



## Garrett slugger hits it like a linebacker.

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Photo by Laura J. Gardner | The Journal Gazette

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**Spencer Burns of Garrett will compete tonight in the Midwest League Home Run Derby.**

FORT WAYNE – Before the counting began and each swing of the bat from the three high school participants meant getting closer to claiming a spot in tonight’s Midwest League All-Star Home Run Derby, each player got five practice cuts from the plate.

By hitting two out of Parkview Field in that brief warm-up session, Garrett’s Spencer Burns was already making a statement.

“I wanted to set the tone early,” Burns said. “I wanted to set the tone and let ’em know I was for real.”

Burns, Garrett’s 6-foot, 213-pound senior catcher, defeated Elmhurst’s Kristian Gayday and Carroll’s Justin Glass to win the Hometown Hitter contest to advance into today’s home run derby competition with the Midwest League All-Stars.

And so-what that he will be going against the best in the Midwest League, many of whom will be in the major leagues some day.

“I’m going in there just like I go into any other competition: I’m going in there to win,” Burns said. “Obviously, the stakes are a little different. The challenge is a lot higher. Those guys have all been drafted. If I go in there and I don’t compete the way I want to, even though it’s a fun event, I’ll be upset. I take it as any other competitive event.”

And that’s Spencer Burns in an athletic nutshell: If you don’t play to win, what’s the point? If he doesn’t give it the requisite 100 percent, then it might as well be none at all.

He is a baseball player in the spring but a football player by trade, a workout machine with a 330-pound bench press. That’s why he is going to Wisconsin-Whitewater, an NCAA Division III school between Milwaukee and Madison that has said it wants him to come there and play fullback. If that position doesn’t work out, then he’ll try outside linebacker.

One way or another, he wants to hit somebody with the ferocity that he hits the baseball, which is completely out of character for the 18-year-old who was class president and a member of the

Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

“Football brings out a different side of me,” Burns said. “I love it. I do. I love running people over.”

When he heard about the Hometown Hitter competition, he thought he would give it a try even though he banged out just five home runs this season, compared with the gaudy 16 by Glass.

But he got through the early round against his ACAC brethren, made it to Parkview Field, wound up tied with good friend Gayday after 12 swings with one hit apiece.

When Gayday didn't get a home run in his extra turns, Burns stepped to the plate and did what he loves to do. He hit something hard, and everyone knew he was for real.

If anything, Burns was the wild card coming into the Hometown Hitter competition.

With Elmhurst closing its doors and making a run to the Class 3A regional, Gayday had been in the media spotlight; same with Glass, whose Carroll Chargers had advanced to the 4A state championship.

“Respect is a big word in my book,” Burns said. “Kristian, going to Elmhurst, being in Fort Wayne and playing in a very good conference; and then Justin, being as good as he is and playing in another great conference, the ACAC is kind of the bottom conference.

“I understand that. I just play for pride and respect, man. So I did feel like the underdog, and I thought I had something to prove.”