

## NFL Players Who Wrestled

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**"I would have all of my Offensive Lineman wrestle if I could."**

-John Madden, Hall of Fame Football Coach

### WHAT NFL SCOUTS SAY

When an NFL Draft Scout evaluated prospect Alex Stepanovich he said that,

"(Alex is) Well-respected by coaches and teammates for his tough, aggressive nature (which is attributed to from his prep wrestling background)"

Alex Stepanovich currently plays Center for the Arizona Cardinals.  
(to see the original article click [here](#))

*John Tait, former BYU offensive lineman and a NFL First Round Draft Pick, tells a story.*

I heard that one time at a workout at Nebraska, a scout told a defensive lineman to wrestle him. He just said, "OK, let's wrestle." Guys were looking at each other, wondering what to do, and the scout just grabbed him and next thing you know, they're wrestling. It's crazy, but you hear all sorts of stories like that.

John Tait currently plays Offensive Tackle for the Chicago Bears.  
(to see the original article click [here](#))

### BEING TOUGH

"My football coach told me, 'You better get in wrestling or I'll beat you up,'" -- Tim Lee, Texas High School All-American.

Lee said that wrestling helps him on the football field because he knows he has to stay low.

"In wrestling, you've got to have self-discipline and self-motivation. As a lineman, it's the same thing ... me vs. you. He brings that mentality to the football field." - Lee's High School Football Coach, Tim Howard



### THE PLAYER TO THE COACH

In the 1970's it was Tom Shawhan's responsibility to line up opposite Mike Denney on the line of scrimmage during practice.

Today, Mike Denney is the head coach at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Tom Shawhan is the head wrestling coach at McAllen High, TX. How and why are two semi-pro football players now coaching wrestling?

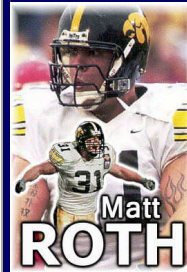
Both credit football and wrestling for getting them where they are today, and one of the messages Mike Denney hopes to relay to the high school coaches and athletes is that wrestling is the perfect complement to football.

While football is in its offseason, wrestling provides the perfect opportunity for the athletes to remain active, while working on their agility and conditioning, Denney said.

Tom Shawhan can attest to his friend's theory (Shawhan and Denny met as team mates on a semi-professional football team, the Omaha Mustangs, during the 1970s). Along with playing semi-pro football, Shawhan also has years of being an assistant football coach throughout the Rio Grande Valley (Mission High, Harlingen High, PSJA High, McAllen Memorial and McHi).

"In Texas, everyone knows that high school football is king," Denney said. "I'm telling you, though, Texas is catching up in wrestling. And a lot of the football coaches are realizing how much wrestling can help their football team. And believe me, that's the truth. I know it firsthand. You have to remember when I started out I was a football coach in high school, and I would go to the wrestling team and get everyone that could to sign up for my football team."

### BECOMING MR. INTENSITY



Some of Matt Roth's intensity can also be attributed to his successful run as a state-champion wrestler in high school. Many coaches, scouts and wrestlers-turned-football-players will laud wrestling for the leverage and quick hands it provides for football. Roth credits wrestling for the never-say-die attitude it gave him.

"It's the attitude. (Wrestling) helps you with your hips, your hands and your balance, but more than anything it helps you with your attitude," he said. "A lot of these kids that are basketball players, we eat those kids up. It's just our mentality — you're going to get the job done and you're going to punish them."

Roth said his dream partner on the wrestling mat would be Ravens LB Ray Lewis, himself an accomplished high school wrestler. Don King is already promoting the match as "The Rumble in the Limo."

-- By Chris Neubauer, Pro Football Weekly (to see the original article click [here](#))

- By Wade Baker, The McAllen Monitor McAllen,  
Texas.  
(to see the original article click [here](#))



