

# Donovan Clay's physical and mental growth has Redbirds in good hands

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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Illinois High School		
2ND PLACE LBS - 1973	JIM REZER 2ND PLACE WRESTLING 50LBS - 1974	LE...
DAKETT 2ND 200LBS - 1987	JOE WIER 2ND PLACE WRESTLING 100LBS - 1991	...
4TH PLACE UMP 1998	QUINCY JACKSON 2ND PLACE TRACK-HIGH JUMP 1999	...
2ND PLACE DEBATE 2002	WILL HENDERSON 4TH PLACE TRACK-LONG JUMP 2002	...
3RD PLACE OODS	JENNIFER PALDOR 4TH PLACE TRACK-LONG JUMP 2003	...
BRIAN JONES RELAY 2007	IAN TALBOT REYNOLDS 800M 2007 614.0 900M 2007	...
DE VILLASCA RELAY 2009	DARYL RICE 2ND PLACE TRACK-HIGH JUMP 2010	...
200M BREWSTER RELAY 2011	JESSICA McCASKEY 2ND PLACE 100 METER HURDLES 2010	...
4 2ND PLACE KES - 2016		





ALTON - The only person who didn't recognize the physical growth of Donovan Clay was Donovan Clay.

A year ago Clay was listed at 6-foot-3 inches. Now, the Alton Redbirds senior forward stands at 6-foot-7, and throughout the summer he never felt any different.

"I really didn't feel it to be honest. It just came," Clay said. "Over the summer I was playing basketball at the park, and everybody knew I was getting taller, but I didn't even notice. I knew I was going to be tall because my dad's six-foot-five."

Before his growth-spurt, Clay was already an all-around talented player, but at 6-foot-7 he can be much more of impact. He's taken full advantage of that.

Through 15 games Clay has scored 238 points and averaged 19.8 per game. He's had six games where he's scored over 20 points and put up double-figures in every contest.

On offense, Clay can post up down low in the paint, but the majority of the time he'll have the ball in his hands running the point in the backcourt. Clay is particularly

explosive when he's out top, and a teammate has possession near the baseline with the lane wide open. That's when Clay cuts to the basket, receives a pass at full force and most of the time either scores or gets fouled.

"If the ball is in the corner it's an easy basket because it's so open," Clay said. "My team gets me open looks. We run plays for me, and we execute,"

Clay's growth-spurt has particularly helped him develop into a rim-protector and a shot blocker, which he takes a lot of pride in.

"I love blocks," Clay said with a smile. "It's exciting. Blocks and charges get your team riled up."

So far this season Clay and fellow senior Malik Smith have established one of if not the best scoring tandem in the St. Louis metro area and perhaps the state of Illinois.

Smith has averaged 15.6 points per game and has scored a total of 191.

Clay and Smith have been the two leading scorers for Alton in the last two seasons. The pair has been playing together since their middle school days.

"We've been playing since sixth grade. Playing with each other around streetball got us connected," Clay said.

Alton head coach Eric Smith has been highly impressed with the work Clay, and Smith has put in thus far while pointing out their chemistry.

"Most nights they're going to be two of the top players that are on the floor. That's a nice luxury to have," Alton head coach Eric Smith said. "Those two have been playing together for a long time, so they know how to play off each other. We've had nights where Malik may have 20 and Donovan has 12 and vice-versa. They do a nice job of understanding who's doing well at that point in time."

Heading into 2019, the Redbirds sport a 9-6 record coming off a runner-up finish in the Centralia Holiday Tournament after losing to No. 1 Class 4A ranked and undefeated Belleville West Maroons 62-57 in the championship game.

Considering all of what's happened with the Redbirds this season, to be where they are now is a testament to the players and coaches.

Since the unfortunate brawl between Riverview Gardens on Nov 23 in the Alton Tip-Off Tournament that led to several suspensions and forfeits on both sides, Alton has won

seven out of their last ten games. They knocked off the 14-2 Evanston Wildkits 80-68 in the semifinals at Centralia and before defeated the now 13-3 Collinsville Kahoks 59-57 on a buzzer beater by Clay. Other critical victories for the Redbirds include Belleville East (73-61), Chatham Glenwood (63-50), Memphis Lausanne (68-65), and Mundelein-Carmel (51-45).

“Everything happens for a reason,” Clay said. “I think we’re going to be straight when our team comes back. We’re going to be alright.”













