

NaVonn Gurley is an offensive linebacker
for the Morton Ranch Mavericks

Photo by Country Park Portraits



FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

Spotlighting the students who transform Katy's Friday nights

Written by Ashley Lancaster and Kirsten Cornell | Select photography by Craig Moseley

The stands fill with fans of all ages donning their school colors and faces painted with their favorite players' numbers and armed with pom-poms, foam fingers, and signs. Athletes who have trained for years grind their cleats on the soft AstroTurf as they stare down the 120 yards to the goal line. Dozens of anxious students polish their instruments and fluff their plumes as they go over the spirit numbers one more time. It can only mean one thing: It's Friday night, and the game is about to begin.



Mascots are responsible for learning stunts, cheers, and getting the crowd going



Varsity squads spend time each week preparing spirit signs and cheers for the game



Katy ISD's bands put on award-winning performances

KATY'S FOOTBALL TEAMS A Winning Mindset

While every football program has its own strategies, the coaches and players at each school will tell you that preparing to take on an opponent takes more than just physical strength. "The coaches will begin preparing right after the previous game by watching video of what our next opponent does and how they do it," says Don Clayton, athletic director and head coach at Cinco Ranch High School. "The players will do the mental work in meetings and video sessions, as well as on their own with study of the scouting report and with opponent video that is available to them."

Physical preparation is accomplished during weekly practices, which averages about eight hours per week. While as many as 450 students try out for football each season, only about 85 will end up playing varsity under the stadium lights on a Friday night, something that each player looks forward to. According to Taylor Jiral, team captain and student at Cinco Ranch High School, Fridays are synonymous with football. "All I can think about is the game. After school we go straight to the meeting room and prepare as a team for our games. We get in the zone and focused for the task ahead of us."

Taylor Mustang Eddie Schwarz is looking forward to competing with this teammates and winning this season. "We will be making new traditions this year with Coach Herrmann and the coaching staff. I can't wait to go all out for them and for all of our supporters."

AWARD-WINNING BANDS Sounds of School Pride

In the moment before kick-off, it wouldn't be a football game if there were no drum roll or music to lift the spirits of the fans in the stands and players on the field. That is why the high school band plays such a huge role in encouraging the athletes and keeping the crowd on their feet.

"The band is one of the integral components of the football game that helps cultivate the environment and create excitement in the stands," says Michael Ary, newly appointed band director at Taylor High School. Without the dedication and hard work of the band programs, like the eight-hour practices during the weeks before school and regular practices throughout the week, Friday nights at Rhodes Stadium wouldn't be nearly as exciting.

"Our Katy fans are really spirited," adds Katy Tiger Nathaniel Hebert. "They make up chants and scream them during the game. They know all of the spirit songs."

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Half-time wouldn't be the same without the drill teams' carefully choreographed dances

SPIRIT LEADERS Rallying the Community

The cheerleaders, mascots, and drill team members boost school spirit with more than their presence at a game. They help rally the community to support their team. "They are responsible for so much more than just sideline cheering," says Seven Lakes cheer coach Amy Weaston. "We go to Red Ribbon Week, pep rallies, store grand openings, public relations appearances, birthday parties, and homecoming decorating - anything that reminds the public of who we are and what school we represent."

This involvement in the community is what keeps people filling the stands to root for their school on a Friday night. The drill team members are in charge of decorating players' lockers to boost morale during the week and practice their half-time routine for hours each day, right up until the moments before they perform.

Darby Boyd, dance instructor and drill team director at Taylor High School, shares what it's like to watch her team perform on game night. "[I love] seeing a dance evolve from initial conception, then to teaching it, casting it, and finally to perfecting it. It all comes to fruition in the moments the Pacesetters are on the field," she says. "I am always nervously excited and incredibly proud."

Student participation is the lifeblood of the crowd, and you can feel their excitement build throughout the game. "We will have a new student section this year nicknamed 'the Jungle' that we are really excited about," explains Ryver Kirk, a cheer captain on the Katy High School varsity squad.

"The THS crowd always loves the chants where we have them repeat after us, getting louder and louder," says Taylor High School varsity cheerleader Nicole Phillips. "They also seem to love the cheers that include our stunts, which take a lot of practice. And I can't go without saying they love tumbling. All of our varsity cheerleaders are great tumblers."

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Traditions run deep in Katy ISD football, and fans look forward to games each season



IN THE STANDS All for the Fans

Each group plays an important role in encouraging school spirit, but without the fans there would be no one to rally. Lorraine Eberly, cheer coach at Morton Ranch High School, remembers one fan in particular who touched her heart.

"There is a little girl named Brittany that comes to every Morton Ranch game. She wears a cheer uniform and sits in the top section, brings posters and noise makers, and leads the 50 yard line crowd during the whole game. She comes down at every game to say, 'Hi.' How much sweeter can it get than that?" It's safe to say that even Katy's littlest fans love their football.

"I love being on the field and cheering for my team and the people who come out to support us," adds Mayde Creek spirit officer Amanda Sprague. "I couldn't ask for a better squad. They are my family."

Without the combined efforts of each group and the dedicated fans, Friday night football wouldn't be able to live up to the hype. Katy High School head football coach and athletic coordinator Gary Joseph sums it up when he says, "It takes the coaches, players, school, athletic administration, teachers, student body, band, drill team, cheerleaders, parents, fans, and loyal supporters to have a successful program." KM

ASHLEY LANCASTER is married with two wonderful boys and loves to watch her youngest brother and cousin play football for Katy High School.

KIRSTEN CORNELL is the lead associate editor of Katy Magazine and she's excited about wearing her spirit shirts to Friday football games this season.

INSIDER SECRETS

Katy coaches and players share special traditions for a big game

Cinco Ranch

Coaches and players play inspirational movies like *Braveheart* or *Remember the Titans* on game day.

Katy

They have a long-standing tradition called "the Flying Tiger" in which varsity players will throw a team member into the air and catch them before every game as a trust exercise.

Mayde Creek

They have a team dinner to reflect on the previous game and plan improvement.

Morton Ranch

The football team participates in a prayer together before every game.

Seven Lakes

Athletes and spirit leaders will blast fun, upbeat music in the locker room before a game to get everyone excited.

Taylor

Athletes and coaches meditate on their motto, "Do it again." This inspires them to give their absolute best every single game.

Tompkins

Head coach Tony Tademey can't wait to start new and exciting traditions with the Falcons; stay tuned for an update next fall.

GO TO A GAME

- Home games are typically played at Rhodes Stadium
- Game tickets are sold at katytickets.com and often need to be purchased prior to the game
- Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students with a valid student ID
- Senior citizens with Gold Card membership and current military with ID are free

Special thanks to Katy sports photographer Craig Moseley with Photos by Mosey for providing the bulk of the photography for this special edition feature.



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