## CURRENT AND FORMER NFL PLAYERS THAT WRESTLED

Shane Olivea  
Alex Stepanovich, C  
Nick Leckey - TX State Champ  
Gregory Walker - State Finalist  
Jonathan Condo  
Zachary Wilson  
Chris Laskowski  
Luis Castillo, DT, San Diego Chargers (First Round Pick)  
Lincoln "Drew" Hodgdon, C, Houston Texans - CA State Champ  
Nick Hardwick  
Fred Weary, C, Houston Texans - AL State Champ  
Coy Wire, SS, Buffalo Bills - PA State Champ  
Kevin Breedlove - SC State Finalist  
Kevin Sampson - NJ State Champ  
Benjamin Claxton - GA State Finalist  
Trevor Johnson  
Clinton "C.J." Brooks, Jr.  
Tai Tupai  
Leon Robinson - GA State Runner-Up  
Roddy White, WR, Atlanta Falcons -2x SC State Champ(1st Round Pick)  
Eric Ghiaciuc, C, Cincinnati Bengals - MI State Champ  
Joey Hildbold  
Adam Seward, ILB, Carolina Panthers - NV State Champ  
Cody Johnson  
Rodney Michael  
Marques Harris - CO State Champ  
Larry Turner  
Andrew "Tyler" Lenda - District Champ  
Tim Anderson - OH State Champ  
Tony Pape  
Matt Roth - IA State Champ  
Mike Patterson, DT, Philadelphia Eagles (First Round Pick)  
David Pollack  
Tim Burrough - OK State Champ  
Antoineo Harris - IL State Champ  
Claude Harriott  
Scott Wells - TN State Champ  
Alex Lewis - District Champ  
Ronnie Brown, RB, Miami Dolphins (#2 Pick)  
Rodney Leisle  
Nick Newton  
Sean Tufts  
Brian Save  
Kevin Atkins

Josh Minkins - District Runner-up  
 Tim Euhus  
 Andrew Tidwell-Neal - MN State Champ  
 Renaldo Works  
 Patrick "Bucky" Babcock - IL State Champ  
 Morgan Pears  
 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  
 Harris Benton  
 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

Hall of Fame Running Back from the Miami Dolphins, Larry Czonka, pounded opponents on the wrestling mat as well as the gridiron.



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 Hulsy, 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, - KS State Champ (in 2004 NFL Draft)

Jess Lewis, LB, Houston Oilers

Ray Lewis\*, Baltimore Ravens – 2x FL State Champ

Ray Lewis, Pro Bowl Linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens, was a Florida 4A State Wrestling Champion at 189 lbs.



Ronnie Lott\*\*, DB, San Francisco 49ers

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

Future Hall of Famer Randall McDaniel was a wrestler before he was named to 12 NFL Pro Bowls.

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

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 Reth, RB, Cleveland Browns – FL State Champ

Willie Roaf\*, OT, New Orleans Saints

Warren Sapp\*, DT Tampa Bay Buccaneers – FL State Champ

Pro Bowl Defensive Tackle Warren Sapp was a Florida State Champion wrestler in High School.



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

\*Pro-Bowler  
 \*\*Hall of Famer



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

### **Ten Good Reasons for Football Players to Wrestle:**

1. **Agility**--The ability of one to change the position of his body efficiently and easily.
2. **Quickness**--The ability to make a series of movements in a very short period of time.
3. **Balance**--The maintenance of body equilibrium through muscular control.
4. **Flexibility**--The ability to make a wide range of muscular movements.
5. **Coordination**--The ability to put together a combination of movements in a flowing rhythm.
6. **Endurance**--The development of muscular and cardiovascular-respiratory stamina.
7. **Muscular Power** (explosiveness)--The ability to use strength and speed simultaneously.
8. **Aggressiveness**--The willingness to keep on trying or pushing your adversary at all times.
9. **Discipline**--The desire to make the sacrifices necessary to become a better athlete and person.
10. **A Winning Attitude**--The inner knowledge that you will do your best - win or lose.



## **... on the Benefits of Wrestling for Football Players**

**Could it be that many football players are "missing the boat" during the off-season. To make a point, I'd like you to consider the following true story of many, many years ago.**

**There was a football coach from a small coal mining town in Pennsylvania who was anxious about keeping some of his players in condition during the winter months. Of course, his ends and backfield personnel were participating in basketball, but what about the offensive and defensive linemen?**

**Then an idea struck him like a sledgehammer--"Why not start a wrestling program for the bigger and often less agile players?" Well, he did and his wrestling teams became so good that they had to compete with college freshmen. Oh, I almost forgot to mention, his powerful football units of the past are still the subject of conversation amongst his local townspeople.**

**What does wrestling have to offer an aspiring football candidate? Primarily, it teaches him "self-reliance"--the ability to make things happen without expecting help from others. A pigskin participant learns (via the mat sport) that although there are 10 of his peers on the field with him, he must perform his duties at all times. and not lean on his teammates for support when fatigued.**

**And that's not all. In the wrestling room, he improves his agility, coordination, quickness, upper body strength, and stamina--to name just a few benefits. So, if you have a son who's a tackle or guard and he's spending most of the snow season on his duff, suggest wrestling. He'll be a much better football player for it!**