basketball season. “I go straight from basketball practice to club volleyball practice,” she says.

Pile this on to her full slate of senior-year classes, including English, physics, finite math, government, orchestra (she has played violin since 5th grade), and speech. She is in the freshman mentor program. She volunteers at Habitat for Humanity and People and Animal Learning Services (PALS), which, she says, “provides therapy to critically and mentally disabled people of all ages.” She also puts in eight to nine hours each week working at the Meadowood Retirement Community and the IU Golf Course.

Hayley enjoys being part of a team and the “intensity” of volleyball has helped to make it her “first love” of sports. Her school team’s biggest challenge, she says, has been having four coaches in four years. “Learning to be flexible with new coaching styles taught us a lot, because now we’re open to new things.”

Hayley says her high standards were set by her older sister. “Some people expected me to be just like her,” Hayley says. “But I didn’t want to be anything less than her. She kept pushing me, and helping me through anything I needed talked through.”

Others who inspire Hayley include her teachers. “They are not teaching us for the money,” she says. “They’re teaching us because they want to help us.” And her coaches: “Every practice is not only about making you better players but making you better people.” And North’s custodial staff: “They are here night and day and are never recognized for what they do. They put in so much time to make our school look incredible.”

Hayley is destined to be an inspiration for others: “My goal in life is to make a difference in other peoples’ lives.”

MAHOGANY HANKS

Bloomington North

Sport: track (100 meters sprint, 4x1 relay)

Favorite subjects: biology, history

Mahogany Hanks attributes part of her academic excellence to keeping busy outside of the classroom. “It helps me stay focused,” she says, “because I know I have a schedule with no room to procrastinate.”

“At times it seems challenging,” she adds, “because you come home and you have to study for this test and you have to write this paper, and you’re so tired. At the same time, you just have to look at the big picture.”

Her day starts early. “I get up around 5:30,” she says. “I talk to my parents before I go to school. I find out what they’re doing for the day, and I give them my schedule.” Mahogany has a journal to keep track of her commitments, which include cheerleading and activities in the National Honor Society, student council, the Monroe County NAACP High School Council (of which she is president), and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, among others.

She believes people her age should discuss the problems confronting their community. “We are a voice,” she says. “And although we are teenagers, and some people might not want to hear everything we have to say, soon we’re going to be running this country, and running this community, and doing many different things, so it’s important that we talk about many different topics—not just music and fashion.”

Every year, the NAACP Council has a “teen rap session,” she says. “Anyone of any race is invited, and we talk about problems we feel need to be changed.”

Two ingredients essential to success are “hard work and having a passion for what you do,” she says. “I have a passion for becoming a pediatrician, because there are so many people who can be helped.”

Mahogany cites her teachers and coaches for nurturing her interest in school and sports. She’s grateful for her teammates and friends, because they motivate each other in challenging times. She also has an older brother, two older sisters, and “a lot of extended family” that she looks up to, and who have been sources of support. But it is her parents—her role models—she most appreciates.

“I feel like school is my job,” Mahogany says, “and I need to do it to the best of my ability. I have to do a good job for my parents, because they have done a good job for me.”

ANDREW HUCK

Bloomington North

Sport: football

Favorite subjects: biology, chemistry

An abrupt coaching change during Andrew Huck’s freshman year put North’s football team in “a huge hole,” Andrew says. “But we kept a positive attitude through all that, and it paid off. We ended up finding an awesome person, an awesome coach, and an awesome role model in Coach [Scott] Bless. We had built some bad habits, and he broke us of those,” Andrew says. “It made us stronger.”

Responsibility is a key trait Andrew looks for in the role models he strives to emulate. “You have to be responsible in and out of the game,” he says, “because there are so many distractions. You have to learn what really matters.”

Overcoming his own injuries sparked his ambition to become an orthopedist, he says. “It’s intriguing to help someone overcome an injury. You can’t do much better in life than that.”

Both of Andrew’s parents are eye doctors, but he says he isn’t motivated by them as much as he is to do well for them. “I motivate myself to represent my family, my school, my team, and the city of Bloomington.”

Asked what he likes about Bloomington, he replies, “What is there not to like about Bloomington? I love the setting—it’s a beautiful place. Everything is so tight-knit. You have so much diversity, too.”

The one exception to that tight-knit community might be on the Friday night during football season when North plays South. Even so, says Andrew, North’s quarterback, “It’s not like two different sides of town,” he says. “We’re all growing up in the same environment.”

It exemplifies perfectly the advice Andrew would like to give youngsters heading into high school: “Go into everything with an open mind,” he says. “Don’t be closed-minded about anything or anybody, because if you do you won’t live as happy a life.” ✨