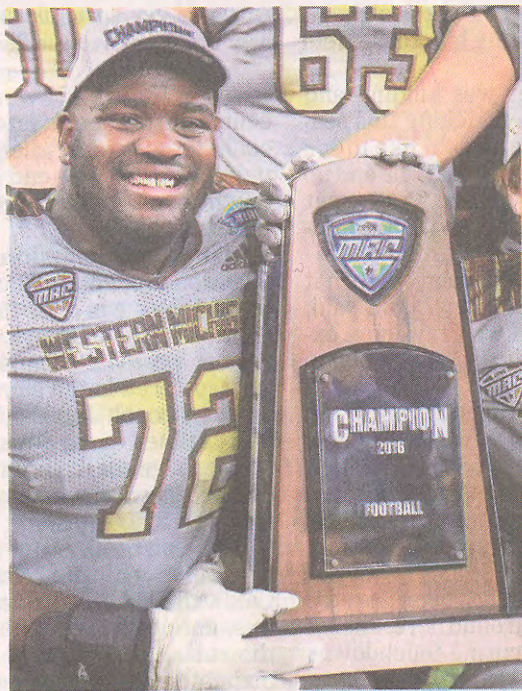


'HE'S A WINNER'



KIRTHMON F. DOZIER/DETROIT FREE PRESS

Moton holds the MAC Championship trophy Dec. 2. It's a long way from 2013 when the Broncos floundered to a 1-11 record.

CODY TUCKER LANSING STATE JOURNAL

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He was looking for his parents. Then his eyes moved toward the rafters.

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SPORTS 1C

DAY 04.28.17 | LANSING STATE JOURNAL | LSJ.COM/SPORTS



TREVOR RUSZKOWSKI/USA TODAY SPORTS

Okemos native and Western Michigan standout Taylor Moton is projected as a second- or third-round pick in this weekend's NFL draft. If so he'll be the highest pick by a Lansing area player since 1996.

MOTON'S MOMENT

Okemos native and WMU standout is Lansing's top pro draft prospect in decades



GRAHAM COUCH
SPORTS COLUMNIST

Taylor Moton might not be a full-blown celebrity in Kalamazoo. But he gets recognized from time to time.

"Once in a while," Moton said Thursday, after finishing breakfast at a Kalamazoo restaurant and acknowledging a fellow patron who wished him good luck in the NFL draft, which began Thursday night.

Moton is easy to spot. He's no small man, and Western Michigan University's football team last fall was no small deal to that community.

He should be a bigger deal in Lansing. He might be someday. Perhaps that starts tonight.

Moton is the highest-regarded NFL prospect to come out of the Lansing area in more than two decades. The 6-foot-5, 319-pound offensive lineman from Okemos is projected as a second- or third-

round draft pick, meaning he'll likely come off the board tonight.

The last local product to grab the NFL's attention like this: Waverly's Muhsin Muhammad, who, after a career at Michigan State, was selected 43rd overall in 1996 by the Carolina Panthers.

East Lansing's Brad Jones, the Green Bay Packers' seventh-round pick out of Colorado in 2009, is the only Lansing area player to be selected between Muhammad and Moton. Lansing Catholic's Cooper Rush, who quarterbacked Central Michigan the last three seasons, is projected to go late in this draft or sign as a free agent.

"It's really cool," Moton said of his place in local NFL draft history. "Because I hadn't realized that since just (Wednesday). It is awesome. I guess I'm someone out of the Greater Lansing area that kids can look up to."

ESPN draft guru Mel Kiper ranks Moton as the

See MOTON, Page 2C

Moton

Continued from Page 1C

61st-best prospect on his big board. If NFL teams see it that way, he'll go late in the second round or early in the third. NFL.com also projects him as second- or third-rounder. Both rounds are tonight. The fourth through seventh rounds are Saturday. Moton plans to watch the draft this evening with a small group of family and friends.

NFL teams see him as someone who can play guard or tackle, most likely guard. He played both positions during his career at WMU.

