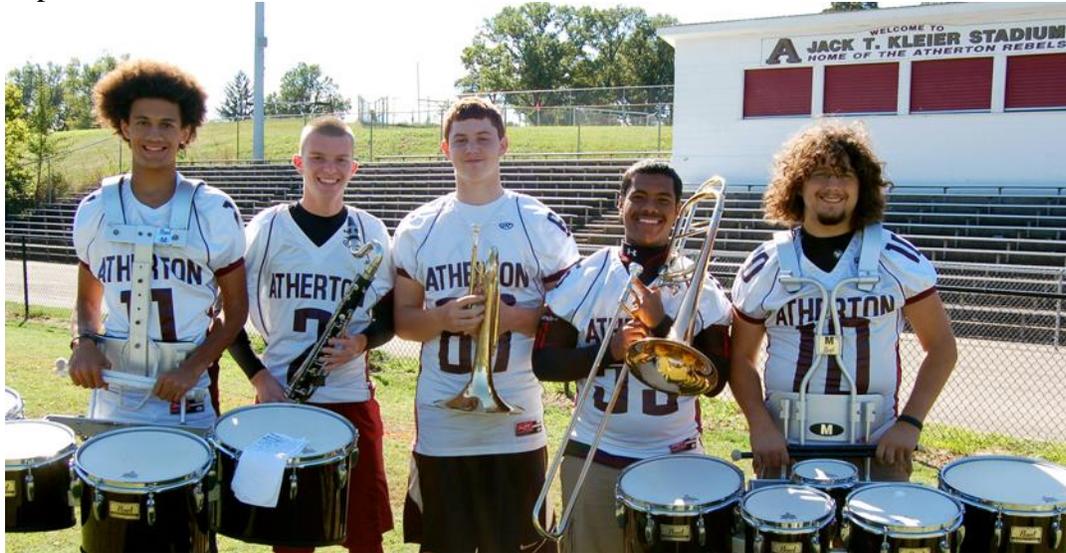


# Marching To Their Own Beat: Five Atherton students split time between football and band

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CHRIS CAHILL | contributing photographer      Members of the Atherton football squad who double as marching band members: Brenden Lacer-Hallback, Erik Mann, Matt Cowles, Derrick Washington and Seth Gadbois.

For most high school football players, halftime is merely a brief respite from the rigors of the gridiron. But for five Atherton High School starters, the end of the first two quarters is the beginning of an entirely different kind of performance.

Still clad in jerseys and pads, Seth Gadbois, Derrick Washington, Brenden Lacer-Hallback, Erik Mann and Matt Cowles pick up their respective musical instruments and take to the field as members of the Rebels' marching band.

While coach Kenneth Walker barks out instructions to the rest of the team in the locker room, this quintet of student-athlete-musicians executes classics from the Michael Jackson catalog including "Billy Jean," "Thriller" and "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough."

This rare dual participation is made possible by a culture at Atherton that encourages students to pursue diverse interests regardless of scheduling challenges or perceptions of incongruity.

"We share our athletes. That's just what we do," said Athletic Director Debbie Beichler. "It's unusual, but we have coaches and staff who are committed to making it work."

During the preseason, Walker and band director Sarah McClave mapped out a plan to balance football practice and band rehearsal.

"She lets me know what days she will be practicing, and I tell her what days I need them," said Walker, who is entering his third year as head coach.

McClave has 93 students in her program this year and thinks “it’s important that they experience as much as possible during high school, even though it’s hard work to do both.”

“There’s more crossover here than at a lot of other schools. The way we see it, everyone’s out there to support each other,” McClave added.

According to Gadbois, a junior linebacker/fullback who plays tenor drums, the scheduling is the easy part. Taking on a day filled with classes and a full commitment to both the football team and the band is most taxing.

“We’re usually here (at school) from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., then up again at 5:30 a.m. the next day to catch the bus and start all over,” Gadbois said.

Gadbois was a serious musician long before he joined the football team this season.

“Football is a place where I can legally hit some guy as hard as I can and get up and do it again ... you can’t do that in band,” he said.

Washington, a sophomore offensive guard/defensive tackle and trombonist, thrives on the long days.

“I came to Atherton because I knew I wanted to do both,” he said. “I’m thankful for the busy schedule.”

While they are supported by the vast majority of teammates, Washington explained that occasional razzing is easily quashed.

“Some people on the team try to crack jokes now and then, but they can’t really say much – we’re all five starters,” he said.

Mann may have the most hectic schedule of all. In addition to his duties as a punter/kicker and bass clarinetist, the senior also is the starting goalkeeper on the soccer team and plays baseball in the spring.

All this while maintaining a 4.0 grade point average in the rigorous International Baccalaureate program of studies.

“A lot of nights I’m up late and some weekends I don’t go out with friends because I’m doing homework, but I’ve had a lot of fun being such a big part of the school community, and I think I’ll benefit from it in the long run,” Mann said.

Still uncertain where he’ll attend college next fall, Mann is considering the pre-med program at Murray State University.

A fellow senior, Cowles (defensive tackle/left guard) plays the mellophone and is considering Western Kentucky and Kentucky.

Lacer-Hallback, a junior corner back and wide receiver, is a quad drummer and one of the team’s top athletes. Although he has the tools to play college football, he is relishing his opportunity to do a bit of everything as a high school student.

“I think it’s worth it. It keeps us busy and out of trouble for sure,” he said. “It also helps us budget our time and set priorities and goals.”