



ELI TRIPPI | SNN

Junior Armani Adams, tackles the Dixie Hollins quarterback on Sept. 23 in a home game. The Spartans won by four touchdowns, a 35-7 final, which was their first win of the season.

Prospects tear up the field

Lakewood High School now has multiple students who are considered top prospects, according to football Coach Cory Moore. That means that they have the best chance to get a college scholarship and possibly go on to play in the NFL.



Troy Von Johnson
5'9 | 155 lbs | Quarterback/ Wide Receiver

Junior Troy Von Johnson, #2, is being scouted by Iowa State, Western Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky, Samford and Troy. Sadly, none of those are Johnson's dream college: Florida State University. If FSU doesn't work out, he said he would like to go to Western Kentucky because he has family members there. Johnson began playing football when he was 4 years old. He played for Lakewood Little League. "I loved it right when I started," he said. He said he thinks he stands out on the

Lakewood team because "I can make people miss." In other words, he is so quick that defenders can't catch him. Just like fellow teammate Sims, Johnson said he believes that he can make it to the NFL. "I'm determined to do whatever it takes to get me there," he said. Just in case his dream of being in the NFL doesn't work out, Johnson said that he would work in culinary arts. "My stepdad's the chef in the house and I always watch him cook," Johnson said.

Rolando Sims
5'8 | 185 lbs | Linebacker

If you have ever been to a Lakewood football game you've probably seen #4 running down the field. That's junior Rolando Sims, another talented football player at Lakewood. Sims said he has received offers from the University of Kentucky, Colgate and more. Sims started playing football when he was 4 years old. He played for the Gibbs Junior Gladiators. "It just looked fun. I was interested in it," he said. Sims said what makes him stand out on the field now is his "skills, ability and hype."

Sims' dream school would be Harvard because of the great education he would receive. "I'll have a good education if sports doesn't work out," Sims said. But Sims has to go to a college that is scouting him. Sims said that he would like to go to Colgate because of the education he'll get. "Their education level is high," he said. Sims said he would like to major in business and become an entrepreneur. "I want to be my own boss," he said.



Armani Adams
6'0 | 190 lbs | Safety



Junior Armani Adams, #11, is one of the players who has excelled the most at Lakewood High School. University of North Carolina, Florida State, Kentucky, North Carolina State, and Cincinnati are some of the colleges scouting him. Adams said that his two dream schools would be the University of Florida or Florida State University. Lucky for Adams, Florida State is scouting him. Adams said he started playing football when he was 6 years old for the Northeast Bandits, because his cousin played there. "I was good at it and it was easy," he said. Adams said he thinks he stands out at Lakewood because he always prepares for the games.

"I study for my opponents. I look at their games before and see what they do, so I can get a head start," he said. Kinesiology, the study of anatomy in relation to human movement, is the subject that interests Adams enough to make it his college major. Like Sims and Johnson, Adams said he thinks he can make it into the NFL. "I feel I'm just as good as other people," Adams said. As a backup plan Adams has three different options that intrigue him. Adams said he would want to be a sports agent, athletic trainer or a sports attorney. "I want to do something in sports," Adams said.

Tyrese Hurst
6'0 | 175 lbs | Cornerback

Senior Tyrese Hurst, #7, is another talented player on the football field at Lakewood High School. Florida International University, University of Central Florida and Troy University are just a few colleges that are scouting Hurst. He said his dream colleges, however, would be University of Miami (FL) or the University of Florida. "I want to stay in Florida," Hurst said. Hurst began playing football in fifth grade at Azalea Little League. "I tried it because my brother played," he said. He said he thinks he stands out at Lakewood because he works hard.

"It comes down to how much work you put in," he said. Hurst said he would like to major in engineering because when he first started high school he took an engineering class and liked it. "I got into it when I was in ninth grade and I just stuck to it," Hurst said. Many young men in high school dream of making it to the pros, but in Hurst's case, that is not the plan. "The goal's just to get free college; if it happens, it happens," Hurst said.



Stories by ZACKERY THOMAS, ELI TRIPPI and JADE MARKS
Photos by VIVIAN MANON | SNN



Junior Connell Murch swims in an event on Sept. 21 in a home meet against East Lake at North Shore. Murch is expected to qualify for states this year.

