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St. Charles North lacrosse's MacKenzie wins lacrosse fan contest

Lacrosse figures to shed its niche sport status in much of the midwest when teenagers choose sides for regular pickup games.

Until then, St. Charles North senior midfielder Cameron MacKenzie holds several picks of destiny. He'll travel to Charlotte, N.C., this weekend to make them.

Last month, Major League Lacrosse selected MacKenzie as one of two honorary team captains for Saturday's all-star game after player and executive voting in the league's Ultimate Fan Fantasy Contest. MacKenzie's three-minute, five-second video served as the backbone of his candidacy, and ultimately landed him a unique opportunity.

"It makes me feel accomplished to be able to set a goal and reach it," MacKenzie said, "then see that dream come true to be able to see and meet these MLL all-stars and learn from them."

This isn't your standard powwow with athletes before the game, then report to your assigned seat. MacKenzie will receive full access during all-star weekend – including a spot on his team's sideline – as well as a personalized jersey.

MacKenzie requested No. 21, which he wears for Naperville-based New Wave Lacrosse during club season. He thinks that's a "cooler number" than the 60 he was issued upon entering what was then the St. Charles co-op program as a freshman.

MacKenzie credits a handful of friends for helping him with video production, namely East lacrosse player Eric Merrill, who edited footage in just a few hours. North football teammate Matt Prestemon had extremely limited experience handling a camera, yet gladly filmed footage of MacKenzie either playing or walking on North's campus.

Other shots included MacKenzie playing in his basement and coaching fourth- and fifth-graders for Tri-Cities -based River City Lacrosse.

"We kind of just wanted to be in it just to help him out," said North junior Eric Koppang. "Just being in the video was enough fun. It was just such a great time that it didn't matter. We really don't expect anything back."

To hear MacKenzie's narration near the beginning of the video, he already has benefited plenty from lacrosse, a sport he took up as a Thompson Middle School seventh-grader:

"Lacrosse isn't just a game. It's a lifestyle. A crazy, demanding lifestyle. It's not for the weak or the faint of heart. It calls for hard work, because talent alone isn't enough. At the end of the day, numbers on stat sheets don't define us as players. But the lessons in pride and character are what make us better people. Our passion for what we love helps us keep in perspective what is truly most important in our lives: Family, friends teammates, school – whatever it is."

MacKenzie remembers forming those feelings when his eighth grade club team traveled to South Bend, Ind., for a tournament and attended a college game between Notre Dame and Syracuse as part of the event.

"Just watching those guys play and hanging out with my friends, it was a great experience," Mackenzie said. "I just said I want to be one of those guys and ever since then I've been working and surrounding myself with everything lacrosse."

That mindset shifted into overdrive in early June, when MLL officials informed MacKenzie that the league had chosen him as one of 20 fantasy candidates.

Already juggling morning football workouts and his youth coaching duties, MacKenzie corralled his buddies when he envisioned his best chance to get to Charlotte.

Candidates had the options of submitting a video, photo or essay illustrating their lacrosse fandom. Co-captain Frank Ranfone, a midfielder for Guilford (Conn.) High School, also entered a video.

MacKenzie's piece is set to music, an instrumental song called "The Intro." As MacKenzie begins receiving recruiting interest – his first letter, from Beloit College, arrived recently – his friends know he's far from finished with lacrosse.

"All the clothes he wears. He always shows me his gear. He always talks about the big tournaments that he goes to," Prestemon said. "I definitely see the dedication, and I can really tell that he loves the game."

An MLL panel agreed. Now MacKenzie is on the clock.