



De Bord embraces tough path

St. Charles East graduate part of lacrosse program at Air Force Academy

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Will De Bord returned home for his older brother's wedding last weekend, the type of trip virtually all of his former St. Charles East classmates would take for granted during the heart of the school year, let alone summertime.

But De Bord is living a college lifestyle to which few can relate. At the Air Force Academy, even a weekend trek home for a sibling's wedding does not come simply.

"It wasn't easy at all," De Bord said of receiving special permission to attend the wedding of his oldest brother, Brett. "It really helps that I was one of the groomsmen. They were understanding about it once I explained this is my brother's wedding, and I'd do anything to get back for that because it's family. I was lucky, very fortunate, to be back for those couple days."

As most of De Bord's old high school friends celebrate the Fourth of July at family cookouts and parties, De Bord, a member of Air Force's men's lacrosse team, is back at the academy near Colorado Springs, Colorado. A class of 2013 St. Charles East graduate, De Bord recently completed his first year at Air Force, a year that tested his physical and mental toughness on a daily basis.

"They expect everyone to be fit here," De Bord said. "They've got some levels they want you to be at and you definitely have to abide by those, but I think at the end of the day, it definitely comes down to the mental side, just the will to keep going and keep excelling."

De Bord arrived at the academy in late June 2013, about a month after his high school graduation, for six weeks of basic training. He said he lost about 10 pounds during training before launching into the heart of his highly regimented first year as a "fourth class cadet."

His days were an exhausting blend of military training sessions, class, lacrosse practice, studying and other obligations, with few social privileges granted. De Bord anticipated a demanding year, but said he couldn't have understood the extent of the challenges until experiencing them firsthand.

"It definitely takes a lot of work, and you have to remember the reasons why you're here and really keep a level head," said De Bord, who, along with his classmates, was promoted to third class cadet at Air Force graduation in late May. "But at the end of the day, that's exactly why I'm here, to serve."

Competing for the Falcons' lacrosse team only heightened the level of commitment in De Bord's transition to the academy – long training runs in Colorado's famous altitude were no treat – but lacrosse also accounted for some of De Bord's most enjoyable moments.

Along with weekly phone conversations with family members, De Bord credited his lacrosse teammates for helping him maintain his sense of resolve.

"I could always count on [my family] to have my back and for my dad to say 'Suck it up,' but here being at the academy, the lacrosse team honestly is a close fraternity of guys," De Bord said. "One of our sayings when we break every huddle is 'Got your back,' so guys on the team really care and understand what you're going through because they're doing it right alongside you. Some of the best times I've had, most of the best times I've had, have been with those guys."

De Bord, a defenseman, played sparingly in his debut season but loved being along for the journey, which ended for the Falcons with an NCAA tournament loss to eventual national champion Duke.

While playing lacrosse has been a longtime passion for De Bord, another athletic pursuit – swimming – took more acclimating. De Bord is interested in a potential career arc in combat rescue.

"It takes a lot of swimming and water confidence," De Bord said. "That's something I've had to [adjust to]. I wouldn't say I've necessarily dreaded it, but it's been a different beast in itself ... and by no means am I there yet or where I think I'm supposed to be. The swimming part hasn't been as natural as running for me, so that's another aspect of what I'm trying to do that I've had to adapt to."

De Bord's father, Eric, played college football at Indiana. Nobody in his immediate family took a military path, but De Bord said one of his former lacrosse coaches, Tom Wood of the Fox Valley Lacrosse Club, attended the Naval Academy, and spoke highly of that experience.

"There are some people here that come from military families, their parents both served in the military and they know all the ins and outs of the Air Force and all that, but at the end of the day, everyone kind of ends up in the same place, and everyone here is going through the same stuff," De Bord said. "I'm in the right place, and I definitely enjoy what I'm doing."

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