

Faith anchors Tech student who wins contest, gains spot on football team

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LUBBOCK—When 21-year-old Matt Williams transferred to Texas Tech University last August, he was just excited about making new friends and getting involved at First Baptist Church.

Matt Williams But after winning a Lynnwood Townhomes kick-for-rent contest at the Tech football game against Massachusetts on Sept. 20, Williams' life changed, and he gained a spot on the Tech football team.

Williams, a former high school kicker and soccer player who briefly played both sports for the Division II Tarleton State University, said that he was shocked to be chosen for the contest, but just tried to do his best while he was on the field.

"Going down there was just a big rush—being in front of all those people," Williams said. "I was just praying and talking to God while I was on the field and the week prior to that. And afterwards, I was just praising him. I went out there and just kicked the ball and did what I knew how to do."

Williams' dreams of being a walk-on player with the Tech football team were jumpstarted when Red Raiders Coach Mike Leach saw Williams' kick. Leach was impressed with Williams' form and sent an equipment manager to bring Williams back for a visit about his kick.

"I had no idea I would get called back down on the field to talk to Mike

Leach," Williams said. "When he called me down, I was scared, because I know he really doesn't like kickers since it has been a problem for Tech in the past. Going down there was a total shock. When he asked me to be on the team, I was like, 'Heck, yeah!' And I've had a blast."

Williams gained a spot on the Texas Tech kicker ~~Mat~~ Williams is an active member of First Baptist Church in Lubbock. Williams is an active member of First Baptist Church in Lubbock.

Williams gained a spot on the Texas Tech kicker ~~Mat~~ Williams is an active member of First Baptist Church in Lubbock. Williams is an active member of First Baptist Church in Lubbock. free rent from the contest to be eligible for play under NCAA football rules. He played in his first game against Kansas on Oct. 25, making all nine kicking attempts.

Even though Williams is now living his dream, he said joining the team mid-season was a culture shock and a challenge to his faith.

"On the football field, it is really hard," Williams said. "There are only a few guys that go to church and really show it. It's hard out there to have Christian ethics, but it's something that you can use for the good of the team."

To stay strong in his faith, Williams has befriended fellow believers and teammates Baron Batch and Brian Duncan. Also, he is involved with Paradigm, the First Baptist's Thursday night college worship service, and the Acts Ministries men's Bible study.

Sam Law, Williams' Sunday school teacher at First Baptist Lubbock, said Williams' commitment to Christ has strengthened despite his new fame and busy schedule.

After most games played away from Lubbock, the team "lands at 2 o'clock

in the morning. He's back in Sunday school that same morning," Law said.

"I've got kids who live right there on campus and didn't even come to class that morning. He is just very faithful."

Law sees God's hand in Williams' new football opportunity and has used it to encourage other students to be expectant of opportunities God brings.

"It's been a unique semester," Law said. "Before the season started, (Williams) is up in the stands. But five games into the season, he's on the field kicking. It's remarkable. We've talked about it in class—not just to focus on Matt but because you never know what God is going to do. You never know how God is going to use you."

Williams' strong faith is not a new occurrence but began during his childhood while attending First Baptist Church in Weatherford.

"I was baptized when I was seven, but a lot of kids can say that," Williams said. "When (my relationship with Christ) really started was when I was 12 or 13 when I went to a revival. That is when I realized I needed to get more serious about everything."

Winning a kicking ~~cont~~ got Williams on to the playing field.

Derek Dodson, Williams' former youth minister at First Baptist Church in Weatherford, said Williams always was a quiet servant and committed to church activities like Bible studies and mission trips.

"Matt is a behind-the-scenes guy and not the type to be in the spotlight," Dodson said. "He always helped out and also had a big heart for missions."

Despite his quiet nature, people always knew where Williams stood in his

faith.

"By the way he lived his life, you knew what he stood for. He didn't try to push his faith on anyone, but he lived his life in such a way that others saw his faith. He is a person of integrity and solid. I would like to have a dozen Matts in my group. He's just an all-around good kid."

Dodson, who has stayed in contact with Williams through his time in college, also sees growth in Williams' faith through the way he has handled his new fame.

Dodson said he can tell "he just wants to enjoy this as long as the Lord allows this blessing on his life. He is going to do what the Lord has placed before him as long as this opportunity is here. He just wants to follow the Lord and use this for his glory."

Williams hopes that he can use this new position on the football team and his example to lead others to a relationship with Christ.

"I hope that we can get to people," Williams said. "That's something hard to do because football guys are not usually known as Christian guys unless they are really outspoken about it. You want to slowly talk to them and see if they will end up coming to church with you or the Acts Ministries or another Bible study.

"I've also met a lot of new people, and with some people, we end up talking about what church I go to. Hopefully, that encourages them to end up going to church by showing that I go to church."