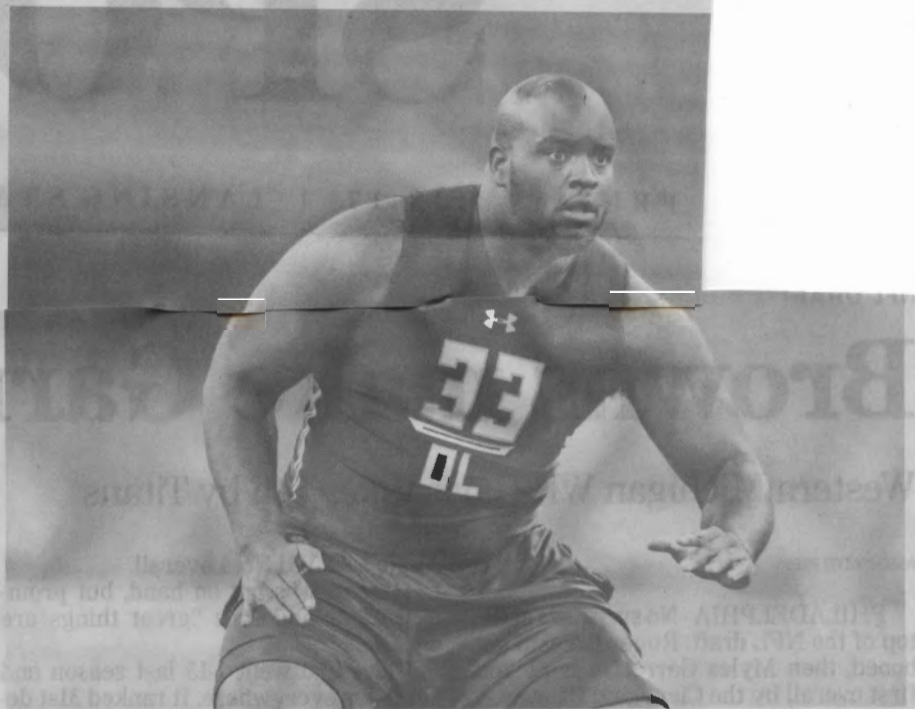
Moton's NFL draft stock and historical Lansing status raise a couple of questions, beginning with: How did MSU miss on him coming out of high school?

"The NFL coaches and scouts asked me about it," Moton said. "They say, 'They missed you. I can't believe they didn't offer you (a scholarship). It's crazy.'"

Moton dreamed of playing at MSU. His mother is an assistant dean in MSU's College of Education. His grandfather was the first African American faculty member at MSU's College of Human Medicine. He was a couple miles down the road.

"I had a chip on my shoulder about not getting offered by Michigan State early on," Moton said. "As I got older, I thought of it as more of a blessing (to be at WMU)."

In fairness to MSU coach Mark Dantonio and Co., no Big Ten school other than Indiana offered Moton a scholarship. Offensive linemen are often difficult to project at 17 years old. For example, Tennessee Titans' All-Pro rookie Jack Conklin didn't receive a single Division I scholarship offer before coming to MSU as a preferred walk-on the same year that Moton began at WMU. Conklin wound up leaving East Lansing a year early and was chosen with the eighth overall pick in last year's NFL draft. Conklin grew up in Plainwell, just outside of Kalamazoo. His grandfather was an WMU Athletic Hall of Famer. Like Moton with MSU, Conklin would have



BRIAN SPURLOCK/USA TODAY SPORTS

Former Western Michigan and Okemos standout Taylor Moton, here going through drills at the NFL combine in Indianapolis on March 3, is projected to be the highest drafted playing from the Lansing area since Muhsin Muhammad in 1996.

danced his way to WMU if the Broncos had offered him a scholarship.

In short, Conklin and Moton should have played on the same offensive line at either MSU or WMU throughout most of their careers. Both schools were smart enough to land one of them. Each whiffed on the other.

It worked out for both players. Conklin won 36 games and two Big Ten titles in three seasons at MSU. Moton finished his career on the greatest team in WMU football history, also playing in a Cotton Bowl, after a 13-0 regular season that included the program's first Mid-American Conference championship since 1988.

"It means the world to me — to be part of the program that was the worst team in the conference (in 2013) and then watch the whole team grow, the coaches and the players, the whole program grow to be one of the best teams in the country," Moton said. "I was blessed to be part of it."

Moton's place in Lansing-area NFL

history leads to another question: How has a community of 465,000 people produced such infrequent NFL talent?

