



## Montclair Athletics: Mountie student-athletes sign National Letters of Intent

2019 National Signing Day

1 of 8



Montclair High School had nine student athletes sign their National Letters of Intent on Feb. 6. R to L - Conor McGrath (baseball, UMASS-Boston), Mason Davisson (soccer, Wesleyan), Robert 'Bo' Bigelow (football, Virginia), Gary Robinson Jr (football, Southern Connecticut State), Chris Masur (soccer, Bucknell), Jill O'Toole (soccer, William & Mary), Francesca Testa (softball, Franklin & Marshall), Leah Plawker (field hockey, Franklin & Marshall), Sophia Pisano (field hockey) ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



MHS students Leah Plawker (Franklin & Marshall), and Sophia Pisano (Bryn Mawr) celebrate signing their NLI's with coaches Marypat Mercurio and Michelle Hagel at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



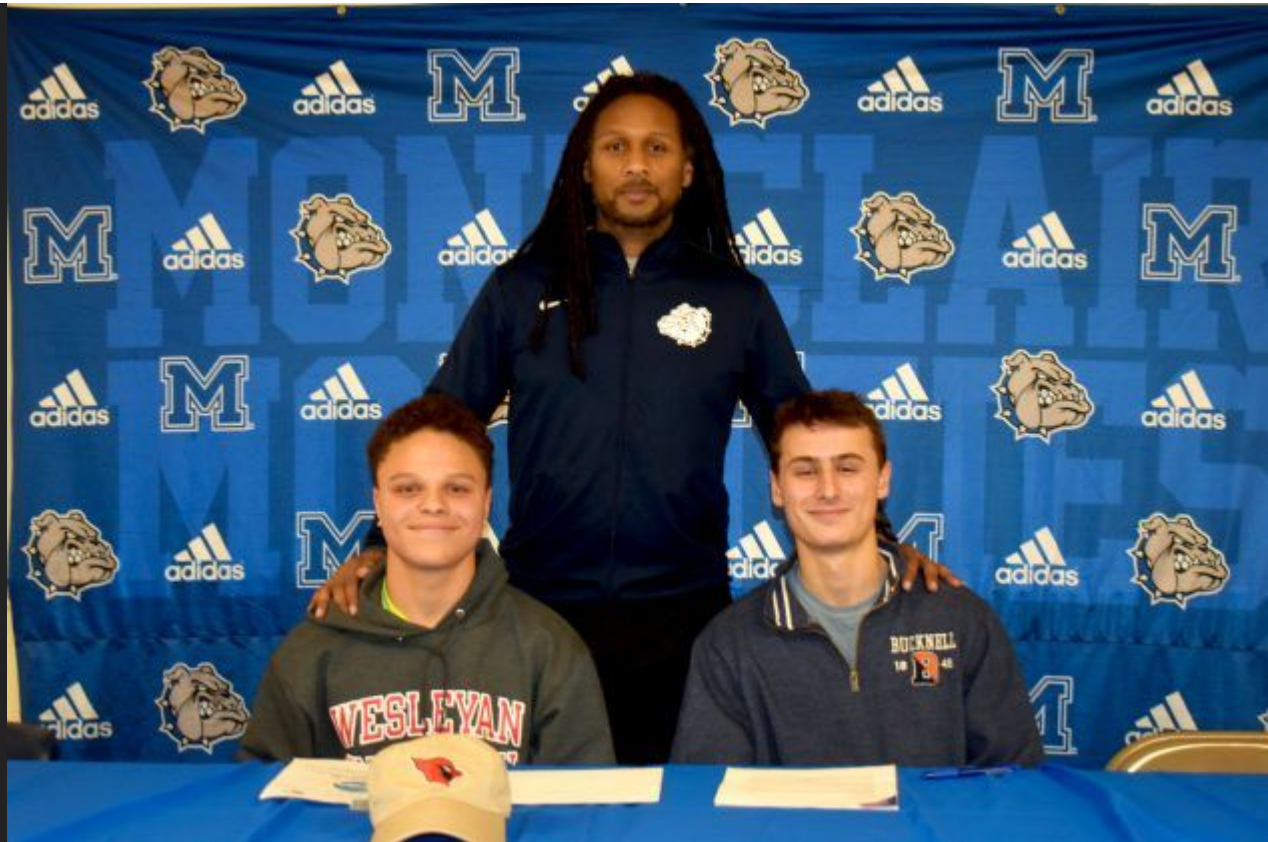
Jillian O'Toole (William & Mary) poses with head girls soccer coach Ashley Hammond at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



