

# Connor McGovern seeks good advice as he continues his growth

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
July 26, 2016

Last year, five of the eight offensive linemen activated by the Broncos for their Week 1 game against Baltimore had never taken a regular-season snap. Two of them -- Ty Sambrailo and Matt Paradis -- started that game. Two more -- Max Garcia and Michael Schofield -- would eventually start before the end of the season.

Barring a cataclysmic wave of injuries, that scenario will not repeat itself this year. So it becomes far more likely that rookie Connor McGovern's development will be more typical of offensive linemen in this scheme than it was for those young linemen last year.

During Gary Kubiak and Rick Dennison's previous stints on the Broncos' coaching staff, rookie starters on the offensive line were rare. Ryan Clady in 2008 was a notable exception, but the typical pattern involved a year of development before starting multiple games, as evidenced by the career track of George Foster, Chris Kuper, Chris Myers and others.

But the reward for last year is a group that is wise beyond its years.

Paradis, who played every snap last season, has become the seasoned veteran of the group. Thrown into the fire last year, Paradis plays with maturity and intelligence and dispenses advice you'd normally expect from a 10-year veteran, not someone with just 19 regular-season starts.

"Matt Paradis is definitely a good guy to talk to," said McGovern. "He'll always answer your questions. He's a super nice guy."

Sambrailo and Garcia, the two projected starting guards working ahead of McGovern, have also dispensed plenty of wisdom to him.

"The offensive line has a lot of good guys," McGovern said. "Being an offensive lineman, you always have those role models there for you."

And with those role models fitting in, the Broncos can take their time with McGovern, introducing him to the scheme piece by piece.

During OTAs, that meant keeping the focus on technique.

"All the technique stuff. You really have to refine your technique in the NFL," McGovern said. "The technique that [Offensive Line] Coach Clancy [Barone] was teaching us, it was nice, because I got to practice that in the offseason. He gave us a lot of drills that we could do on air, on our own, so it was good to get that done and practice it."

As McGovern hones his technique, he can learn the scheme position by position.

Although he can play anywhere on the offensive line, he expects his focus to be on the interior three spots, with his first work at both guard positions. Center repetitions will come, but "not right away," he said.

"In any NFL offense, center has such a big responsibility, so I think they want to work me in at guard just so they make sure I can play," McGovern said. "Once the mental side is really there, they can move me back to center."

And if the Broncos have good health up front, they can take their time and ensure that when McGovern's time up front comes, he's ready for an impact as big as the prodigious weight-room numbers he posted at Missouri.

# In Connor McGovern, Broncos land weight room star, O-line standout

By Nicki Jhabvala  
DenverPost.com  
May 8, 2016

The McGovern's aren't afraid of rebuilds.

In 2012, Keith McGovern and his wife, Rondi, renovated an old brick warehouse in the heart of Fargo, N.D., that eventually would become their home. The interior was gutted, the windows replaced, the roof redone and the cold feel of the former occupant, Leef Cleaners, warmed by Rondi's design company.

The former boiler room received a face-lift, too. The century-old cinder block and brick still line the walls, and the heating, ventilation and air conditioning ducts, and water pipes remain exposed. But the couple's eldest son, Connor, decided to furnish it, handling the interior design himself.

His centerpieces? A pair of Rogue Fitness squat racks and a mounted rig with attached gymnastics rings. There's a stationary bicycle and hanging punching bag. A mounted flat-screen TV flanked by speakers serve as wall art. And medicine balls, plyo boxes and weighted ropes are strewn across the floor. Call them accent pieces.

For more than two years, "The Pit" has been Connor McGovern's weight-lifting sanctuary and one of his many vehicles to the NFL. From Fargo to Columbia, Mo., he has made a name for himself as a weight-room enthusiast and a standout offensive lineman, breaking lifting records and earning football accolades at each stop.

Last week, he added another city to his tour and became a part of another rebuild. The Broncos selected him April 30 in the fifth round (No. 144 overall) in the NFL draft, making him the newest piece of their revamped offensive line.

"This is a team I grew up watching, early Madden games, playing with John Elway and Terrell Davis, the Bronco history-makers then and now," McGovern said. "When I talked to John Elway on the phone, I was a little star-struck, and I didn't know what to say. Words can't describe how happy I was to be a Bronco."

The feeling was mutual. Having played guard and tackle at Missouri, McGovern offers the Broncos versatility on the line, but also a mindset Elway is known to love.

"A tough guy," Elway said. "One thing we know about him is that he likes the weight room. He spends a lot of time in the weight room, so it's our kind of guy."

## A shared passion

Keith McGovern wasn't a very good swimmer. That's his description — and that's how the story really begins. A neck injury when he was young booted him from contact sports and left with him swimming as one of his remaining options.

"So I went to Olympic weight-lifting and I competed at that in high school. I have always weight-lifted," Keith said. "Connor was a little kid who wanted to do some of the things your dad does. Connor was a big kid, so I promoted getting him into the gym early so that his weight was more useful weight. Even today, I do Crossfit workouts and he sends me videos that he puts on Instagram of his lifts. It's just something we have in common."

Over the years, the shared passion became a honed craft.

At Shanley High, a small Catholic school in Fargo, coach Steve Laqua made Connor McGovern a starter on the varsity football team as a freshman and used him on both sides of the ball, taking advantage of his size and power to help the team to two state titles. His junior season, McGovern was all-state on defense. His senior season, he was all-state on offense and earned North Dakota's Gatorade High School Player of the Year honors.

