

# Javonte Williams: A story of small town football success

By Tanner Barth

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Javonte Williams played football for four years at Wallace-Rose Hill High School earning himself a scholarship at North Carolina. Now, three years later his dream is becoming a reality on the gridiron. Nothing has ever come easy for the former Bulldog. The 5'10 running back had no power five offers headed into his senior year, but after rushing for over 2,000 yards and 30 touchdowns in 2017 the Tar Heels came calling. He says even with a scholarship under his belt he went into Chapel Hill with something to prove.

“Coming from a small town you just got to make the most out of what you got,” Williams says. “So, I feel like that’s what helped me be so successful at Carolina. I’m not used to having too much, but I know how to make the most of what I got. So, I just kept that mentality coming into UNC. I just kept my head down and worked and did everything I was supposed to do.”

Williams did even more than that during his time in the UNC colors. His freshman season in Chapel Hill he rushed for just 224 yards. Two years later, he’s one of the best running backs in nation wracking up over 1,100 yards and 19 touchdowns on the ground. He credits the culture established at Carolina and those around him for making him the player he is today.

“The other running backs in the room, I’d say there really the reason for my success on the field,” says Williams. “Just having somebody like Mike to compete against whose also a very good player. We challenged each other in the weight room, on the field, and even in the meeting room. Just having somebody to push me everyday, I feel like that’s really where my success came from.”

His success this past season left him with a tough decision as the regular season came to an end. Would he return to the field with his team in the Orange Bowl or take the next step towards achieving a goal he’s had since he was a child? A choice that Williams says wasn’t easy, but it’s one the former Bulldog can be proud of. He chose to chase his dreams of one day playing in the NFL.

“Just talking to my family it’s all a timing thing and just leaving out of it healthy,” Williams said. “I think that was like the most important part, not knowing the risk of getting hurt in the bowl game. Also I play the running back position, we get hit pretty much every play. So yeah just trying to get out of it healthy and put myself in the best situation to succeed at the next level.”

Nothing is guaranteed at the next level, but Williams finds himself one step closer to playing on Sunday. He says that reality hasn’t really set in yet, but one day he’ll look back on all he’s accomplished coming from a small town in Duplin County. He is proving it doesn’t matter where you come from. If there’s a will, there’s a way.

“I feel like one day when I’m able to sit down and just think about like how blessed I am, it’ll all just hit me,” said William. “I’ll see the bigger picture of my entire journey.”

We want to wish Williams the best of luck in his football career. The 2021 NFL Draft is set to kickoff on April 29th.

# Before being named the starter, UNC's Williams almost quit football

By Jonathan M. Alexander  
Winston-Salem Journal  
September 21, 2019

As a kid, Javonte Williams and his dad spent most Saturdays at home watching North Carolina football on television.

The young boy was fascinated by the games, so every year around Christmastime, Williams wrote to Santa Claus and asked for the same thing: a Tar Heels football uniform, a helmet and cowboy boots (because he liked horses, too).

"He would always say, 'Daddy, I'm going to play for Wallace and Carolina,'" Jermaine Williams, Javonte's father, said. "I said, 'OK, buddy, if that's your dream then go get it.'"

Williams started playing flag football when he was 5. Fourteen years later, Williams is a 5-10, 215-pound sophomore starting running back for the Tar Heels. He has emerged this year as one of UNC's top running backs, passing those who were ahead of him on the depth chart last year.

Heading into UNC's game today against Appalachian State, he leads the Tar Heels with 205 rushing yards and a rushing touchdown. As a true freshman, Williams had 224 rushing yards and five touchdowns in 11 games.

"He's got such powerful legs, he's hard to tackle," UNC Coach Mack Brown said last week. "And in our offense, you get the ball to him in space a lot. So when you throw those flares and you've got receivers blocking, sometimes those safeties don't want to come up."

A year ago today, in pictures: Coronavirus outbreak and more moments you may remember  
But Williams almost quit the game before his college career ever got started.

Williams played linebacker until he was a senior in high school. As a high school junior, he averaged 16 tackles a game. But the colleges he wanted to go, including UNC, never offered him a scholarship.

Williams said he seriously considered quitting football after his senior year, and just enrolling at UNC as a student. He also thought about committing to Coastal Carolina, even though he knew he wouldn't be happy there.

"It was real hard on me just not knowing what I was going to do after high school," Williams said. "My whole high school career I was just dreaming of playing college football. But when I thought the opportunity was going to be taken away, it just started wearing me down."

After watching film, Coach Kevin Mottsinger of Wallace-Rose Hill thought Williams had the potential to be a running back. So he had Williams switch positions for his senior year. Mottsinger knew if anyone could make a successful switch, it was Williams.

“He’s always done everything he was supposed to do, and he always had a little extra,” Motsinger said.

In his first game at his new position, Williams rushed for 207 yards in a 50-0 win against James Kenan. He had six games that season, including two in the state playoffs, with 200 or more rushing yards.

