



File/SJ-R

Brian McMillen played basketball for UIS from 2004 to 2006.

McMillen focused on the team

Played a big role in Pana. UIS sports

By AMANDA REAVY

STAFF WRITER

Whether he was blocking football players twice his size as an offensive lineman or guarding the opposing team's best player in basketball, Brian McMillen was an athlete focused on the good of his team.

"He was the type of kid that didn't care about his stats. He was a good shooter, capable of scoring, but that wasn't what mattered to him. ... He was a kid that knows what it takes to win and was willing to do whatever his role may be," Pana High School varsity basketball coach Gary Bowker recalled Monday.

He said McMillen's work ethic and sacrifice played a major role in the basketball team's second place finish in the Class A State Tourna-

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ment in 2001, his senior year.

"How he played basketball carried over his entire life. He was unselfish, always doing whatever to help out. He went from high school to the military ... he continued serving as (an Illinois) state trooper. It's just the way he was," Bowker said.

Therefore, he said, it's not surprising that the 24-year-old trooper was en route to assist fellow law enforcement officers handling a bar fight when he was killed in a three-vehicle collision near Illiopolis. The two other drivers were allegedly driving drunk.

"You watch movies with gladiators and warriors. The only thing warriors like that fear is a dishonorable death. ... They want to die on the battlefield; a captain wants to go down with his ship. For Brian, he was hustling his tail off to help someone in need in an unselfish manner and that's just so typical."

A day after his death, McMillen's family and friends as well as former coaches and teammates continued to mourn the loss of the officer, soldier, standout scholar and competitor.

"Brian was a true model of the student-athlete, an outstanding young man and just a pleasure to have in our athletic program," University of Illinois at Springfield Athletic Director Rodger Jehlicka said in a news release. "It is sad to see someone like Brian taken from this world way too soon."

McMillen received his bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the UIS and was a member of the basketball team from 2004 through 2006. He was also twice named to the dean's list and Academic All Conference Team.

A member of the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Fighter Wing, McMillen transferred to UIS from Lincoln Land Community College.

He approached Coach Kevin Gamble and tried out for the men's basketball program, then only in its third year, the news release said.

He was accepted and in 2006, McMillen was named the team's Champion of Character during its first trip to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics basketball tournament in Kansas City, Mo.

As part of the honor, McMillen made a presentation to three groups of elementary school students about the five values of a NAIA Champion of Character: sportsmanship, integrity, servant leadership, respect and responsibility, the release said.

Former UIS student Brad Ward, who now lives in Indianapolis, met McMillen at UIS' open gym ses-



McMillen

Funeral arrangements

Trooper Brian McMillen's obituary. **PAGE 17**

sions, where they started to play basketball with a group several nights a week.

"He was a unique kind of competitive. You knew he was there to win, but he would never drop his head, get upset, criticize a teammate or give up. He was a leader by example on the court and off the court," Ward wrote in an e-mail to the newspaper.

Ward, who was president of the UIS Blue Crew student cheering section, said McMillen was always a crowd pleaser with his tight defense and ability to hit three-pointers.

Ward and McMillen married their wives, Jennifer and Angela, respectively, in July 2006, and before the nuptials, both couples found themselves in the same dance class.

"I think Brian and I were both a little embarrassed when we saw each other at the first lesson, but that didn't last long. He always made it a great time, even when we were tripping over ourselves or our brides-to-be," Ward wrote.

Bowker recalled becoming Pana's head basketball coach in 1999 and learning McMillen was also a lineman on the football team.

"This kid is not that big, but he was a strong kid and tough. He's blocking guys that weigh 100 pounds more. ... He liked to get up in the trenches and bang around with the big guys," Bowker said. "He then turned around and was a guard on the basketball team."

In addition to being named to All-Conference teams in both sports, McMillen was Defensive Player of the Year and Top Linebacker in football as well as the First National Bank Senior of the Year, UIS' news release said.

Bowker praised McMillen's parents, Terry and Jane McMillen of Pana, for instilling a good work ethic in McMillen and his 10 brothers and sisters, several of whom play sports as well.

"He was just a great human being, a great role model," Bowker said. "Somebody like that always makes somebody better. A guy that leads by example, showing what to do and how to do it, and it carries over with everybody involved in anything he was a part of - the military, the state police. He makes everyone around him better."

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