

Hometown Hero: Profile of an Olympian

Beginnings

Gilbert McGee was born on June 25th, 2004 in Madison, Wisconsin, where he would one day learn how to play the bagpipes. As a child, Gilbert loved to hug anything and everything: cereal boxes, pillows, small children, and even the occasional passing bicyclist. Gilbert's parents decided to find a healthier outlet for his obsession and signed him up for bagpipe lessons when he was just 5 years old. From his first lesson onward, Gilbert was hooked.

Struggles

As Gilbert grew older, he realized that his neighbors did not love the sound of the bagpipe as much as he did, especially at 5 o'clock in the morning. So Gilbert hopped on his bike to explore the neighborhood and find a place where he could practice the bagpipes without disturbing anyone. He rode for days, finally arriving at his grandmother's house. Gilbert asked her nicely, and his grandmother said he could practice in her bomb shelter from the 1950s, since she didn't think the Russians were going to bomb them after all. Finally Gilbert and his bagpipe could be alone.

Accomplishments

When he was 12 years old, Gilbert attended his first bagpipe recital. Playing a mash-up of the classic hymn "Amazing Grace" and Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up", Gilbert brought the house down to thunderous applause. (Seriously, the roof collapsed. The infrastructure was highly unsound. It was incredibly dangerous.) Having escaped the collapse with only a sprained liver, it took Gilbert very little time to get in shape for the Wisconsin "Wind"vitational, a statewide gathering of wind instrumentalists. His ability to beatbox while playing "God Save the Queen" impressed the judges and earned him a spot in the final showcase.

Future Goals

Gilbert is currently working on his audition for the Big Old Bagpipe or BOB tournament being held in the Netherlands in late December. When asked about his future goals Gilbert said, "No I don't think so, they're too smelly and pushy... What? Oh GOALS not GOATS. One goal I have for the future is to backpack through Scotland with my bagpipe. I hear it takes a lot of patience and endurance, and I want to be ready for it. So I'm training right now by playing the bagpipes and Pokemon GO at the same time."

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