

Dream becomes reality

According to nj.com, only 0.08% of high school football players will reach the NFL, making their dream a reality.

Matt Nelson had dreamed of becoming a professional athlete ever since he was little. He had a passion for football and this passion grew during his time in the Xavier football program. He graduated from Xavier High School in 2014, played football at the University of Iowa, graduating in 2019, and is now playing in the NFL with the Detroit Lions.

"Matt loved sports, all of them, but even clear back in his kindergarten class at St. Matthew's with Mrs. Peck, he was drawing himself as a famous football player," Julie Palmer, Nelson's mom, said.

The journey of making this childhood dream a reality began with the help of the lessons Nelson learned at Xavier.

"The Xavier football program taught me the basics of football and taught me about toughness, discipline and work ethic," Nelson said.

Even though Nelson learned many life lessons at Xavier, he already had characteristics that would help him succeed in the future.

"Matt was intelligent, tough, a competitor and always put the team first," Xavier Head Football



Matt Nelson (X14) warms up at offensive tackle for his practice with the Detroit Lions. Photo Submitted.

Coach Duane Schulte said.

Matt's wife, Hayley Nelson, also a Xavier alum of 2014, acknowledges their lives would not be the same if they had not gone to Xavier.

"Xavier laid the framework for the success Matt has had. Xavier always pushed us to be the best version of ourselves, whether it was in the classroom or on the field/court. He has always been taught that hard work will give you the rewards you want to see," Hayley said. "For example, when he changed positions at Iowa [from defensive end to defensive tackle], he knew it was not going to just be handed to him. He worked tirelessly at practice and when he got home,

he was constantly watching film to see what he could do to get better."

These behind the scenes tasks Matt worked on to improve are the reason he is where he is now, with the Detroit Lions.

"I was able to make this dream a reality with lots of hard work and support from friends and family," Matt said.

Palmer has loved being there to watch and support her son as he has grown into the person he is today.

"I have the best seat in the house, being able to see Matt and his brothers grow into compassionate, funny and hard working men. There has been nothing better than to watch them all chase

after their dreams," Palmer said.

As the first Xavier alum to hold an active roster spot in the NFL, Matt has brought joy to the Xavier community and especially to his coaches.

"I feel proud. We tell our guys 'you get what you earn' and Matt has earned all he has achieved," Schulte said.

While Matt has been very successful in his career, he has also been a Christian role model through his humility.

"Matt really does not want the fame. He loves the game of football. He feels tremendously blessed that he can still play a sport that he has loved since he was a child," Palmer said.

Matt's intention is to continue playing the sport that he loves for as long as he can and he is looking forward to the future.

"Football has given us a lot of memories and will continue giving us more in the years to come. We are both very excited to go on this football journey," Hayley said.

Watch this former Xavier Saint live out his dream when the Detroit Lions play the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois Sunday, December 6 at 12:00 p.m.

Rylee Beardsworth
Sports Editor

Long awaited championship

When one strives and works for something for a long time, their chances of achieving this are high.

The Xavier volleyball program is a prime example of that.

This year's state title for the girls' volleyball team has been a long time coming. This championship team was affected in large part by the previous teams who came before them.

"They sacrificed everything to get this program moving in the right direction," Head Volleyball Coach Austin Filer said of the past alum to the Xavier volleyball program. "Without those players paving the way, this 2020 team could never have won this championship."

The past teams' leadership and dedication to the program inspired the 2020 team to work even harder.

"The team played for the teams that wanted this so badly in the past," Filer said. "They were not going to let them down."

Senior Jazmine Yamilkoski explains how the players who came before her impacted her journey.

"They were tough without being mean and very accountable," Yamilkoski said. "They set a good example for me in the future."

One teammate in particular that Yamilkoski looked up to was Keera Ball (X19). They played together when Yamilkoski was a sophomore and when Ball was a senior.

"I learned that Keera is the type of player you want to be,



Keera Ball (libero) and Jazmine Yamilkoski (15) huddle with their team in the 2018 4A state championship against Dubuque Wahlert Catholic at the U.S. Cellular Center. Gazette Photo.

so I tried to base my choices, words and actions on what Keera would do," Yamilkoski said.

It is easy to recognize the tight bond and appreciation that these two have grown for each other throughout their time being teammates.

"She [Jazmine] has worked so hard to be the volleyball player she is today and has dedicated so much time," Ball said. "She is the type of teammate that you want to be around."

Ball, being a former libero, finds pleasure in knowing the years of hard work finally paid off.

"It is something the Xavier volleyball program has been working towards for five years," Ball said. "I am proud and honored to have been a part of this program and that we started the stage for success."

The experiences that the

players, both past and present, have shared has created a family.

"They shared triumph and heartbreak together and many are bonded for life," Filer said.

This 2020 team proved to be special, not only through their accomplishments, but also through their close relationships with each other.

"I absolutely loved being a part of this team," junior Maya Karl said. "The dynamic between all of us made playing the game that much more fun."

The combination of the team's strong chemistry, dedication, perseverance and grit led them to go down in school history as Xavier's first volleyball state championship winning team.

"This title means everything because we have overcome so much and worked so hard, it feels earned," Yamilkoski said.

Karl explains how some of the motivation came from last year's unfortunate ending.

"With the way things ended last year, we all knew we had to make changes to get the outcome we wanted," Karl said.

They did just that: remained focused and executed when the time came.

"They never lost sight of the goal," Filer said. "They never gave up on the dream, they earned this."

The 2020 championship team fought until the end and came out

victorious. With the contributions of both the past teams' players and this year's team, they have created a name for Xavier volleyball, a name that will be remembered forever. So, thank you to Jess Callahan (X17), Lexi Noonan (X17), Charlotte Richards (X18), Elle Choate (X18), Ellie McDermott (X18), Jade Henderson (X18), Rachel Sodawasser (X18), Akeela Jefferson (X19), Emily Jasper (X19), Keera Ball (X19), Madison Rollinger (X19), Olivia Richards (X19), Ashley Hinrichs (X20), Aubrey Jones (X20), Julia Shoger (X20) and Lindsey Winger (X20).

Mary Kate Moeder
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