

Dillon Powers his way to national soccer award

By Kevin Hageland Staff Writer

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It was a scene right out of a surprise birthday party.

Plano Senior Dillon Powers had just returned from Portugal, where he was playing with the US Junior National Team in the Lisbon International Tournament, and was being taken out to dinner. Powers walked into the back room of the restaurant and found all his friends and family waiting for him.

Only those closest to Powers weren't there to celebrate his birthday, rather his selection as the 2008-09 Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year.

"All I could think was, 'No way,'" Powers said. "It was just ... wow!"

Currently in its third decade of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade, partnering with ESPNRISE, selected the midfielder because of his prowess on the club and varsity pitch.

The award distinguishes Powers as the nation's best high school boys soccer player. A national advisory board comprised of sportswriters and sport-specific experts from around the country helped select Powers from more than 383,000 players nationwide. Powers is now a finalist for the Gatorade Male High School Athlete of the Year Award, which will be presented at a special afternoon ceremony prior to The 2009 ESPY Awards in July.

Former notable Gatorade National Players of the Year include: Emmitt Smith, Peyton Manning, Lisa Leslie and Kerri Walsh.

"Dillon is very quiet, very unassuming, very shy off the field, but on the field he's an impact player," said Gary Williamson, North Texas State Soccer Olympic Development Program director of coaching. "His range of passing and his pass selection is spot on. He can get out of tight spaces and he's got a very powerful shot; he's just on a different level. His soccer IQ is up there along with his natural ability. Technically, tactically, physically and mentally, he's got the edge."

Those attributes helped make Powers a clear-cut selection for the award.

"Without question, Dillon is deserving of recognition as the nation's best high school boys soccer player based on his statistics on the field and the impact his play had on Plano's success," said Jeff Urban, Gatorade senior vice president of sports marketing. "But he is also a shining example to peers and aspiring young players of what a leader and a student-athlete should be. He represents everything we hope for in a Gatorade Player of the Year recipient."

The latter part of Urban's statement has been proven true by Powers accomplishments off the field. Powers has maintained an A average in the classroom, served as a member of the Student Council at Plano and completed multiple community-service initiatives in association with the National Honor Society, including peer tutoring. Powers has also volunteered on behalf of his local church youth group.

The honor, however, was still humbling for Powers, despite everything he has accomplished in his young career.

“To even be considered in this category is an honor, but pretty shocking,” Powers said in typical modest fashion. “I would say this honor takes the cake [for the year] because it is such a prestigious award.”

Powers is just the third player from Texas to receive the award, but second from the Plano ISD, joining Plano East’s Lee Nguyen, who took the top prize for the 2004-05 season. Nguyen currently plays for Hoang Anh Gia Lai.

Powers has aspirations of playing overseas as well and he is already well on his way to achieving those dreams on a professional level. Powers has been on multiple international tours with the national team, with the next one coming at the end of the month when he travels to Egypt to play for the U20 squad.

Making that trip does come at a bit of a price though as Powers will not be with his Andromeda squad when they head to North Carolina for regionals.

“That was a really tough decision, especially since this is our last time together, and I understand that my choice is viewed as kind of controversial,” Powers said. “A lot of people have said that Andromeda helped get me where I am today and they are right, but I would be wasting all the support they have given me if I didn’t try to further my career as well.”

Powers, who blogged last summer for the US Youth Soccer National Championships, was quick to point out that he has complete confidence in Andromeda and will be ready for nationals in California.

Helping Andromeda win another national title would cap of a season that has already been filled with accomplishments for Powers. In addition to competing at the national level overseas, Powers was a standout on the U18 gold medal squad at the Australian Youth Olympic Festival, the 5-foot-11, 180-pounder scored 16 goals and notched 24 assists during the varsity season as Plano won its sixth state championship. Powers completed his high school career with 39 goals and 57 assists and was a 2008 All-America selection by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America.

Powers, the No.6-rated Class of ’09 national recruit according to ESPNU and TopDrawerSoccer .com, parlayed those accomplishments into a scholarship to Notre Dame. But the new high school graduate knows his latest accomplishment will serve to intensify the scrutiny on him.

“Any time you get an award like this it sets the bar higher,” Powers said. “And I have to get ready for that.”

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