

KICK



KICKING IT: Junior Will Fang poses with his instrument in Waters-Wilkins Stadium before practice. Kickers usually spend practice time apart from the team, creating stereotypes for the specialists. "Yeah, they (football players) already think I'm pretty weird. Kickers are weird people," Fang said. Photo by Jackie Wright.

KING BRASS

by **Tristan Lankford**

It's halftime at Waters-Wilkins Stadium, and head coach Leroy Ryals leads the Jaguars off the field for a pep talk in the locker room. As the marching band lines up to perform, there's one outlier. A 5'7" Jaguar football player jogs away from his team over toward the marching band and picks up a mellophone.

Under normal circumstances, this player would face severe punishment after the game, but junior kicker and marching band member William Fang is just doing his job: kicking field goals for the team and playing mellophone for the band.

"My mom thought it was crazy at first," Fang said about first expressing his desire to play football. "Her obvious question was, 'what about marching band?' I told her that I would take care of it," Fang said.

And he did just that.

"I looked at him, like, football? Really Will? You're not going to quit band, are you?" Cedar Shoals band director Dr. Zandra Bell-McRoy said when Fang brought the idea to her.

After pondering about it, Bell-McRoy knew what to do.

"That's a dream situation when you have a student that wants to do both," Bell said. "Coach Ryals and I got together and we talked about how we would split up the time and share him.

We both agreed that he was valuable to both of us."

"I didn't even notice last year," Ryals said about Fang splitting time between football and marching band. "He's a quiet kid who does his job, and that gives you an idea how good he is at what he does because he doesn't miss a beat with us."

Fang has showcased his importance to the team this year, completing 17-20 extra points while tying for third with quarterback Jaylan Rusher in points scored per game.

"He's a great addition to what we want in our team," special teams coordinator and defensive line coach Shedrick Wynn said. "In the previous years, Cedar Shoals hasn't had specialists in the kicking game."

Revamping the kicking game is already a strength for the Jaguars, but it helps when you can rely on Fang to hit a 42-yard field goal against Clarke Central in the Classic City Championship.

"He's been pretty consistent with it as well," Wynn said. "Those things are valuable to us, especially in clutch situations and every other level too." The specialist's influence on the team stretches far past his kicking leg.

"Will has a type of temperament you look for: do the work and get it done," Wynn said.



STANDING TALL: Fang knows the risks of getting hit during a game. “Not very confident,” said Fang when asked about possible contact in a game. “But I’ll give it my best effort. And if someone comes at me, I’ll just dive at their legs and hope to get lucky.”
Photos by Anthony Manzione.

Fang’s mentality is also reflected on the marching band.

“Will is a quiet leader,” said Bell-McRoy. “He doesn’t have a lot to say, but he does set a really good example especially for our younger students through his practice, hard work, and dedication.”

The silent-but-deadly leadership style has garnered Fang opportunities to serve as the football team’s captain three times this season and the brass captain of the marching band. But Fang does not think these instances make him special.

“It was just all symbolic,” said Fang referring to his football captain status. “There’s no difference in the captain’s role versus a non-captain’s role, but it was just cool to be walk out there for the coin toss.”

“I tried to get him to date my daughter

but he won’t,” joked Ryals. “He’s what we want in a student athlete, his hard work in the classroom, fine arts, and on the football field.”

Like many kickers in the National Football League and in college, Fang transitioned from the pitch to the field.

“If you told me my freshman year that I would be a kicker on the football team, I would have laughed,” Fang said.

Similar to his other extra curricular activities, Fang excels in soccer, too. He started in the Jags’ playoff game versus Rome in Spring of 2018 as a freshman.

“I was just lost in the moment. I couldn’t believe myself,” Fang said.

Starting every varsity game his sophomore season, primarily at left or right wing, Fang looks to build on his high school soccer career in the upcoming 2020 season.

