

Photos: Green Bay Packers linebacker A.J. Hawk visits Appleton school

**By Kate McGinty • Post-Crescent staff writer •
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APPLETON — The 8-year-old pressed his hands against the window as he stared down the street, his Packers hat reflecting in the glass.

[Photos: A. J. Hawk visits Appleton school](#)

Sam Arnoldussen then whipped around and ran anxiously across his living room.

He wondered aloud if he could build a snow fort with his guest later. He finally returned to his post at the window, where he stood frozen with anticipation.



“I just want to meet a Packer for once,” he said longingly. “Before I knew this was happening, I was going to be a baseball player, but now a football player.”

Sam, a third-grader at McKinley Elementary School, was ready to star in the ultimate show-and-tell at school Tuesday: He was bringing Green Bay Packers linebacker A.J. Hawk.

Sam was the winner in the Packers market for the NFL Take a Player to School sweepstakes, which scored him the opportunity to spend the morning with Hawk.

They rode in a limo to school together, spoke at a school assembly, then led other third-graders in a physical education class. It was part of Play 60, an NFL initiative that encourages kids to be active for one hour daily.

“I think this is probably one of the biggest things that will happen in his life,” said Jill Arnoldussen, Sam’s mother. “It’s something he will never forget. I still can’t believe it’s happening.”

Sam and his brothers — identical twin Seth and 9-year-old Matt — jumped out of bed at 5 a.m. with giddy energy. They pulled on matching No. 50 jerseys and counted down the minutes until they would meet Hawk.

“A.J. is coming in 10 minutes. I’m going to check the clock. A.J. is coming in nine minutes,” Sam announced to relatives gathered in his living room.

The brothers ran down a list of questions to ask Hawk: How many cars do you have? How much do you weigh? Are you really “the chosen one” like your teammate joked on TV?

Finally, a sleek black limo appeared on their quiet residential street. “The limo!” Sam gasped.

Hawk stepped out of the limo and strolled up to the door. Sam, an energetic but shy boy, went silent. He opened the door slowly, shook Hawk’s hand, then flung his arms around the player’s waist.

“What’s up, buddy?” Hawk laughed, rubbing his hand playfully over Sam’s hat.

Hawk loaded up the three boys in a limo to head to school, where the Packer was greeted by screaming kids chanting his name. He joined the kids on the gymnasium floor for stretches, raced them in a relay course and tossed footballs.

The morning reminded Hawk, 24, of his own third-grade days. Even then, he dreamt of being a professional athlete in baseball, basketball or football.

“This would have been a fun day for me in third grade,” he said. “This was always the best part, I think, coming to gym class.”

He jumped at the invitation when the Packers approached him about taking part in the sweepstakes, he said.

“When I was a little kid, I couldn’t even look at adults barely. ... Anything I can do to try to help or just let them have a little fun — even get a little break from class — is fun,” Hawk said.

The opportunity to work out with a Packer was an emotional one for the Arnoldussen boys, who declared Hawk their new favorite player. Seth broke into tears as the morning wound down.

“I like playing with A.J. because he’s just an awesome guy,” Sam said.

“One more goodbye,” he said, throwing his arms around the Packer again.

Then he walked out of the gym, taking his eyes off Hawk only long enough to glance down at his now-autographed Packers hat.

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