

Getting in position, he stares at the snapper, Asher Weinberg, waiting for the ball. All that he can think of is "don't mess this up." Receiving the snap, Mack Reed, sophomore, holds the ball for his kicker. After a successful kick and the high fives from his teammates, Mack climbs back into his wheelchair, and is wheeled back to the bench with the roar from the crowd in his ears.

"I was so scared," Mack said. "The first time around, I was eager because I wanted to do it. I was ready the whole game, [and] coach [said], 'Mack, you're going in. You're going in.' [The experience] was awesome."

Mack has spina bifida, a result of the L4 and L5 vertebrae not forming correctly in his back. The space between the vertebrae is filled with spinal fluid and bone tissue. In Mack's case, this left his legs immobile.

"Honestly everything [in daily life] is a struggle," Mack said. "Of course, it's been hard [on the football team] but it's stuff that we all have to go through. There's nothing really that's been singularly hard for me, nothing I can complain about."

His love for football was not the only reason Mack joined the team. Mack said he got the idea after he watched a video of Danny Liyla, a 16-year-old in Minnesota. Danny was paralyzed from the waist down and played the position of placeholder. He inspired Mack to do the same.

"I saw his video of him doing it, and I [said], 'Wow if I could do that it would be great,'" Mack said. "Shaquem Griffin, [who] just got drafted in the NFL, really inspired me. For him to do that made me believe that I could do it."

Shaquem Griffin was born with amniotic band syndrome, which resulted in him playing with only one hand, according to a *Sports Illustrated* article.

Mack said he had enjoyed getting to know his teammates, and hoped to make varsity his junior season. Until then, he focused on winning games and having fun.

"It's been really fun getting to know those guys," Mack said. "[They are] are really nice. They treat me as not just as a teammate, but as a friend."

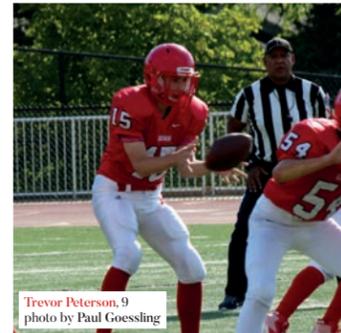
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SOPHOMORE INSPIRES HIS TEAMMATES BY SUITING UP FOR THE GAME HE LOVES



Jack Shanahan, 9
photo by Anna Stutz



Trevor Peterson, 9
photo by Paul Goessling

Dripping in sweat, Jack Shanahan, freshman, grabs a drink of water. Jack was one of the freshman football team captains and played the positions of wide receiver and safety. "I always wanted to be a leader," Jack said. "I wanted to be in the spotlight, and thought football was a place to be there."



Mekhi Macklin, 10
photo by Hollie Bickel

Staring at the field Mekhi Macklin, sophomore, watches the play in the game against Marquette Sept. 11. Mekhi said he liked being on the JV team because it made him more prepared for varsity, and wanted the team to go undefeated this season. "[I love] being with my teammates, having a good time on the field, having fun and winning," Mekhi said. "[We need to] keep the team bond together, making sure we get enough practices in, making sure everyone's coming to practice [to] work hard [and] get better as a team."

GAME DAY HIGHLIGHTS



Jackson Fortner, 12
photo by Avery Grabau

5:17 Jack Matousek, sophomore, scored a touchdown with 5 minutes and 17 seconds left on the clock. After David Bregande, junior, made the extra point, leading Kirkwood to a 43-2 victory.

4:31 The first score for Kirkwood happened as Kannon Nesslage, sophomore, scored a rushing touchdown with 4 minutes and 31 seconds left in the first quarter.

1:30 With 1 minute and 30 seconds left on the clock in the first quarter, Jackson Fortner, sophomore, picked up the ball after Marquette High School fumbled and ran 75 yards for a touchdown.

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