Francesca Testa celebrates her commitment to Franklin & Marshall with head softball coach Mike Goldstein at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



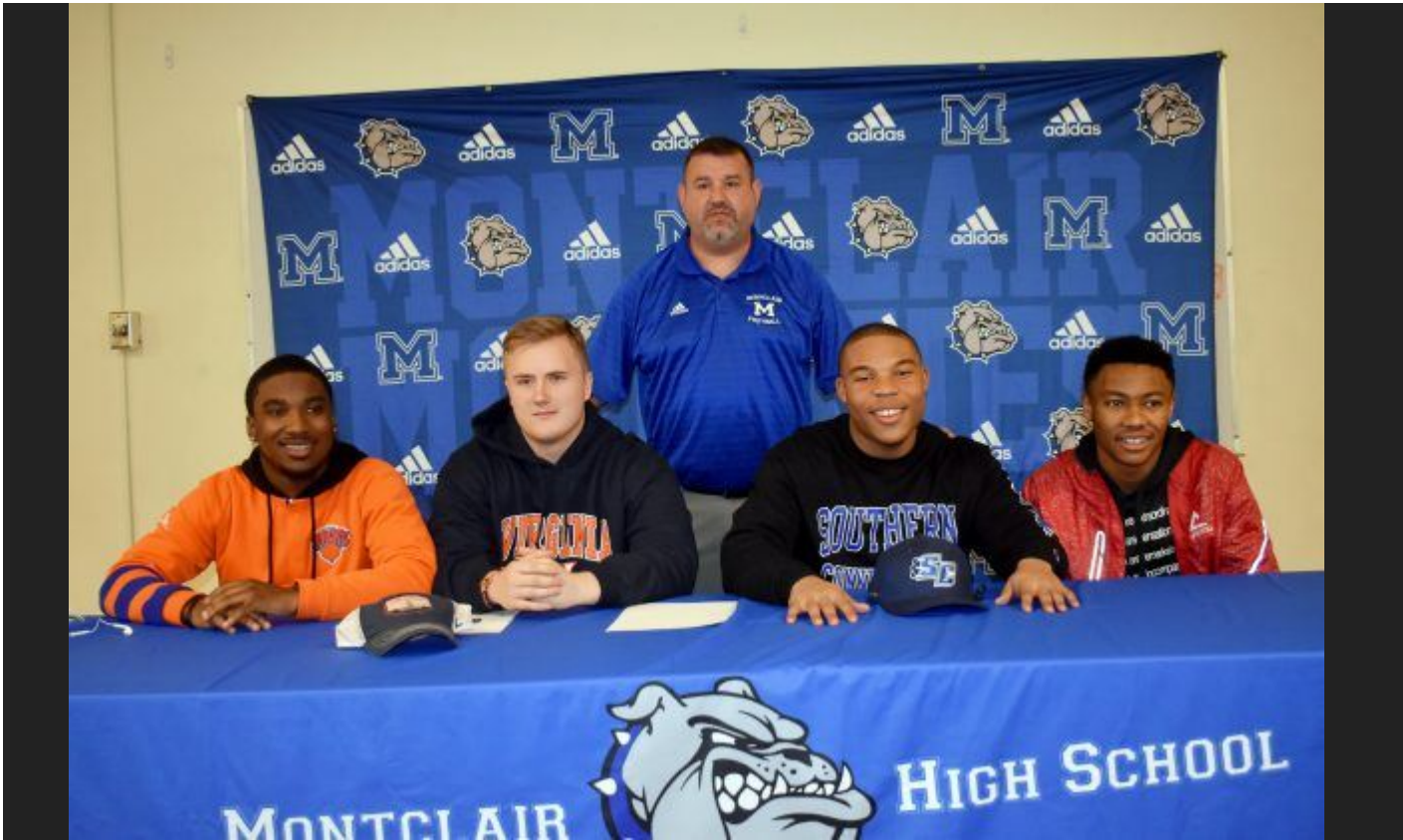
Conor McGrath (UMASS-Boston) is flanked by co-head baseball coaches Anthony Genchi and Ron Gavazzi at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



