

The Alumni Field Experience



Quakertown Community High School's student section, band, and cheer squad create a community spirit at Friday night football games that have become the envy of visiting schools.





By Gary Weckselblatt

The Quakertown Community School District has developed a formula that doesn't need a scoreboard to prove it's a winner. On Friday nights at Alumni Field, the magical experience is captured in the leadership of high school students by high school students, who come together to cheer on their Panthers in a family friendly way that is inclusive of the broader Quakertown community.

The ingredients include an exuberant student section, a nationally ranked band, an awesome cheer squad, and a hard-working football team built on character that appreciates the support. The recipe produces an experience that's second to none on the high school level.



**Madison
Jeffery**

"These football games have shaped my high school experience in unimaginable ways and to see everyone in the student section smiling, laughing, yelling, and cheering together exhibits how much we care about our school and the people around us," said Madison Jeffery, one of 12 student section leaders who have taken on the responsibility for the positive behavior of their classmates. "No matter the out-

come of the games, people show up every week because the atmosphere of being in those stands with your friends and classmates and watching the people you know and have grown to care about on the field is an amazing feeling.



**Brooke
Ziemba**

Friday night football will always be the most exciting experience throughout my years of high school and it will absolutely be the number one thing I will miss most when I graduate next year."

Brooke Ziemba, the band's Drum Major, said "We love coming out to support our community and student-athletes. It's exhilarating to see the student section and cheer team sing and



dance to the music we are playing. Quakertown has such a wonderful atmosphere, and I'm so glad the band is a part of it."

While the football team is central to the gathering - and the 7-0 Panthers are having an awesome campaign - the student section is the one area where students are responsible for their peer's behavior.

It's a responsibility they seek out by filling out an application that's submitted to the high school administration, which then selects student leaders. Their tasks include control of the @QCHS_student22 Twitter page, choosing the game's themed attire, organizing the section seating by grade level (seniors in front), and getting the cheering started. They meet regularly with Principal Mattias van 't Hoenderdaal.

"You want to see our young people in the building take that piece of ownership," Mr. V said. "You want students to step up and make it their own. There's pride in that, and I'm proud of how they're handling it."

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"We've been really blessed. There's not an empty seat and people are standing shoulder to shoulder. The interaction is super positive. Our players definitely feed off that."

Coach George Banas



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Band Director Frank Parker commended the student section for the respect it shows to opponents. "They don't boo or say anything negative," he said. "They won't do that. And that's a culture the administration, teachers, and student leaders have worked hard to establish." For example, when an opponent is injured, the student spirit section sits down, while the football team and cheer squad take a knee.



**Brendon
Ruzicka**

In addition to Madison, student leaders include Alli Caputo, Amelia Cianciola, Emma Donnelly, Kyla Frederick, Jadyn Fuentes, John Juszynski, Todd McGann, Leah Mestayer, Laney Mitchell, Brandon Pierce, David Pyfer and Brendon Ruzicka.

"Being a student section leader is one of my greatest high school memories," said Brendon, a senior. "Being one of the people in



Will Steich

charge of getting everyone going and getting the football players hyped up is a special feeling. When the band is playing their songs we feed off that by going along with them and just being loud, which is our job."

"They're loud and they're fun," said Will Steich, the senior quarterback. Every now and then you look up and appreciate everyone being there. It's great."

Senior running back Tyler Woodman said "They really make it fun to go out and play. Their noise on third down definitely makes a difference. It's ridiculous."

Football Coach George Banas has told his players to "stop, take in, and enjoy" the stadium's atmosphere. "We've been really blessed," he said. "There's not an empty seat and people are standing shoulder to shoulder. The interaction is



**Tyler
Woodman**

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super positive. Our players definitely feed off that.”

When the Panthers play at home on Friday nights, there’s school and community pride in evidence on Park Ave. between 7th and 8th Streets in Quakertown Borough. When the lights go on, memories are made, and friendships are strengthened to last a lifetime.

The body of Alumni Field adds to the cozy feel. There’s no walking track nor eight-lane track. The stands are essentially on top of the field, giving additional strength to the noise levels of the students section, cheer team, and band.

Coach Banas said every visiting coach has remarked to him about how special Alumni Field is. “They all say, ‘Man, this complex, this facility, is like no other.’”

Athletic Director Sylvia Kalazs said staff members from opposing teams have told her they are “amazed and awed” at how the band and student section “interact for such a wonderful Friday night atmosphere.” She said the band and student section were intentionally moved together approximately five years ago to enhance the camaraderie.

Cheer Coach Liz Ebersole, a 2013 QCHS grad, said “The student section is so loud and so big. It has expanded so much since I was a student here, not even close. It’s definitely more of a social event.”

After a recent game, Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner said Neshaminy Superintendent Dr. Rob McGee told him he has “never seen a high school sports section like Quakertown’s.”

Dr. Harner, who called the student section “electric,” said a “positive school culture is fundamental to academic excellence. And a very important part of that excellence are programs for athletics and arts. It raises the expectations and performance of everyone involved.”

Coach Banas believes that in the midst of an 18-month pandemic, Friday night community gatherings are part of a “healing process.”

“Our full community is coming together, from elementary on up. They’re having an experience with their friends to enjoy life again.”

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