



**Wildwood Football**  
**Nominated By: Matthew LaBranche (Coach)**

What makes Wildwood Middle High School Football a Champion?

Many people believe that talent and coaching alone makes a champion football team. In reality, there are so many more elements involved in being a championship team. As the head football coach, I can shape my program in any way to create champions, but at Wildwood Middle High School the foundation is already here to succeed on the field, in the classroom, and in our community because of our student-athletes are committed to excellence in all aspects of their lives.

What makes us a champion on the field? Commitment to uphold tradition and a blue collar hard working mentality makes Wildwood Football a champion. One could make a case that we are champions on the field based on our program being one of the all-time leaders in the state in categories such as overall wins and playoff appearances. I attribute the athletes' overall character and our school's commitment to developing citizens of character for the obvious presence of responsibility for upholding that tradition. We are a small school which often means we have fewer players, and these players have to play multiple positions and remain on the field throughout the game. Learning these different positions often leads to longer more grueling practices. However, our players take it in stride without complaining as they understand that there is a price to pay to maintain a championship reputation. The players' commitment is visible in our summer weight program as two thirds of our players earn Iron Cat status for only being absent two or less days the entire summer. Lastly, the coaches and players have one final commitment which is the most important to showing our championship caliber. As a staff we remind the kids we have one responsibility to our players which is to love them. And, as an athlete on my team they have one responsibility which is to love each other. Our players simply perform their responsibility and hold each other accountable to make it all work as a championship caliber team.

What makes us a champion in the classroom? Wildwood football players understand the true meaning of student-athlete and the same competitiveness we display on the field also transfers into the classroom. Sumter County is an "A" county through the states FCAT standards, and our school plays a big part in that score. Our kids know they matter and feel responsible for maintaining that standard and raising the expectations. Players compete on the school math team

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and the HI-Q team. They also stay involved as members of the Spanish Club, Art Club, and other school clubs. The current senior and junior classes have several players in the top fifteen percent of their class with two junior players vying for valedictorian. In addition, a high percentage of our upper classmen are currently taking college classes at Lake-Sumter Community College earning credits alongside their high school diploma. Leadership in the classroom also drives my players as several are active members of our school's student government which helps support our school's relationship among the teachers, students, and community. My players' competitiveness not only drives them on the football field but also in the classroom where they are leaders.

What makes us a champion in the community? Our players' compassion is demonstrated with their desire to improve the community any way they can. Their involvement in their community includes active involvement in their churches, giving blood to those in need, and cooperating with efforts to help the less fortunate. Many of our athletes are members of the FFA program here at the school which allows them to learn about the importance of animals in our lives, economy, and our entire planet. Yearly food and toy drives are pushed or driven by many of our players. Becoming involved in the Wildwood community truly shows the compassion and c

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