

From Dallas Morning News:

Richardson Pearce student with Down syndrome getting the royal treatment

By ANN MARIE SHAMBAUGH

Davis Hartley is a man of few words, but his quiet personality has spoken volumes to his J.J. Pearce High School classmates, who recently nominated him for homecoming king.

Davis, 18, has Down syndrome, but his condition hasn't stopped him from embracing the joys of being a senior at homecoming, from suiting up for the varsity football team to asking a date to the big dance.

"I had heard that a bunch of people were thinking about nominating him, and I felt so proud to be a part of a school that would go out of their way to really support someone who's spent so much of his time supporting Pearce," said Amy White, a senior who has known Davis since they attended kindergarten at Prairie Creek Elementary.

If Davis wins the crown Saturday night, he will join Mariah Slick of Azle High School and Kristin Pass of Aledo High School as North Texas students with Down syndrome to win a top homecoming title in recent years.

A defensive end for the football team, Davis often encourages his teammates with cheers and pats on the back on the sidelines after they make big plays, Amy said. His playing time is limited, but his impact on the team is huge.

Seeing him doing well makes everyone else feel good, said Reid Bitten, a Pearce senior and defensive end. "Everyone on the team supports him and cheers for him."

The football team's backing extends beyond the gridiron. Several of the players joined an informal Facebook status campaign to encourage Pearce students to nominate Davis for homecoming king.

It worked.

Davis and his date, Josilyne Schluter, a Pearce senior he met in a special-education class, are looking forward to joining their friends Saturday for dinner at Deep Sushi, displaying their shiny matching sports-themed mum and garter and dancing the night away until the homecoming king is chosen.

Davis' parents, Richardson City Council member Kendal Hartley and Cindy Hartley, will be at the homecoming dance late Saturday night when the king and queen are announced.

But Davis is already a king in their eyes, no matter the result of the vote.

“It doesn't matter,” Cindy Hartley said. “I think he's already won.”

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