Not long before Muhammad in 1996, Sexton's Alan Haller was selected in the fifth round in 1992. Two years earlier, Lansing Catholic's DeMond Winston went in the fourth round. But Lansing has only produced eight NFL draft picks in the last 50 years, none higher than the second around. By comparison, Greater Kalamazoo, a smaller and less blue-collar area than Lansing, has produced six draftees in the last 15 years — T.J. Duckett, Jason Babin, Noah Herron, Greg Jennings, Jerome Harrison and Conklin — including three in the first round (Duckett, Babin and Conklin).

Those players were all revered in that community. Moton, after this weekend, might be in this one.

"I'd be more than happy to represent 517," he said.

Contact Graham Couch at gcouch@lsj.com.

SPORTS

SATURDAY 04.29.17 | LANSING STATE JOURNAL | LSJ.COM/SPORTS

Carolina Panthers tap Okemos native in 2nd round

GRAHAM COUCH
LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Taylor Moton became the first Lansing area NFL draft pick in eight years Friday night when the Carolina Panthers selected him with the final pick of the second round, 64th overall.

Moton, an Okemos native and four-year starting offensive lineman at Western Michigan University, is the seventh offensive lineman chosen in this year's NFL draft.

"God blessed me. I'm just so thankful," Moton told Lansing State Journal colleague Cody Tucker, who spent Friday evening with Moton and his family at their Okemos home. "My grandfather is definitely smiling down on me from heaven."

Moton's grandfather, a major influence in his life, passed away in 2010.

Moton, projected as a second- or third-round pick, is the second Western Michigan player taken in this draft, following receiver Corey Davis, who went No. 5 overall Thursday night to the Tennessee Titans.

Moton is the highest NFL draft pick from Greater Lansing since Waverly's Muhsin Muhammad was chosen 43rd overall by the Panthers in 1996. He is the first area player selected since the Packers took East Lansing's Brad

See MOTON, Page 2C



TREVOR RUSZKOWSKI/USA TODAY SPORTS
The Carolina Panthers chose WMU's Taylor Moton in the second round of the NFL draft.

Moton

Continued from Page 1C

Jones in the seventh round in 2009.

As a fifth-year senior, Moton helped

Western Michigan to an undefeated regular season and the program's first Mid-American Conference championship since 1988. He played both tackle and guard during his college career, but is projected by most analysts as a guard at the NFL level.

He is the fourth player from Western

Michigan selected in the last two NFL drafts and, other than Davis, the highest selected Broncos player since the Lions took Louis Delmas with the first pick of the second round in 2009.

Contact **Graham Couch** at gcouch@lsj.com. Follow him on Twitter @Graham_Couch.

COLLEGE NOTES

Okemos grad Moton of WMU named All-MAC

BRIAN CALLOWAY

LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Taylor Moton played a vital role in the trenches to help Western Michigan to a perfect regular season.

And the Okemos graduate was recognized last week when he was named first-team All-Mid-American Conference as an offensive lineman.

Moton, a 6-foot-5, 328-pound senior, has been a fixture on the Broncos' starting offensive line since his redshirt freshman season in 2013. He's paved the way for a Western offense that will next play in the Cotton Bowl against Wisconsin on Jan. 2.

Moton was one of two Lansing-area graduates to earn All-MAC recognition. Central Michigan senior quarterback Cooper Rush (Lansing Catholic) was named third team All-MAC.

Rush threw for 3,299 yards and 23 touchdowns this fall and ranks second in the league with an average of 247.3 yards per game. The Charlotte native completed 61.1 percent of his passes for the Chippewas, who ended the regular season with a 6-6 record and will face Tulsa in the Miami Beach bowl on Dec. 19.

Olivet College: Comet senior punter Ryan Anderson (DeWitt) was voted the College Sports Information Directors of America Academic All-American of the Year for NCAA Division III football. Anderson has a 4.0 grade-point average as a business administration major and also is a fellow for the President's Leadership Institute.

On the field, Anderson repeated as a first-team All-MIAA selection after averaging 46.2 yards per punt, which is tied for the Division III single-season record. He had 18 punts longer than 50 yards and 15 that landed inside the 20-yard line while helping Olivet to an MIAA title and a 9-2 record.

