

Latham signs letter of intent to attend Parkland Community College

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
April 15 2016 3:02 PM



GODFREY – Marcus Latham didn't see a lot of playing time his junior year as part of Alton's boys basketball team.

Things were much different this year as Latham took advantage of the opportunity and helped lead the Redbirds to a 16-11 record and their second straight IHSA Class 4A sectional final, where they dropped a narrow decision to East Moline United in the final in Collinsville; he averaged 14.1 points per game last season.

Latham's hard work and effort on the court didn't go unnoticed, and in a ceremony Friday morning, Latham signed a letter of intent to attend Parkland Community College in Champaign next season.

“I think it's going to be a real good school for me,” Latham said following the ceremony. “Coach (Anthony Figueroa, the Cobras' head coach) is going to make sure nothing is going to be given to me; that's how I want to go, I want to earn everything I get.”

Going to Parkland will mean that Latham will be in the shadow of two major university basketball programs, the University of Illinois' in nearby Urbana and Eastern Illinois in Charleston, about an hour south of the Champaign-Urbana area; Latham chose Parkland mostly because of Figueroa. “I feel like he'll push me to be the best I can be,” Latham said, “and he's going to make it hard on me; I feel that it's going to make me the best player I can be.”

“It's exciting,” said **Redbird coach Eric Smith** of Latham's signing with the Cobras. “Marcus is going to get an opportunity to go up to a place where they've really done well with their kids (the Cobras won the 1986 NJCAA national championship and finished sixth in last season's NJCAA Division II Men's Basketball Championship in Danville after winning the Region 24 title). They've had some success since coach Figueroa's been there; they play a tough schedule, they hold the kids accountable – the kids who play for him get better.”

“I'm very, very proud of him,” said Latham's mother, Amy Bechel. “We're hoping he does well and goes on to a bigger school.”

Going to the next level is something Smith talks about with his players. “It's what we talk about with our kids,” Smith said, “whether they choose to come back to Alton or not, which we obviously encourage, it's nice for them, at least at some point in time, to get out and see how other people do things and what it's like in different places.

“It's a bigger area, a bigger community, so there's going to be a lot of different influences, there's going to be a lot of different people he's going to get the opportunity to meet.

Smith recognizes the contributions Latham made to the Redbirds' success over the past season. “Marcus had a good year this year this year,” Smith said. “He's a quality player; he did some really good things for us, but most importantly, some of the leadership stuff he did for us this year, he kind of grew into that role and was kind of a leader.

“He was the one of the first guys off the bench cheering his teammates on when he wasn't in the game. He's been here for the four years I've been here; he came in as a freshman and he's been in almost everything that we've done. He's committed to being a better basketball player, and the nice part about it is that, through this decision, he's put himself in a position where he's going to a place that can help him.”

“I just want to get better, stronger and faster and get myself to the next level after this,” Latham said about what he hopes to accomplish with the Cobras; he plans on majoring in business management at Parkland.