WALLACE NEAL-WILLIAMS | SNN

BY TONY RENGIFO
SNN Staff Writer



TONY RENGIFO | SNN

Ten years ago junior Connell Murch started swimming in a rec league. He practiced at Lake Vista's pool during the summer and North Shore pool in the fall. Then sixth grade came and he started swimming competitively — and he hasn't stopped since. "He's a leader. Everybody respects him. He definitely sets a good example for his peers and (the) underclassman," boys' head swim coach Andrew Holzbog said. Murch now swims for St. Pete Aquatics in North Shore pool six times a week, two hours a day from 3:30-5:30 p.m. During an average practice for SPA, he'll swim 6,000 yards. Sometimes, he also will do dry-land workouts for an hour that strengthen his core. All the practice and dedication has allowed Murch to become a standout on the Lakewood High School swim team. He competed in the state championships in his freshman and sophomore year. Now a junior, Murch is on track to qualify and swim in the state meets again this year.

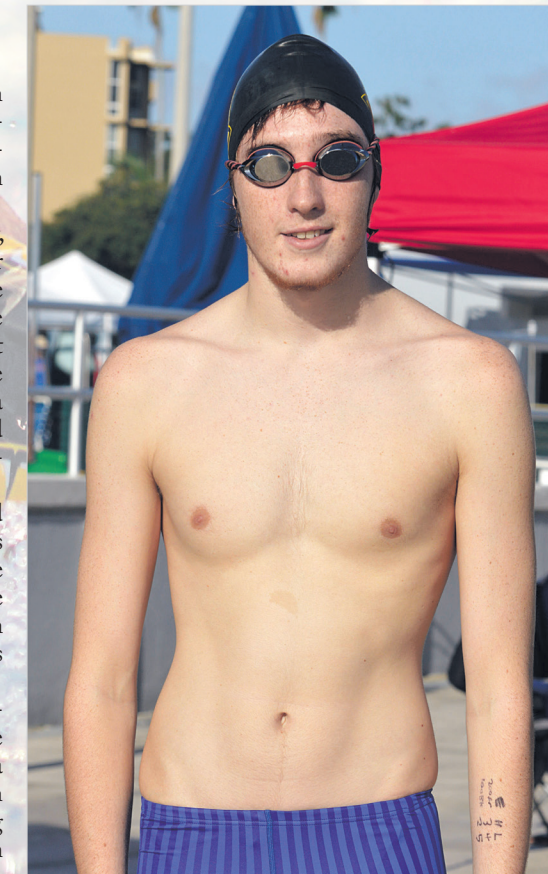
"I expect him to be there," Holzbog said. Murch swims four events: the 100 butterfly, 100 backstroke, 200 medley relay (a team race where Murch swims the butterfly) and 200 freestyle relay race. Murch faced adversity the two years he competed at the state championships. Freshman year, he got sick a week before states, and sophomore year he contracted an ear infection right before the event. "I'm the only swimmer who attends Lakewood that made an individual event those two (specific) years," Murch said. He swam in the 100 backstroke and two relays his freshman year and for his sophomore year the 100 backstroke, 100 butterfly and the two relays. "In big meets he seems to have another gear that allows him to be one of the top swimmers in the meet," Holzbog said. "(His best strength) is his turn off the wall. Even if an opponent is faster, he catches up and passes them on his turns." As a junior, Murch is one of the captains of the boys' team as well. "He's a good swimmer, always caring for his team, (and) encouraging his teammates," said junior Ethan Long, who started swimming with Murch 10 years ago in rec league. "Likewise, Murch said he is fond of his team, from the teammates to his coach. "I think my (Lakewood) teammates usually keep a good attitude (and) keep the spirit up. (And) I like having (Holzbog) as a coach. He gives us the freedom we wouldn't really have with another coach. Holzbog understands we do a lot of practice," said Murch. "Though with all his success as a swimmer, Murch is not looking to swim in college. Murch has a weighted 4.3 grade point average, and is interested in majoring in cybersecurity or biomedical engineering. He would like to go to college in Canada and is considering the University of Toronto or the University of British Columbia. "(Swimming is) not something I prioritize," he said. "I shoot for academics." Even though his main focus is on academics, swimming is a close second. "For me I like that competitive edge and spirit," he said. "That's what makes it fun for me and that's why I swim."

Swimmers in the spotlight

Connell Murch and Jonathan Ruefle, two strong swimmers on the Lakewood team, started swimming when they were young and haven't stopped since.

BY GISELLE ZAYAS
SNN Staff Writer

Sophomore Jonathan Ruefle is an up-and-coming star on the Lakewood High School swim team. "Taking after his father, who was also a swimmer in high school, Ruefle started swimming nine years ago at Northwest Community Pool. He now practices five days a week with the Lakewood swim team and St. Petersburg Aquatics (SPA). "Whenever he would tell me his times for his events, it would make me strive to do better because I would base myself on it," Ruefle said about his father. While keeping a competitive mindset, Ruefle — also known as Yonya — manages to keep it fun at the pool. According to the Lakewood swim team coach Andrew Holzbog, he's able to have a good relationship with all of his teammates but is focused when it comes time for the big meets. "He's good because he's really fast," sophomore Cameron Gerrard said. "He's also a really fun guy to have around."



