

Edwardsville's A.J. Epenesa makes verbal commitment to University of Iowa to play football

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - Edwardsville three-sport star A.J. Epenesa has made a decision to attend the University of Iowa next year to play football.

Epenesa, 6-foot-6, 235 pounds, made a verbal commitment to the University of Iowa this past weekend. He will follow his father, Eppy, playing football at the university. A. J. Epenesa is a defensive end/tight end for the Tigers. The Tigers were 9-1 last year. A.J. was a leader on defense, posting 44 tackles, seven sacks and three fumble recoveries.

Eppy Epenesa starred on defense for the Hawkeyes from 1995 to 1997.

Edwardsville head football coach Matt Martin said there has been a buzz started around the University of Iowa and in the Big 10 with A.J. making the verbal commitment.

“If you have spent any time in Iowa, there is something about playing major college sports where you don’t have a pro sports team,” Martin said. “(University of) Iowa is the biggest show in the state and it seems like in states that don’t have pro sports team they get more support.”

A.J. Epenesa is a high school All-American selection and one of the most highly touted football recruits in the country. Coach Martin said A.J. is the most highly recruited Edwardsville football player in his time other than Rodney Coe.

Martin said he thinks A.J. has the potential to be a great college player, but it is like anything, he will have to work at it.

“A.J. will be 18 competing against 23-year-olds and I don’t care how good you are, it is tough,” Martin said. “He will sink or swim and I think he will swim. He has been blessed.”

Coach Martin said players like A.J. Epenesa make his job easy, because he simply has to reemphasize somewhat what they hear at home from the parents. He said A.J. is a “great” kid and comes from a wonderful family with high values for him as a person, athletically and in the classroom.

A.J. is averaging 15 points a game and 12 rebounds per contest for Edwardsville’s varsity basketball team this season. He is now the Edwardsville High School record holder in the discus with a toss of 194 feet and he placed second in the discus at the IHSA state meet and eighth in the shot put.

Martin said he thought A.J. Epenesa making the verbal commitment might slow college recruiters a bit, but he said until someone signs, colleges don’t normally give up that easily on a prized recruit.