Loyola Marymount: Lions junior guard Steven Haney Jr., who played at



Cooper Rush



Taylor Moton

East Lansing and Eastern, was named a National Association of Basketball Coaches Allstate Good Works Nominee last week for his efforts in community service and leadership. Haney was an all-league academic selection last season. He's started four games and is averaging 8.8 points and shooting 60 percent from beyond the 3-point arc for Loyola Marymount (2-2) this season.

Saginaw Valley: Middle hitter Kaylee Schmitt (DeWitt) was named honorable mention All-Mideast Region by the American Volleyball Coaches Association last week. Schmitt earned first team All-GLIAC honors this fall and ranked fourth in the conference in hitting percentage (.331). She also has a team-high 339 kills and 109 blocks for Saginaw Valley, which plays in the NCAA Division II tournament on Thursday.

Western Michigan: Sophomore forward Breanna Mobley (Waverly) was named to the all-tournament team of the UMKC Plaza Lights Classic recently. She had nine points and 10 points in a win over Eastern Kentucky and 17 points and 10 rebounds in a victory over host UMKC.

Siena Heights: Senior safety Cha'Quan Love (Everett) was recently named honorable mention Mid-States Football Association Mideast League. He had 30 tackles and three interceptions for the Saints (5-5) this fall.

Contact Brian Calloway at bcalloway@lsj.com. Follow him on Twitter @brian_calloway.

SPORTS^{1C}

12.09.16 | LANSING STATE JOURNAL | LSJ.COM/SPORTS

Okemos grad Taylor Moton hung in when Western Michigan was losing, now ...



CODY TUCKER/LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Senior Taylor Moton embraces his mother Sonya Gunnings-Husband after his Western Michigan Broncos knocked off Ohio 29-23 in the Mid-American Conference Championship at Ford Field in Detroit on Dec. 2.

'HE'S A WINNER'



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He was looking for his parents. Then his eyes moved toward the rafters.

See **MOTON**, Page 3C

rs will be a test for young Spartan team

in November, the Spartans (4-6-1 overall) host No. 11 Minnesota (7-5-2 overall) at Munn Ice Arena this weekend. The puck drops on the series at 6:30 p.m. Friday. The teams then meet again at Munn at 8 p.m. Saturday.

MSU earned three of its four victories last month, including a win over No. 5 North Dakota on Nov. 25. The second game in the series ended in a 2-2 tie.

"I think there's a deeper understanding of what we're trying to do structur-

ally as a team," Anastos said of MSU's improvement. "So that's helping the cause across the board. We still have a ways to go in that area. But we're certainly getting better.

"And I do think we're growing our confidence level. I think guys are understanding the expectations that we have for them, both individually and as a group."

The Spartan will be a bit shorthanded against the Golden Gophers, who were

selected as the Big Ten favorites during the preseason.

Junior defenseman Carson Gatt, who suffered a lower body injury against U.S. U-18 team last Sunday, is out. Freshman defenseman Butrus Ghafari is dealing with an upper respiratory issue and is day-to-day, Anastos said.

With two defensemen down, the Spartans will rely more on its freshmen. An-

See **SPARTANS**, Page 2C

Moton

Continued from Page 1C

"He'd be very proud right now," Moton said, pointing toward the sky. He was talking about his late grandfather, Thomas Gunnings.

And, then talking to him, "This is for you."

During Moton's redshirt freshman season in 2013, the Bronco's floundered to a 1-11 record. Many of his friends and teammates left the program. He was a phone call away from leaving himself.

This was his reward for staying.

His mother, Sonya Gunnings-Husband, leaned over the railing in Section 127 behind the Broncos' bench, hugging and congratulating Western Michigan players and coaches as they greeted the crowd. She was waiting for the arrival of No. 72.

Mom and son locked eyes. He extended a taped up, gloved hand up to his mom.

"I've been bawling like a baby," she said from the bleachers. "I am so proud of you."

Playing for him

Thomas Gunnings was larger than life to a lot of people in mid-Michigan. He was an esteemed psychologist, activist and educator, the first African American faculty member in the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University. His obituary called him a "Spartan legend."

Gunnings passed away unexpectedly in August of 2010, just after Moton's 16th birthday.

