



Photo by Deana Celaj/Nighthawk News

Kai-Von Baxter works with his fellow cheerleaders (above) at First Flight's Homecoming game against Pasquotank. Every week, the school's first male cheerleader uses his acrobatic skills (right) to wow the crowd with wild flips.

Nighthawks flip out for first male cheerleader

By Arabella Saunders
Staff Writer

Halfway into the second quarter of the Marlin Bowl, players stand strong on the sidelines anticipating the next play. Fans crowd shoulder to shoulder in the bleachers, voices already hoarse from cheering their team on to victory. Varsity cheerleaders perch on their navy crates, eyes following the players up and down the field.

One cheerleader steps down, takes a running start, and begins a tumble pass, roundoff, back handspring, roundoff, back tuck, roundoff, back layout. The crowd goes crazy. Words of praise and encouragement are shouted from the stands as Kai-Von Baxter – First Flight's first male cheerleader – makes his way back to his team.

Baxter's interest in cheerleading first began in elementary school. After participating in a school program, where he learned basic cheerleading techniques, Baxter started to pursue tumbling. Throughout elementary and middle school he continued to tumble, sharpening his skills and learning new tricks with each passing year.

"I've always loved tumbling," Baxter said. "I tumbled a lot when I was little, but they didn't teach me much. I have kind of taught

myself everything I know."

As he entered high school, Baxter became increasingly interested in cheerleading. The thought of being a part of the FFHS cheerleading squad evoked excitement as well as hesitation. With encouragement from his friends, Baxter successfully tried out for the basketball cheerleading squad his sophomore year, making him the first male cheerleader at First Flight.

"I was really nervous at first, even though people were telling me I was going to make it," Baxter said. "Just trying out, I was really anxious."

His love for cheer extends outside of the school as well. In addition to the varsity football and basketball cheerleading squads, Baxter also cheers two nights a week for the FAME All-Stars, a competitive cheerleading team located in Currituck.

As the only male cheerleader at his school, Baxter is determined to show people that cheerleading isn't only for girls.

"You have to do what you love because you love it, not because of what other people think," Baxter said. "You shouldn't let a stereotype hold you back."

He also serves as an important asset to the team, playing a strong role in forming stunts, tumbling and keeping the team as well as

the crowd spirited during games and practices.

"Kai-Von adds a lot of positive attitude," senior cheerleader Samantha Xiques said. "He's a really good person to have on the team."

Baxter's background in tumbling has been especially helpful. The crowd goes wild at home football games when he performs difficult tumbling passes in between plays.

"When he goes out there and tumbles, everyone is cheering him on," varsity cheerleading coach Alice Baldwin said. "Hearing parents say, 'Kai-Von, throw that pass,' is awesome. He's a very talented young man."

Having Baxter as part of the team has helped both the cheerleaders and the coaches realize just how much the team can benefit from having a male cheerleader. They are hoping Baxter's participation in First Flight cheerleading will encourage other males to try out in the future.

"I would hope he influences more guys to try out," Baldwin said. "Males tend to be very strong, which helps with stunting, and have great tumbling backgrounds, which is something we are looking for."

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