

## HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

# Detroit Loyola's Shenard Foster carries wrestling team to state because ... he is the team

**Mick McCabe** Special to the Detroit Free Press

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## Meet Detroit Loyola wrestler Shenard Foster

Photo of Detroit Loyola wrestler Shenard Foster working out with his brother, Dre Foster, on Tuesday, March 30, 2021.

When Shenard Foster transferred to Detroit Loyola last summer, he inquired about the school's wrestling team.

“When I came here they said there was going to be a wrestling team,” he said. “I was thinking about it, but it was during the football season and I was thinking about football.”

During the football season Foster, who finished seventh in Division 2's 140-pound class later winter at Harper Woods, would occasionally ask his football teammates questions about the wrestling program, but did not receive much feedback.

Finally, he met Fr. Adam DeLeon, his theology teacher who doubles as the school's wrestling coach.



Loyola wrestler Shenard Foster, 16, picks up his brother and coach Andre Foster during warm up at Dream Team Performance in Oak Park, Tuesday, March 30, 2021. *Junfu Han, Detroit Free Press*

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“His technical skill level is out of this world,” said DeLeon. “Just his ability to push himself. He’s a real focused young man, really hard-working, tough kid.”

But ... wait for it.

“He’s the only guy on our team this year,” DeLeon admitted.

Being the only wrestler in the school hasn’t been a problem for Foster (12-1). Two weeks ago he captured a Division 4 district title by defeating Clinton’s Spencer Konz, the top-rated 160-pound wrestler in D-4.

Last weekend Foster finished second in the region, losing to Konz in the closing seconds, his only loss of the season..

This weekend, he is off to Kalamazoo to compete in the D-4 individual championships.

This is not what Foster envisioned when he was told Loyola had a wrestling team. He didn't think he would be the only member of the team.

“At the end of the day wrestling is an individual sport, so it wasn’t that much of a downer,” he said. “It’s nice to have teammates there to keep you going, but it was alright. I still had Fr. Adam, my brother, my father to be by my side.”

***[ Michigan high school wrestling: Double-DQ makes short path to final for New Lothrop ]***

His brother, Dre, was more than just by his side. He was on top of him, below him and everywhere in between.

The worst part of being the only member of a team is simple: who you practice against on a daily basis.

Foster has solved that problem by keeping it all in the family.

That is where his brother, Dre, came to the rescue. Dre, 28, was an outstanding wrestler at Pontiac High and wrestled at Illinois.



Detroit Loyola wrestler Shenard Foster runs on treadmill with weights as his brother and coach Andre Foster watches during practice at Dream Team Performance in Oak Park, Tuesday, March 30, 2021. *Junf Han, Detroit Free Press*

Dre was his younger brother's inspiration to begin wrestling in the first place when Foster literally grew up watching him wrestle.

"I used to always watch him wrestle and I saw how good he was," Foster said. "I always wanted to be as good as him or better."

Foster was 11 when his brother returned home from college and asked him if he wanted to begin wrestling.

He showed him a highlight film from the Silverback Academy club in Highland Park and little brother was all in.

The highlight tape made it seem like a fun sport and who doesn't like to take part in a fun sport?

"I am a physical person so I liked all the slamming, all the shooting at the legs and the moves they were doing I felt I could do them and it looked like fun," he said. "I wanted to try that out."

But then Foster had to actually begin wrestling, which wasn't exactly a walk in the park.

When do we get to the fun part, he wondered.



Loyola wrestler Shenard Foster, 16, left, grapples with his brother and coach Andre Foster during practice at Dream Team Performance in Oak Park, Tuesday, March 30, 2021. *Junfu Han, Detroit Free Press*

“My first day wasn’t fun at all, it was hard,” he said. “But they said you have to go through it to be the best so I came back the next day and went through it again. I kept on coming back.”

His older brother noticed that he had been struggling in a number of areas over the first few days and didn’t look like he was enjoying it. Dre opened the door for his brother to quit.

“He asked if I still want to do it and I said yeah, I still wanted to do it,” Foster said. “It took me that first week to learn the moves and get to know everybody. By my second week is when I started to show that I could do it.”

He learned quickly. As an 11-year-old, he lost his second and fourth matches before running off over 40 consecutive victories and winning a state title.

But wrestling did much more for Foster than just allow him to have some athletic success. It transformed his body.

“I was real chubby,” he said. “When I was living in Pontiac, we moved from Pontiac to Detroit and Detroit to Pontiac, so I couldn’t play any sports, so I wasn’t doing anything but eating, for real.



Detroit Loyola wide receiver Shenard Foster (11) makes a catch against Detroit Catholic Central during the first half of the Catholic High School League Prep Bowl at Detroit Catholic Central High School in Novi on Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020. *Junfu Han, Detroit Free Press*

“I was a chunky little dude so I started wrestling, it helped me get my weight down and turn it into muscle.”

Although he is only 5 feet 5, Foster was a standout on the football field for Loyola. The only problem was pinning down coach Kevin Rogers on a specific position Foster plays.

Last season he played some at wide receiver, slot receiver, running back, cornerback, safety, nickelback, kick and punt returner.

“He’s even our field goal kicker,” Rogers said. “He plays wherever you need a play made at.”

It seems that Foster has brought his wrestling mentality to the football team.

“He’s an old-school, lunch pail kid,” Rogers said. “He won’t say more than 10 words a day in practice, but he’ll bring his hardhat, he’ll work his butt off. He’ll be one of the first kids there, he’ll be the last kid to leave. He’s very humble, just an extremely hard worker. His work ethic is ridiculous.”

Rogers is anything but an expert on wrestling, but after having Foster on his team, he wants more guys like him.

In fact, he would love to see Loyola wrestling roster greatly expand for next season.

“I don’t know much about wrestling as far as the technical side of it,” he said. “But the thing that I respect about wrestling is not only the physical shape you have to be in, but the mental toughness that you have to have to be able to compete match in and match out.

“We lost in the semifinals to New Lothrop and they won the state championship and everybody on their team wrestles. We’re definitely trying to mold ourselves in that image.”

DeLeon couldn’t agree more. That is why he is trying to use Foster’s success to build a wrestling program with a roster full of competitors.

“It took a guy like Shenard to say: ‘Hey, I want to do this,’ “ DeLeon said. “And then our community — faculty, staff, administration, benefactors, parent involvement — to say all right let’s see what we can do and we’re trying to find a way to get mats and find a place for them.”

Foster and Dre lift weights before school at 6 a.m. because one of his best features is his overall strength for someone his size.



Andre Foster helps his brother Shenard Foster lift weights during practice at Dream Team Performance in Oak Park, Tuesday, March 30, 2021. *Junfu Han, Detroit Free Press*

“Strength is always a key in wrestling,” Dre said. “Some might argue, but strength will always beat technique. He’s really strong for his age. He has the strength, he’s got the technique. He’s very explosive, fast and quick. It’s really hard for guys to get away from him if he’s taking his shot.”

Now Foster wants to take his shot this weekend where he will be one of the D-4 favorites in the 160-pound class.

Making this possible has been Dre, who operates Dream Team Performance in Oak Park where the two work out each day.

“He’s always been there for me since I was little and when he came back from college,” Foster said. “He’s always been right there when I needed him. He’s taught me everything I really know in football and wrestling. So, we’re together, we’re good.”

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