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## **Scholar Athlete: Ward O'Brien, Tate High School**

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*WEAR*

ESCAMBIA COUNTY, Fla. -- Our Scholar Athlete has had his character tested, and courage challenged. He's not only prevailed, he has thrived.

Ward O'Brien has always performed beyond his years. Two years ago, he was a leader at Tate as the Aggies' sophomore quarterback. A year later, new coach Rhett Summerford came in, and went with a new quarterback, then-sophomore Taite Davis. But Summerford also knew Ward was a leader he needed to build around.

"I knew deep down that Ward needed to be involved to turn the program around," Coach Summerford said.

One thing Ward needed to do was find a new position.

"And this says a lot about Ward, I think he went to tight end in scout team period as a junior. He looked really good. He could catch the ball," Coach Summerford said.

"At first I was hesitant. Then I had my first hit, my first catch, my first touchdown," O'Brien said. "Enjoy it."

And Ward's selfless transition was pivotal.

"How he was gonna handle that was the change of culture," Coach Summerford said. "We had

a group of guys who had to change their mentality if we were to find some success."

The Aggies took their lumps in that 2022 season. But they were young, more competitive, and were clearly building toward better days in '23. But it all appeared to come undone for Ward, last February. He's the goalie for the Aggies' soccer team. During the regional playoff, a Chile player crashed him, Ward's arm snapped.

"I was on the field," O'Brien said. "I knew something was wrong. My arm was 90-degrees from where it was supposed to be. I had some doubts."

"It was going to take a lot of work. You could see it on his face. He was nervous, you could tell," Coach Summerford said.

Again, Ward's character prevailed. He answered the mental challenge of a grueling rehab, and threw the javelin during the spring track and field season.

"I think trusting the process. Put my faith in God. I started praying more. I'm closer to him. My family, coaches and teammates helped me get through it," O'Brien said.

Through it all, he's maintained a 4.2 GPA.

"And I don't know how he did it. Focus level. It's impressive to see," Coach Summerford said.

He's interested in sports management. His favorite subject: English.

"I like to argue. So, I guess, like you say, learn how to express yourself in different ways with your writing," O'Brien said.

O'Brien has aced tests to his character and courage and he's helped restore a winning culture in the proud Aggie program.