

January 23, 2013

Gavin Schilling: Michigan State Is a special program

Brian Hedger

SpartanMag.com **Talk about it in Basketball Recruiting Board**

Gavin Schilling sees a lot of things to like about Michigan State University.

It's located in East Lansing, Mich., a manageable drive from his hometown of Chicago - where his mother and 13-year old brother live. It's got a spacious, picturesque campus that Schilling and his family toured during an impromptu unofficial visit during the holiday season.

The basketball program's facilities are nice at the Breslin Center, the Spartans boast a talented roster that competes for Big Ten titles, and they also happen to have an intensely driven, fiery, somewhat legendary basketball coach named Tom Izzo.



Gavin Schilling will visit Michigan State and UCLA with two of his remaining four official visits.

After recently offering Schilling a scholarship, Izzo and Spartan assistant coach Dane Fife appear to have MSU sitting in good position to snare the 6-foot-9, 240-pounder - who's become one of the most sought-after unsigned prospects in the Class of 2013 during the past month.

"It was real special," said Schilling of the Spartan offer, which he received last week, after playing well in the Penny Hardaway Hoopfest in Memphis, Tenn. "Michigan State is a special program with Coach Izzo. I like him a lot. He's a great coach and he really develops players."

Schilling had seen his recruiting interest pick up quite a bit after showing improvements in his game and put on some muscle playing for Findlay Prep in Henderson, Nev. - USA Today's No.1 ranked high school team in the country. After cutting his list down to 10 schools not long ago, Schilling told Spartanmag.com on Tuesday that he now plans to trim it to five later this week.

Michigan State will be among those finalists, along with UCLA.

Schilling plans to take official visits to Michigan State and UCLA, although he has yet set up a trip to either school. Schilling traveled to Minnesota for his first official visit back in September.

Ohio State, Oregon St., Villanova, Georgetown, Kansas State, and Missouri are also in the mix for an official visit from Schilling.

Illinois and DePaul have also offered scholarships and Schilling made an unofficial visit to Oregon St. last summer.

"A lot of schools have been recruiting him," said Findlay Prep head coach **Todd Simon**, who also worked with standout forwards **Anthony Bennett** (UNLV star freshman) and **Tristan Thompson** (Cleveland Cavaliers) when he was an assistant coach for the Pilots. "Gavin was kind of under the radar, but he's been pretty sought-after here lately. Now it's starting to come to a head."

Schilling plans to pick a school after his official visits are done and then sign his letter of intent in the spring. In the meantime, he already sounds excited about the potential of playing for Izzo someday.

"He's a mentor for all the players," Schilling said. "He helps them out a lot, on and off the court. It meant a lot to get the offer from him."

Schilling is also keeping tabs on MSU's current season and thinking about how it could relate to him in the future. In particular, he's taken note of 6-10, 240-pound junior Adrien Payne's development.

"I know that Payne has improved on his shooting and Izzo has worked with him very hard on it," Schilling said. "He likes to have versatility in his big men and that's what I am. I try to be versatile and I could improve my game at MSU. That's what [Izzo] says he can do for me."

It's interesting that Schilling should bring up player development, because he's currently going through his own at Findlay Prep.

After just turning 17 this past November, Simon said that Schilling is still adding facets to his game on a daily basis. He's also added muscle to his frame and already looks the part of a prototypical Big Ten power forward.

Schilling is also a grade ahead of most kids his age because of the schooling that he got in France when he was young. Schilling was born in France and lived there until he was 8-years old. Upon moving to Chicago at that age, it turned out that he was ahead academically by a grade.

That means, despite his size and strength, Schilling is still playing on most nights against kids who are almost a full two years older.

"Sometimes, it's not too cool ... but it's alright," said Schilling, who was also being pursued by Duke prior to the Blue Devils landing prized former MSU target Jabari Parker. "I've just got to deal with it. I'm one of the biggest bodies on the floor, so I just deal with it."

Schilling has also bounced around a bit for his high school years.

After playing his freshman year at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Ill. - a Chicago suburb - Schilling opted to attend an elite prep school in Germany his sophomore year, which was located closer to his father, who lives there and works as the CEO of a large publishing company.

While in Germany, Schilling also spent some time playing for the German National team before moving back to Chicago for his junior season and attending Chicago De La Salle. At De La Salle, Schilling made a name for himself on the Windy City basketball scene and wound up playing last summer for a loaded Chicago-based AAU team, the Mac Irvin Fire - where he was teammates with the likes of Parker and Jahlil Okafor, the No.1 overall prospect in the 2014 Rivals150.

Schilling then opted to attend Findlay Prep for his senior season - which meant again moving away from home and making quite a few long-distance road trips. Findlay will ultimately play in six states and make two trips to Canada this season.

"This whole experience at Findlay is definitely getting me ready for college next year," Schilling said. "We've been all over the place lately, so it'll be good to get back home and play some home games."

As for recruiting and Michigan State, Schilling said it's been nice to have the interest pick up lately. Back when MSU was recruiting Parker - the No.3-ranked player in the 2013 Rivals 150 - the Spartans appeared to have just one scholarship available.

Since Parker's commitment to Duke in December, MSU had a second scholarship open up when former Spartan guard Brandan Kearney decided to transfer to Arizona State.

"They've always had an interest in me, ever since I played for De La Salle," Schilling said of Izzo and Fife. "The interest just grew stronger over time. They didn't get Jabari, so they looked closer at me and said, 'Okay, now we can really focus on Gavin.' They did and now they're really interested."

Could Schilling possibly commit to the Spartans after taking his official visit?

"They want me to go on an official visit and hopefully commit," Schilling said. "Eventually, that might be a possibility, because I really like them a lot, but at this point I plan to take all five of my visits."