

# Play Ball

Gilbert teen's hard work leads to major league honors

BY LORI ROMANO

PHOTO BY CARL SHULTZ

**A**t first glance, Taylor Kaczmarek seems like an ordinary teenager—he loves working out, spending time with family and friends, and graduated this past May from Desert Ridge High School. But toss him a baseball and you'll see he is anything but ordinary; he's an up-and-coming ballplayer receiving state-wide honors and major league attention for his standout skills.

Kaczmarek was recently recognized as both the Arizona Baseball Coaches Association Player of the Year and East Valley Region Player of the Year. And, this summer, he was awarded the prestigious Gatorade Arizona Baseball Player of the Year Award.

"Hard work and perseverance got him where he is today," says Kaczmarek's mom, Michele. "Receiving the Gatorade Player of the Year award was an incredible surprise. I couldn't be more proud of my son and he has proven that hard work really pays off."

Kaczmarek began playing T-ball when he was 4 and, by age 9, he was playing travel ball and dominating as a pitcher. Throughout his high school career, he developed into a power hitter. That, combined with his dominant pitching, helped his team at Desert Ridge reach two state championships.



Gatorade has given the Gatorade Player of the Year award to America's elite high school students for their athletic achievement, academic excellence and exemplary character since 1985, according to Gatorade's website. The award is given to the best athlete in their respective sport by state and each state winner is eligible to be selected as the national winner. Previous winners include Peyton Manning, Serena Williams and Derek Jeter.

"I enjoy pitching and hitting, and just really enjoy the game," Kaczmarek says. "Winning the Gatorade award was a great accomplishment."

Added to his list of baseball honors, Kaczmarek was also recently recognized with the 2010 Louisville Slugger State High School Baseball Players of the Year Award for Arizona. This award honors one high school player in each state every year.

"Once again, we are proud to join Louisville Slugger in honoring these fine young baseball players from all across the U.S.," says Ron Davini, executive director of the Baseball Coaches of

and has integrity. I am proud of the young man he has become."

Ever humble, Kaczmarek claims his success is a result of both his hard work and the encouragement of the people around him.

"There have been so many supportive and dedicated people throughout my baseball career who have made me the person I am today," he explains. "It started from club ball when I was 9 and extends to my pitching and hitting coaches throughout high school. My family and friends have always been there for me—I feel very lucky to have such incredible people to share my love of baseball with."

With fall in full swing, Kaczmarek has begun his college career and is taking the next step toward his dream of playing major league baseball. His path begins in the L.A. Dodgers minor league farm system, where he will hone his skills and work his way up to the majors.

"I worked hard this year, and I am one step closer to my dream of playing in the Majors," he says. "I need to keep at it, but this shows that hard work really does pay off." ■

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America organization. "These players have been selected by coaches in their jurisdictions as the best player in their respective states. We're certain we'll be hearing more about these players in years to come, at both the collegiate and professional levels as their careers develop."

As a pitcher, Kaczmarek finished the year 11-1 with a 2.16 ERA, leading Desert Ridge to the Class 5A Division 1 state championship. Also a first baseman, Taylor batted .436 with 54 RBI, 30 runs scored, 13 doubles and 12 home runs. He did all this while maintaining a 3.51 GPA and preparing to go onto college to study mechanical engineering.

Because of his achievements, he received a full-ride scholarship to South Mountain Community College, where he's currently studying. There have also been offers from several Division 1 schools, but he says he hasn't made up his mind where he wants to go.

Growing up, Kaczmarek says he dreamed of one day playing in the majors. As the awards and accolades rolled in, he caught the eye of major league scouts. Suddenly, the dream became real, when he was drafted by the LA Dodgers.

"When we received the phone call that he was being drafted and heard his name announced we were overwhelmed with emotion—it was such an amazing moment," Michele says. "Taylor prides himself on respect, strong family values, and self-confidence. He is a team player, shows great sportsmanship

