

Bear Down: Edwardsville cheerleader Paige Way signs letter of intent with Arizona

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE – The University of Arizona's traditional battle cry, “Bear Down”, is going to be said by Edwardsville cheerleader Paige Way when she arrives on the U of A campus in Tuscon this fall.

Way signed a letter of intent to cheer for the Pac-12's Wildcats beginning in the upcoming school year in a ceremony Wednesday at the EHS campus.

The reason Way decided to head to southern Arizona to cheer for the Wildcats was two-fold. "I was looking at the academic aspect and my cheerleading career; I want to be a nurse and they have a really good nursing program," Way said. "That was really important to me when I was deciding on colleges; I was also looking into being able to cheer.

"It was a great mixture of a good environment for my future; when I tried out for the team, it felt like a good home away from home – it seemed like the perfect place for me."

Way won the Illinois Cheerleading Coaches Association scholarship this year, an award based on cheerleaders throughout the state of Illinois who excel in the classroom and on their cheer squads; winning a scholarship award meant much to Way. "One of the most memorable things will be winning (the scholarship award)", Way said. "It's a really big opportunity for me because it's something I've worked for since my freshman year being on the high school team.

"Just getting to showcase my skills and my academics and receiving a scholarship to show I've really worked that hard is a great experience."

Tiger cheerleading coach Cayla Bowen is excited for Way's opportunity in Tucson. "It's very exciting," Bowen said of Way's opportunity. "I'm beyond thrilled for her; I've been her coach since she was a freshman. To see the way she's progressed and how hard and determined she works towards her goals, to finally see her accomplish this major goal is huge. She really could have written her ticket anywhere; she could have gone to any school she chose to – Arizona is definitely very lucky to have her."

Bowen feels that Way has contributed much to the cheerleading program at EHS over the years. "So many things come to mind," Bowen said. "She is a major leader in her work ethic, her determination and above all else, her skills.

"Not only was she a leader on the mat, she was a leader off the mat and excelled academically – she was always wanting to help other people and make everyone else better."

"We could not be more thrilled for Paige," added assistant coach Ashley Walsh. "We're just so excited that she is able to continue her passion; she does have a passion for the sport."

Way plans on obtaining her nursing license after her graduation from Arizona. “I'm going to do two years in (intensive-care unit nursing),” Way said. “After that, I'm going to go back to school to get my doctorate in nursing so I can become nurse anesthetist.”

Way is interested in extending her cheering career as long as possible but is excited about her future regardless. “I'm excited” about what the future may hold, Way said.