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Middletown native, Cubs catcher Kyle Schwarber remembers his roots

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BUTLER COUNTY — Kyle Schwarber has as much power away from baseball as he does in the batter's box.

The Middletown native, a rookie for the Chicago Cubs, had one of those dream Major League Baseball seasons, a Hollywood script too unbelievable for the big screen.

He was named MVP of the Futures Games played before the All-Star Game at Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati.

During the regular season with the Cubs, Schwarber hit 16 homers, drove in 43 runs and batted .246 in 69 games. And in the playoffs, he hit five homers and drove in eight runs for Chicago, which was eliminated in the National League Championship Series by the New York Mets.

He became a Wrigley Field legend when he hit a 438-foot homer in the NLDS-clinching win over the St. Louis Cardinals that landed on top of the right-field scoreboard, which was erected just before the season.

So after the long baseball season — one that started in the minor leagues in April and ended under the national spotlight in October — Schwarber and his girlfriend headed to the beach, right? Wrong.

Schwarber, 22, a 2011 Middletown High School graduate, has made three public appearances in his hometown. He went around with Middletown police officers and staff and passed out Halloween candy as part of the department's "Candy with a Cop" program. They delivered candy that was donated by local residents to people with disabilities who couldn't trick-or-treat.

Schwarber, dressed as a professional golfer, and police officers visited Morgan Gilchrist, 16, who has Cornelia de Lange Syndrome (CdLS), a rare syndrome that slows developmental and physical growth and causes sensory integration issues that resemble Autism, said her mother Tracy Gilchrist.

Gilchrist said this was Morgan's first trick-or-treat because she's fed via g-tube and can only tolerate smooth textures orally. The group delivered chocolate pudding cups for Morgan along with sensory toys.

"He was very humble and sweet with our children," Gilchrist said. "Kyle's reputation is right on. He is a very down-to-earth young man... Kyle is a class act with his roots deep in our community and his fast feet on the ground."

Then Schwarber appeared at the YMCA Character Awards banquet, and on Thursday night, attended the Middletown Community Foundation's annual awards dinner.

After walking to the podium, the sharply-dressed Schwarber joked that while he plays baseball in front of 47,000 fans, he was "a little nervous" speaking in front of 350 people at Miami Valley Gaming.

He credits his parents, Greg and Donna, for instilling character and a strong work ethic. He remembered back in 2008 when his father, then Middletown's police chief, accidentally shot himself in the left leg while cleaning his gun. The story, as you can imagine, made national news: "Police chief shoots self in leg" the headlines read.

But his father never hid from the accident.

"He set a good example," Schwarber told the crowd. "Own up to your mistakes. Your character has to take over."

T. Duane Gordon, executive director of the MCF, said Schwarber "came from really good people."

Then the foundation, which hopes to raise \$4.25 million as part of its "Ready! The Campaign for Our Kids' Future," auctioned off six autographed items Schwarber donated: three baseball cards, a baseball, a bat and a jersey. The total retail value: about \$400.

The items sold for \$4,275.

The buyer of the \$1,600 Cubs jersey was Middletown Mayor Larry Mulligan, whose wife, Kristen, serves as administrative manager for the foundation. Mulligan said he may wear the jersey, or have it framed. He purchased the jersey to support the foundation's educational initiative, he said. Plus, he said, the jersey "is a piece of Middletown history."

Everyone it seems, wants a piece of Schwarber. After the dinner, he signed autographs and posed for pictures until the room was empty.

"It's all positive things and I want to give back to the community I grew up in," Schwarber said. "I want to give kids a chance at success. They deserve that. This place is a special place."

It all goes back to his upbringing. Good or bad, it all starts at home.

"It's how my parents raised me," he said. "They told me, 'Remember where you came from. Every time you go out and play a ball game remember where you came from.' I'm just the same as you. I'm no different. I put my pants on the same way you do. Just because I play baseball for a living and you're a reporter doesn't mean we change anything. We're still people. That's where you can't let egos get in the way. You are never too good for something."

Then Schwarber walked over and looked for Gordon. Schwarber wanted to thank Gordon for allowing him to speak.

It's easy to say, "Remember where you came from."

But Kyle Joseph Schwarber is living the words.

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