

WRESTLING AND FOOTBALL

“I draft wrestlers because they are tough. I have never had a problem with a wrestler.” –Joe Gibbs, Hall of Fame football coach

“I would have all of my offensive linemen wrestle if I could.”-John Madden, Hall of Fame football coach

“I love wrestlers. They are tough and they make great football players.” Mike Stoops, National Championship football coach-University of Oklahoma

“Wrestlers make coaching football easy. They have balance, coordination, and as a coaching staff, we know they’re tough.” –Tom Osborne, College Hall of Fame football coach-University of Nebraska

The following article illustrates what these coaches are talking about:

Ohio State football: Work on mat can be edge on line

Buckeyes past, present excelled as wrestlers, too

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By Ken Gordon

The Columbus Dispatch

Size doesn't impress Luke Fickell. Each year, Ohio State's co-defensive coordinator evaluates dozens, maybe hundreds of high school football players while recruiting. They're all big, all fast, all strong. But tell Fickell a kid is a standout wrestler, and he'll get a gleam in his eye. Now he's interested.

"We talk about competitiveness, and I don't think there's a better sport to look at someone's competitiveness than wrestling," Fickell said. "You can tell (with wrestlers), it's something that's one-on-one competitive, and that's what we're trying to look for. "You can't define it. You don't know what someone has got inside their chest and their heart, but if you know they've been one on one and they've got that competitive nature ... " Fickell knows. He was a three-time state champion wrestler at DeSales, and as a defensive lineman at Ohio State he set a school record for consecutive starts (50). Since then, several Buckeyes have gone from being high school wrestling stars to successful football careers, including offensive lineman Alex Stepanovich and defensive tackle Tim Anderson, each now in the NFL. This season, defensive tackle Dexter Larimore appears ready to uphold that tradition. He was the nation's top-ranked heavyweight wrestler two years ago at Merrillville (Ind.) High School. Just a redshirt freshman, Larimore had a stellar spring and will see extensive playing time this fall. Technique has a lot to do with what makes wrestlers successful linemen. They are accustomed to being tied up, pretzel-like, with an opponent. "I know a little bit more about leverage than some defensive linemen do," Larimore said, "so it helps that I can just keep a little bit

lower center of gravity. I just try and work guys into kind of backwards positions for them, but it's kind of natural for me." Offensive coordinator and offensive line coach Jim Bollman said he notices wrestlers tend to be adept at getting their hands in proper position, which is a key to blocking or defeating a block.

"The quickness and strength of their hands inside is becoming a much bigger part of the football game nowadays," Bollman said. "And I think that (wrestlers) have a little bit of a head start."

But as Fickell said, it's the intangible desire that translates well to football.

Wrestlers famously have a warrior mentality. Injuries and fatigue are no excuse.

"When you're a wrestler, you have to put a lot on yourself if you want to be good," Stepanovich said. "It teaches you that every day in wrestling you're not going to feel good. You're going to have bumps and bruises. You've got to be able to grind it out. I think that helps in football." Larimore said he thinks wrestling makes him better equipped to handle adversity, such as the heat and humidity the Buckeyes practiced in last week. "Wrestling is so hard and just so physically taxing on your body, that I get out there (for football practice) and a lot of guys will mentally break: 'It's hot,' and I just keep working and trying to get better," he said. "I just can basically push myself to a point where I physically can't go anymore. I think wrestling instills that mentality." Another wrestler is in the Ohio State pipeline. Defensive tackle Garrett Goebel of Lombard, Ill., recently orally committed to the 2008 recruiting class. He won his state's heavyweight title in the spring. "My nasty attitude comes from wrestling," Goebel told the Chicago Sun Times. "You can't be a nice guy and be an accomplished wrestler. You have to want to stick a guy's nose into the mat." In football, I want to hurt the other guy. I want to knock him down all the time." He sounds like Fickell's type.

Here is a list of some of the NFL football players who wrestled in high school or college:

Art Baker, RB, Buffalo Bills

Rhonde Barber, SS, Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Tiki Barber, RB, New York Giants