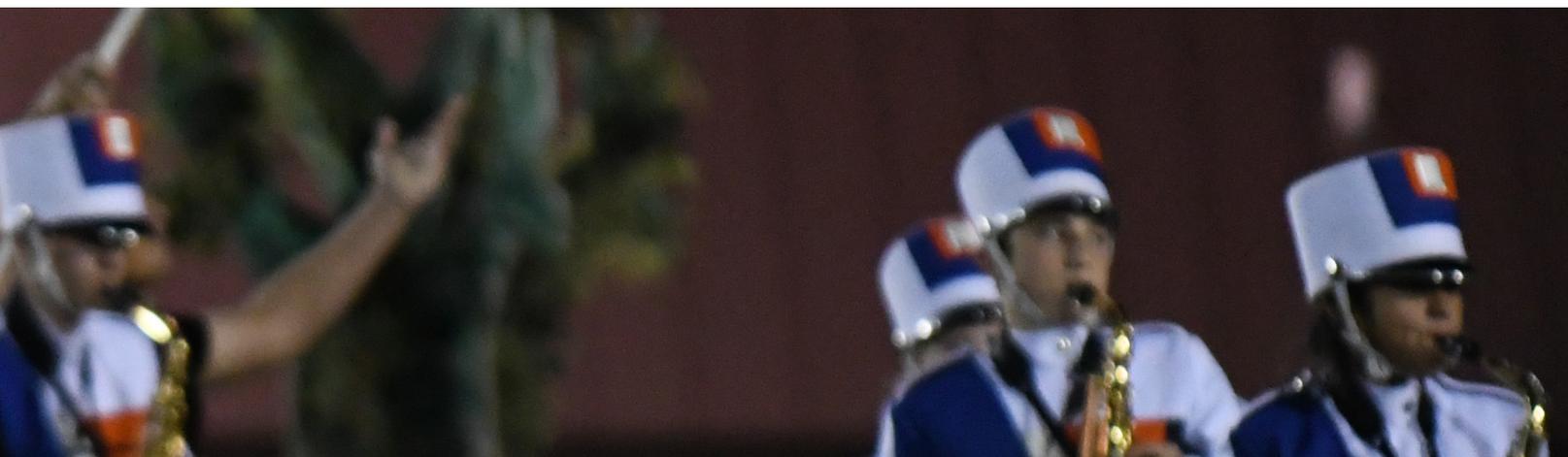
“Obviously, I want to make myself of the best player possible,” Fang said. “Soccer is a very team oriented sport, so it’s difficult to really set individual goals. But as a team, I want to see us make deeper runs in the playoffs, in the second and third rounds.”

Fang draws much of his inspiration from his older brother who also played in the marching band. Yang Fang, who graduated from Cedar Shoals in 2016, is now a senior at Stanford University studying computer science.

“Everything he did, I wanted to do as a kid,” Fang said.

Musically, Fang had already been invited to all-state orchestra for the violin and the all-state band for the French horn his eighth grade year.

“He had a huge impact because he came in, auditioned, and beat out a senior as a freshman,” Bell-McRoy said



about Fang. “So, you know, there was a little buzz around him anyway.”

Fang never let it get to his head and kept the teamwork mentality.

“I really didn’t feel a sense that I was better than anyone else. I just felt that we were all part of one program and we all work together towards a common goal,” he said.

In marching band, the French horn is considerably more strenuous to play than other brass instruments because the sound selection of the notes it projects are extremely close to one another, requiring a fine musical ear.

“You have to be able to hear in your head what you’re wanting to get out of the instrument, and know how exactly how it feels to get that sound in your head out of the French horn,” said Bell-McRoy. “He (Fang) can audiate well because he doesn’t miss pitches often,

and that’s not normal especially with younger horn players in the ninth and tenth grade. He’s got really great ears.”

Splitting time between football and marching band last year didn’t slow Fang down, again making all-state band. Although this time, he merited only second chair.

“Sometimes I pinch myself,” said Fang jokingly. “I have to come to terms that I’m one of the top four French horn players in the entire state of Georgia.”

These accolades don’t all come from pure talent.

“He has an extremely great work ethic,” said Ryals. “He’s very conscientious about what he does and anything he does he’s going to be the best in the building.”

Proving it academically, Fang currently dual-enrolls at the University of Geor-

gia.

“If I don’t do biology or pre-med, I’ll go into computer science which is one of the brightest fields right now,” said Fang. “It’s really cool to imagine that you’re one of the innovators that will revolutionize this world with technology.”

“In practice, in between kicking, Will often times has a book in his hand reading,” Ryals said.

Fang’s constant dedication to better himself doesn’t isolate him or go unrecognized from his teammates or friends.

“I love that man like a brother, a quiet little brother,” senior tight end Xavier Melton said. “He’s the (current) valedictorian of his class. He can be a leader on the football field and in the school, so why would he not be our captain? It’s a perfect fit.” 🐾