



# **Powerlifter Maxon Karnes Signs With McKendree University, Looks Forward To Competing Plus Helping To Popularize Sport**

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EDWARDSVILLE - Powerlifting isn't a well-known sport in the United States, but an Edwardsville High student is hoping to both succeed in the sport and to help popularize it in both the area and across the country.

Maxon Karnes, a senior at Edwardsville, signed a letter of intent in a ceremony at the school to join the powerlifting team at McKendree University in Lebanon. He'll compete for the Bearcats in local and national competitions against other schools, and is looking forward to the challenges that await.

For Karnes, attending McKendree was an easy choice: The school's close to home, and there's also a family legacy as well.

"It's close to home, and it's been in my family; both my parents went there," Karnes said in an interview that followed the ceremony. "it's a great school, and I look forward to going there and powerlifting."

Powerlifting is a very physical strength sport, which is competed in various weight classes, much like wrestling. There's three disciplines in each meet - the squat, bench press and deadlift. Each competitor gets three attempts at each discipline, and the highest weight lifted in each section is counted towards both an individual and team score. It's a sport that Karnes has been interested and involved with since a young age.

"I've always loved the weight room," Karnes said, "and I've been lifting weights since I was a little kid, and it's just always been my passion. When I figured out this was a sport and I could do it competitively, from then on, it was all I wanted to do."

Bearcat head coach Guillermo Blanco, who also is the strength and conditioning coach for various McKendree teams, thinks that Karnes brings a solid work ethic and who'll help bring out the best in his teammates.

"He brings a lot of hard work to the table," Blanco said. "He's going to be a great teammate, going to bring out everyone's hard work and energy levels in the weight room, and that's what we're looking for. On the academic side, obviously, he's done pretty well there. So he's going to help us out in that area as well."

There aren't a lot of varsity powerlifting teams in the country, but the Bearcats regularly compete against schools such as Midland University in Fremont, Neb., Ottawa University in Ottawa, Kan., and Missouri Valley College in Marshall, Mo., among others. And such as any other sport, team chemistry and togetherness is most important.

"Exactly," Blanco said. "It's similar to track and field, where it's very individual, but at the same time, it's much a team sport when it comes to training and practice, and obviously, at the end of the day, scoring. When we go to bigger competitions, we compete as a team."

Karnes is planning on majoring in exercise science at McKendree. and didn't consider any other school other than McKendree. There's also a mental aspect to the sport as well.

"The mental aspect of the sport is everything," Karnes explained. "You've got to have your mind right to be able to lift the weights."

Karnes does hope to continue powerlifting after graduation, and also has aspirations on competing in the Olympic Games should powerlifting be added to the program by the International Olympic Committee in the future.

"If that's the direction the sport goes, that will be 100 percent my goal," Karnes said.

Outside of continuing to compete in powerlifting, Karnes isn't sure what he'll do after graduating with his degree, but may become a strength and conditioning coach as well.

Blanco, who's competed as a powerlifter for six years, and became the Bearcats' head coach in 2018, has very high expectations for Karnes as he begins his collegiate career.

"I have some pretty high expectations for him," Blanco said. "Right now, he's really grown on his own. I think once he gets to campus with us, and he's trained under my guidance, he's going to excel very well."

Karnes closed by saying he is looking forward to begin competing at McKendree, and help expand the sport's popularity.