



The stuff that dreams are made of

BY DENNIS CHASE
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TRAVERSE CITY — Eric Gordon's dream will soon come true.

"When I was five-years-old I had this little Michigan State football outfit with shoulder pads, helmet, pants, jersey," he said. "I always wanted to go to State. That was my goal. To go there and play Division I football."

The Traverse City West linebacker-running back will get that opportunity, starting next fall. Gordon accepted a scholarship offer in June to attend Michigan State and play football for the Spartans.

And he'll have a friend in Michigan State's 2006 recruiting class. In July, St. Francis lineman Patrick Rigan also committed to the Spartans.

"I talked to Eric right after he committed and congratulated

him," Rigan said. "I told him that's where I wanted to go, too. And it happened."

Gordon and Rigan are ranked among the top high school players in the state. The two heard from a number of colleges — and had other scholarship offers on the table — before ending the recruiting process early and committing to State.

They can officially signing a binding letter-of-intent with the Spartans in February.

The seniors started hearing from colleges their sophomore year. Rigan's first letter arrived in the mail from Notre Dame.

"It caught me off guard," Rigan admitted. "I didn't expect it. Then I thought, 'This is cool. Keep 'em coming.'"

Gordon's first letter came from Western Michigan.

"Ben (VanZale) and Tony (Gourlay) were getting all the letters," Gordon said. "We had

weights together. Coach Prisk would always walk in and give them mail every day. Finally, one day I got a letter."

The letters kept coming. It turned serious this spring when Gordon and Rigan traveled the Midwest, participating in combines in front of college coaches.

The 5-11½, 220-pound Gordon, whose grandfather played defensive end for State in the 1950s, caught the attention of coaches with his strength and speed. He ran a 4.57 in the 40 at the Nike camp at Michigan. Rigan impressed with his size and agility. The 6-6, 235-pound Rigan was clocked at 4.7 in the 40 at Michigan State.

The two realized Michigan State was serious about them when assistant coach Jim McElwain called on May 1 — the first day coaches were allowed to contact prospects.

Gordon then attended a one-day camp at Michigan State in June. Rigan — who spent his spring break visiting Missouri, Iowa and Notre Dame — did the same in July. Both committed to coach John L. Smith the day following their camp.

Gordon is expected to play the bandit position, a cross between linebacker and defensive back. Rigan was recruited as a defensive end.

Gordon, who helped West to a 10-1 campaign in 2004, has worked hard in the weight room to become a stronger, more chiseled athlete.

"As a sophomore I weighed 175 pounds as an inside linebacker," he said. "After that, all I've done is lift, lift, lift."

Rigan had shoulder surgery in December to repair an injury that occurred his sophomore season when the Gladiators went undefeated

and won a state championship. He did not lift at all over the winter and it forced him to miss the Nike camp in early May because he didn't feel he was ready.

"I was behind," he said. "You see everyone else lifting, getting bigger, and you think you better pick up the pace."

Rigan said he'll probably live in the weight room his freshman year at State.

"They see my body frame and they know they can put 30 to 40 pounds on me in a year," he said. "They're looking at me down the line."

Gordon and Rigan said they were impressed with Smith and his staff.

"My coaches at West are my friends off the field," Gordon said. "They'll do anything for you. The Michigan State coaches seem the same way."

PLEASE SEE PAGE 30

Record-Eagle file photos/Douglas Tesner
Left, Eric Gordon during a TC West game against East Kentwood; above, Patrick Rigan during a St. Francis game against Harbor Springs.

Michigan State University lands commitments from area players Eric Gordon and Patrick Rigan.