Walter Barnes, DL, Washington Redskins - SEC Champ

Eric Bateman, OL, New York Jets

Brad Benson, New York Giants – PA State Champ

Greg Boone, RB, Oakland Raiders

Jeff Bostic*, C, Washington Redskins – SC State Champ

Tedy Bruschi*, ILB, New England Patriots

Bob Bruenig*, LB, Dallas Cowboys

Phil Bryant, Philadelphia Eagles – 2x National Prep Champ

Ralph Cindrich, Houston Oilers – PA State Runner-Up

Jonathan Condo, LS, Dallas Cowboys - PA State Champ, Dapper Dan Champ

Tom Cousineau*, LB, Cleveland Browns – 3rd State

Tom Covert*, OT, Chicago Bears

Chris Cooley, WR, Washington Redskins

Roger Craig*, RB, San Francisco 49'ers

Damien Covington, LB, Buffalo Bills
Curley Culp*, DL, Kansas City Chiefs – NCAA Champ
Larry Czonka, RB, Miami Dolphins**
Rob Davis, ST, Green Bay Packers
Dan Dierdorff, OT, St. Louis Cardinals**
Donnie Edwards, OLB, San Diego Chargers
Carl Edwards, San Diego Chargers – 3x MD State Champ
Rob Essink, Seattle Seahawks – NCAA DII Champ
Jim Everett, QB, New Orleans Saints
DeMarco Farr, St. Louis Rams
Patrick Flannery, OL, Houston Oilers
Ed Flanagan, C, Detroit Lions
Terrell Fletcher, RB, San Diego Chargers
Bill Fralic*, G, Atlanta Falcons
Doug France*, LT, Los Angeles Rams – OH State Runner-Up
Frank Garcia, C, St. Louis Rams – 2x AZ State Champ
William George, Chicago Bears – 2x PA State Champ
Charlie Getty, RG, Kansas City Chiefs – 2x NCAA All-American
John Gilmore, TE, Chicago Bears
Kevin Glover*, C, Detroit Lions
La’Roi Glover*, DE, Dallas Cowboys
Mike Goff, G, Cincinnati Bengals
Bob Golic*, DT, Cleveland Browns – OH State Champ
Mike Golic, DE, Philadelphia Eagles
Darien Gordon, PR/CB, Denver Broncos
Scottie Graham, RB, Minnesota Vikings
Tim Green, DE, Atlanta Falcons
Kelly Gregg, NT, Baltimore Ravens, 3x KS State Champ
Morlon Greenwood, OLB, Miami Dolphins
Archie Griffin, HB, Cincinnati Bengals
Nick Griesen, LB, New York Giants
Randy Grossman, TE, Pittsburgh Steelers
John Hannah, G, New England Patriots**
John Hartunian
Carlton Haselrig*, Pittsburgh Steelers, 3x NCAA Champ
Ron Heller, TE, Seattle Seahawks
Chad Hennings, DT, Dallas Cowboys – IA State Champ
Jay Hilgenberg*, C, Chicago Bears – IA State Runner-Up
Orlando Huff, MLB, Seattle Seahawks
Corey Hulsey, G, Oakland Raiders
Bo Jackson*, RB, Oakland Raiders
Mario Johnson, DT, New England Patriots
Dahanie Jones, LB, New York Giants
Henry Jordan, DT, Green Bay Packers**
Dave Joyner, OL, Green Bay Packers
John Jurkovich*, DT, Cleveland Browns

Alex Karras, Detroit Lions
Tim Krumrie*, DL, Cincinnati Bengals – WI State Champ
Ernie Ladd, DL, Kansas City Chiefs
Nick Lecky, C, Arizona Cardinals- Tx State Champ
Jess Lewis, LB, Houston Oilers
Ray Lewis*, Baltimore Ravens – 2x FL State Champ
Ronnie Lott, DB, San Francisco 49'ers**
Kirk Lowdermilk*, OL, Minnesota Vikings
Sean Mahan, G, Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Mike Malczyk, LS, New York Giants
Joel Mackavicka, RB, Seattle Seahawks
Steve Martin, DT, Houston Texans
Mickey Marvin, RG, Oakland Raiders
Napolean McCallum, RB, Oakland Raiders
Randle McDaniel*, G, Minnesota Vikings
Mark McDonald, SS, Arizona Cardinals
Chris McIntosh, T, Seattle Seahawks
Bryant McKinnie, T, Minnesota Vikings
Greg Meisner, DL, Los Angeles Rams
Matt Millen*, LB, Oakland Raiders
Ronald Moore, RB, Cleveland Browns
James Mungro, HB, Indianapolis Colts
Jim Nance, FB, New England Patriots – NCAA Champ
Lorenzo Neal, FB, Tennessee Titans - NCAA Champ
Stephen Neal, OL, New England Patriots – NCAA Champ (Did not play football in college)
Jeremy Newberry, C, San Francisco 49'ers
Chuck Noll, Pittsburgh Steelers – PA State Champ
Leo Nomellini*, T, San Francisco 49'ers – Big 10 Champ
Jonathan Ogden*, OT, Baltimore Ravens
Irv Pankey, Los Angeles Rams – 2x MD State Champ
David Patten, WR, New England Patriots
Scott Peters, G, New York Giants
Bob Pickens, OL, Chicago Bears
Jim Plunkett*, QB, Oakland Raiders
Dave Porter, T, Green Bay Packers
Mike Pyle, C, Chicago Bears – IA State Champ
Rocky Rasley, G, Detroit Lions
Mike Reid, Cincinnati Bengals
Eric Rnett, RB, Cleveland Browns – FL State Champ
Willie Roaf*, OT, New Orleans Saints
Warren Sapp*, DT Tampa Bay Buccaneers – FL State Champ
Mark Schlereth*, OL, Washington Redskins - Alaska State Champ
Cory Schlesinger, LB, Detroit Lions - NE State Champ
Steve Sefter, DT, Philadelphia Eagles, 2x PA State Champ & NCAA All-American
Tony Siragusa*, DT, Baltimore Ravens – NJ State Champ

Fred Smerlas*, Buffalo Bills - MA State Champ
Bruce Smith**, DE, Washington Redskins
Brad St. Louis, TE, Cincinnati Bengals
Matt Suhey, RB, Chicago Bears
Bill Szott, OL, Washington Redskins – NJ State Champ
Dave Szott, Kansas City Chiefs – NJ State Champ
Woody Thompson, RB, Atlanta Falcons – PA State Champ
Jim Thorpe**, HB, New York Giants
Mike Trgovac, DC, Carolina Panthers – OH State Champ
Kyle Turley*, T, St. Louis Rams
Ryan Turnbull, RB, Cleveland Browns
Tommy Vardell, RB, San Francisco 49'ers
Adam Vinatieri*, K, New England Patriots
John Ward, OL, New York Jets – NCAA All-American
Fred Weary, DB, St. Louis Rams
Charles White*, HB, Los Angeles Rams
Randy White*, DT, Dallas Cowboys
Cory Widmer, LB, New York Giants
Leo Wisniewski, NT, Baltimore/Indianapolis Colts - PA State Champ
Steve Wisniewski, G, Los Angeles/Oakland Raiders - CA State Champ
Ricky Williams*, RB, Miami Dolphins
Coy Wire, LB, Buffalo Bills – PA State Runner-Up
Greg Wojochowski, St. Louis Rams

* Made the Pro Bowl

** Hall of Fame Player