

McGivney's Smith/Rodgers Both Sign Division I Letters Of Intent - Both Are Byron Carlson Petri & Kalb Male Athletes Of The Month

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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GLEN CARBON - Wednesday afternoon, seniors Gabe Smith and Jackson Rodgers became the baseball program's first Division I commits at Father McGivney.

According to McGivney head coach Chris Erwin, there aren't two other guys more deserving to get to continue their baseball careers.

“It starts with their work ethic. There isn’t anyone working harder than they are,” Erwin said.

He mentioned that Jack is more of a “vocal leader” while Gabe is “kind of quiet and goes about his work.”

When asked about what he’ll miss the most about Jackson and Gabe, Erwin jokingly said “the wins.”

“The wins are fun, but to see the kids develop and achieve their dreams, there’s nothing better,” he said.

Smith and Rodgers' freshman season was canceled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, but when they came back for their sophomore season, they were ready to work.

In just two years they compiled 63 wins with their team. They started out on the mound in 24 of those games.

The Griffins boasted a 31-7 record in the 2021 season where they were runners-up in the IHSA Class 2A State Championship. Then in their junior season, they notched another impressive record of 32-5 helped by a 28-game win streak that wouldn't see them lose a game in the month of April.

Smith will be heading to the University of Mississippi, or Ole Miss, where he plans to study business finance. He mentioned one day wanting to become a financial advisor.

He said that a couple of other colleges were in the mix with Indiana and East Carolina also being options. He said he got to visit all three, but after seeing Oxford, Mississippi, he knew that's where he wanted to be.

He mentioned the town's atmosphere and fan support as well as his working relationship with assistant coach Carl Lafferty.

"I was going to pick the school that was going to develop me the most, help me become the best baseball player that I could and I think Ole Miss and their coaching staff has the best chance to do that," Smith said.

As for Rodgers, he'll be heading to Macomb to Western Illinois University. He also had some other schools like Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and Eastern Illinois University, but he'll become a Leatherneck next fall at WIU.

"I'm just looking forward to the growth that the program is going through," Rodgers said. "They've got a new coach," he mentioned.

"I went down there for a football game and the atmosphere was electric. I'm just excited to be a part of that."

He also plans to study business but also hinted at the Sports Management Department at WIU.

Both Smith and Rodgers will miss Father McGivney, but also look forward to getting out in the world.

"I'm going to miss the tight-knit family of it," Rodgers said. "Coming from a school of 200 kids you get to know everyone pretty well, but it's time to get out there and make some new relationships."

Smith said he'll miss the small atmosphere and the love that everyone has for each other.

"Like we say all the time, we're one big family, but I'm excited about my new family in Oxford."

They were able to enjoy National Signing Day after the years of dedication they've put into the sport.

"We both work pretty hard, we're both training together and it's just a culmination of all that hard work," Rodgers said.

"If you put in the work and you truly love the game, anything is possible," said Smith.

The two are both going to their respective colleges to focus on pitching, both being right-handed starters, although they can still swing the bat with the best of them.

Smith was batting .404 while Rodgers had a .444 average a year ago. The two combined for 96 RBIs last season and 12 home runs.

Smith made 10 starts on the mound last season to Rodgers' nine. The two combined for 133 strikeouts.

"That's my thing. That's my love. It's in my blood," Smith said about pitching.

Both agreed that committing to colleges before their senior season takes some stress out of it. It lets them focus on some unfinished business.

"We have one common goal and that's to win state," Smith said.

"That was the goal last year and with an early exit, it just lights that fire even more," Rodgers said. "We're looking to make some noise in the spring."

"We're not done," Erwin said. "We got one big year left."

NATIONAL *Signing* DAY

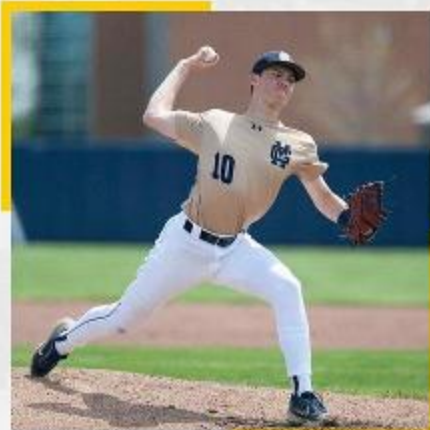


GABE SMITH

EDWARDSVILLE, IL • RHP

Ole Miss

NATIONAL SIGNING DAY



JACKSON RODGERS

GLEN CARBON, IL

W

6-1 170 RHP

HEIGHT

WEIGHT

POS

