

Westfield football players key for Team Indiana

By Mark Ambrogi
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Westfield High School football coach Jake Gilbert has had his eyes closely trained on the eighth-grade class of football players since they were in kindergarten.

Makes sense since Gilbert's son, Jackson, a quarterback, is part of the class that was part of undefeated Westfield Middle School teams as seventh- and eighth-graders. As sixth-graders, they were state runner-up to Center Grove in the Indiana Elementary Football Association.

"We got star power and a whole lot of good solid football players (in that class)," Gilbert said. "They all love football and love each other."

Three of the players were part of Team Indiana, which went 10-0, winning national tournaments in Tennessee and St. Louis before capturing the World Youth Championships title game Dec. 9 at the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Tom Benson Stadium in Canton, Ohio.

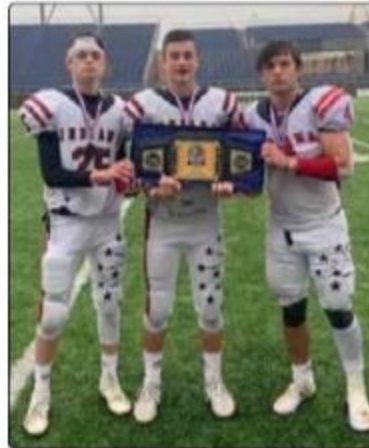
The three players are running back/kicker/punter Porter Rode, cornerback/receiver Brock Stewart and safety/receiver Andrew Lieske.

"It was awesome to represent Indiana against competition from all over the country," Rode said. "It makes us all better players. I think Indiana football is underrated. I like going out and proving the doubters wrong."

Team Indiana outscored opponents 204-47.

"We had a lot of depth on our team," Rode said. "I think that helped us to wear teams down as games got into the third and fourth quarters. Also, we've had a core of guys together for three (postseasons) now. We know each other's strengths. We're really comfortable playing together as a team."

Stewart said the competition of playing all of the teams from different states was the best part of the playoffs. Stewart said everyone worked



From left, Westfield Middle School players Brock Stewart, Andrew Lieske and Porter Rode were key players on Team Indiana. (Submitted photo)

together and bonded as a team.

"It was amazing to play in the Pro Football Hall of Fame Stadium where not many people have that opportunity and to experience the history that surrounds the stadium of all of the greatest NFL players of all-time," Stewart said.

Stewart said the key was making sure that everyone did their jobs in their positions.

"Playing as a team and to not blame or complain. Sportsmanship and representing your state with dignity is the key to any great team," Stewart said.

Lieske said the key to winning was to "just do your job and trust your teammates to do their jobs."

Gilbert said the experience the three players received is invaluable.

"When you are competing against the best it always makes you a little better," Gilbert said. "Porter Rode is probably as good a player as I've had. Andrew Lieske is a great wide receiver and defensive back. He played mostly defensive back mainly for Team Indiana, but he may play wide receiver for us. Brock Stewart can play just about anywhere. He's played running back, receiver, linebacker and defensive back for us. He's outstanding."