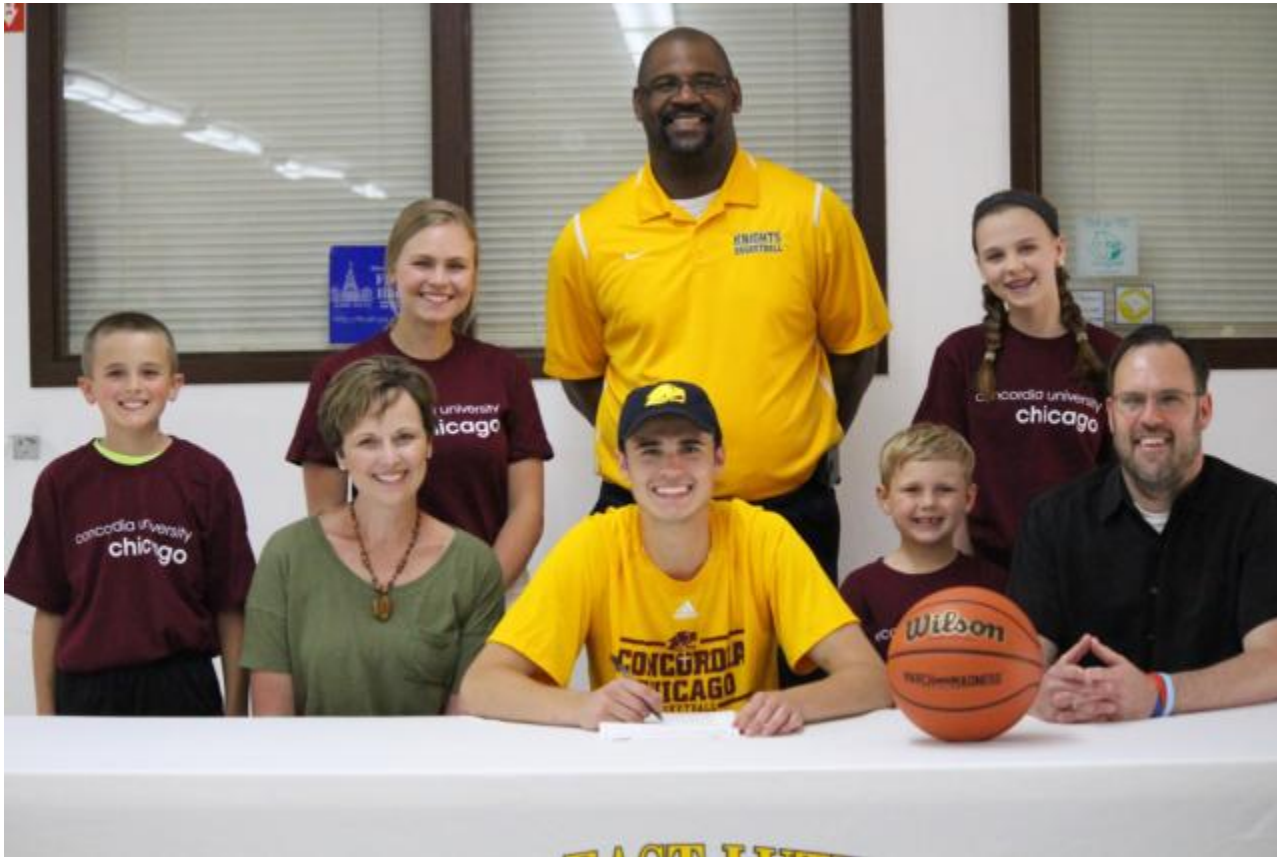


Supported by friends and family, Metro East's JJ Schwarz picks Concordia University

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer
May 20 2017 12:50 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - When you would have asked Metro East Lutheran's J.J. Schwarz about his hopes for the future in 2015, getting healthy was his top priority.

After heading to the doctor for an MRI scan after getting a concussion, Schwarz was diagnosed with Moyamoya disease, a condition that causes the carotid artery to be constricted and block blood flow this brain.

"I went to Boston Children's Hospital to have brain surgery and I was out of basketball activities for about a year," Schwarz said.

Fast forward to May 2017, exactly one day where he is expected to cross the stage at MELHS' graduation ceremony to accept his diploma, and with his family, friends and coach by his side, JJ signed his letter of intent to play basketball and study at Concordia University in Chicago.



"Being able to play at all, at any level, really means a lot to me," he said. "Especially where I was after my surgery."

JJ was joined by his mother, Beth, father, Jeff, and siblings, Emily, Jack, Joey and Katie, and other family members, when he signed his letter of intent on Friday afternoon at MELHS.

His coach, Anthony Smith, has been not only by JJ's side throughout his short, varsity playing career at Metro-East, but has become an extra father figure of sorts in the young man's life. His son, Mark Smith, has been friends and has played ball with JJ throughout their adolescence.

"Playing college ball has always been one of his dreams," Coach Smith said. "My biggest advice for him is to just keep being JJ. He is an example of what hard work can do."



"After everything happened, he had to learn how to play with his left hand. I would stand back and think, wow, this kid is going to do great things."

"Having my whole family here, along with Coach Smith and Mark, means a lot to me," Schwarz said.

Schwarz has grown incredibly fond of the positive, Christian environment that Metro East provides to its students. The faith-based mission influenced his decision to attend Concordia.

"I loved the Christian environment, first and foremost," Schwarz said. "I wanted to go to a school like Metro because I really love it here."

Overall, Schwarz is extremely excited to see what his future at Concordia will reveal.

"It feels so amazing," he said. "I can't wait to go up to Chicago and start the next chapter of my life, my education and play college basketball."