In the weight room, McGovern turned to Anthony Carlquist, Shanley's strength coach and a professional power-lifter, for help with his technique and for tailoring his lifts to his work on the field. (Search the web for Carlquist and you'll likely stumble upon clips of him squatting 1,000 pounds and benching 738.)

"(Connor) put up some crazy, crazy numbers in the weight room," said Chris Needham, a former high school teammate who is now the recruiting coordinator for Minnesota State University at Moorhead. "I think he still holds quite a few records at Shanley. Lifting and working out with him, he made people around him better — on the field and in the weight room."

More records would be set at Missouri, where he would continue to adjust his lifting routines to focus on flexibility and bend. On June 26, in the presence of Laqua and others in Columbia, Connor shattered Missouri's squat record with five reps of 690 pounds.

"I mean, Missouri is no slouch and the best squat record of all time? That's pretty significant," said Laqua, now the head coach at Minnesota State at Moorhead. "It was rewarding and exciting to be able to see him accomplish that."

At the NFL scouting combine in February, McGovern recorded 33 reps in the 225-pound bench press, tied for second among all participants. He said he was aiming for 40-plus, but the message was sent.

"There are no shortcuts there," Laqua said. "That weight either buries you and drops you to the ground or you lift it up. Having that mindset — because he's put up such high numbers in weight — you have to attack that consistently or you don't succeed."

Rewrapping Mack truck?

Keith McGovern's other remodel is a 48-foot Mack truck once used in his potato farming business in North Dakota. If he has his way, this one will find a semi-permanent home not in the heart of Fargo, but in the parking lot of Sports Authority Field on Sundays.

The truck — currently wrapped in black and yellow with the Missouri Tigers mascot and helmet stamped on the side and a yellow "60," Connor's jersey number, pasted on the hood — will have to be modified. Again.

"Oh, if I bring it to Denver, it'll be rewrapped," Keith said.

But the living room built behind the cab should hold. As should the full bathroom, kitchen, bunk bed and garage in the back.

The outsize house on wheels was a tailgating fixture at Faurot Field in Columbia, driven down from the airport where the McGoverns would fly in from Fargo to watch Connor play.

The hope is that the McGovern Motorcoach will be a fixture among Broncos tailgaters, too.

The bigger hope is that Connor will be the same on the Broncos' line, likely at guard. More tailoring to his routine and game is expected; the lifting will have to be toned down, he said, and acclimation to the speed of the pro game and a thicker playbook will take time. Those who have witnessed his success over the years say he's built for the Broncos.

"I know that it's still a long road, especially for linemen," Laqua said. "His understanding that the weight room has built him into the football player as much as practice and studying the playbook has, I think, really given him that framework to succeed professionally."

About McGovern

Height: 6-foot-4

Weight: 306 pounds

Hometown: Fargo, N.D.

College: Missouri

Draft: Fifth round, No. 144

#### HIGHLIGHTS

All-state on defensive and offensive line at Shanley High School

Gatorade High School Player of the Year in North Dakota in 2010

Set Missouri weight-room records, including five reps of 690 pounds on squat

Benched 33 reps of 225 pounds at NFL combine, tied for second-most

Three-year starter at Missouri; has played right tackle, right guard, left tackle

# MU guard Connor McGovern joins Shane Ray in Denver

By Tod Palmer  
Kansas City Star  
May 1, 2016

The closest thing Missouri had to the Incredible Hulk is headed west after Connor McGovern was selected Saturday by Denver in the fifth round of the 2016 NFL Draft.

McGovern — a workout warrior from Fargo, N.D., who started at multiple positions in a standout Tigers career — will reunite with Bishop Miege graduate Shane Ray, the Broncos' first-round pick in 2015.

"I fell in love with the gym early," McGovern said on a conference call with reporters in Denver. "That came through my father (Keith), who is a body builder. I think it helps a lot, whether it be my actual strength on the field and being able to use it there or as a mental confidence booster. I was always one of the strongest guys on the field."

Ray, who won a Super Bowl with Denver as a rookie three months ago, told The Star in a text message that he's thrilled to have McGovern join him in the mountains.

"I think (McGovern's) going to make a roster, and I think he's going to make that organization better," first-year Missouri coach Barry Odom said.

McGovern, who was picked 16 spots after Evan Boehm was drafted by Arizona, was a jack of all trades at Missouri.

"He moved so many spots and positions this last year, it probably wasn't the best for him for us to ask him to do that, but he never said a word and just went and tried to use his skills and do it," Odom said.

His best seasons probably were at right guard and that figures to be his position moving forward, but McGovern also started at right tackle as an underclassman and found a home at left tackle as a senior.

McGovern told NFL teams during the interview process that he's willing to play center, where he practiced during his redshirt season at Mizzou, so he could fit anywhere on the interior and his strength could make him a force in Broncos coach Gary Kubiak's zone-blocking system.

"We know we got a smart young man that has played against really good players and has done that at a very high level, so we'll get him in here and put him to work and see where he fits best," Kubiak said.

McGovern's experience at tackle experience gives him added versatility. He could slide out to right tackle in a pinch.

McGovern was credited with a Mizzou-record 810-pound squat last summer. He also tore his pectoral muscle attempting a 515-pound bench press during his time with the Tigers.

"One thing we know about him is that he likes the weight room," Broncos general manager John Elway said. "He spends a lot of time in the weight room, so it's our kind of guy."

At the NFL Combine in February, McGovern benched 225 pounds 33 times, which was the second-most behind Arizona State's Christian Westerman (34).