

Star quarterback embodies student-athlete role on the field and in high school Fire Academy

Senior Anthony Richardson is actually comfortable in two uniforms—the one he wears as the starting quarterback of the Eastside High School Rams football team, the other he’s trained in as a student of the Academy of Fire and Emergency Medical Services at the Professional Academies Magnet (PAM)@ Loften High School.



Richardson has earned plenty of attention as an outstanding high school athlete. He’s currently ranked eighth in the nation as a dual threat quarterback in the 247 Sports Composite rankings, and at this summer’s Elite 11 Finals in Dallas he had the distinction of making the longest throw—more than 68 yards. The Gainesville native has committed to playing for the Florida Gators, and this year will be featured in the popular Netflix series QB1, which highlights three of the nation’s top high school quarterbacks each season.

Richardson has also earned praise for his academic achievements. In December, he will graduate early from PAM@Loften. Since enrolling at the school as a freshman, Richardson has been a part of the Academy of Fire and EMS, which trains students for healthcare and public safety careers.

That training includes plenty of hands-on, rigorous and relevant experiences in firefighting, emergency response and patient care. It also stresses teamwork, something that is critical on the football field

“We all do things together, we support each other, we’re a family,” said Mark Smith, director of the Academy. “When we’re working, we’re working as a team, we’re productive, we’re effective, and that’s the same mindset you have to have in football.”

Richardson says the Academy has honed other skills that serve him well as an athlete.

“There’s a lot of pressure in the fire service but also in football,” he said. “You have to face adversity a lot, so you have to learn how to overcome it and communicate and just deal with the pressure.”

Of course, essential to Richardson’s success as a quarterback are his leadership abilities, something Smith emphasized to him from the beginning.

“Even as a freshman everyone looked up to him, and I specifically talked to him about what it takes to be a good leader,” he said. “I wanted him to think about leadership in fire/EMS services or athletics, whatever he chose to do.”

“Since ninth grade, Mr. Smith has been telling me about becoming a leader,” said Richardson. “So I just try to incorporate that with my field work and try to be that leader.”

As a school of choice focused on preparing students for careers in a variety of growing and lucrative fields, PAM@Loften does not have its own athletic programs. But students can and do compete on teams at their zoned schools, which is how Richardson came to be playing for the Eastside High football team.

He says PAM@Loften has been a great fit for him, allowing him to pursue his studies in a smaller setting while still achieving amazing success as a football player. He says he’d encourage other student athletes to consider taking the same route.

“There are not as many distractions as there would be at another school,” he said. “People here don’t ask me a lot of questions about football, and I can just be me.”

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