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A Top-Notch Wrestler, Newton Stellar Off The Mat

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It's a crisp Saturday afternoon in the fall of 2008, and Emerald High School three-sport athlete Zane Newton is in Columbia watching the Vikings' girls tennis team compete against Bishop England for a Class AA championship. The night before, Newton's football season ended in an awful rout against Southside in the opening round of the Class AA playoffs, and the defeat still registers on his face. Wrestling season starts Monday, but there Newton is, rooting on his classmates fewer than 24 hours after he played his final snap of high school football.

And that's what Newton is about. He's a tremendous athlete, a three-time state champion in wrestling. But he's also a Christian, a member of his school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes organization. He's a good student, scoring quality grades. And he's a good person, unfailingly polite. So when he's asked why he's at the tennis match, he simply shrugs his shoulders as if to say, 'Why not.'

John W. Whitehead, founder of the Rutherford Institute, once said, "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." Look closely at Newton, and that future becomes the present-day reality. NEWTON, FOR THE second consecutive years, is the All-Lakelands wrestler of the year. This comes as no surprise. Newton's superlatives on the wrestling mat have been extensively covered through his prep career.

He won three state championships. This season alone, Newton, wrestling at 160 pounds, posted a 38-1 record and his career record is a stout 162-3. But it's what Newton did away from wrestling that most find astonishing. Away from the wrestling mat or the football field or the tennis court where he labors during the spring, Newton has always been a class act, a yes-sir, no-sir type of kid. He's never hidden his love for Christ, even donning a Jesus Get-R-Done shirt when collecting his three individual state championships.

Former Emerald football coach Mike Clowney was fond of saying that if he one day was blessed with a son, he'd hope that child has the same characteristics as Newton. That's a high compliment to receive, and Newton is more than deserving. WE LIVE IN a world where our athletic heroes sometimes shoot people or themselves. Some of them lie, cheat and steal. At least one of them -- Michael Vick -- abused dogs. There are drug peddlers and drunks, and athletes who abuse women.

But there are also those types of people outside the spectrum of sports, so the world is not immune to evil. And for all the bad, the world is full of good. Newton represents that good. His potential is limitless, his future has no bounds.

A year ago during football season, Newton was injured, and he'd stand on the sidelines, donning jeans, a jersey and a Pittsburgh Pirates baseball cap. During the games he was attentive, listening to coaches' instructions as if he were anywhere near healthy enough to play. He was supportive of his teammates. Even when he couldn't play, he still led by example.

If it weren't for his athletic exploits, we wouldn't know Newton. He'd be another high school student, but still worthy of all the attention he receives. He used that attention -- the crowds watching this athletic superstar -- to spread his message. Surely, he hoped his teammates and his classmates would learn from the way he carried himself. It's an example we can all learn from.

Perhaps the greatest quotation about children is unattributed, but the anonymous opinion is still compelling. "Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate." Imitating Newton isn't a bad idea either -- for all of us.

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