Williams’ last high school game was the 2017 Class 2-A state championship against Reidsville at Kenan Stadium. Williams didn’t know it, but then-UNC Coach Larry Fedora and his staff were watching from the box.

On the first play of the game, Williams took a handoff and ran 73 yards up the right side of the field for a touchdown. He had his best game of the season, and finished with 224 yards, a touchdown, a player of the game nod and Wallace-Rose Hill’s fourth consecutive state championship.

In the locker room afterward, Williams was greeted by then-UNC running back Jordon Brown, who told him the UNC coaches had set up an official visit for him.

The next day, Williams and his parents met with Fedora in his office. Williams said Fedora asked him, “How would you like to come here and give us a championship if I were to give you a scholarship?”

Williams recalls the moment with a smile.

“It was like the world was lifted off my shoulders,” he said.

# UNC's Javonte Williams ready to compete for championships

By Jackson Fuller  
Star News Online  
December 7, 2018

In a way, Javonte Williams has the N.C. High School Athletic Association to thank for his football scholarship to the University of North Carolina.

A year ago at UNC's Kenan Stadium, the site the NCHSAA used for its 2A state championship, Williams was carrying Wallace-Rose Hill to its fourth-straight state title. After 223 rushing yards and two touchdowns in a 35-28 win against Reidsville, Williams instantly became a Tar Heel recruiting target.

"The recruiting coordinator was waiting for me in the locker room," Williams said. "They wanted me to take an official visit. (Wallace-Rose Hill) coach (Kevin) Motsinger told me they'd bring my pads home, and I was staying in Chapel Hill."

It was a turning point in Williams' career. It was just his second major Division I offer and it came from his dream school. After a one-day visit, Williams committed. He even enrolled early.

Whether that scholarship offer came or not, Williams said he was going to school in Chapel Hill. Fast-forward to today, and he's preparing for exams after finishing his freshman season on a high.

Williams was UNC's leading rusher in the Tar Heels' final two games. He ran for 93 yards and three touchdowns in a 49-26 win against Western Carolina, and had 83 yards and a touchdown in a 34-28 overtime loss to N.C. State.

"I didn't really know I was going to play more," he said. "At practice I was still going with the twos. Everything was the same, but when game day came those last two weeks I just played more. I wanted to take advantage."

The freshman season wasn't a smooth ride by any means. He admittedly struggled early with time management between practice and school, and he didn't record a single rushing attempt in five games.

He was proficient in film sessions, but the game moved too fast for him on the practice field. During one practice midway through the season, he ran the wrong play two times in a row after a week of struggles. That prompted some tough love from running backs coach Robert Gillespie, and it proved to be a turning point.

"Coach G, he got on me," Williams said. "He was telling me, 'You're a good running back, if you weren't you wouldn't be here.' That's when I just sat down and started focusing on it. Like, I'm really good enough to be here. I need to start acting like it, and that's when everything started slowing down."

Williams' end-of-the-year success has him excited for the future. Despite a 2-9 season, Williams plans to help the Tar Heels compete for titles and one day play in the NFL.

He's also looking forward to playing under new UNC head coach Mack Brown, who led UNC from 1988-97. Williams had a positive relationship with Larry Fedora, but knows Brown's successful background and is excited to play under a former national champion.

Williams is also the perfect example of players Brown is looking to target, namely in-state talent. Fifty from this year's roster hailed from North Carolina. That number is expected to go up with Brown at the helm, and Williams understands why that could be valuable.

"We take a lot of pride (being from North Carolina)," he said. "Most of the time, we're the one getting the extra tickets because our family is coming and things like that. I think it's something we all think about and want to put it all on the line together."

# Dynamic duo fueled by family, Wallace-Rose Hill tradition

By Mike Foster  
Star News Online  
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Teammates held their breath, but Javonte Williams held back his smile. A few moments later, he let it out.

In a JV game against Clinton, Desmond Newkirk entered late in the game on 4th and 15 as the replacement punter. Wallace-Rose Hill's starter was injured earlier with a separated shoulder.

Newkirk's job was to kick the ball and hope the defense could make one more stop, but he had other ideas. After noticing a flaw in the opponent's special teams formation, Newkirk elected to take off with the football.

For most players, the decision was reckless at best. For Newkirk, it was routine.

"If he didn't score on that play, I'm sure he would have gotten chewed out," Williams said. "But you know, that's Des. He's always got something up his sleeve. You always know he's going to do something crazy."

Newkirk and Williams have been playing football together since pickup games as 9 and 10-year olds. The cousins carry the torch for a much larger family and a tight-knit, football-loving community in rural southeastern North Carolina.

Now seniors, they've become the centerpiece of the Wallace-Rose Hill football team. They will play for their fourth and final state championship Saturday when they take on Reidsville in the 2A contest at Kenan Stadium in Chapel Hill.