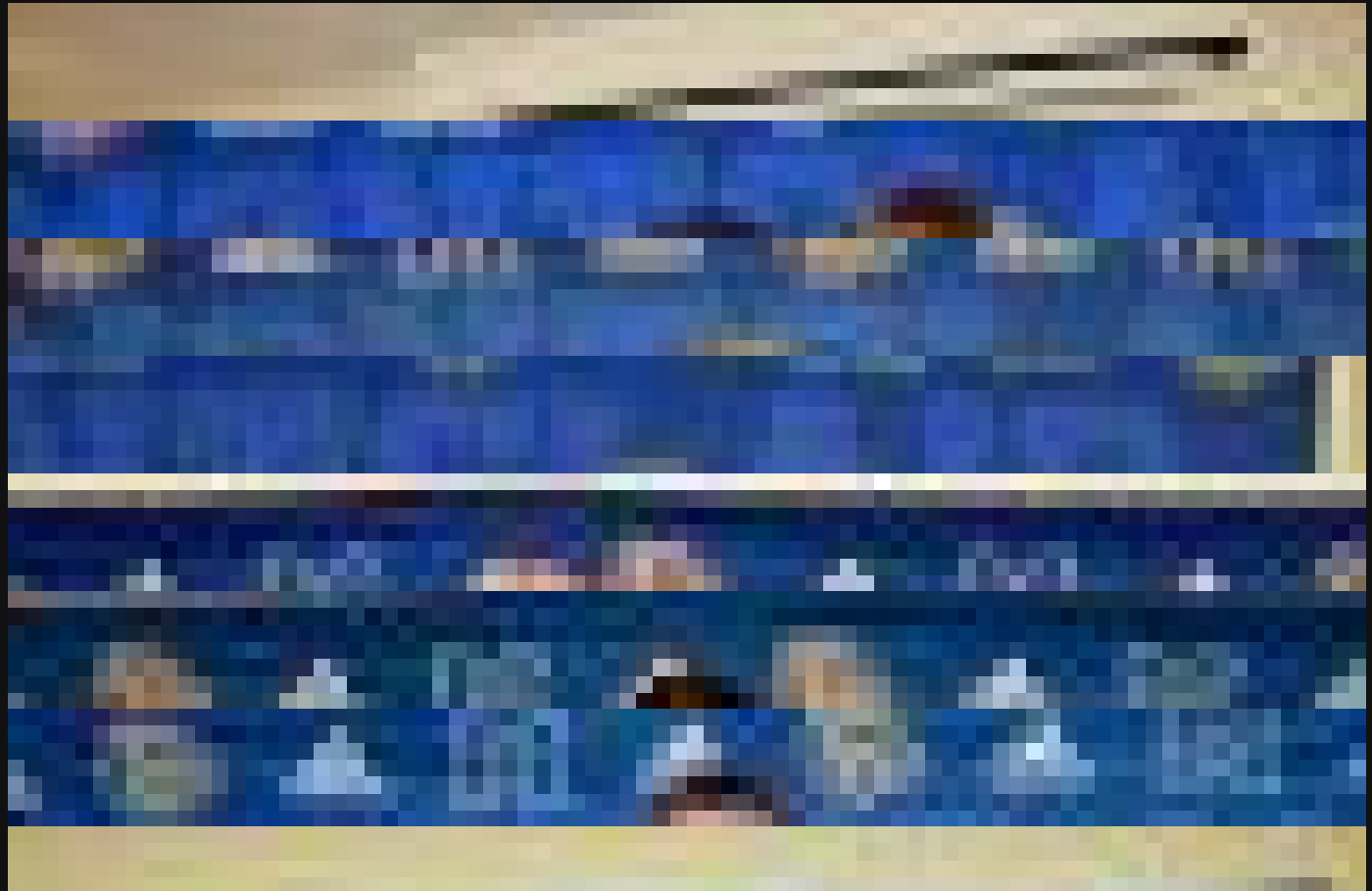
MHS boys soccer head coach Toure Weaver stands with Mason Davissou (Wesleyan) and Chris Masur (Bucknell) at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



