

## Kicker Clark

Let's start with the firsts, remembering that as a family we took this one step at a time.

Erika is the first girl at Bolles to: complete spring football practice, 32 days of summer conditioning, pre-season practice, start in a JV game, score points, take the field in a varsity game and play high school football for Corky Rogers.



This was so unimaginable. And we're so proud that Erika has stuck with it in one of the America's best football programs with the best coach. We've asked her throughout to earn the respect of her teammates and coaches with her work ethic and performance. She tried to do that and we believe she did.

In the final JV game at Buchholz in Gainesville Erika was five-for-five in kicking extra points with good snaps, good holds and good blocking from her teammates. They even put her in for a play as free safety. She took the field for a point-after attempt in a varsity game against Episcopal but the snap was out of reach of the holder.

She kicked off for the JV, a job that we hadn't expected her to get. Coaches asked her to kick the ball high and across the field. Typically the ball would come down between the 20 and 25 yard line and her cover team would make the tackle between the 30 and 35. On the one kick that was returned for a touchdown she got knocked down. Other times she tried to get in on tackles, and on point-after snaps that went high she learned to block.

The road here started in Middle School when she saw the football team score touchdowns without attempting kicks for extra points. At the next home game, St. Mary's brought a girl who was kicking for their team.



Erika tried kicking footballs on what for her had only been a soccer field and was impressive from the start. But the Middle School team doesn't use a place kicker by choice. Her story continued because of support from teachers.

Gina Redding, Erika's soccer coach and weights class instructor, encouraged Erika and allowed her to use some weights time once a week to kick. Marty Coyne, a teacher who kicked and coached kickers in college, helped Erika get started with proper form and most importantly told us that Coach Rogers would likely accept her in the high school program. Then Coach Allan Leavitt, the volunteer who is Bolles kicking coach, came out to see Erika and allowed that Bolles was short on kickers and that Erika was doing well for a 13-year-old.

Lessons from Mike Hollis, a former Jaguar, and Jim Gaetano helped along the way.

There was a great deal of parental worry about Erika being with 75 boys, especially for “camp week” when the team typically moves to the dorms, but the FHSAA stepped in and put an end to camp week this year by limiting practice.



Erika is back in soccer mode for the time being, but she plans to continue practicing with the football and show up in the spring. We'll see.

We're thankful for all the encouragement and acceptance from the players, coaches and parents, And especially Coach Redding.

Merry Christmas!