



Griffins' Ryker Keller Signs With Concordia, Is A Byron, Carlson, Petri & Kalb Male Athlete of Month

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November 22 2023 11:18 AM



GLEN CARBON - Father McGivney Catholic senior baseball pitcher Ryker Keller signed a letter of intent to attend Concordia University in River Forest, Ill., in suburban Chicago, in a recent ceremony held in the school's chapel.

Keller, who's become one of the St. Louis area's premier relief pitchers, was an outstanding 4-0 with five saves in 19 appearances in the 2023 season as the Griffins went 37-2, winning their first 29 games and advancing to the IHSA Class 2A sectional final before losing to Columbia. Keller had a 1.14 ERA and allowed only 13 hits on the season, walking eight and striking out 23. Keller is a Byron, Carlson, Petri & Kalb Male Athlete of the Month for the Griffins.

Keller had a variety of reasons why he chose Concordia, both baseball and academic.

"I really liked the school," Keller said in a post-ceremony interview, "the coaching staff, and I liked how they were really approaching the baseball side and the side of growing young men."

The fact that the school is also in suburban Chicago was also a factor in Keller's decision.

"It was like four hours away," Keller said, "so they made it feel like home. So, that was nice."

Keller also considered Illinois College in Jacksonville to attend school and plans in majoring in sports management or business. The Cougars have a very good NCAA Division-III team and Keller is looking forward to the chance.

"They've had some really good teams." Keller said, "and they have a really good baseball culture. And hopefully, we can put together a couple of winning seasons."

Keller has been one of the key contributors to McGivney's success in baseball, which includes a 31-7 mark and a second-place finish in Class 1A in 2021 and a 32-5 mark in 2022, losing in the regional final to Breese Mater Dei Catholic. in addition to last season's success. He's looking forward to his senior season.

"Yeah, it's going to be a lot of fun," Keller said. "Hopefully, we can make a deep run. I really hope we can finally break through and hopefully win it all."

Griffins head coach Chris Erwin is very proud of both Keller and his other signee, catcher Nick Franklin, who signed with Longwood University in Farmville, Va.

"A big day in the Griffin household, " Erwin said, "and the Griffin baseball family today."

Erwin feels that Keller will be a good fit with the Cougars and will also bring much to the table.

"I think he's going to be very successful at Concordia," Erwin said. "The fact that he can throw a lot of strikes, throw many different pitches for strikes, not wavered by the competition, I think that bodes really well for him at the collegiate level."

Keller has been a very important player in McGivney's rise to the top in baseball, and Erwin agrees he's been a very important player for the Griffins.

"Ryker has been one of the difference makers for us the last couple of years," Erwin said. "Being able to put him in the back end of every game, knowing he's going to find a way to get those outs, whether it be three outs or six outs against any opponent we play so far. He's been extremely good, extremely efficient, and really helped us finish games throughout the last two years."

Just as important is the kind of person Keller is, always willing to help out younger players and being a mentor to them, making them feel welcome and an important part of the team.

"We talk about the baseball stuff," Erwin said, "but as a young man, it doesn't get much better than these two guys that recently signed to play baseball in college. Ryker is always working with the younger guys, he's always helping the guys out.

"It's something from the head coaching perspective that you really want to see, a guy like Ryker looking down and helping a freshman or a sophomore that's trying to understand how to develop or command a pitch, how to work through a game or keep mentally focused throughout a game, and Ryker does all those things very well."

For Keller's part, he feels he's also bringing a lot to the table for the Cougars.

"I hope I can bring to them that I can take some innings when they need it," Keller said, "just whatever they need, something they can rely on. And hopefully, I can be that guy."

Keller doesn't see himself as a starter or a closer, but as a pitcher who can do whatever is needed to bring home the wins.

"I like to consider myself a pitcher," Keller said, "not a starter, not a closer, just someone who they need to pitch."

Keller has a variety of pitches at his command that he uses to great effectiveness with the Griffins and hopes to do the same with the Cougars.

"I've got my fastball, my curveball, slider and change-up," Keller said. "I align all of them deeply, so just whatever the situation calls on."

Again, congrats to Ryker Keller for his recognition as a Byron, Carlson, Petri & Kalb Male Athlete of the Month for the Griffins.