His grandfather was proud of a lot of accomplishments in his life, but there was no greater source of pride than his grandson.

"My dad worshipped the ground Taylor walked on," Gunnings-Husband said. "He always called him the 'brilliant big man.' Dad would be out of his mind right now. He would be his No. 1 fan."

Moton thinks of his grandfather often.

"He is the reason I got into football in the first place," he said. "He was like a father to me. I saw him every day, and he was a giant part of my life. He never missed a game."

Moton's biological father died when he was 4. His mother married Delbert Husband, who made a seamless transition into the family. Gunnings-Husband said she and her son needed a hero, and they got that and more.

Husband became the main male figure in Moton's life.

"I don't consider him a stepdad," Moton said. "He has always been there for me. I am blessed to have him in my life."

For Taylor, his grandfather's passing couldn't have come at a worse time. After a standout junior season at Okemos High School, the recruiters were calling.

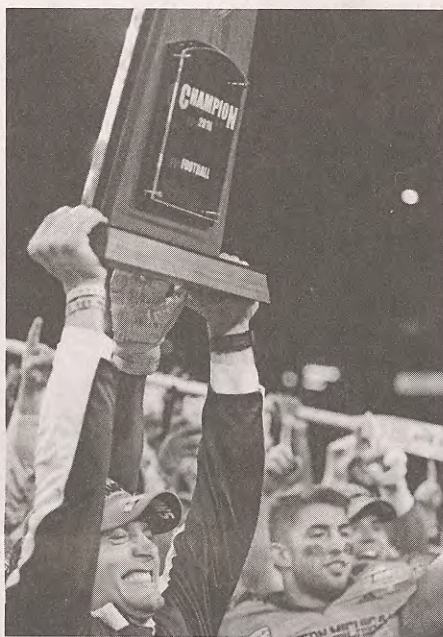
It was almost time to make a decision.

Becoming a Bronco

Before there was boat rowing, a Cotton Bowl berth, College Game Day and a rock star head coach, Western Michigan was a middle-of-the-pack team that mostly toiled in mediocrity for the last



Moton dedicated the victory to his grandfather Thomas Gunnings. "He'd be very proud right now," Moton said, pointing toward the sky. "This is for you."



Western Michigan head coach P.J. Fleck holds the MAC Championship trophy after the Broncos' victory Dec. 2 at Ford Field.

Rowing the boat

In his postgame press conference deep inside the bowels of Ford Field, an elated Fleck was adamant about one thing – this team was a special one.

"They kept their oars in the water," he said.

"Row the Boat" has been the Broncos' mantra since Fleck arrived.

"Those who stay will be champions," Fleck said, quoting the late U-M coach Bo Schembechler from the podium.

Moton, quarterback Zach Terrell and wide receiver Michael Henry are the only players who remain from that 2012 recruiting class. And they are now indeed champions. It's still a surreal thought for Moton.

"These are the best friends I have ever had," he said during the postgame celebration last week. "I have never won a championship before."

When Moton lines up against Wisconsin at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Jan. 2, he will be the new "iron man" of Western Michigan football. It will be his 52nd straight start, the most in the program's 110-year history.

There is also another reason for the senior to celebrate – the clock will start

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Becoming a Bronco

Before there was boat rowing, a Cotton Bowl berth, College Game Day and a rock star head coach, Western Michigan was a middle-of-the-pack team that mostly toiled in mediocrity for the last couple decades.

In high school, Moton dreamed of playing college football in one place – East Lansing. The University of Michigan sent some recruitment letters, but his mom, an assistant dean in MSU's College of Education, joked that she wanted nothing to do with U-M.

During his senior season in 2012, Moton helped lead Okemos to the district playoffs for the first time in 25 years. He was named to the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association All-Star team. He was also named Lansing State Journal's "Athlete of the Year."

"Taylor is a special young man, and we all knew that," said Paul Palmer, Moton's head coach at Okemos. "I knew Taylor's best days were to come. He was raw but had tremendous talent."

Surely, Sparty would come calling.

But Western was the first school to seek Moton's services. Then came offers from MAC rivals Ball State, Bowling Green, and Central Michigan, where his brother Jason Husband played.

Big Ten schools Indiana and Minnesota came into the picture late, and MSU finally offered him a preferred walk-on opportunity. It came without a scholarship.

