



Jay Mabry (left) and Sarah Olesen (right) are on staff with DEA Nation, seen here with some of their student athletes training at Barrington High School.

## Next Level Training

DEA NATION REMOVES FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO SHAPING CHAMPIONS

JAY MABRY BELIEVES that every athlete deserves the chance to become a leader. But he also knows that not every family can afford the level of training required to achieve that goal.

On a mission to do something about it, he searched for nonprofit organizations dedicated to the cause, but he could not find one that allocated all the money raised directly to the athletes. After taking his time to put together a program that did, Mabry, 42, launched DEA Nation 3 ½ years ago from the Canlan Sportsplex Lake Barrington. “The concept is to provide elite athletic training that the wealthy will want to pay for and use that revenue to create opportunities for families experiencing financial hardship,” Mabry said. “At DEA, applications are confidential. So, a child from a family experiencing financial hardship can participate right next to a child from a wealthy family and just be a child.”

An acronym for dedicated, educated, achievers, DEA is Mabry’s philosophy for shaping champions. “You need a dedication to family first,” he said. “Without that foundation, no matter how much effort is given, eventually something will fall through the cracks; education, because no matter your performance in athletics, something can always happen where you can’t do it anymore. If you achieve academically, you can keep moving forward; and achievers because I don’t care if it’s sports, academics, or the arts, you should be pushing yourself to your maximum potential.”

### ELITE PERSONAL TRAINING

Mabry and his team of high level athletes—former Olympic competitors, college players, and celebrated coaches among them—provide elite personal training in small groups to athletes, from grades 5

through seniors in college. A typical class size is one trainer per six students. The athletes play all types of sports, from basketball to football to soccer to volleyball, and come to DEA Nation to take their performance to the next level. Ideally, successful athletes stay in the program and during college breaks, return to mentor younger participants.

Training focuses on speed, agility, strength and conditioning, to improve balance, help prevent injury and boost performance in games. There are no contracts. Athletes pay, on a month-to-month basis, \$99 for 12, hour-long sessions. “The people who can afford to work with us pay for training and the people who can’t, automatically receive 50 percent off,” Mabry said, noting it’s not always low-income families on scholarships; it’s also families overwhelmed by medical bills or single parents struggling to survive on one income. Regardless, all of his athletes, many

of whom travel far distances to work-out at DEA and a few who are homeless, insist on donating what they can to the cause. They tell Mabry, who's humbled by their kindness, "You're providing an opportunity I wouldn't get anywhere else. Why wouldn't I donate?"

He sets goals for each athlete to reach within three months and assesses their progress along the way. "We can take an athlete from any program and over 90 days, he or she will increase speed and agility by 5 percent, and power, partially measured by vertical leap, by two inches. Vertical is generated with strength and speed, and is a good measure of how much energy you push into the ground, he said. "It's those first explosive three steps that can make or break a game." To stay in the program, students are required to maintain a 3.0 GPA. If they are having a difficult time achieving that, Mabry finds them a tutor.

He also enters athletes in track meets through Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and USA Track & Field, to cross-train them and prevent burn-out. Mostly, it gives them an opportunity to race against higher-level athletes outside of their usual network and learn what they need to do to reach that point, because someday, he said they might be competing against that player for a college scholarship.

"Taking an elite athlete, challenging them to improve and compete at a level where they can experience loss, then teaching them the tools to cope with that loss is my favorite part about what I do," Mabry said. "It goes back to my own story."

### A FOUNDATION THROUGH SPORTS

Mabry grew up in Harristown, Ill., a small town near Decatur, with sports as a big part of his life. In high school, he broke the state record in track and field in the 300 hurdles. He said his family had "financial means" most of his life, until his dad lost his restaurant, a business he operated for 27 years, that was



From left: Brielle Rochester, Nikki Prell, Kathleen Baker, and Riley Raynor.



Riley Raynor (on left) and Kathleen Baker train at Barrington High School's track.

founded by his father.

"My dad became deaf and couldn't run the restaurant anymore," Mabry said, noting the losses were too great for his father to bare. "He fell into a deep depression and never rebounded." Still, Mabry moved forward. Without help from his parents, other than occasionally paying for books, he graduated from college debt-free by working as a residents' assistant and joining the Army.

"It's important to understand, I lost this, but it's not the end of the world," he said of the lesson he tries to instill in young athletes. "If they can learn to problem solve on their own now, how to handle losses, they can take it with them their whole lives. And if we get a couple kids full-ride scholarships to college while we're at it, cool."

Paule Augustine, who emigrated with her family from Haiti to America, is one of those kids. She came to DEA as a basketball player. Yet Mabry knew she was meant for volleyball and encouraged her to make the switch. The move resulted in the high school sophomore receiving an early offer from Bradley University in Peoria to play the game on a full-scholarship.

Mabry's first client, Felicia Guagliardo, a freshman at Barrington High School, has been with DEA since 2014, when she joined to work-out and practice during her club volleyball's off-season. "DEA has helped Guagliardo's technical skills greatly improve in all aspects of volleyball," her mother Debbie said. "The work-outs have also made her much stronger physically. Even more importantly, both her self-confidence and motivation skyrocketed. She gained

self-esteem both on and off the court."

Barrington resident Hal Baker, whose children, Matt and Kathleen, train with Mabry, said he was looking for someone to supplement their individual sports training. "A lot of times, training is sports specific, which leads to injuries because you don't develop your other muscles," Baker said. "We were looking for someone with more of a holistic approach to help them become better overall athletes."

Kathleen, an 8th grader at Prairie Middle School, runs track and plays soccer. Baker said Mabry brought out her full potential, took her to finishing at the top in state track meets. After seeing how well his sister progressed, Baker's son Matt, a sophomore at Barrington High School, joined DEA for his golf game. "Jay takes such a personal interest in each kid," Baker said. "It's not just a job where he's trying to make everybody run through a specific program. He takes each individual and caters toward their needs, whether it's a soccer player, football player, tennis player or golfer, he customizes a program for them." Baker said what really drew him to DEA was Mabry's motivation to help athletes who otherwise cannot afford elite training. "To just do it, because that is what he loves, is amazing."

DEA Nation is located at the Canlan Sportsplex Lake Barrington, 28156 W. Northpointe Parkway in Barrington. For information, visit [www.deanation.com](http://www.deanation.com) or call 630-408-0403. 

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