

# ONE FINAL GAME: Jonas Barnes, Jacob Kitchen Among Senior Players On Edwardsville, Granite City, Get Opportunity To Play Again

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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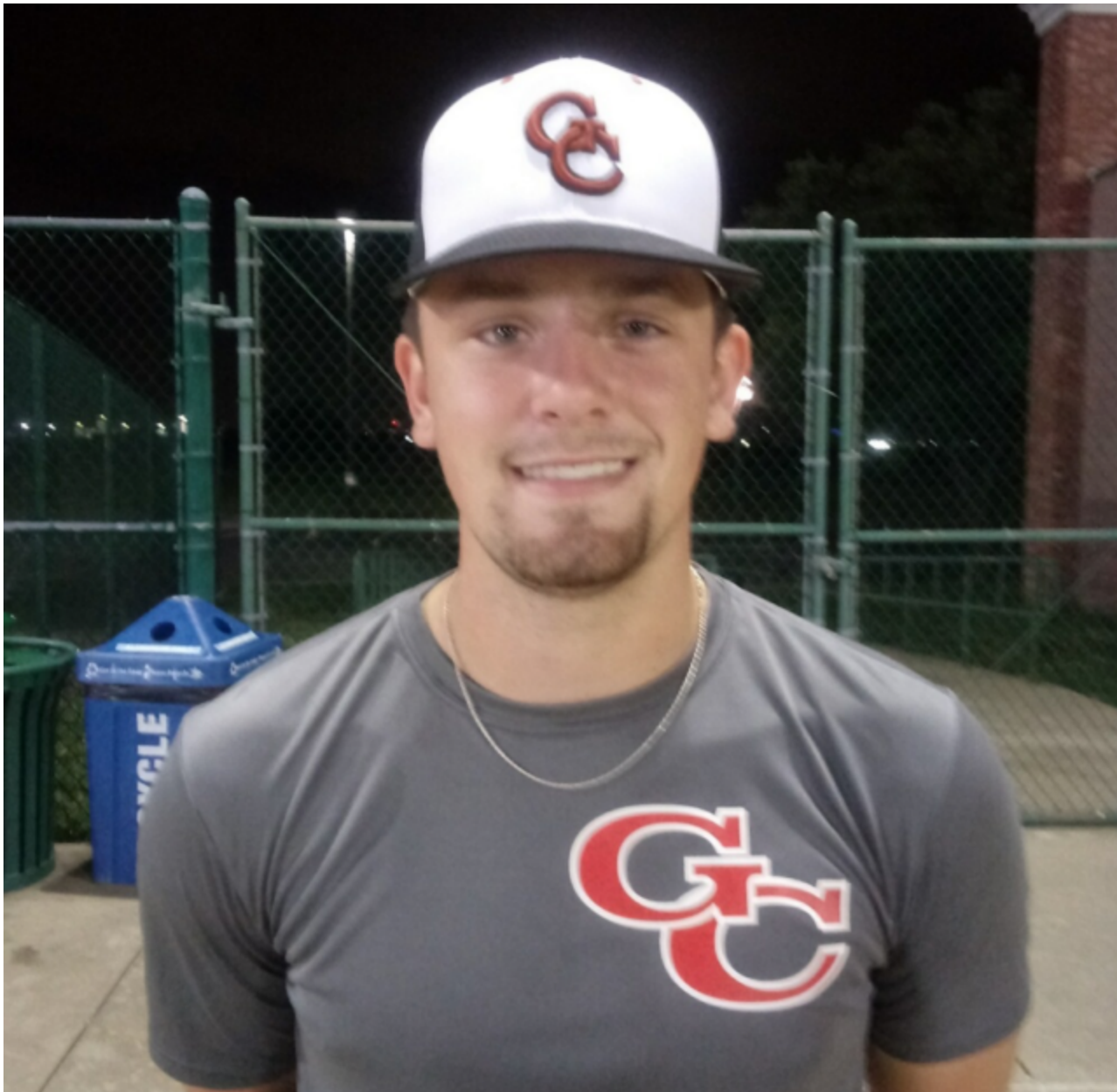


SAUGET - One of the biggest losses that came when the Illinois High School Association canceled the 2020 spring sports season because of the COVID-19 pandemic was that the seniors were denied their final season to play with their teammates and in a sport they truly love.