Robert "Bo" Bigelow (Virginia) and Gary Robinson Jr. pose for a picture with head football coach John Fiore at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. ANDREW GARDA/STAFF



Head football coach John Fiore takes a picture with the four Mounties who are currently committed to play collegiate football at Montclair's National Signing Day ceremony. (L to R Josh Crawford - Central Michigan, Bo Bigelow - Virginia, Gary Robinson Jr — Southern Connecticut State, Charles Murphy Jr — Towson). ANDREW GARDA/STAFF





**by Andrew Garda**

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Spring athletes signed National Letters of Intent on Wednesday, Feb. 6 in a ceremony that holds a special place for student-athletes.

While the NCAA now launches the signing period with an early November day, many sign their Letters of Intent the first Wednesday in February.

Nine Mounties signed their NLIs this year surrounded by their families, coaches and friends.

As is always the case, the schools these scholar-athletes will be attending will be just as rigorous off the field as on it.

The students and their colleges are: Conor McGrath (baseball, UMASS-Boston), Mason Davisson (soccer, Wesleyan), Robert 'Bo' Bigelow (football, Virginia), Gary Robinson Jr (football, Southern Connecticut State), Chris Masur (soccer, Bucknell), Jill O'Toole (soccer, William & Mary), Francesca Testa (softball, Franklin & Marshall), Leah Plawker (field hockey, Franklin & Marshall), and Sophia Pisano (field hockey, Bryn Mawr).

None of them shied away from colleges with rigorous academics when looking at schools, however.

"I wanted a good balance of both," said Jillian O'Toole. "And I knew that at William & Mary, I'd be able to have that. And I think playing a sport helps you manage academics better, because having that time-pressure makes me get that work done."

"As I get older, I realize that knowledge is eternal," Gary Robinson Jr. added. "It's power. Football, sports, you can only play them for so long. Your body starts to give out, you start to ache, get broken bones and bruises and everything."

While he loves football, for Robinson the attraction of Southern Connecticut State came down to his interest in their communication program more than the athletics. He said he saw the communication facilities and was ready to sign up immediately, so much so that the Owl head football coach had to jokingly ask him if he was still going to play football.

Robinson is excited for that, but knows that he also needs to prepare long term.

"As long as you have this right here," Robinson said, pointing to his head. "Nobody can stop you. I feel like the more I get older, I empower and enlighten myself, I feel unstoppable either on the field or off."

Each athlete credited the MHS Athletic Program with helping prepare them for college on and off the field.

“For soccer at least, every day we were expected to come and we had accountability with coach [Touré] Weaver,” Chris Masur said. “He expected us to be representatives of Montclair on the field but also off the field we had responsibilities of making sure we were in class and I think that prepared the soccer players for the next level of college.”

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“In terms of softball, I think every year there was a lot of turnover in terms of seniors that left each year,” said Francesca Testa. “The underclassmen were faced with a lot of adversity in terms of filling those spots or adapting themselves to fill those spots. And I think that really goes to show how impactful the seniors were that had left and how the coaching staff with all the practices and games helped mold them into people who made such a great impact on the program.”

“I remember during football season, we talked about the ‘five percent rule’ in that only five percent of high school coaches really know what they’re doing,” Robinson chimed in. “On the coaching staffs at Montclair High School, we have that five percent. The practices were crisp, fast paced, like college practices. So I feel like when I get to the college level it will be a smooth transition. And I really thank the coaches and everybody for support in pushing us along the way.”

One supporter for Robinson really stood out. His great-grandmother, herself a Mountie who graduated in 1947, was on hand to witness the proceedings.

“Words can’t even explain how it feels,” Robinson said. “I’m extremely blessed, I just want to thank God. I’m extremely blessed to have my great-grandmother still alive and be able to come here and do great things. My whole entire family as a whole, we’re a very close knit family and I’m very blessed to have a family like this.”