

BIXBY SPORTS

Bixby Linebacker Nick Wedel a Top Oklahoma Standout

By **MIKE MOGUIN**
GTR Sports Writer

Being small for the position you play can be an advantage. Just ask Bixby starting linebacker Nick Wedel.

A lifelong Bixby resident, Wedel, a 5'10", 200-pound senior, began playing the gridiron when he was in the third grade. He started on the line, but began playing linebacker in the fourth grade. He has played the inside position since seventh grade. He also played baseball and basketball in the past, but is now focused exclusively on football.

Wedel is listed among the state's top 100 players in this year's VYPE Oklahoma Pigskin Preview. The publication says in its profile of him, "The Spartans' system continues to produce linebackers that play with a chip on their shoulder where Wedel will be a key performer in Bixby winning another 6AI gold ball in 2020."

Does Wedel feel like he plays the way he is described by the preseason publication?

"I do," he said. "Throughout high school, even playing as a junior, I feel like I'm kind of underrated as a player. I'm an undersized backer. I can see how other teams would see me as a smaller player. So, I kind of do play with a chip on my shoulder. I just always have something to prove with every game I play."

When he's on the field, he is "always just looking to read my keys, just playing the next down," Wedel said.

Wedel does believe that his size gives him an advantage.

"It's a lot easier to evade blocks when you're smaller because you know you can go around them," Wedel said.

One major accomplishment for Bixby are victories in its first two games against Union (33-0) and Jenks (42-35), programs known to be the top two in the state's highest classification until recently.

"It feels great," Wedel said. "As a team, my buddies and I have been talking about that for a long time. Growing up through high school, a lot of people don't think that we can play with 6AI schools and that's always been a topic of conversation when we win state every year. To beat both teams that went to the playoffs in 6AI, I feel like it's a real big deal to beat those teams. It shows that we can play with the big leagues."

The Spartans dominated Union but were challenged by Jenks as the Trojans had a 21-7 lead in the first half. But Bixby rallied to take a 28-21 at halftime and never looked back.

"They (Jenks) got up early. We have a lot of young players who haven't experienced a close game like that," Wedel said. "When that's the case, we have to keep everyone locked in and focused on their job. It helped us a lot in the game."

Bixby extended its lead to two touchdowns



Courtesy photo

SPARTAN LEADER: Linebacker Nick Wedel takes advantage of his size in helping the Spartans' success.

twice before hanging on to win by one.

What Wedel likes about football is that it is a brotherhood, he said.

"Everyone is in the same locker room, you're out there with your brothers, practicing and playing together," Wedel added.

Eric Kendricks of the Minnesota Vikings is his favorite NFL linebacker.

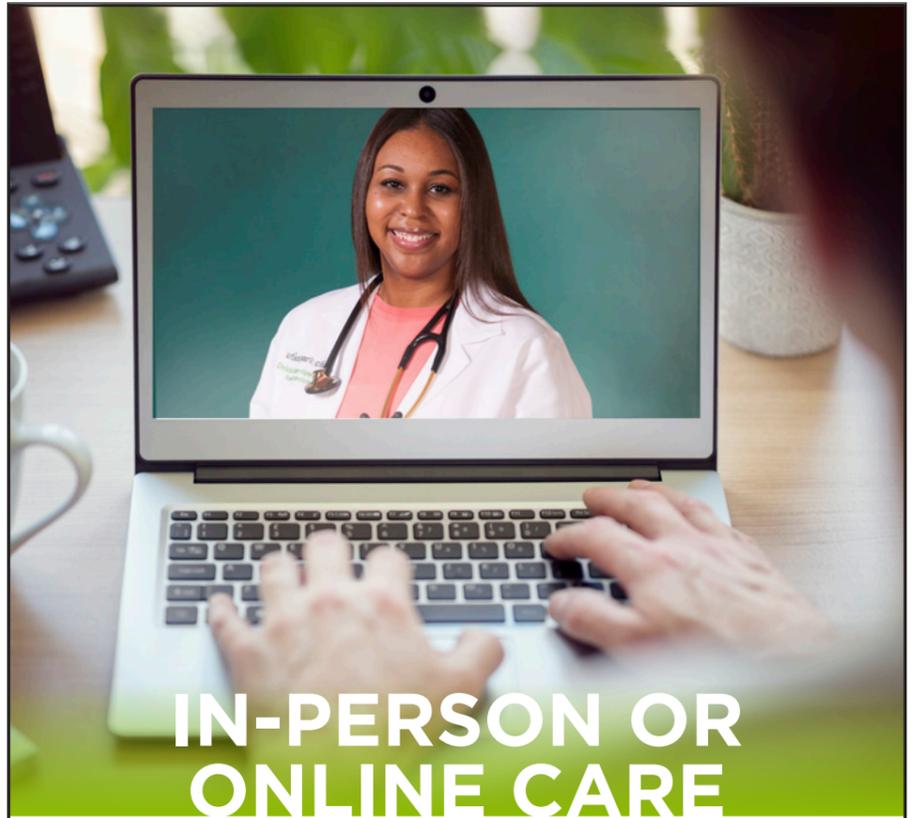
"That's been my favorite team since I was a kid," Wedel said. "I've watched (Kendricks) ever since he came into the league, because he's an undersized linebacker. They list him at 6 feet (Kendricks also weighs 232 pounds). But if he's 6'0", he's barely 6'0". He's kind of a smaller guy compared to all the other NFL linebackers or defensive players, so I kind of like how he plays. I try to model my game a little bit after him."

So far, Wedel's favorite high school football moments involve beating Jenks last year, when the Spartans inflicted a 57-7 rout of the Trojans in Jenks, and winning last year's Class 6 AII-State championship final against Stillwater.

"That was such a memorable game," Wedel said. "I think it was one of the best high school state championship games ever played in terms of going back-and-forth. My favorite play was watching Braylin (Presley) on that last touchdown. That was such a mood thing for everyone watching that happen."

As for winning another state championship, Wedel does believe his team has a lot of work to do.

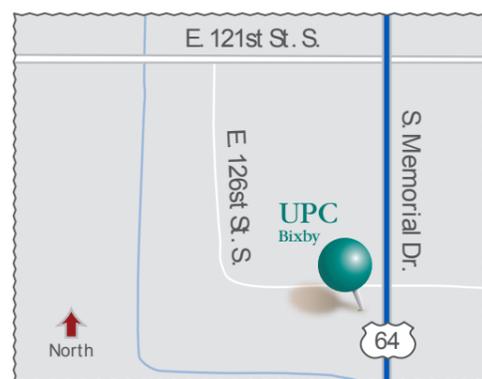
"I think we have a lot of weapons," he said. "We have a lot of great players for this team and great coaching. I think there is a good chance we'll win another one, but we still have a lot of work to do before we get to that point. We play our best football in the playoffs."



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