TONY RENGIFO | SNN

Ruefle participates in three swimming events: the 200 freestyle, with a best time of 1 minute 51 seconds, the 100 backstroke in 56 seconds and the 50 freestyle in 23 seconds. Ruefle qualified for the states competition last year, and is expected to go again this year. "Last year, Yonya was an alternative, meaning if one of the four main swimmers got injured, he would take his place. However, this year he's one of the main four starting swimmers," Holzbog said. Ruefle is considering pursuing swimming in college. He says that even though he enjoys swimming, it's not his whole life.

'All that matters is that no one beats me'

Two standouts on the cross country team say they love the sport — but they especially love winning.

BY ELI TRIPPI
SNN Staff Writer



GABRIELLE SŁIWOSKI | SNN

Junior Hannah McAuliffe takes a deep breath and relaxes after finishing first at the Lil' Pirate Invite cross country event at Boca Ciega High School on Aug. 25. McAuliffe placed first with a time of 20:33 minutes, almost four minutes ahead of the second place finisher.



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Junior Hannah McAuliffe runs at Boca Ciega High School on Aug. 25 at the Lil' Pirate Invite. "I felt good. My coach told me it was a good day for a PR (personal record)," said McAuliffe on her first performance of the cross country season.



TONY RENGIFO | SNN

Junior Skyler Walker runs at the Lil' Pirate Invite on Aug. 25 at Boca Ciega High School. Walker placed first individually and the Lakewood boys team placed first place overall.

Junior cross country runners Hannah McAuliffe and Skyler Walker have proven to be two of the best cross country runners in the county. The duo has been successful in past meets, racking up a number of medals. But more than that, both of them have a strong passion for the sport. "They have passion and drive; you can't coach that. That's the reason they're so good," cross country coach Anthony Snead said. They both started running right before their freshman year of high school. Initially, they ran just for fun and to relieve stress, and they found that they both enjoyed it a lot. "My dad wanted to get back in shape so I would run with him a few times a week," McAuliffe said. When McAuliffe ran in a local 5K in eighth grade, a Boca Ciega High School coach saw her and told Snead about her impressive performance. Snead then recruited her when she came to Lakewood. They both agree that Snead has had a great impact on them running for Lakewood. "Coach Snead is the sole reason that I am running competitively. Before his efforts to get me on the cross country team, running for me was a stress reliever, exercise, and fun, but never a competition. I'm very thankful that he convinced me to run for Lakewood," McAuliffe said. Walker said Snead makes sure his runners are healthy and in top shape. The two have a rigorous training schedule to get ready to run in meets, including running outside of school to become better athletes. In addition, they make healthy food choices that enhance their endurance throughout races. "(Snead) is a great aid to all of us getting faster and stronger," Walker said. As the leaders of the cross country team, the two work to keep all the runners motivated before meets. Not only do they want to succeed, they will share the same for their teammates. "I always try to cheer my teammates on not only during races, but especially hard practices. ... While it isn't always enough, I put effort into making our runners feel like they have what it takes to finish," McAuliffe said. Walker said he doesn't like the team to miss a day of training. "The main thing that keeps us going in practice is the idea that there are people out there getting faster and stronger each day we don't train, and when it's hard, it's because we are getting better," Walker said. With fewer than two years left in their high school careers, the two have begun looking at colleges to not only study at, but possibly continue running. "As of right now, it is my goal to run cross country in college. I am definitely paying attention to academics first, but getting a (running) scholarship to a university of my choosing would be a great reward for a lot of hard work," McAuliffe said. McAuliffe said her biggest goal this year is to break 19 minutes for a 5K. She also wants to make it to the state championship in both cross country and track. As for Walker, he plans to be in the top 20 of his class at the state championships and run a 5K in about 16:30. "The biggest reason that they are both so good at running cross country is they both love the sport," Snead said. "Their drive and attitude for the sport makes them so good." McAuliffe's favorite thing about cross country is racing. "A lot of people like to say that there will always be someone faster than you, or better than you, and maybe that's true, but when I race, all that matters is that no one beats me without having to work for it," McAuliffe said. Walker, on the other hand, said he likes the "purity" of the sport. "In every other sport you have pads, a ball, or some other type of equipment. This is just you and your body, no weird spins, or tackles or plays to master, just running," Walker said.