

Gallup baseball player to compete on All American team in Florida

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Comes from a big sports family

The Denetclaw family has a history of playing a number of sports, from baseball and softball to wrestling to volleyball. This love of sports has resulted in a remarkable opportunity for one of the family's children.

Jalen Denetclaw, born and raised in Gallup, will be a freshman at Gallup High School this fall. Before then, he will travel to Viera, Fla. to play on the United States Specialty Sports Association Midwest Region All American Baseball team July 28 - Aug. 3.

The USSSA All American Baseball program was created to be an environment where athletes are evaluated by the top players and coaches in baseball based on their skill levels and athleticism, according to the USSSA website.

When Jalen's family found out he had made the USSSA Midwest Region All American Baseball team, they were in awe and disbelief.

"We couldn't have been more proud of him at that moment," Casey, his mother, said. "We're just proud of all the hard work he's done."

GETTING INTO THE SPORT

Jalen said it was his father, Jay, who got him into baseball by teaching him to play when he was young.

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“He taught me how to hit, how to throw since I could pick up the ball,” Jalen said. “I’ve loved it ever since, and I want to keep playing as long as I can. He’s been coaching me all my life, teaching me drills, how to do this and that. He made me love the sport,” he added.

Jalen said he wants to get into a college with a good baseball program and then take his playing to a higher level.

Casey said she played softball while Jay played baseball, and Jalen’s aunt, uncle, and grandfather all played, as well. All those family athletes kept Jalen and his siblings around the baseball field ever since they started playing tee ball.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Jalen said it was his mother who told him about the USSSA All American tryouts several weeks before they began June 6. The cost for trying out was \$300, which felt daunting to Jalen, at the time.

“If I didn’t make the team, I didn’t want to waste the money,” Jalen said. “I thought about it for a while, thinking I’ll really do it and then I won’t do it.”

Then one day, Jalen decided to commit to the tryout. His parents spent the money and during the tryouts, Jalen, who plays all infield, was evaluated on throwing across the field, a live batting practice, and sprinting 60 yards.

The USSSA website states participants in tryouts are evaluated on hitting, running, throwing, fielding, pitching or catching depending on their position.

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THE REACTIONS

"We're a really big sports family," Jalen said, mentioning several cousins who went to college to play sports.

When he told his family he had made the All American team, he said he got a great response. "They were proud of me."

Jalen also recalled playing when he was 10, which he said was his best year of playing. He credits his success to his coach that year, Ben Chavez.

"He helped me a lot," Jalen said.

Casey said Jalen's time and effort paid off, and this accomplishment reflects how he carries himself.

"He's really humble. He has a good head on his shoulders," she said.

Despite the reaction he had to Jalen making the All American team, his father, Jay, knows this is just the beginning of a big opportunity.

"He's got to put in more work. He's always doing more," Jay said.

Jay also spoke about how Gallup and surrounding communities are more focused on basketball throughout the year, and baseball is considered one of the smaller sports. He said the environment is different than it is in states like Texas and Oklahoma, where the crowds are

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more involved and engaged with the sport than around Gallup.

His father says that makes Jalen's accomplishment even more impressive. "[Baseball players] are a different breed out there, so we were surprised and proud he made it."

Jalen Denetclaw's family has set up a GoFundMe page to help with fundraising for the trip to Viera, Fla. to play.

For more information, visit https://www.gofundme.com/f/all-american-baseball-player?utm_source=customer&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_campaign=p_cp+share-sheet

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