

Oak Ridge Football

Nominated by: Janet Rasmussen

What makes you a champion?

Oak Ridge Pioneers have heart. Our team knows what it is to fight through adversity and never give up. The majority of Oak Ridge High school students are Haitian and many, having moved here recently, are learning English for the first time. Over 85% of our student population is on free and reduced lunch. Only two of our student athletes this year have cars to help with transportation back and forth from their sports team practice. Many of them do not have parents at home, some living with distant family members or friends. Our student athletes arrive by 7 am on the county school bus, attend their classes and study hall, participate in their practice or game and take the city bus, walk, or ride their bike home, sometimes arriving home after 10.30 pm at night.

High school sports are many of these student athletes' first experience in the athletic arena. Their families do not have the money to pay for them to participate in club or AAU sports. In addition, Oak Ridge High School is smaller than most schools within Orange County. We have 1,800 students, while most Orange County High Schools have closer to 3000 students. Therefore, Oak Ridge has been forced to play up two classifications in football in order to save on transportation costs. In spite of all these obstacles, our football team made it to the district playoffs last year, finishing as the district runner-ups.

Much of our athletic budget is spent on not only outfitting our sports teams, but feeding them as well. Our athletic department supplies uniforms, cleats and food for our athletes. In return, our student athletes work hard to perform well in the classroom and participate in community service opportunities. Coach Elijah Williams expects not only good behavior and respect on and off the field, but high performance academically as well. Coach Williams expects the football student athletes to set the standards for all athletics at Oak Ridge. To him, building character is more important than building a winning record. The football team attends a local church helping out the congregation with their many needs. Noticing that the church does not have any playground equipment, the football team will be helping to build one for the congregation this next year. Our football players support our staff, working in classrooms and building relationships amongst the teachers. When one of our teachers' spouses passed away from cancer last year, the entire football team attended the funeral for support. The Pioneers football team also visits all middle schools zoned for Oak Ridge to speak with the students and give them information on their experience as an Oak Ridge Pioneer.

The Oak Ridge football team is comprised of many hard-working individuals who despite many hardships strive to achieve greatness. They know what it takes to become a champion. They are acquiring the skills necessary to achieve on and off the field and will become positive contributing members of our society. Our football student athletes are not only champions, but are Pioneers as well. They pave the way for our other student athletes to achieve greatness as well.

Thank you for your consideration of the Oak Ridge High School football team for your Dress the Champions Sponsorship Program. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Dr. Janet M. Rasmussen