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The Recruit

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Adam Carper is sitting on a weight bench. Sweat runs down his face, dripping onto the floor. He breathes deeply, his muscles aching, as he rests between sets. These deep breaths are the only sound in Clarinda (IA) High School. It’s a snow day. All his classmates are home, enjoying the day off. Adam picks up the dumbbells and starts his next set.

Adam isn’t your ordinary high school athlete. He’s a Division I football recruit. Check that - he’s our Division I football recruit. Next fall, he’ll be trotting onto the field of Jack Trice Stadium with the rest of the Iowa State Cyclones.

Follow Adam’s journey from being Clarinda’s golden boy to one of Coach Dan McCarney’s strongest, most versatile recruits.

SUMMER 2002 - THE IOWA SHRINE BOWL

The Shrine Bowl, an all-star football game for Iowa’s finest high school seniors, is held annually at Jack Trice Stadium. Adam's dad, Dave, has been selected to coach the South team. Dave, also Clarinda’s head football coach, spends the week in Ames and Adam tags along, getting his first glimpse of the Iowa State campus in the process. During the week of practices before the game, Adam, who was Clarinda’s starting varsity quarterback the previous fall as a sophomore, fills in during certain passing drills and finds himself throwing to the state’s best receivers. It’s just another week of preparation for Adam.

Adam returns from Ames with a new perspective. “When he came back from being with Dave at the Shrine Bowl, it was obvious that he really liked the campus,” Adam’s mom, Jolene, says. “That was the first time I ever heard him talk about ISU.”
SEPTEMBER 2002 - ADAM'S JUNIOR YEAR

Both Adam and his dad are busy preparing the upcoming season. Imagine what a family dinner is like at the Carper house. The topics of conversation range from football to football...and football. "Most fathers and sons don't get the opportunity that we do," Adam says. "It's nice to be able to go home and have somebody who understands what I'm going through."

After an impressive sophomore season, Adam is already garnering national attention. He's receiving recruitment letters from Division I programs including Iowa, Iowa State, Michigan, Kansas State, Colorado, and his favorite team, Nebraska. Saturday afternoons at the Carper house are focused on Cornhusker football. Clad in Nebraska red, the family of five gathers around the television, cheering loudly after every touchdown. However, Iowa State and Kansas State have shown the most interest in Adam so far.

NOVEMBER 2002 - THE STATE PLAYOFFS

The Clarinda Cardinals make it to the state playoffs. Following wins over Nodaway Valley and Carlisle, Adam and Clarinda find themselves at the UNI Dome in Cedar Falls for the first time ever. But Clarinda loses to Emmetsburg, 27-7.

The season wasn't without its high points, though. Adam had a major impact on both sides of the ball. He accounted for over 2,000 rushing and passing yards combined. He rushed for 15 touchdowns while passing for 12 more. At defensive back, he recorded 52 tackles, four fumble recoveries, and four interceptions and was named first-team all-state. The numbers don't lie.

JUNE 2003 - IOWA STATE FOOTBALL CAMP

For a week each summer, recruits from across the country come to Ames to show Cyclone coaches their skills, hoping to stand out among the pack of players. The camp is invite-only, so each player is already on Iowa State's radar and this week will go a long way towards determining who has the talent to play D-I. Throughout the week, the recruits are put through a series of drills with coaches looking on, scoring their performances. Out of the 200 athletes at the camp, Adam is tied for first in the overall standings at the end of the week.

Due to a strained calf muscle, Adam sits out the last night of camp. While on the sidelines, Coach McCarney approaches Adam. They talk about football, Iowa State, the coaches, and the campus. McCarney gives Adam a hard time about being a Nebraska fan, pointing out that the Cyclones defeated the Cornhuskers in the previous season. Then, McCarney asks Adam if he'd like to be a part of the Cyclone program and offers him a scholarship. At first, Adam can't believe what he's hearing. "I just smiled at him," Adam says. "I didn't really know what to say, so I just smiled at him."

From the first day of camp, McCarney says he had "no doubt" he was going to offer Adam a scholarship. "I really liked his athleticism," McCarney says. "He's my kind of guy, and my kind of player."

