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Student begins weather career

Sophomore airs broadcast on The Weather Channel

BY DEVONTE GARDNER
Staff Writer

Ryan Hoke, Mississippi State University sophomore professional meteorology major, turned a childhood obsession with thunderstorms into a career in weather forecasting.

Hoke's accomplishments include an interview on The Weather Channel, feature weather forecasts on ABC affiliates WAVE-TV in Louisville, Ky., and WBBJ-TV in Jackson, Tenn., a job as a tour guide for Storm Chasing Adventure Tours and a full scholarship from MSU.

He said his fascination with weather began at age five when he developed an intense fear of heavy rains and lightning.

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BY HANNAH ROGERS
Assistant News Editor

Bank robberies, kidnappings and FBI showdowns pepper '30s gangster Machine Gun Kelly's mythology; however, the man who became the notorious criminal began as a student at Mississippi State University.

The man now known as Machine Gun Kelly was born George Kelly Barnes to George and

Linda Hoke, his mother, said he was more in awe of lightning than afraid.

During this time, Hoke's parents cut a hole into a cardboard box and attached knobs to make it look like a television set. Hoke would crawl inside and give amateur weather reports.

"I thought he had the most vivid imagination and he's going to use it in whatever field he gets into," his mother said.

She said it was a joy to watch.

"My dad got the video camera out and started recording me doing these ridiculous newscasts," Hoke said. "I was always the weather man. It's that first experience that got me really interested. I got to see what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

By age 10, Hoke's phobia of thunderstorms developed into an intense interest in weather and a yearning to figure out its mechanisms. Soon, he began reading *Discover* magazine, which had an issue on tornadoes and storm chasing, and weather-related children's books, he said.

"Books haven't been a huge deal for me after middle school," Hoke said. "The Internet was huge at that time and learning about weather on the Internet was becoming a real big deal. That's where you can find all the analyses and forecasts and products and learn pretty much on the fly as you're looking at these real-time things."

In late 2006, during his sophomore year of high school, Hoke and his family received a personal weather station as a gift from a relative.

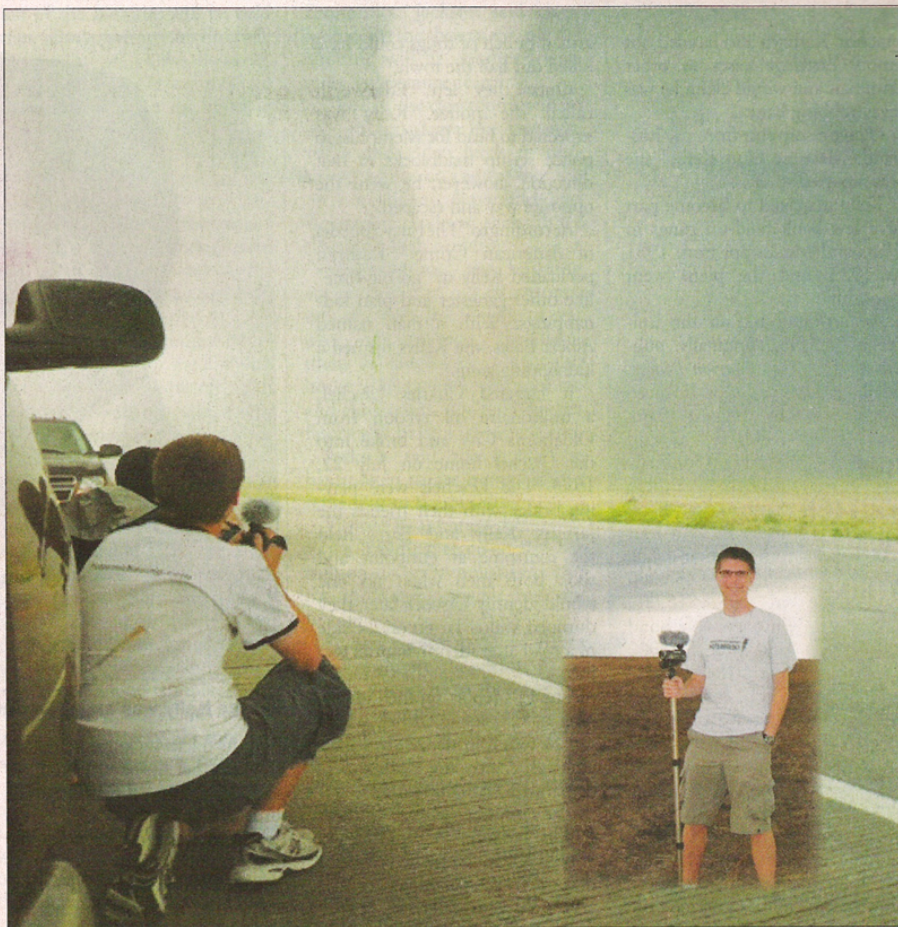
A few months later, Hoke launched his own website, "Ryan Weather," and began broadcasting original weather reports using data from the station.

The Weather Channel came across his website a year later and offered him an opening in its weather forecasting contest. Hoke came in second overall but finished first in the category of "most likely to become a meteorologist."

Bailey Hanson, sophomore biological engineering major and friend of Hoke, said he is amazed with the level of attention Hoke received.

"I think it's really impressive that his work is good enough to be featured on the national stage," he said. "I'm also impressed that he has that level of respect."

In the midst of success and



COURTESY PHOTOS | THE REFLECTOR

Ryan Hoke personally studies a tornado while storm chasing on May 31, 2010 in Campo, Colo.

RYAN HOKE

To learn more about Ryan Hoke and his accomplishments, visit his official website at ryanhoke.com.

recognition, Hoke struggled with one major obstacle — an obstacle that could have prevented him from progressing any further in his meteorology career: math.

"Meteorology requires a lot of mathematics," he said. "Math is something I've never been great at. As a child, I struggled with math. Trying to get my multiplication tables memorized was definitely something that was not easy for me."

Hoke said he had problems getting into the upper-level math classes in high school, particularly calculus.

"It was very difficult. It was more difficult than I imagined it would be. I was like 'how much tougher can it get?'" he said. "It took a little more effort than I thought it would, because my math background is not the

best. That was definitely the setback."

In 2008, Todd Thorn, owner of the tornado and severe weather chasing organization Storm Chasing Adventure Tours, came across a broadcast of Hoke explaining the characteristics of severe weather on his website. Soon after, Thorn offered Hoke a job via e-mail as a tour guide and later as a web designer.

"That was probably the best thing that came into my e-mail inbox in 2008," Hoke said.

Renny Vandewege, Hoke's mentor and broadcast meteorology instructor at MSU, said Hoke made a name for himself by storm chasing.

"You can learn weather from a textbook, but Ryan gets to learn weather firsthand. At his age, that's pretty incredible," he said.

In May 2010, Hoke and the storm chasers came across a tornado in southeast Colorado and submitted the video to The Weather Channel. The day after, The Weather Channel responded via Twitter and requested an on-air interview with Hoke.

"They asked me a whole bunch of questions, not only about the tornado, but who I was and about my meteorology career that I was embarking on," he said. "It was a lot of fun. It was my first national media experience."

After Hoke received a full scholarship from MSU through the Distinguished Scholar program, he decided to further his education in meteorology.

"I had Mississippi State near the top of my list [of] where I wanted to go to college. This place definitely has the best broadcast meteorology program in the region," he said.

