

# Blind from page A1

back - to the left or right hip pad - indicate which direction Jared is supposed to block.

Why? Because Jared is legally blind. He has some light perception, enough to perhaps make out movements, but it's not enough to help him tackle an opponent.

"It's easier for me to hike the ball because I can rely on my hearing," said Jared, about playing the center position. "But it's harder to block."

Whether or not Jared always gets his man is beside the point. His participation on the team is viewed as an ultimate positive example by those connected with the school and team.

"Jared is a role model and a motivator" to teammates and classmates, said Dunlop's assistant football coach, and one of his classroom teachers, Morrissey. "It's really an exceptional story. Football isn't just win or lose. It's team, discipline, learning to do things you might not otherwise do."

And, said parents John and Lori Stofflett of Farmington Hills, the youngster's efforts might somehow lessen stereotypes about blind people.

John Stofflett said, "All the other kids do it and he's just like all the other kids."

"We hope other kids have benefited from having Jared on the team," Lori Stofflett said. "Just because he doesn't have all his senses doesn't mean he can't do most things."

## Gritty competitor

Heck, some kids with 20-20 vision don't Rollerblade, wrestle and downhill ski like Jared does. His head football coach, Vince Bellante, said Jared is a "daredevil" who doesn't mind hitting or being hit during drills.

When teammates see how Jared approaches the sport, it makes them think twice about complaining of minor aches or pains.

"He exemplifies fortitude to the nth degree," Bellante said, following his team's 14-12 loss to Warren.

Morrissey said the student shows the same perseverance in science and social studies class that he does in practices or games. He is on the honor roll and nearly owns a 4.0 grade-point average.

"The kid doesn't worry about overcoming anything. He just worries about doing the best he can," Morrissey said. "I teach him in class and he's the same way" there.

The Stoffletts also are grateful



Ready: Jared tosses the ball while waiting to be sent into the game.

to the Farmington school district for fostering an environment in which their son has prospered.

Meanwhile, Jared and teammates such as seventh grader Matt Bills and eighth grader Spencer Wood are able to joke on the sidelines about typical teen subjects such as dating. They treat each other the way you'd expect middle

schoolers to.

Nothing special. That's how Jared wants it.

"He knows what he's doing," Matt said. "He just needs a little bit of help getting out there."

## One of the guys

Spencer added, with a laugh, "You should hear him in the locker room."

The fact that Jared is able to play football is something that thrills him to no end, according to his parents, both teachers themselves.

"He absolutely feels great about playing," Lori Stofflett said. "But I don't think he always understands the impact of his play. It's hard for him to understand his contributions."

For example, Jared hiked the ball and the play turned into a touchdown. But he couldn't see his teammate cross the goal line or see the referee throw his arms straight into the air. Instead, he had to wait for teammates to pound his helmet and shoulder pads to know the Wildcats scored.

Jared got revved up about playing football after attending a summer sports camp at Western Michigan University run by a blind professor.

"I heard about another blind person doing it and it



Friends: After the game, Jared talks with classmates Brynn Allen and Kristina Reese.

sounded like fun," said Jared. "I just like being able to play on a team with the other kids, being able to fit in. And being a good center."

And, now that he has a taste of grid-

iron action, he isn't about to relinquish it anytime soon, said John Stofflett. "He'd like to try (high school) varsity."

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