

The State News

By Zach Smith
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Globe Trotter

It's minutes before tip-off in Champaign, Ill., and Lisa Schilling is sitting inches from her TV, waiting for her son's name to be called.

Gavin Schilling, a 6-foot-9, 240-pound freshman forward, only sees the court for five minutes against the Fighting Illini, but it doesn't matter to his mother — she's as excited as anyone else decked out in green and white.

"I feel like I want to be right there in the stadium," she said. "I'm nervous. I'm screaming, I'm clapping and yelling. All the things that you may see me do at the game, I do at home."

The German-ator

Gavin Schilling's journey to East Lansing was longer than most.

He was born in Germany and moved to Strasbourg, France for eight years before settling down in his mother's hometown of Chicago.

He can speak French, German and English fluently, and he's been to more places across the world than many people will in their lifetimes.

Schilling attended Loyola Academy near Chicago his freshman year of high school and went back to Germany to play for Urspring, a German basketball boarding school, his sophomore year. He also represented Germany in the 2012 FIBA U18 European Championship.

He came back to the states for his final two years of school, putting on a Chicago De La Salle Institute jersey his junior year before finishing out his career for Findlay Prep in Henderson, Nev.

"It's been pretty hard to adjust each year of high school," Schilling said. "They don't play as physical (in Europe) as they do over here. It's more based on skill. I'm learning something new each year, then I have to adjust to what the new coach says."

Although the travel might have set Gavin back on the court, it's given his mother a trip down memory lane.

With more than 20 years of experience as a professional model, the travel was no problem for Lisa, as it took her back to the time when she was traversing the globe for a living.

“For me, it brought me back to the old times when I was in the business myself,” she said. “It brought back really good memories. I’m having a great time following him around now.”

In Izzo We Trust

It’s always hard for parents when their children leave the house for the first time, but everything changes when your son is a high-profile basketball player.

Lisa Schilling has been by Gavin’s side every step of the way. The two talk daily, and she’s the rock Gavin can count on.

Like any mother, she wants her son to be in the best hands. She said she feels safe with head coach Tom Izzo, and his ear is open to talk about anything at any time.

“For me, I found coach Izzo a real man,” she said. “He’s very sincere in what he’s doing, he enjoys his job, and you know he’s going to tell it like it is.”

Izzo is the front man, but assistant coach Dane Fife was the one who wasn’t afraid to get down and dirty in his analysis of Schilling.

Fife said there was inconsistency in terms of Schilling’s basketball terminology, but his rebounding and high motor were enough to put him at the top of the list in terms of recruiting.

“It was my goal to get him here,” Fife said. “It was an easy decision for us. The way he plays, it was exactly what we were looking for. He had work to do, and he finally figured it out.”

But it wasn’t just the coaches that had an influence on Schilling’s journey to East Lansing.

Gavin and freshman guard Alvin Ellis were teammates for a year when Schilling was at De La Salle in Chicago.

Ellis originally was committed to Minnesota, and tried to convince Schilling to come join him with the Golden Gophers.

“When I ended up leaving Minnesota, he tried to get me to come here with him,” Ellis said.

The two are roommates and remain close friends.

In the end, Gavin fell in love with Izzo, and said the history and culture of Spartan basketball turned his blood green and white.

“I really liked Michigan State from the start,” he said. “I started looking into the school and the Michigan State tradition. I think at the end, it fit me both basketball wise and academic wise.”

Time To Shine

When Gavin stepped foot on MSU’s campus as a student for the first time, he was 17 years old.

Now, with senior forward Adreian Payne sidelined with an injured foot, he’s finding out very quickly that he must grow up quicker than anyone originally thought he would.

“With (Payne) out, I’ve learned a lot from him,” Schilling said. “He’s taught me a lot, and given me advice about what he sees. I’m getting more minutes, which is good for me. I’ve just got to work hard every time I get out on the court.”

Izzo has been mystified by Schilling all season. He’s said on numerous occasions that the talented freshmen is one of the most athletic big men he’s ever seen.

Izzo said the prospect of learning his fifth system in five years would be tough for anyone, and the game is moving very fast for Gavin right now because he’s played both here and abroad.

“When the year started, I thought that guy might even be starting,” Izzo said. “He’s had all these different coaches and I think because of it, it’s set him back. He’s working a little harder at it, he’s appreciating it. He’s getting in and watching film. He’s doing things to try to catch up to the college game.”

Lisa Schilling will be the first to admit that her son has a lot to learn, but it wasn’t until he started getting offers from big programs like UCLA, USC, Illinois and MSU that she started to see him as a potential professional basketball player.

Whether it’s said in French or German, Lisa Schilling is incredibly proud of her son.

“How proud? Are you kidding me?” she said. “You can answer that one. Everything, not only sports. You don’t get that very often.”