But the Gateway Grizzlies of the Frontier League created the Sandlot Series to give Metro-East high school teams one final chance to play for their schools, and on Monday night at GCS Ballpark, Edwardsville and Granite City had the chance to play under a bright spotlight, and the seniors were able to shine as the Tigers defeated the Warriors 5-1.

Edwardsville seniors Grant Coffey, Ryan Kulasakara, Gavin Huebner, Nick Logan, Logan Cromer, Drake Westcott, Gavin Reames, Jacob Kitchen, Collin Salter and Weston Slemmer, along with Granite seniors Dylan Pritchett, Brayden Bennett, Jonas Barnes, Bennett Smallie, Freddy Edwards, Spencer Barrett, Aaron Gibson and Nathan Merz were honored in pregame ceremonies, as was Tiger senior Paul Kampwerth, who is currently in basic training with the Illinois Air National Guard. The singing of the National Anthem was dedicated to Kampwerth and his family, and was sung by another senior, Granite City's London Kimble.

After the game, both Barnes and Kitchen talked about their experiences during their time with their respective schools and also offered their perspectives on the lost season.



"Oh, yeah, I was thrilled," Barnes said. "It was my one and only chance to really prove myself my senior year, and I feel like I did a good job, but it felt good out there, and it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me."

As his teammates, Barnes felt very disappointed over the cancellation of the season.

"It was heartbreak," Barnes said. "I couldn't really express it, because it never really happened before, and I was so mad, sad, I couldn't really express it. But I wanted to get after it and after it more and more and more."

But the thrill of being able to play one last game with the Warriors, especially in a venue such as GCS Ballpark, was a big thrill for Barnes.

"It was great," Barnes said. "I mean, a lot of pressure, because there were a lot of people here. But it was just fun being out here with all my friends again, and you can't take that away from anybody."



Kitchen expressed a similar viewpoint about finally getting to play a senior game.

"Yes, it was a great thrill," Kitchen said. "I had a blast, and it was really awesome to be back here with the guys one last time. It was really special, and to do it in orange and black really put the cherry on top."

Kitchen also felt disappointment and hurt over the announcement of the cancellation of the season.

"You know, when we got told we wouldn't have a season, we were kind of bummed," Kitchen said. "It was just really hard to comprehend why they would take our season away, but it's for the better, for health and safety issues, and all that. So I'm glad we were able to do this."

And as much as sports are an important part of people's lives, no game or event is worth risking the health and safety of those involved.

"I feel the same exact way," Kitchen said. "I feel that sports are not as important as people's lives are. If we can save lives, we should do that, and that's what I think about that."

As for both players' futures, it involves college baseball. Barnes is going to play baseball at Illinois College in Jacksonville, and hopes to improve as a player there.

