

Livonia Clarenceville honors, humbles favorite son Tim Shaw with stadium

[Shawn Windsor](#), Detroit Free Press Published 8:28 p.m. ET Aug. 27, 2017 | Updated 9:43 p.m. ET Aug. 27, 2017



At halftime of Saturday's football game the Clarenceville football field was renamed the David B. McDowell Field at Shaw Stadium in honor of Tim Shaw. Wochit

Friends, teachers, opponents pay tribute as Clarenceville's field named for former star RB now battle ALS



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Tim Shaw's had a lot of great moments playing football. He competed in a state championship. Started at linebacker for Penn State. Found a role in the NFL as a devastating special teams member.

But nothing — nothing — felt as gratifying as Saturday night. Back at Livonia's Clarenceville High School, where'd he become a prep star, budding actor and friend to nearly everyone in the community.

Now, here he was, three years after being diagnosed with ALS, settled into a golf cart parked next to the chain-link

fence that hugs the football field, smiling and welcoming hundreds of friends and classmates.

More: [Ex-NFL and Livonia linebacker Tim Shaw: ALS doesn't define me](#)

They wanted to shake his hand, to tell him they loved him, to say hello and that they were praying for him.

His first grade teacher swooped in for a hug. His auto shop teacher did, too.

His best friend, whom he met in elementary school, slid next to him on the golf cart for a while. He'd driven up from Cincinnati to be here, next to the grass where Shaw used to set state records for touchdowns and Mande Garcia used to watch.



Former NFL star Tim Shaw, who's now battling ALS, shows off his most prized football possessions, including the ball he used to break the MHSAA touchdown record. Video by Dave Birkett/DFP

“I was actually a cheerleader,” said Garcia.

He had the best seat in the house, at least when he wasn't somersaulting girls into the Friday night air.

That Shaw, an all-state running back and the best athlete Clarenceville ever produced, became best friends with a male cheerleader tells you something about how comfortable he was with himself. He didn't want to live the stereotypical jock life.

“I wanted to be different,” he said.

And so, on some winter afternoons, he left basketball practice early to make rehearsal for the school's spring musical, “Anything Goes,” — he was the lead.

More: [Clarenceville tribute to Tim Shaw packs an emotional wallop](#)

And after several years of earning A's in science, in math, he signed up for the school's auto mechanics class so he could see how the equations he'd mastered revealed themselves in 3D.

He did this despite some who wondered what a future valedictorian might gain from a class that taught a trade. He didn't care. He just wanted to learn. Meet folks who were not like him. Build relationships.

"I tell you what, I don't know why I did either of those things, but I love diversity," Shaw said of his interest in plays and cars. "I love being well-rounded. My parents always encouraged us to try anything that interested us. (And) I wanted to have different friends."



Tim Shaw speaks to the crowd. Livonia Mayor Dennis Wright is at right. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

No wonder then so much of the Clarenceville community funneled onto the football stadium grounds Saturday night

to honor him. To serenade him, while he stood on the track at halftime as the school's athletic director emceed a ceremony to name the stadium after Shaw.

Standing isn't easy for Shaw, 33, these days. Walking is even harder. So when he made his way from the golf cart to the track to start the ceremony, the crowd howled, then fell silent when he eventually stepped to the mic:

"Family. Team. And community," he began. "Those are the three things that I learned the most about when I was running up and down this football field."

Shaw, who was forced to retire from the NFL in 2013 when his muscles began to betray him, spoke for a couple of more minutes about his love of Clarenceville, as humble as ever.

"It's never been about me," he told them, the same message he gave to the current team in the pre-game locker room. "I can't believe this is happening."



Tim Shaw. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

Kevin Murphy, the school's athletic director, first thought of renaming the stadium after Shaw several years ago, before diagnosis.

"He kept telling me it wasn't time," said Murphy.

Every year, when Shaw would return to Livonia to run his free football camp at the school, Murphy would ask again and Shaw would decline. Until this past June, when he finally agreed.

More: [Football great Tim Shaw weighs in on stadium honor](#)

"He's our greatest athlete, our most famous alum, he's made donations and done so much for the community," said Murphy. "It just fit."

Murphy had to ask the school board to waive a rule that said facilities couldn't be named after individuals unless

they were deceased. Murphy and the community wanted Shaw to be a part of the night.

“He’s done so many good things for everybody else,” he said.



Retired NFL player Tim Shaw is battling ALS. He returned home as Clarenceville High School renamed the football field to honor him. *(Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)*

That’s what John Shaw will tell you, too. Tim’s father stood next to his son for much of the night. Rubbing his shoulder, saying hello to all the folks who’d lined up to see him.

In some ways, the night was overwhelming for John. He thought about how his son used to be before the disease.

He thought about the nature of the ceremony, and that it usually comes to those after death.

“It does seem strange,” he said, pausing to compose himself.

And yet?



Former NFL and Livonia Clarenceville star Tim Shaw explains how things have changed in the year since he was diagnosed with ALS. Video by Dave Birkett/DFP

“For me, (while) he has some amazing sporting accomplishments, it’s more about the person he is and the character he is. That’s what people remember him for and still do.”

That's why Tim's auto shop teacher, Greg Dix, has hopped on his Harley-Davidson with his wife the last three years and driven to Nashville to spend time with Tim.

"I only had him for one class," said Dix, "and I don't care a thing about football, but I love that kid."

And that's why Gary Steiner drove from Clinton Township on Saturday night, even though he doesn't know Shaw personally. All he knows is what it feels like to get run over by him.



Tim Shaw speaks to the crowd. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

"I was standing on the goal line and Tim plowed over me," said Steiner, who played free safety for Macomb Lutheran North. "After he scored he leaned over, stuck out his hand, and asked me if I was OK?"

"No," Steiner told him.

Of course he wasn't. His pride had been hurt.

More: [Ex-NFLer Tim Shaw fights ALS: 'What I see is a lot of hope'](#)

Still, that moment stuck. How could one of the best backs in the state in the last 25 years be so humble and thoughtful?

He wanted to meet him. Wanted to honor him, too. He wasn't the only opponent to pay respects Saturday night. Which says plenty about who Shaw is, too.

Steiner had waited until late in the third quarter to approach Shaw and, by then, it was dark. The stadium lights lit up the players on the field but everyone else sat and walked in the shadows.



Tim Shaw and the Clarenceville Trojan mascot pose for photographs. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

Shaw was back on the golf cart, next to the fence, a smiling silhouette reveling in the memories and the stories that kept coming. His best bud, Garcia, stood nearby, talking about how Shaw once convinced him to try out for theater.

“From the very beginning we all followed his lead,” said Garcia. “And even though he can’t walk or talk like he used to, he’s still the same guy. We’re still following him.”

Shaw, who’s a Christian and has traveled the world to do mission and volunteer work, used to say that football was

the platform God gave him. Now he says that platform is ALS.

That's true in a sense, as Shaw has written a book, "Blitz Your Life: Stories from an NFL and ALS Warrior," and has shared his story the last several years to help raise awareness of the disease.

But some don't need platforms to make a connection. Some have that gift from the start.

"Life, no matter what you do, is about relationships," said Shaw. "Some of those last a long time. Some are very short. (But I never) wanted to waste time. I don't want to be fake. I want to (be) real."

Saturday night, several hundred folks let him know how real he has always been, giving Shaw one of the best moments of his life.

"Very few people get the opportunity to be shown how much they're loved," he said. "That's what I've been shown here. It's very humbling."

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