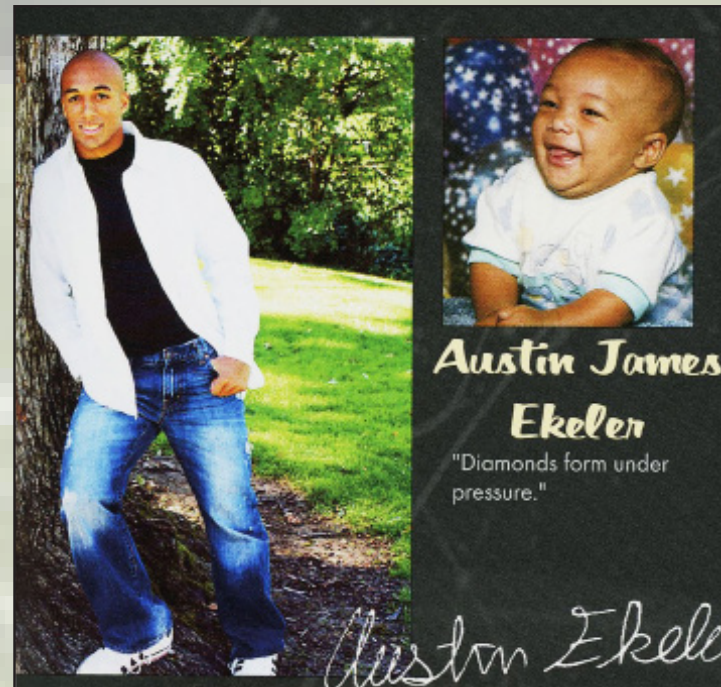


redzone

From Eaton to NFL, These small-town boys have made it big

Sure, Eaton's latest NFL standouts are making big plays, but if you want to know how phenomenal they are, just ask anybody from home. Perhaps former Eaton Red and NFL player, Seth Lobato, said it best: It's easy to support the hometown guys when they're such likable and high character people. In a small town of just over 4,000 people, many might not expect to see amazing athletes go pro. Most of the time, pro players come from big cities and schools that are the size of Eaton's whole town. Eaton High School has two players in the NFL this year from the small town of Eaton, Colorado, Trent Sieg and Austin Ekeler.



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Austin Ekeler is ripping up the 2019 NFL season on the San Diego Chargers. Ekeler got his chance to shine when starting running back Melvin Gordan suffered an MCL injury last year during a regular season game.

In the first game of the season, Ekeler racked up three outstanding touchdowns, making coaches and fans stand up and take notice. But coming out of nowhere is nothing new to this incredibly talented and hardworking athlete.

Most people might not know it, but, Austin James Ekeler graduated from Eaton High School in 2012, an average sized 2A school located in rural Northern Colorado. Anybody who knew him will tell you Austin was an all-around great person throughout high school.

"He was a very phenomenal athlete and a very kind person," said former English teacher and basketball coach Amy Ross, "You wouldn't know that he was such a good athlete because he was so humble."

Throughout high school, Austin got involved in many things. He was a three-sport athlete, playing football, basketball, and participating in track and field.

In fact, in 2011, Ekeler took state in the boys 4x100 relay along with Tony Ball, Chad Foos, and Gunnar Haynes, and he set school records for long jump at 22' 8.00".

It's this speed and athleticism that allows him to excel in his football career. In high school football,

Ekeler had an incredible total of 4393 rushing yards on 461 carries, averaging 129.2 rushing yards per game and 9.5 yards per carry. He also had 581 receiving yards on 33 receptions, averaging 17.6 yards per catch. In total Austin attained 70 rushing touchdowns and 80 receiving touchdowns in his high school career.

Football coach, basketball coach and P.E. teacher, Dean Grable said, "Austin had the best work ethic I've ever seen. He never took a rep off on warm ups and sets. Just from the way he worked you knew he was something special."

Going on his third year in the NFL, Ekeler has 481 rushing yards on 112 carries and 830 receiving yards on 73 receptions after 13 games played. In addition to these stats, Ekeler has a total of 11 touchdowns this season, with three being rushing and eight receiving.

As a kid, Austin's mom Suzanne Ekeler said he was very mellow and quiet. "He loved competition. He competed whether it was sports, board games, video games, shooting a Nerf ball through a hoop. He loves competition!" she said.

Throughout Austin's life, football was his ultimate passion Suzanne said. She also added that he was always a good role model and older brother for his younger brother Wyette. "The boys have always gotten along well, even being six years apart. They hung out together all the time. Austin's work ethic has shown Wyette what it takes to be successful at the next level." Suzanne explained what it's like having a son

in the NFL. "It's pretty amazing to see Austin out there living his dream and doing well at what he loves."

As a mom, Suzanne is very supportive of Austin as she's able to go to just about every game. Suzanne said, "Typically I'm traveling by myself. I will fly in Sunday morning, drive to the game, watch the game, take Austin out for dinner, then fly home that same night."

Going from a small 2A school in Colorado to being in the NFL teaches you to appreciate the little things, Austin said. "Back in Eaton, it's a smaller school, you don't have all of the best equipment, you kind of have to work with what you got and get by with that and now it's to the point where you have everything you could imagine. It's just a special moment because you don't take things for granted."

Austin also added that his biggest challenge was to overcome himself. "Throughout this entire journey it's always been focusing on myself and trying to be the best that I can be in the situation and let the results play out from that. Many times it's been pushing myself and trying to up the bar, seeing how far I can take the bar."

As a kid Austin said he tried to play as many sports as he could and stay active and involved all year around. "Playing different sports kind of helps you build some coordination and build chemistry between teammates," he said.