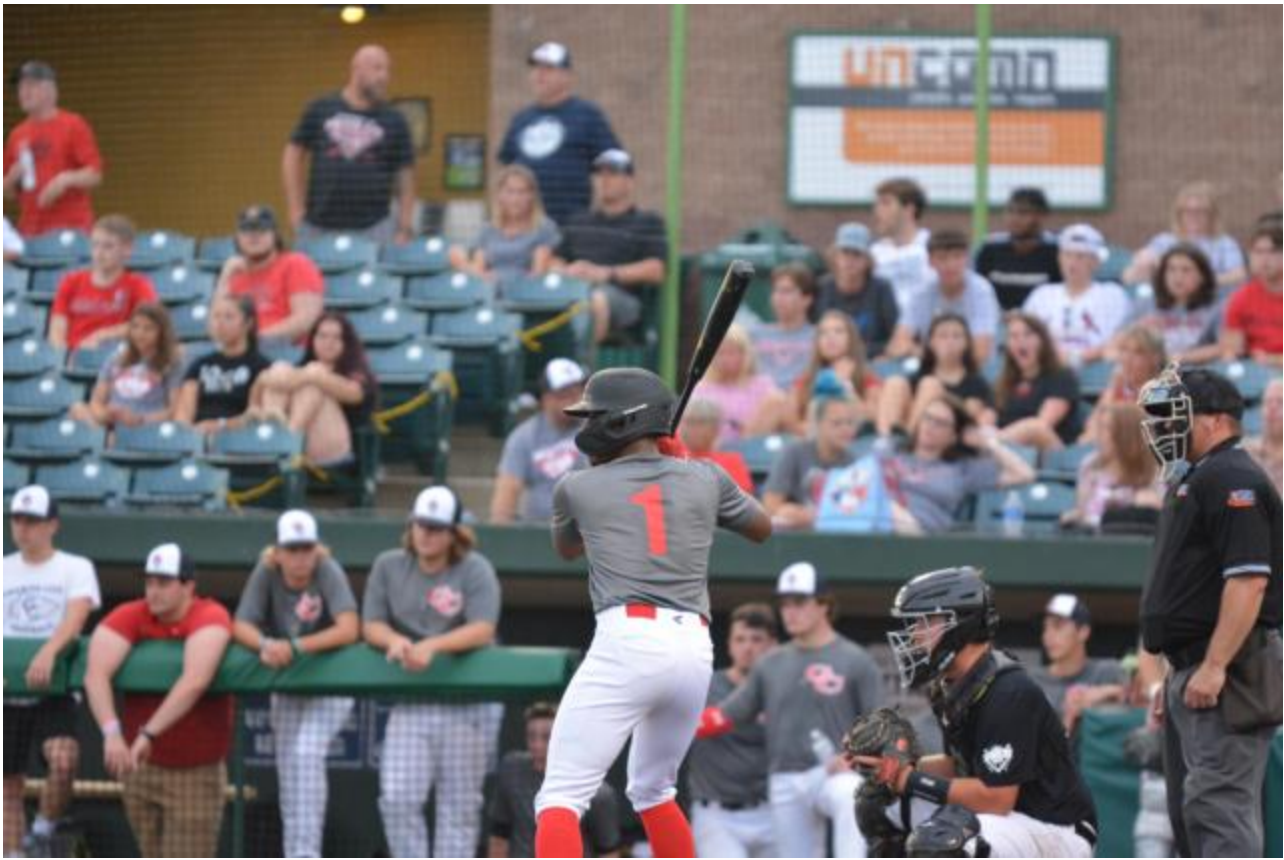
"Just get stronger, get bigger, more athletic," Barnes said, "and whatever happens happens. I'm just going to go with it."

For Kitchen, he'll be going to Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Ky., majoring in business, and will attempt to make the Hilltopper baseball team as a walk-on.

"And if that doesn't work out, I'll just enjoy my time down there in Bowling Green," Kitchen said. "I'm gonna have a blast, and enjoy college."

And there's also great memories for Kitchen of the Tiger team that won the IHSA Class 4A state championship in 2019.

"Nothing but great memories at all," Kitchen said. "We'll cherish those the rest of our lives. It was so cool to be able to get out here one last time, and it really was pretty awesome, and I was glad we were able to."





The positive vibrations of the Edwardsville title, and for life in general, is the way Kitchen looks at life.

"The good feelings are never going to end," Kitchen said. "Positive vibes for the rest of your life, man. That's how you've gotta live life. You can't let little things get down on you."

For Barnes, it was a chance to take advantage of a great opportunity, and he took full measure of it, with everyone on the Warriors enjoying the moment.

"Yeah, everyone enjoyed themselves," Barnes said. "There was a little turbine, but I just wanted to play and have fun, being with friends the last time. But I just wanted to have fun."

When asked about a favorite memory of his time with Granite, Barnes didn't hesitate.

"I think my first home run at home," Barnes said. "But I just couldn't explain that feeling. I'd do it over and over again a thousand times."

The playing of his final game for the Warriors is one that Barnes won't soon forget.

"Yeah, it'll be something I'll never forget," Barnes said. "It'll be something I'll never forget. But it's just being out, being able to play with my friends again, and be out there. A great experience."

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)