Adam tells McCarney that ISU is one of his top choices, but he wants to weigh his options and talk with his parents before he makes any decisions.

The next day Adam is scheduled to attend the Iowa Hawkeyes football camp. He drives to Iowa City, weighing the Cyclone scholarship offer during the two-hour trip. "I knew all of the hard work had finally paid off," he says. "All of the lifting and running was worth it." He arrives in Iowa City, but only stays for the basic part of the camp. It seems pointless to finish out the week. He's anxious to get home and tell his parents he wants to be a Cyclone.

JUNE 18, 2003 - Verbal Commitment

At 1:00 p.m., Adam picks up the phone and calls Coach McCarney to inform him that he will play for the Cyclones. Adam talked a lot with his parents before he commits to the Cyclones and they decided he had nothing to lose by accepting early. "We thought it was an ideal situation for him to go into," Dave says. "His mother and I will have the chance to go to most of his games, since even away games are pretty close."
While a verbal commitment shows a recruit's college of choice at the time, it's not binding. Adam could still end up something other than a Cyclone. "It's very unlikely I will de-commit because I feel comfortable at ISU and they've shown confidence in me from the beginning," Adam says. "My options are still open, but I'm confident Iowa State is where I'll end up."

In a town of five thousand, it's not uncommon for a sports star like Adam to be a focal point of the community. He's revered by the people of Clarinda. Dozens of fans line up after football games to congratulate him on another amazing performance. Parents drive their sons to the local barber shop to get their hair dyed dirty blond, just like Adam's. Adam is even the high school's homecoming king. It's exactly what a senior year should be.

Committing early takes a lot of pressure off Adam during his senior season. He no longer feels he has to put up big numbers every single game to impress the scouts. "I just went out there and enjoyed playing with my team and winning." The downside to committing early is that teams get fired up to play against Adam. Each week, Adam knows the opposing team is going to play their best game of the year.

But it doesn't matter. The Cardinals not only beat the teams they play, but they blow them out. They finish the regular season undefeated. They beat their district's second-ranked team by 36 points, and they win their district championship for the third time in four years.

Adam and the Cardinals carry their regular season momentum into the state playoffs. After beating Carlisle, 42-17, and Eddyville-Blakesburg, 59-7, Adam and Clarinda advance to the state semifinals where they face Emmetsburg for the second consecutive year. Unfortunately, the Cardinals fall again, 24-14.

Despite the disappointing conclusion, Adam again put up amazing numbers on both sides of the ball in 2003. At quarterback, he completed 140 passes for 1,154 yards, 14 touchdowns and only two interceptions. He also ran for over 1,000 yards and 18 touchdowns. Adam even caught one touchdown pass on a trick play. On defense, Adam had 71 tackles and seven interceptions. He was named first-team all-state at defensive back and was the team captain on the Des Moines Register's Elite 11 team. He also will play on the South team in the 2004 Iowa Shrine Bowl this summer.

This is the day Adam has waited for, the day he has dreamt about since the first time he held a football. Standing in the Clarinda High School media center, surrounded by his parents, the school's principal and athletic director, and a photographer from the local paper, Adam officially signs the National Letter of Intent to play at Iowa State. "When I signed, I felt like I'd only achieved part of my goal. Helping Iowa State win is the other." Many people wonder why a talented recruit like Adam would choose to come to Iowa State. "It hasn't affected me at all," he says. "I think they are a young team and in the next couple years, we're going to surprise a lot of people."

The Cyclone coaching staff is ecstatic to have him. McCarney can see Adam becoming one of the team's strongest defensive players, most likely as a safety. "He brings a lot of versatility," McCarney says. "We'll coach him and get him ready to play this year, and if he's not ready, we'll red-shirt him."

McCarney has no doubt that Adam will bring much more to this campus than simply being a great football player. "He's confident, but not arrogant. Believes in himself, but isn't cocky. He's unselfish, a team guy, and just a dominant athlete."

"I think he's going to have a beautiful, bright future here at Iowa State."