Looking back on his high school days, Austin said he started focusing on football his junior and senior year. "Junior year came and I was starting

on the football team, so then I was like 'now I'm going to start focusing on this sport, it's what I love to do.' I started going to more camps over the summer and working hard in the offseason," Ekeler said.

His best memory from high school football, Ekeler said, was his entire senior year. "It was special to me because of the group that I grew up with. We were together from kindergarten to graduation, we were like a family on the team; we were super close."

I go back and watch those high school games and it makes me get emotional; I'll never forget it."

When the Chargers played the Raiders on November 7, and again on December 22, these games means something to Ekeler as he's playing against a former high school teammate, Trent Sieg.

"He's one of those guys I grew up with; we're basically best friends and now to see him on another NFL team and we're playing each other is pretty special to me," Ekeler said. "Everytime I see him at meetings I'm like, 'hey that's my boy.'"

Ekeler persevered and overcame many challenges coming from a small 2A school in Colorado to making it to the NFL. He learned to appreciate the little things in life and take nothing for granted; to work with what you've got and stay motivated.

When Ekeler was a senior in high school, his senior yearbook quote was "Diamonds form under pressure." It would seem that this prophesy has come to pass for this small-town kid turned pro football star.

Austin Ekeler (right) out-maneuvers a Platte Valley defender for one of his five touchdowns in a 2012 high school game. Ekeler currently plays for the Los Angeles Chargers wearing the number 32.

Trent Sieg (below) reaches for an offensive pass in a snowy 2A state playoff game in 2011 against Platte Valley.



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Trent Sieg a 2012 Eaton High School graduate is now the long snapper for the Oakland Raiders and has been with the team for two years now.

He was signed by the Baltimore Ravens after his college career at Colorado State University. Sieg went through many challenges during his high school career, but he said exposure was his biggest hurdle to overcome.

"The biggest challenge coming from a small town was probably to actually gain interest from college coaches," Sieg said. "Small schools aren't recruited very heavily by bigger schools and it can limit the opportunity a little bit."

Sieg graduated from Eaton High School in the same year as his friend and teammate, Austin Ekeler, the other Eaton graduate who is having a successful career in the NFL.

Long snapping is the most underrated position in football. When a team has to punt the football, a long snapper must snap the football 13-15 yards straight back, flawlessly, and this is Sieg's job.

A bad snap can result in turnovers and points lost. On a punt, the long snapper has to deliver the ball a significant distance to the punter—a very difficult task considering there are six or seven special teams players running full throttle to try to block the punt. Then Sieg must immediately join the punting team to sprint down the field to tackle the returner.

Sieg said, "I have been long snap-

ping since middle school. My dad made me learn it because it is a good skill to have on your resume to get recruited. Then in college, I started to focus on it as my main position."

On a field goal, the long snapper delivers the ball on a 7-8 yard snap to the place-holder. The result of a bad snap could result in losing an opportunity for three points. Long snapping is a job that requires steady nerves and flawless repetition. Sieg said, "The most difficult part about the job is just how consistent you need to be on every rep. The punter's job depends a lot on how easy you make it for him, so you want to do virtually the same thing every time."

EHS was a big part of Sieg's young football career and is still a big part of his life today. One of the things he's taken with him from those days is his high school sweetheart, Carly Jurgensmeier.

Sieg said they began dating at the end of their high school careers and all of college. Last year the two married, and Carly remains his most devoted fan.

Sieg said, "I started dating her senior year in high school, but we were friends long before that."

He wasn't only a long snapper in high school, Sieg was an All-Colo-rado linebacker in 2012. He also played tight end on the offensive side. Sieg said he enjoyed his time at Eaton, he uses many of the skills he learned along the way to this day.

Sieg said, "I think coming from Eaton actually played a big role in where I am. Eaton is where I learned to work hard and expect big things of myself. I also learned that I need-

ed to do a little extra to get a chance to go to the next level."

Hard work and dedication are nothing new to Eaton athletes, Sieg's favorite memory demonstrates Eaton's hard work, he said, "When we scored 18 points in under two minutes to come from behind and beat Brush. I don't think I will ever forget that."

Sieg left his mark on Eaton high school where he will be the athlete that made the NFL. The task is nearly impossible, fewer than 2 percent of high school athletes make it to the pros in any sport.

Even attending college for athletics is a difficult task; only 7 percent of athletes are able to play college sports.

But Sieg is not alone in the NFL. One of his best friends who graduated with him from high school plays for the Los Angeles Chargers—Austin Ekeler.

Sieg will face off against Ekeler on November 7 and they will go head-to-head again on December 22.

"I'm excited to see him," Sieg said. "He is one of my best friends, and I could not be more proud of the career he has been having. It's just crazy to look back at how far we have both come from the small town of Eaton."

Both Sieg and Ekeler played College football in Colorado.

Sieg walked on at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, while Ekeler attended Western Colorado University in Gunnison. Sieg said, "I was recruited to CSU as a walk-on long snapper, and once I got there, I was able to hone my skills enough to be fortunate enough to become the starting long snapper the next year."

Sieg said his favorite memory from his college career "was beating Utah State my redshirt freshman year. We won on a last-second field goal, and it boosted us up to being ranked one of the top 25 teams in the country."

Sieg led an outstanding college career which led to a career in the NFL. During his time in Eaton, he played on the offensive and defensive side. His career on offensive was outstanding, he had a total of 513 receiving yards, and averaged 17 yards per reception. In his 30 catches, he ended with six touchdowns.

Trent Sieg's senior quote said that at some point in your life you either have the things you want or the reasons you don't. For this phenomenal athlete from the small town of Eaton, it looks like that through hard work and dedication, he has gotten the things he wanted.