Anywhere else, and being three-time state champions is a pipe dream. But for these two Bulldogs, bringing home a trophy in their senior season will be the only mark of success.

"In this town, it's a football first place. Everyone knows each other. All you talk about is Bulldog football, no matter where you go," Williams said. "In other places like Wilmington and Chapel Hill with Duke and UNC, people talk basketball, but not here. Not nearly as much as they do us."

Newkirk is one of many in his family who have suited up for Wallace-Rose Hill. His uncle Terry won a state championship and pressed him on his own path to success. Now Desmond says he's got little cousins waiting in the wings to be the next great breed of Bulldogs.

"Wearing the 'Newkirk' name on your back, that's a piece of pride I carry with me onto the field," Newkirk said. "We're just doing what's expected of us."

What's unexpected? Newkirk and Williams do have a hobby to keep their mind off the field. Both are avid horseback riders. Williams' family owned a horse as a kid, while Newkirk still takes time out of his day to saddle up.

“I remember being a little kid and wearing my cowboy boots around the house,” Newkirk said. “If I wasn’t a football player I wanted to be a cowboy.”

If Wallace-Rose Hill’s backfield is the stable, Williams and Newkirk are the thoroughbreds. In 14 games this season they’ve put up incredible numbers: Williams has 2,064 yards rushing, 363 receiving and 30 total touchdowns; Newkirk has carried for 1,557 on the ground, caught for 295 and has 27 total scores.

Running out of an old-school, wing T system, the cousins have been simply unstoppable.

“We are always on each other, but it’s fun,” Newkirk said. “If I’ve got two (touchdowns), he knows he’s got work to do. We fuel each other.”

“The other great thing about it is, we pick each other up,” Williams said. “If Des is having a down game, I know it’s my time to shine.”

On Saturday at 7 p.m., they’ll tee it up in the cold with a chance of adding to the trophy case. For Williams, he thinks the defense will get the job done.

“We can talk about offense, but our defense -- they’re going to be the key,” he said. Both he and Newkirk also play defense.

With offers from 12 schools, including Harvard, Yale and Navy, Williams knows he’s got plenty more to think about in the coming weeks.

“It’s huge. Being able to go to school for free is what it’s all about,” Williams said.

Newkirk also hopes his stellar career will lead to playing at the next level. But for now, nothing matters more than the Bulldogs.

“I told my team at the beginning of the year, we didn’t come this far to go backwards,” Newkirk said. “Nothing before the team this year matters right now. It’s all about us.”

# WRH'S JAVONTE' WILLIAMS NAMED WENDY'S HIGH SCHOOL HEISMAN WINNER FOR NC

By Jonathan M. Alexander  
Dublin County Schools  
October 23, 2017

There are some students who set the bar. They work harder, show more passion and lead by example—in the classroom, on the field and within the community. Today, Wendy's High School Heisman recognizes Javonte' Williams from Wallace-Rose Hill High School and their dedication to never cutting corners by naming them the Wendy's High School Heisman State Winner of North Carolina.

"These students are known by their teachers and friends for their commitment to excellence. We are excited and honored that a program like Wendy's High School Heisman is also recognizing their hard work," said M.D. Guthrie, Principal of Wallace-Rose Hill High School.

Since 1994, Wendy's and the Heisman Trophy Trust have been running the same play to perfection: honoring more than 600,000 of the nation's most esteemed students. This year, Wendy's will celebrate the accomplishments of thousands of the best high school seniors, awarding winners in five phases.

## About Wendy's High School Heisman

The Wendy's High School Heisman was created by Wendy's founder Dave Thomas in 1994. Dave Thomas dropped out of high school when he was 15 years old in order to work full-time and went on to become one of the most successful entrepreneurs in history. While this nontraditional path led to his prosperity, it always worried Dave that others would follow in his footsteps and expect to achieve similar fame and wealth by not finishing high school or attending college.

Faced with this dilemma, at 61 years old, Dave enrolled at Coconut Creek High School in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., and received his General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Inspired by this moment and with a desire to celebrate the outstanding achievements of youth in America, he launched the Wendy's High School Heisman program.

Twenty-two years later, Wendy's High School Heisman has honored more than 600,000 of the nation's most esteemed high school seniors who share Wendy's values of giving back to their communities, treating people with respect, continuing education and excelling on the athletic field.

The Wendy's High School Heisman is a joint program between Wendy's and the Heisman Trophy Trust, host and custodians of the Heisman Memorial Trophy®.

As a State Winner Javonte' will receive a \$1,000 scholarship, a silver medal, a Wendy's High School Heisman State Winner patch, and a \$50 Wendy's gift card. In addition, State Winner's move on for the chance to become named a National Finalist where they would earn at least a \$5,000 scholarship and a trip to Heisman Weekend in New York City. National Finalists will be announced on [www.wendysheisman.com](http://www.wendysheisman.com) beginning the week of November 6.