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South Elgin native's social media outlet Sloche puts spotlight on prep athletes --- 3/21/2022

By Eli Mokert, Daily Herald Correspondent



Since creating the social media platform Sloche, South Elgin High School graduate Derrick Echols has built a huge community of high school sports fans across the state. *Courtesy of Derrick Echols*

Many young basketball players dream of playing their sport at the highest levels, like the NCAA Division I "March Madness" basketball tournament that got underway last week.

In reality, the chances of that happening are incredibly low. NCAA research shows each year less than 3.5% of high school basketball players will take the court in college. And only about 1% will play Division I ball.

The social media site Sloche is beginning to help student-athletes change those odds.

Founded by suburban native Derrick Echols, Sloche -- pronounced "slow-shay" -- gives young basketball players more attention and recognition by highlighting their performances through an Instagram account and YouTube channel with more than 110,000 combined subscribers.

Echols, a 21-year-old **South Elgin High School graduate**, launched Sloche his junior year when he fell out of love with playing the game, but not the game itself.

"I knew that when I quit basketball, I wanted to stay around it in any way shape or form, so I picked up a camera and started recording my local high school and helped them get some exposure," said Echols, who's now studying business at Mississippi State University.

Sloche took off rapidly, and one of Echols' first jobs with the site took him to a Las Vegas tournament in 2017 with a popular Chicago AAU team called Team Rose. The work entailed Echols recording the trip and performances of the team, which featured some of the top talent in the Chicago area, then posting highlights online.

It was then that Echols knew he wasn't going to take the path of most high school students, or continue with his job at a local Jewel-Osco store.

"I knew, working at Jewel-Osco, that I wouldn't get a chance to go somewhere like that, so I had to decide whether to put my two weeks in there and then, or keep my job and not fulfill Sloche," he said. "I decided right then to quit my job and from there on, Sloche blew up."

Through Sloche, Echols has since created a massive community of prep basketball in Illinois, where students and fans comment, share information and debate through Sloche's posts.

With the high school basketball season now over, Echols is looking for ways to continue to grow Sloche in different areas, such as a recent experiment with hockey.

When asked what keeps him going, Echols did not hesitate to mention the community his site has created.

"To see how the community was starting to notice what was going on, I thought that I can't stop. It felt like there was a bigger mission than just me." Echols said, "I don't see it as a job anymore. It's like breathing. I'm doing what everyone wants to do, I couldn't just end it."