

## Features



TOP

# Kleffer: The Hard Work Paid Off

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Kleffer: The Hard Work Paid Off

*By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports*

It's no secret that Richland's basketball team had its share of struggles this season - posting a 7-18 record and being knocked out in the first round of both the Stoddard County and Bloomfield Christmas Tournaments.

Given the tough nature of the season, one would think that there wasn't a standout player on the squad.

Think again.

Ryan Kleffer, the son of Steve and Cheryl Kleffer, is a senior this year at Richland High School, and was recently named to the Missouri Boys All-State Basketball team in Class 1.

"I've always wanted to make All-State," Kleffer said. "I did well last year, but didn't get any awards. I'm just proud of myself for all the work finally paying off. I never got anything - all conference, nothing - it all happened my senior year.

Kleffer definitely put in hard work during the off-season, adding nearly 15 pounds of muscle to his 6'3" frame.

“He got on the *Bigger, Faster, Stronger* program at school this year and gained about 15 pounds of muscle,” Richland head basketball coach John Walker said, “and that really helped him in the post. He’s listed as a guard, but I used him a lot in the post this season (Kleffer recorded a 38” vertical jump).”

“Most of my jumping ability came naturally,” Kleffer continued, “but I worked hard all year to be able to get up more.”

A solid player all-around for the Rebels this season, Kleffer averaged upwards of 25 points, eight boards, and two blocked shots per game.

“We expected a pretty good season from [Kleffer] this year,” Walker continued. “He’s a good scorer (putting up 1,700 points in his career at Richland), and has a good three-point shot - he led the team in threes this year. He also shoots good from the free-throw line.”

Kleffer also possessed great endurance, rarely coming out of a game this year.

“He played a lot of minutes this year,” Walker added. “I can only think of five or six games that he really came out of.”

Kleffer began playing basketball competitively at a very young age, and cited an AAU coach as being key to his development as a player.

“I started playing competitively in third grade,” Kleffer said. “We had a school travelling team. In fifth grade, I played for an AAU team in Illinois - The Illinois Jets - and my coach Emerson Bowie was really influential on my game.”

Collegiate attention is pretty open for this young man, with several junior colleges already making offers.

“State Fair and Cleveland State have offered me scholarships so far,” Kleffer continued. “Cleveland State has given me the best offer, but I’m looking to get some more tryouts this spring and get some more offers.”

“North Dakota State and Northwest Missouri State have also expressed interest,” Walker added. “He’s also going to try out for Three Rivers this summer. He’d like to go to a two-year school first to improve his skills, and hopefully transfer to a Division One school after that.”

Kleffer doesn't seem to have any skills that need a lot of improving in his game, but his coach did note his defensive struggles.

“He has all the tools there, and that’s what I keep trying to tell people, and that’s what I’ve told him all year long,” Walker said. “When it clicks, he’s great defensively. He had a great defensive showing during a tryout at Cleveland State. He just has to put everything together.”

Walker noted Kleffer’s performance in the classroom as being just as impressive as his ability on the court.

“He does well in his classes, gets A’s and B’s,” Walker continued. “He’s an all-around good kid. He doesn’t get in much trouble, and he listens well.”

Kleffer also noted a pair of his favorite players, and even likened his style of play to one of them.

“I’ve always liked LeBron [James, of the Miami Heat]. I really liked Terrence Jones, from Kentucky, this year. I think I play a lot like [Jones],” Kleffer said, laughing, “except I’m about six inches shorter than he is.”

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