"I didn't see the point in doing that," Moton said.

Neither did his mom.

"I wanted my son to go where he is wanted, believed in, and a place that would develop his talents," she said. "I tell him all the time that you have to love who loves you back. It was a disappointment to not go to MSU, but it was very short lived."

The decision came down to Western and Indiana University, Palmer said. On the way back from a trip to Bloomington, Moton received a phone call. Indiana wanted him.

But Western had been the first school to make an offer. Western stuck it out with him during the recruiting process. Now, it was his turn to commit to them.

The turnaround

After redshirting his freshman year, Moton was slated to become a starter on the Broncos' offensive line. But during the offseason, the school fired head



Western Michigan head coach P.J. Fleck holds the MAC Championship trophy after the Broncos' victory Dec. 2 at Ford Field.

coach Bill Cubit and replaced him with PJ Fleck, an NFL receivers coach who cut had his teeth coaching in the MAC at his alma mater, Northern Illinois.

In Fleck's first season, Moton started all 12 games on the line, but the wins weren't coming. Western lost its first eight games en route to a one-win season.

His teammates were leaving in droves. Moton wondered if 2013 should be his last year, too.

"There was definitely a time when I wanted to give up, quit and move on to do something else with my life," Moton said.

He discussed options with his parents. He spent a few sleepless nights.

And he started to get a good feeling about his new fiery, enthusiastic head coach. It didn't hurt that he was getting plenty of playing time.

"Toward the end of the offseason, I just told myself how good we could be and to trust the process," he said. "I thought, things are only going to get better. I just put my trust in coach Fleck."

Sitting in a jam packed hotel lobby in downtown Detroit before the game last week, Moton's parents were trying to wrap their heads around the turnaround in Kalamazoo. Every other person that passed the couple said "row the boat" or "Go Broncos."

They remember paltry crowds at home games and lopsided losses.

"It's really thrilling," Gunnings-Husband said. "To keep with the Bronco theme, I can't believe it's his last rodeo."

Husband agreed.

"I love that I have been able to watch this happen," he said. "These are the highlights of his life."

"These are the best friends I have ever had. I have never won a championship before."

TAYLOR MOTON

TALKING ABOUT BRONCOS QUARTERBACK ZACH TERRELL AND WIDE RECEIVER MICHAEL HENRY, THE ONLY PLAYERS WHO REMAIN FROM THE 2012 RECRUITING CLASS

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There is also another reason for the senior to celebrate – the clock will start ticking on the NFL Draft.

A recent article from 247sports.com calls Moton "elite" and says that he could be the highest drafted offensive lineman in school history. NFLdraftscout.com ranks Moton as the sixth-best tackle in the nation. His draft stock could rise more after playing in the annual Senior Bowl Jan. 28 in Mobile, Alabama.

Palmer, who was the coach at Okemos from 1990 to 2011, said Moton is taking all the hype in stride.

"I think Taylor's thoughts right now are to play in the Cotton Bowl," Palmer said. "After that, it's one step at a time. The opportunity is there and someone will be very fortunate to draft him. Taylor is a very grounded young man, so he is going to do it the right way."

Moton admitted he has been hearing the outside noise, but his focus is on his current team and the goals that are still within reach. He said he would stress himself out if he put too much weight into the draft.

His family, on the other hand, is enjoying the experience.

"His mom will text me and say 'did you see where that website ranked him?'" Husband laughed.

And believe it or not, she wasn't buying the hype early on, he said.

"I believed the NFL was always a legit possibility. She didn't," he said, pointing to her and smiling. "He has the determination to finish and be the best. Plus, his body just blew up, too. Taylor has got it in him."

Gunnings-Husband just wants her son to be happy and successful. Moton has already earned his bachelor's degree from Western Michigan and is working on an MBA in accounting. She takes great pride that her son is a college graduate, the rest, well, that's just an added bonus, she said.

She isn't worried. She believes in her son. And so do plenty others.

"Taylor has been a fortunate young man," she said. "He has tremendous character and garnered tremendous respect. Everyone loves him."

"He's a winner."

Contact Cody Tucker at (517) 377-1070 or cjtucker@lsj.com and follow him on Twitter @sewyopoke.